

**10 November 2020**

**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 the National Domestic Abuse Helpline run by Refuge reporting demand is approximately 50% higher than pre-Covid averages.** There has been no drop in contacts to LFF helpline experienced during Wales's firebreak lockdown. The Galop helpline has seen 30% more calls since the second lockdown began related to homelessness as a result of domestic abuse.
3. **Refuge have extended the hours of the National Domestic Abuse Helpline livechat service to 3pm-10pm Monday-Friday to meet demand**  
<https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/> .

**Funding and Policy Updates**

4. **The Domestic Abuse Commissioner and the Victim's Commissioner have written to The Home Office, MHCLG and MOJ regarding the second lockdown and domestic abuse.** They have outlined their priorities for ensuring that victims and survivors of domestic abuse can access support and perpetrators are brought to justice during this period.
5. **A cliff-edge of funding in March 2021 has become an increasing anxiety for front-line domestic abuse support services,** with many organisations lacking funding certainty beyond this point. Without funding certainty by Christmas organisations will be forced to issue redundancy notices to staff. Despite domestic abuse workers being 'key workers' during the pandemic, many work in precarious employment due to short-term funding contracts, many of which expire in March. Long-term funding certainty will be vital to retain staff expertise and keep services running.
6. **The Sector voiced concerns regarding the Home Office Migrant Women's Fund prospectus, which was published on 19<sup>th</sup> October,** as well as concerns over the short-term nature of funding (only through to March 2021) We understand that proposed revisions are with Home Office Ministers for consideration.
7. **Women's Aid Federation England reported a significant increase in inappropriate Housing of Multiple Occupancy for vulnerable women opening up in the North East of England.** There is evidence of CICs opening up supported accommodation for victims of DA and other forms of VAWG, making use of public money but in many cases without any specialist DA expertise. It appears that the providers are largely delivering this by claiming Housing Benefit for specified or support exempt accommodation, but it also seems that emergency funding during the pandemic has had unintended consequences in this regard.
8. **The next DAC Covid-19 meeting will take place on Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> November.** Diary permitting, Minister Atkins intends to join the call.