

Supplementary written evidence submitted by the Designate Domestic Abuse Commissioner (COR0239)

Executive Summary

- Over the last ten months there has been a significant increase in the number of people reaching out to domestic abuse services for support, and in the severity and complexity of the abuse. This rise has been sharpest in ‘by and for’ services for the most marginalised survivors, where specialist services have experienced up to a 49% rise in demand.
- We welcome the emergency funding from national government. However, the surge in demand for services has further exposed the vulnerability of the sector with regards to funding, with many services still struggling to cope with the increased number of survivors requiring support. This is particularly the case for specialist ‘by and for’ services and smaller grassroots organisations.
- Despite a small initial rise in police reporting rates, they have since dropped. We anticipate that as other crime types return to pre-pandemic levels, the police will have less time to focus on DA cases and as result, referrals to the CPS will continue to drop.
- During the first lockdown period there was a significant drop of 39% in prosecutions for domestic abuse cases between April – June 2020. In the Family Courts, there were also increases in the average times taken for care proceedings – taking an average of 40 weeks (up 7 weeks compared to the same period in 2019).
- In addition to the strain specialist ‘by and for’ services are under, the Domestic Abuse Bill currently fails to provide support for migrant women who are subject to domestic abuse. We strongly recommend that the Bill is amended to provide recourse to public funds for survivors and to create a firewall between public authorities and immigration enforcement to ensure that women are not deterred from coming forward for help.
- Whilst additional bed spaces have been created as a result of emergency funding, a significant percent have been created in temporary, non-specialist forms of accommodation, such as student halls of residence. This will not address the longer demand for accommodation created by the pandemic.

Recommendations for Government

- **Explicitly include domestic abuse frontline workers (in both accommodation-based and community-based services) in the Priority 2 cohort of the JCVI’s list to ensure they have swift access to Covid-19 vaccination.**
- **There is a clear need for long-term, sustainable funding for services to ensure they have the resources to increase staffing levels.** This is especially crucial as we near the cliff-edge of the end of the financial year. Funding should also include provision for clinical supervision in recognition of the huge toll that the past year has had on frontline workers. Linked to this **the Government should amend the Domestic Abuse Bill to include a new statutory duty on public bodies to**

commission community-based services – to mirror the statutory underpinning of refuge provision.

- **A single dedicated cross government ringfenced pot of funding for specialist ‘by and for’ services** for survivors who face the highest levels of exclusion (including BAME, LGBTQ+ and disabled survivors) that is administered directly from national government straight to frontline services.
- **Significant work to clear the backlogs in both Crown and Magistrates Courts to ensure that more perpetrators are brought to justice** and mitigate increased victim attrition as victims have to wait many months before their cases reach court.
- **Funding guarantees to local service providers to prevent a cliff-edge of funding from April 2021.** This will also prevent loss of expertise as specialist domestic abuse workers may seek more stable employment elsewhere.
- **Greater coordination across Government and with local services to ensure the entire system responds better to domestic abuse.** Lack of statutory sector support throughout this period has resulted in the domestic abuse sector often needing to step in and provide mental health and other support, which they do not have the capacity for.
- It will be essential that the government **continues to sustain investment in public communications campaigns beyond the public health lifetime of the pandemic** to ensure we continue to reinforce the message that preventing and tackling domestic abuse is everybody’s business.

The scale and nature of domestic abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic

1. Over the last ten months there has been a significant increase in the number of people reaching out to domestic abuse services for support.¹ For the period 1st April to 31 December 2020, the number of calls and contacts logged on the National Domestic Abuse Helpline run by Refuge (both incoming and outgoing) increased by 34% on the same period for the previous year (114,986 in 2020 vs 85,771 in 2019). This number only increases for specialist ‘by and for’ services, with Galop’s national LGBTQ+ helpline experiencing a 36% increase in calls over the same period; Karma Nirvana’s so-called ‘honour-based’ abuse helpline experiencing a 49% increase in calls; and the Respect helpline for male survivors experiencing a 39% increase in calls.

2. While Covid-19 has not in itself caused domestic abuse, what the very necessary public health measures have done is to create a conducive context for it to happen. For many, this period has led to an escalation of violence and abuse, closed routes for people to escape safely and made it more challenging to bring perpetrators to justice. Women’s Aid’s Perfect Storm report on the impact of Covid-19 found that over three quarters of survivors (78.3%, 36 out of 46) of those living with an abuser said they felt they could not leave or get away because of the pandemic.²

¹ Please refer to our previous written submission for further information on the helpline data:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/22154/pdf/>

² <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/A-Perfect-Storm-August-2020-1.pdf>

3. In addition, the report found that two thirds of survivors who were currently experiencing abuse reported that their abuser used lockdown restrictions as part of the abuse. 91% of respondents currently experiencing domestic abuse said the Covid-19 pandemic had negatively impacted in at least one way. Of those women living with their abuser during lockdown, 61% said the abuse had worsened. More than two-thirds (68%) said they felt they had no one to turn to during lockdown.³

4. Frontline domestic abuse services are overwhelmingly reporting that survivors have higher and more complex support needs. This is in part because people are facing difficulties accessing statutory support services such as mental health services. We have heard a number of reports from Domestic Abuse services that other agencies, owing to the significant demands for their support, are reportedly 'stepping back' from supporting victims of abuse, particularly mental health and drug and alcohol services. This is leaving specialist DA services to 'pick up the pieces' and consequently their caseloads have become more complex, with lengths increasing as a result.

5. Evidence also suggests that the nature of abuse itself is becoming more severe, with an increase in domestic homicides and suicides during the pandemic. Provisional data show there were 64 domestic homicides recorded by the police in England and Wales between January and June 2020, of which 30 occurred in the period April to June. This represents an increase in the number of domestic homicides recorded by the police compared with the same six-month period in the previous year (55), but a slight decrease compared with 2018 (67).⁴

6. As there is no existing accurate and detailed national dataset held by the police on domestic homicides, the National Police Chiefs' Council embarked on a rapid project to look at each and every homicide in order to identify rapid learning for police during lockdown. The Domestic Homicides Project was first established as a pilot in June 2020, and was subsequently funded until 31 March 2021. The project aims to better understand domestic homicides in England and Wales during Covid-19 and lockdown, in particular: a) the true scale and nature of domestic homicide deaths during the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown compared with previous years, and whether any increase is related to lockdown; b) rapid learning for police from an examination of domestic homicide deaths about how police might predict, intervene or manage risks to prevent homicide; c) typologies of perpetrators, and to what extent they were already known to police. This report will be published in March.

7. However domestic homicides do not account for all domestic abuse-related fatalities. Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse have reported a 117% increase in domestic abuse-related suicide/unexplained death referrals received (12 to 26 – comparing the nine-month periods April to December 2019 and 2020). The majority of these referrals (60%) come directly from bereaved families. The remainder come from other charities, Domestic Homicide Review chairs and Community Safety Partnerships. This does not necessarily

³ <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/A-Perfect-Storm-August-2020-1.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabuseduringthecoronaviruscovid19pandemicenglandandwales/november2020>

indicate an increase in the number of victims taking their own life, but that more families are reaching out for support.

8. Indeed we have seen an increase in public awareness and attention on domestic abuse over the past 10 months, as evidenced by the increase in third-party reports. The National Domestic Abuse Helpline run by Refuge record that over this period, 72% of calls were made from survivors, 10% from professionals and 11% from third parties.⁵ The proportion of calls from third parties were at their highest level during the first national lockdown. The London Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) received a total of 41,158 calls-for-service for domestic incidents between 25 March (following the lockdown restrictions imposed on 23 March) and 10 June 2020. This is a 12% increase compared with 36,727 calls over the same period in the previous year. The weekly number of calls from victims remained at similar, sometimes lower levels to the previous year, however, there were large increases in calls from third parties.⁶

9. The increase in third-party calls can be understood in the context of lockdown, where more people who may not usually be at home would be in close proximity, and therefore have greater opportunity to observe and report the abuse. The targeted #YouAreNotAlone media campaign launched in April 2020 may have also increased awareness of domestic abuse, and therefore the likelihood of members of the public being vigilant of it.⁷ In contrast, victims who were confined to their homes in close proximity to their perpetrator would have had less opportunity to safely report their abuse. It will be essential that the government continues to sustain investment in public communications campaigns beyond the public health lifetime of the pandemic to ensure we continue to reinforce the message that preventing and tackling domestic abuse is everybody's business.

10. The pandemic will have a significant long-term impact on the nature and rates of domestic abuse. The sharpest surges in demands for domestic abuse services have followed the periods of the tightest national lockdown restrictions. Research from the Home Office in 2019 found that the average length of abuse for a victim is three years.⁸ We also know that the length of time taken for a survivor of domestic abuse to be able to access support will vary across different groups. For example, for disabled survivors, many of whom have been shielding throughout this period and face some of the highest levels of exclusion from mainstream services, we expect this period to be longer.

Funding for domestic abuse services

11. We welcome the emergency funding that has been provided by national government for the provision of community-based services, national helplines and emergency accommodation for those fleeing domestic abuse. Funds provided by the Home Office,

⁵ <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/22154/pdf/>

⁶ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabuseduringthecoronaviruscovid19pandemicenglandandwales/november2020>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-secretary-announces-support-for-domestic-abuse-victims>

⁸ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/918897/horr107.pdf

Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government totalled £44 million. The fund was split in the following ways and has proved to be a vital lifeline for many organisations:

The Ministry of Justice: secured additional funding to support victims of sexual violence and domestic abuse.

