



**domestic
abuse
commissioner**



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Sent by email (cc' Victoria Atkins MP, Parliamentary Undersecretary)

Spending Review allocations

Dear Home Secretary,

Following last week's Spending Review, we are urging the government to prioritise funding to help meet its commitment to deliver the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, the Domestic Abuse Strategy and the successful implementation of the Domestic Abuse Bill when it becomes law, as well as the ongoing work to support victims during the Covid-19 pandemic. As the department leading on these two strategies, we are calling on the Home Office, to ensure that Violence Against Women and Girls and domestic abuse are prioritised within spending allocations.

Domestic abuse and sexual violence 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, lowering these costs and reducing serious violent crime.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the demand for domestic abuse and sexual violence 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. We have also received reports from those working in frontline services that those seeking support are now more likely to present with higher and more complex needs. Due to the Covid-19 restrictions survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence are also expecting to face significant delays in accessing justice, with perpetrators who are charged now not facing trial until mid to late 2021 in many cases. Taking these factors together, it is clear that a commitment to sustainable funding for the sector will be crucial to support victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence beyond the most critical period of the pandemic, and therefore we recommend prioritising these services in the Home Office spending allocation for 2021/22. Given the significant demand for support services, based on recent calculations submitted to the Treasury by Women's Aid and Safe Lives we recommend that the Home Office allocates at least £2.8 million for helpline support in England, £1.8 million for local phone support (including Wales), and £12.9 million for early intervention programmes. This funding will be required in addition to support for specialist community-based responses, local service central and activity costs, specialist ring-fenced provision for 'by and for' services and perpetrator programmes, as well as the expansion of ViSOR, in order to enable more effective management of serious and violent offenders in the community, including perpetrators of domestic abuse. We very much welcome the increased funding for the police and would recommend an annual investment of £5.8 million in police culture change and for domestic abuse training and awareness to be prioritised among new recruits.

To help ensure that funding for domestic abuse and sexual violence services is most effectively targeted to support survivors, we 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' 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, we envisage that this could operate through a similar mechanism currently used by the Ministry of Justice to fund rape support centre provision. As part of this funding it will be essential to ensure that longer-term resourcing is in place for second tier provision within specialist services to help assess and map the need for support in order to assist targeting funding most effectively and allowing for greater strategic planning. We have recommended something similar to the Ministry of Justice in how they distribute their £40m for victims' services, and we strongly suggest that any such fund is jointly administered by the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice. Effective collaborative working will be vital, and disjointed funding pots between government departments will only add to the significant capacity issues faced by specialist by and for services. With its history of leadership on Violence Against Women and Girls, and relationships across multiple local commissioners, the Home Office could play an important role in ensuring effective join-up locally and that funding is not restricted to being channelled through only either PCCs or local authorities.

We also welcome the establishment of the £46 million shared prosperity fund to run pilots to test multi-agency support for people with multiple and complex needs, including experience of domestic abuse. We recommend that the Home Office ensure that there is a strong focus on the specialist services targeted at victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse.

We want to thank you, and your team again for the support for victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence during this period, and as ever, we stand ready to assist you with the work ahead.

Yours sincerely



Nicole Jacobs
Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales



Dame Vera Baird QC
Victims Commissioner for England and Wales