

MAYOR OF LONDON

Caroline Pidgeon AM

(Sent via email)

Date: 16.04.20

Dear Caroline,

Thank you for your email received on 24th March 2020 and for bringing this issue to my attention.

First and foremost we are acutely aware of the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic is having on the most vulnerable persons in society, sex workers included. We are clear that all and any vulnerable persons access the support packages in place. However, it is clear that sex workers face a particular set of challenges due to the close physical contact of some types of sex work and likely fall in clients during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sex workers should follow the government guidance on social distancing that applies to everyone in the United Kingdom. This means working from home where possible and staying two metres away from other people at all times. As a result, many people will be worried about their finances and what this means for them and their family.

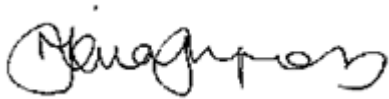
MOPAC's Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) team have been in contact with specialist agencies who, while having to adapt their service offer, are still operational. Many locally funded VAWG services are also still operational and local communication is taking place to ensure that people are aware of the services which are available. Services that support women engaged in sex work are well placed to navigate the multiple risks they face, which may be exacerbated by the pandemic. Due to the current challenges and uncertain environment, MOPAC's VAWG team are in communication with the sector, and are responding to the needs expressed, for example, MOPAC has contributed to the London Community Response fund in order to make emergency funds available in order to keep such vital support services functioning.

There will also be a number of people who will find it difficult to meet the eligibility criteria outlined in the government guidance which accompanied the release of the self-employment support scheme and are likely to be pushed onto Universal Credit. It is welcome that the government has allocated 10,000 Department for Work and Pensions staff to support new Universal Credit claims, but the government needs to go much further. The Mayor of London has written to the Prime Minister to ask that the five-week wait for Universal Credit be lifted and replaced by an automatic, non-repayable advance payment from day one and I fully support this call.

Lastly, the safety of sex workers is also an important issue. MOPAC are working closely with colleagues in the Metropolitan Police Service and sector experts through the Sex Worker Advisory Group to provide strategic coordination at this time. Plans are in place to address the safety of those engaging in prostitution and importantly, how the women can access support

If you have any other questions on this or any other issue, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fiona Twycross', written in a cursive style.

Dr Fiona Twycross
Deputy Mayor, Fire and Resilience