



**domestic
abuse
commissioner**

Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales
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Sent by email to Kelly Tolhurst MP, Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing

Spending Review allocations

Dear Kelly,

I am writing to warmly welcome the £125 million announced in the Spending Review to enable local authorities to deliver the new duty to support victims of domestic abuse and their children in safe accommodation in England in the Domestic Abuse Bill.

Domestic abuse has a devastating impact on communities. Research from the Home Office estimates the social and economic cost for victims of domestic abuse in England and Wales to be approximately £66 billion. Sustainable and long-term funding to prevent and end domestic abuse is essential to protecting victims.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the demand for domestic abuse services already exceeded provision. As you will be very aware, there has been a significant increase in the demand for these support services as a result of the Covid-19 lockdown measures and national restrictions. Recent data published by the ONS on domestic abuse, has shown that during the first lockdown period there was an increase in demand for domestic abuse services. Of those who responded to Women's Aid England's June provider survey, 58% of refuge services and 80% of community-based services reported an increase in demand during the pandemic. The impact of the first lockdown particularly affected online and telephone support services; 91% and 81% of which respectively reported an increase in demand. This is further substantiated by the National Domestic Abuse Helpline, who recorded a 65% increase in calls in April to June 2020, compared to January to March 2020.

The figures published by the ONS this week on domestic abuse across England and Wales make clear that the highest spike in demand for services followed the period of the tightest restrictions. I am therefore calling on the Ministry of Housing,

Communities and Local Government to ensure that funding for safe accommodation for survivors of domestic abuse is prioritised, beyond the most critical period of the pandemic.

I appreciate that the new safe accommodation duty and the funding to support this will go a significant way to achieving this. With regards to the funding mechanism to deliver this new duty I recommend that a national oversight mechanism is put in place which would serve the purpose of carving out a specific settlement from central government for specialist 'by and for' refuge services who provide support to survivors who face interlocking forms of discrimination, including LGBTQ+, BAME and disabled survivors. Some survivors will need an additional degree of specialism in the support that they access. These services are routinely undercut by more generic services in the commissioning process which do not provide the higher level of specialist support required by these groups. We would therefore recommend the creation of a specialist fund that is administered directly from central government to help protect these services in the year ahead. Given the relatively small number of these services, I envisage that this could operate through a similar mechanism used by the Ministry of Justice to fund rape crisis provision. We have made a similar recommendation to the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice with regards to the commissioning of specialist by and for services, and would welcome further discussion about whether a cross-departmental centralised fund could be established to streamline this process to tackle domestic abuse and violence against women and girls most effectively.

As part of the spending allocation for the forthcoming year, I also strongly recommend that a proportion of the £250 million allocated to end rough sleeping and the £46 million shared prosperity fund to support people with multiple and complex needs is assigned to expand gender-informed services to support women who are sleeping rough, the overwhelming majority of which will have experienced domestic abuse. There is strong evidence to suggest that gender informed approaches are far more successful in ending women's homelessness and rough sleeping, helping the government to most effectively meet its manifesto commitment in this area.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicole Jacobs". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nicole Jacobs
Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales