

19th January 2021

Fortnightly Update from the Domestic Abuse Commissioner

Background

1. Every fortnight, Nicole Jacobs chairs a conference call with national helpline providers, second tier organisations, and Government Departments to share emerging trends, facilitate cross-sector working, and to escalate issues as required.

Helplines

2. **Call volumes into national helplines continue to exceed pre-Covid levels, with an increase in calls following the announcement of the 3rd national lockdown in early January.** The National Domestic Abuse Helpline run by Refuge reporting demand remains approximately 50% higher than pre-Covid averages, with increases in early January, and Welsh Women's Aid Live Fear Free helpline experienced their fourth highest levels of calls since April 2020. Calls continue to have increased complexity across national helplines, with increased numbers of callers seeking refuge.

Funding and Policy Updates

3. **The Sector continue to voice serious concerns for front-line domestic abuse services facing a cliff-edge of funding in March 2021,** with many organisations lacking funding certainty beyond this point. Without funding certainty many organisations may be forced to issue redundancy notices to staff. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office is conducting a quick survey of local commissioning leads to understand the number of areas where contracts are not confirmed beyond March. Long-term funding certainty will be vital to retain staff expertise and keep critical services running.
4. **Staff burn-out remains a significant problem facing front-line staff, with the mental health impacts of long hours working from home being felt, along with unsustainable caseloads by IDVAs and ISVAs meaning individuals holding a significant amount of risk.** We continue to hear of domestic abuse services stepping in to provide support where other statutory services are unable to, for example emotional and mental health support.
5. **Clarity is needed on the provision of vaccines for frontline domestic abuse and violence against women and girls workers.** Some local areas have already contacted services as they are classified as part of the wider social care system, but this is not universal. Clear confirmation within the guidance would go a long way in ensuring that these services are prioritised in vaccine roll-out so that they can continue their life-saving work.
6. **The next DAC Covid-19 meeting will take place on Tuesday 2nd February.**

Invitees: