



**domestic
abuse
commissioner**



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27 November 2020

**Sent by email to Alex Chalk MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
at the Ministry of Justice**

Spending Review allocations

Dear Alex,

We are writing to warmly welcome the £40 million announced in the Spending Review as part of the Ministry of Justice's settlement to offer additional support to victims of crime, including victims of domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse and sexual violence has a devastating impact on communities. Research from the government 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.

We want to thank you for your leadership and the hard work of your department during this period to help make emergency funding available to assist victims, including the very welcomed second wave of extraordinary funding that was announced following the second period of national restrictions. This has been extremely welcomed by those working in the Violence Against Women and Girls sector.

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 spending allocations for 2021/22. We would also like to offer the services of our offices to help assist the Ministry in preparing for the multi-year Spending Review to help ensure a longer-term sustainable funding package for the sector beyond March 2022.

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 that the Ministry of Justice creates 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 used by the Ministry of Justice to fund

rape support centre provision. We have made a similar recommendation to the Home Office and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government 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. We also recommend that the Ministry of Justice maximise the opportunity presented through the Victim's Funding Strategy to draw together a range of funding streams across government to improve effectiveness whilst maintaining a specific focus on domestic abuse and violence against women and girls.

I 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,

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

Nicole Jacobs
Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales

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

Dame Vera Baird QC
Victims Commissioner for England and Wales