

16th February 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. **Calls to national helplines continue to be higher volume and longer than they were during the same period the year before, with a notable increase in complexity and diversity.** This is due to issues of mental health and stalking, as well as an increase in calls from disabled, pregnant and BAME survivors.
3. **Significant decline of available bed spaces in refuge.** This likely indicates high demand and issues with moving survivors on. There is also high staff sickness and absence compared to previous lockdowns, along with an expected, annual increase in demand after Christmas.

Funding and policy updates

4. **VAWG strategy call for evidence closes on Friday 19th February at 11.45pm.** The Domestic Abuse Commissioner has submitted into this Call for Evidence, which will be circulated alongside this note.
5. **Domestic Abuse Bill has finished Committee Stage and will return to the House of Lords for Report Stage on 8th March, with a deadline of 3rd March for laying amendments.** DAC continues to press the Government on key amendments including to broaden the statutory duty to community-based services, better support for migrant survivors, the extension of the controlling and coercive behaviour offence to post-separation abuse, and additional powers for DAC office to enable better oversight of domestic homicide reviews.
6. **Vaccination roll-out to front-line domestic abuse services remains patchy.** Some Local Authorities are prioritising domestic abuse workers as part of the Priority 2 cohort (as part of the wider health and social care system), but others are not. This has been escalated within the Department for Health and Cabinet Office to provide clarity in the national guidance given