

**10 August 2020**

**Fortnightly Update from the Domestic Abuse Sector**

**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 a 70% increase in calls in the month of July (Monday-Friday data) compared to the same period last year. Welsh Women's Aid reported the last week in July as their highest for contact on helplines, as Wales emerges more slowly from lockdown than the UK.** Calls remain complex, with low numbers of survivors calling helplines who currently live with their perpetrators, although this is starting to increase.
3. **Calls relating to refuge increased significantly towards the end of July, indicating a likely surge in survivors seeking to escape.** Welsh Women's Aid reported a 2% vacancy rate and vacancies in refuges across England and Wales remain much lower than at the same time last year.
4. **Services have been experiencing abusive phone calls which are affecting service delivery and distressing staff.** The Police have been notified and the sector will engage with TikTok, whose app hosted a number of videos encouraging these calls.

**Funding and Policy Updates**

5. There remains significant concern around a 'cliff edge' of Covid-related funding on 31<sup>st</sup> October, and the sector and DA Commissioner are still awaiting a response from their letter to the Chancellor calling for an extension to this funding.
6. **Equally, the sector repeated their call for one integrated Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, and are very concerned at the prospect of a separate domestic abuse strategy.** This would undermine a gendered understanding of domestic abuse and artificially separate it from wider forms of overlapping and intersecting forms of VAWG, such as sexual violence or so-called 'honour-based' abuse. Further details have been requested from the Home Office on the nature of engagement and consultation with the Sector, and for concerns around a separate domestic abuse strategy to be escalated.
7. **Court of Appeal has granted permission for a judicial review of any change to CPS rape policy and practice.** On 30<sup>th</sup> July the Court of Appeal overturned a High Court decision in March 2020 that women's groups should not be granted a full judicial review, which will now be heard as soon as possible in the Court of Appeal.
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