

Message

From: Abolhasani Azita [/O=PHU/OU=PHU/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=POISE USERS/CN=IND USERS/CN=ABOLHAA]
Sent: 09/04/2020 15:18:42
To: Abolhasani Azita [azita.abolhasani@homeoffice.gov.uk]
Subject: DA CALLS

DA Commissioner, Nicole (NC)
Home Secretary (HS)

After introductions and awareness of the impact of the COVID-19 on victims of domestic abuse, the HS invited NC to share her views on what she through the sector required.

NS spoke of the engagement she had been undertaking in recent week which included working groups with charitable organisations and Government departments which have been helpful in understanding the situation and what the asks are of the sector. On Monday she will be chairing a call with the Government sector and understood that a readout is shared.

NS went on to make the following points:

- NS spoke of the importance of comms and thanks the HS for her recent article which really help bring this issue to the surface.
- Helplines – the support of helplines are important and are usually contacted in the first instance providing advice on the rights of women in relation to family courts to criminal courts which t
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- More work needs to be don't to utilise contact points – such as employers and

The support to helplines is the important in first instand, not just national, but other helpliens like rights of wome at, advice about family courts – first weeks – family court, but this last week moreabout crimal cours/pendin case. Lots of reasons people call helplines. Think about who are interating with people right now such as employers - theres not much – should amplyie and turn the dail up on this work.

The work on british retail consortium is really key and will be speaking to offiicals about this later today

One thing I know about DOH, there needs to be more information about to communication thinking about people seek help

Children in social care and the role of education, there is a lot here and these are the things are her mind and whether we can strgthen some of the strands related to DA work looking out for vulnerable children and people. The fund – appreciate the conversations I have had about the shape of the fund and flexibility of this going to driect to charities and knowing that we have you support to ensure there is sufficnet funding to address issues of DA.

HS - funding - yes, confirm we support commitment to supporting/porecting vicitms who need this help

Raised important issues on 2 folds – first on education, she commissioned vulnerable children workstream, recognised the importance that school play in this work, share her knowledge of this, happy she's on the working group. Recognised the type of kids not in school at present, are not.

Tech – protect and prevent messages - keeping safe of kids online working with the NCA/Police because some of these messages/approach would equally apply to women/DA. We are working x -gov but thinks we can do much more in the DA space, including online companies we work with. - Action – can we send her something on this official channel

Health and social care – this sits with volunteers - we should we be equipping them all with guidance and indicators - looking at contact points during COVID,

Employers – vital –

HS keen to understand what the key interventions might be as we move forward and the situation goes on – are wr going to need more reguge places, etc asked for DA commissioner to report back.

DA – she's will think about this and said the police engagement has been great – DDPOs, and identifying the address of the perpetrator – interesting work – Northumbria to unlock the ability to unlock this and do more with that too. Thinks we could be doing now – possible use of hotels too but recognise this isn't the whole answer but knew MHCLG are working hard on this and seeking input.

Would like to see funding sitting with the HO as with the breadth of knowledge it has and understanding of the sector and its complexities.

DA bill – post code lottery - LA didn't fund DA service in that county at all – relies - HS would like to map out where the funding is going more control over, make sure it reaches where it is needed and close the gaps. How do we ensure we are provided – fundamental structure pieces - HS see as a statutory service as a duty to the state. Refuge have been helpful in getting the data, best practice and bad practice and we need to accelerate this work but presenting as a statutory duty

Women's Aid

Introduction

- Thank you for your time today.
- I wanted to touch base with you following your discussions with various teams at the Home Office to ask if there's anything else you feel you would like to raise with me directly. I am absolutely prioritising this issue and I am here to help, so please do let me know what you need.
- We are in a very critical point in our response to COVID-19. I am taking the threat to vulnerable people very seriously and my message is clear: domestic abuse in any circumstance is unacceptable, no matter what pressures or stresses you are under. Perpetrators will be brought to justice and those that need help will receive it.
- As you know, we have been in frequent contact with you and the wider sector, to closely monitor the situation as it develops. Your advice and thoughts, particularly on communications, has been welcome – thank you.
- Nicki Norman, Acting Chief Executive
- Lucy Hadley, Campaign's and Policy Manager
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- Direct services to continue and to enable workforce to work from home – main challenge supporting our organisations virtually
- Did a survey release today
- Group support - VAWG directory data base goes wider - important
- 84% service provider had to cancel third of their services - staff shortages
- Around half had struggled with staff illness and self-isolation
- Around 77% concerned about loss of income and funding and loss of demand they expect the greater demand to come after the lockdown to life - need to look in immediate, medium term long
- Practical challenges only 30% of refuge providers have sufficient access to PPE.
- Concerns about women and children, but staff and ability to offer face to face support linked into their requirement to work remotely.
- Vacancies for refuge spaces - seeing half of the vacancies that we are used to – so around 70 vs 160 we would normally see. Issue accessing refuge space and opening up new referrals
- HS – impact on courts and the impact on women – Action – to pick up on practical issues and when the situation changes and how this going into the longer terms incl DA bill
- Pressing – financial investment this period and pleased to hear the announcement and keen to understand more and what proportion would be coming to the DA sector and what mechanism for accessing this. Previous ways to access funding was very difficult or didn't get to the members who needed them most – small charities such as LGBTQ, BAME orgs. No lengthy – proportionate and equitable.

