

27 April 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. Following this week's call, the DAC call will take place on a monthly basis, with stakeholders being invited to contribute agenda items ahead of each meeting.

Helplines

2. **The beginning of April saw a slight reduction in call volumes compared to March, however they are starting to go back up to 'normal' pandemic levels. Call volumes to the national helplines remain significantly higher than they were at pre-pandemic levels.** There has been an increase in the number of repeat callers to helplines, with calls being longer in length and more complex in nature. More calls have raised issues of sexual assault in addition to domestic abuse over the past couple of weeks.

Sector and Policy Updates

3. **The Domestic Abuse Bill received Royal Assent on Thursday 29 April.** Whilst there was disappointment across the sector that provisions around migrant survivors, community-based services and judicial training were not included in the Act, it is still a warmly welcomed landmark piece of legislation. The Home Office will be releasing dates for implementation for different parts of the Act shortly, with provisions for Part 1, Part 2 and the Statutory Guidance expected by the Summer, with the rest of it expected by the end of the year. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office will be closely monitoring implementation of the Bill.
4. **Whilst the new rules around homelessness have not yet been felt by services, there has been an increase in denial of accommodation by local authorities to migrant women of domestic abuse.** As there is a very limited amount of accommodation which organisations can help migrant women access, services have had to arrange accommodation with faith charities due to local authorities' refusal to help.
5. **There are concerns that the police and probation service are failing to notify survivors of domestic abuse about release dates for their perpetrators.** This is causing a significant amount of anxiety for survivors

who do not feel that they are being given the time to adequately protect themselves against potential harassment and further abuse.

6. **The delay in the confirmation of funding by the Ministry of Justice on IDVA and ISVA support is causing widespread disruption, with the number of IDVAs available having declined for the first time in five years.** Various areas are seeing large numbers of IDVAs leaving their posts due to continued job insecurity and they are struggling to recruit replacements as they are unable to fund IDVA training, which prevents current staff from being able to apply for the role. The provision of specialist IDVAs is also causing issues as it is taking resources away from standard IDVAs.
7. **The NPCC are currently leading investigations on how police forces across the country tackle VAWG and the most serious cases of domestic abuse, which are being led by Zoe Billingham and Louisa Rolfe.** The work will include a deep dive into how eight police forces across the country currently deal with these cases using methodology led by Hampshire Police.

Attendees:

Sector: Refuge, Karma Nirvana, Women's Aid Federation England, Welsh Women's Aid, Respect, SafeLives, Stay Safe East, Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Coalition, Galop, Rights of Women, Latin American Women Rights Service (as representatives of the Step Up Migrant Women Campaign), IRISi, Surviving Economic Abuse, The Employers' Initiative, Imkaan, Rape Crisis England & Wales, Suzy Lamplugh Trust

Government Officials: Ministry of Justice, CPS, Association of PCCs, Department for Work and Pensions, Department of Health and Social Care, Welsh Government, Local Government Association, National Police Chief's Council