- HS Make sure we are focus where this is going – third party procurement process no.
- Flagging they have put forward a proposal – live chat demand which has seen a high demand who are not able to call. The proposal to increase the hours from 2 to 6 hours - national infrastructure to do that.
- Ask share info on tech support but work in progress but agreed for officials to share info we have so far.
- Refuges – if half availability, need to maintain spaces we have are funded – then another question expand capacity in the short term. They have engaged with MHCLG on this and as along about national coordination and safeguarding – accessing specialist support.
- VA some LA have been good at sourcing other accommodation eg uni accommodation, Do you have any info on which are doing well – will help when addressing with MHCLG. Don't think they have detail but have been collecting feedback but could ask for specific feedback on this point.
- HS to see a consistency of services
- ACTION FOR OFFICIALS AND VIKY TO KEEP IN TOUCH

Situation

- I have been closely following the impact on self-isolation on domestic abuse victims I'm aware that calls and online contacts to the national domestic abuse helpline and to your online chat service are now reported to be increasing – in some cases quite significantly - over short periods.
- We are working closely with the police too and understand that while currently, they are not seeing a significant increase in calls this may be because people assuming that 'normal' service isn't operating, or they believe the isolation advice will mean that the police will not be able to act to remove the perpetrator.
- We will remain in frequent contact with the police to monitor this situation as it develops.
- As you know we have undertaken some communications work to help publicise helplines and support local police campaigns – but we are mobilising a much more significant campaign including on social media and with the retail sector.
- I'm pleased that we've been able to work with key partners but am very aware of the difficult and unusual circumstances in which you are working and the challenges this poses in addition to any potential increasing demands on the support services.

Chancellor announcement

- The Chancellor's announcement of £750 million support package for charities across the UK, including those supporting domestic abuse victims, will ensure that those organisations providing critical support to victims are able to maintain their functions.
- We will be working closely with the Treasury on the delivery of this fund.
- We expect it to provide a broad range of support both in terms of sustaining income to organisations as well as funding refuges, helplines and other community based support services where needed.
- We will need to be clear where this funding is most needed and where it will do most good – and enabling smaller as well as larger organisations to seek necessary support.
- I would appreciate your help in signposting this especially to smaller organisations and raising awareness once details of how to apply are published.
- [If pressed for immediate funding for Women's Aid - We will need to ensure fair distribution of the funding and to do so will need very clear picture of what the precise need is and how the funds will be spent]

Home Office Announcement - £2m fund

- Whilst these proposals are being worked up, I believe that it is possible to provide some immediate support for organisations providing remote services for victims – such as helplines and online portals and chat functions.

- I am therefore proposing to announce an additional £2m of funding to boost online and helpline services, so that those cut off from their usual social contacts and support can still reach out with the help of technology.
- We're also working with companies such as Fujitsu to provide additional hardware such as laptops for organisations.
- There are some other options we are exploring including bolstering support to schools and vulnerable children at this time through Operation Encompass.
- However for now I would be very interested in your thoughts on how best this funding could be used to increase online and helpline capacity and capability.
- How for example might chat facilities such as your own be enhanced?

If raised What about future funding

- In this year's Budget the Government announced that it has allocated an additional £15m funding to tackle domestic abuse in 2020/21:
 - £10m will be invested to curb domestic abuse, including by tackling high-risk, high-harm perpetrators of domestic abuse through early interventions using case management and one-to-one interventions. We are working with the sector to assign this funding
 - There will also be a £5m fund to trial new domestic abuse courts which will consider family and criminal matters in parallel, providing more consistent support to victims. We are working with the sector to assign this money
- This is in addition to the existing funding for domestic abuse for 2020/21. The allocation of this funding will be announced shortly, including the Children Affected By Domestic Abuse fund.

If Raised Additional capacity for refuges – alternative accommodation

- Recognise that there are particular pressures on accommodation at present.
- Understand MHCLG is working with the sector on this but that the issue of simply putting people into hotels is not necessarily safe or straightforward.
- Happy to continue to work with sector and OGDs on this issue.

Refuge

Kept helpline going from building to remote working – operationally challenging and was an achievement

Tech abuse their work

Difficult about accessing their post – VA spoke to Royal Mail about that

Many women will be less able to seek help as the perpetrators all time, include computers.

Refuges are busy with children off school and staff self-isolating. There may be a time we may have to close them – loss 5.2m – over 48 refuges they run and manage and support 6.5k victims – stretched to capacity.

In terms of helpline, we've seen an increase in calls – 25% increase compared to before lockdown – 120% last week increase to the hotline, correlation and not just covid, other campaigns but it is likely that women are trying to reach out for help.

We were not able to provide a breakdown of the calls of the 120%. We are down on income due to political demonstrations in HK 500k and incur costs to remote working of staff and volunteers and mobile phone contracts. What we might need over the next 6 months – increasing capacity by 20% to answer more calls and provide live chats on the web platform 89k. Tech support of live chat 17k (just to have it running, not staffed). Translated contact chat box for BAME women. More comms such as adverts to raise awareness – 160k (now to next 6 months).

Are anticipating more calls post lockdown – already we are seeing an increase but once women are able to reach out, plus with HS announcement, do expect to demand increase and have tried to think about funding 1.5m involve expanding helpline team, staffing, training, developing programme to support emotional wellbeing of staff, meet the needs of underrepresented groups, enhancing digital support options and development of the national helpline web platform. This is not including community based support like refuges. If refuges close, they would lose housing benefit income. Other impacts – having to leave rooms clear for 72hrs as per PHE guidance, cleaning fees we incur

Azita Abolhasani

Private Secretary to the Home Secretary

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