- This included £10 million to be distributed to domestic abuse services that were already commissioned by Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs).
- £5 million for domestic abuse services not currently commissioner by PCCs.
- £5 million for sexual violence services that are already commissioned by PCCs and those that are not currently funded by PCCs.
- Following the second national lockdown in November, the MOJ was able to issue a second wave of emergency funding of £10 million to domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations, to help them to continue to provide valuable support to victims during the pandemic.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government:

- Made an additional £10 million available for the provision of safe accommodation for survivors of domestic abuse.

The Home Office:

- Made £2 million available for national and regional community-based domestic abuse support.
- Made a further £2 million for national domestic abuse helplines.

12. However, the pandemic and surge in demand for services has further exposed the vulnerability of the sector with regards to funding, with many services, who have been relying on piecemeal funding, struggling to cope with the increased number of survivors requiring support. This is particularly the case for specialist 'by and for' services and smaller grassroots organisations.

13. Independent research has shown that local authority spending on domestic abuse has decreased during the past decade. Of 178 authorities that responded to FOI requests from the Guardian in 2018, 65% had cut funding for refuges in real terms since 2010, amounting to an average fall for each of £38,000, or £6.8m in total.⁹

14. FOI requests to all London councils by Novara Media found that refuges led 'by and for' Black and minoritised women lost around half of their annual council funding between 2009 and 2016. Independent research carried out for Imkaan on the impact of Covid-19 found that 75% of their members entered the pandemic with less than three months reserves.¹⁰

15. Research from SafeLives with frontline practitioners in June found that many services were already experiencing financial difficulties. Over half said that this was due to funding opportunities having dried up, and almost one in six (16%) due to local commissioning changing due to Covid-19.¹¹ Comments from practitioners highlighted that the funding pots

⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/mar/23/council-funding-womens-refuges-cut-since-2010-england-wales-scotland>

¹⁰ Imkaan unpublished research

¹¹ Safe Lives, (June 2020), Safe at Home: Domestic abuse frontline service COVID-19 survey results for June 2020

they would usually apply to in order to fund core services had become Covid-19 specific, leaving their service ineligible.

16. Pre-existing capacity issues within the sector have been compounded by Covid-19, and particularly the third lockdown. Sector partners are reporting increased sickness by workers who are already at full capacity and at breaking point – either through Covid, through the need to self-isolate, or burnout due to excessive workloads.

17. However, it is important to recognise the proactive and timely work of the Ministry of Justice to gather vital evidence during this period from the services that were funded through the initial funding round. This evidence included the volume and nature of the work they were carrying out, as well as the projected costs required to continue over the winter months. This helped the department secure the additional £10 million for domestic abuse and sexual violence organisations.

18. Nevertheless, we would have welcomed greater coordination from central government in the distribution of these funds, through the establishment of one single funding pot as there were instances of organisations having to make four separate funding applications to central government for emergency funding.

19. Recommendations going forward:

- **A long-term multi-year funding settlement** for the whole of the domestic abuse sector covering both community-based and accommodation-based services.
- **A single dedicated cross government ringfenced pot of funding for specialist by and for services for survivors** who face the highest levels of exclusion (including BAME, LGBTQ+ and disabled survivors) that is administered directly from national government straight to frontline services.
- **The Government should amend the Domestic Abuse Bill to include a new statutory duty on public bodies to commission community-based services – to mirror the statutory underpinning of refuge provision.**

The police response

20. Whilst rates did not mirror the significant rise in the numbers of people seeking support for domestic abuse, it was encouraging to see an 8% increase in police referrals of domestic abuse cases to the CPS between April to June 2020 compared to the first three months of the year.¹²

21. However, we are concerned that the latest CPS data covering July to September 2020 showed a 4.1% drop in police referrals compared to the previous quarter.¹³ The quarter-on-quarter fall might be due to police responding to other types of crime as we came out of lockdown. This is concerning as we did not see significant drops in the number of survivors reaching out for domestic abuse support.

¹² <https://www.cps.gov.uk/publication/cps-data-summary-quarter-1-2020-2021>

¹³ <https://www.cps.gov.uk/publication/cps-data-summary-quarter-2-2020-2021>

22. We therefore anticipate that as other crime types return to pre-pandemic levels, the police will have less time to focus on DA cases and as a result, referrals to the CPS will continue to drop. This is particularly troubling given what we understand about the long-term impact on the nature and rates of domestic abuse and the increase in reporting that we anticipate over the next 1-3 years.¹⁴

23. In terms of DVPNs and DVPOs, there was an increase in the percentage of DVPNs granted between April and June 2020. A total of 26 forces provided data on both the number of DVPNs applied for and the number granted by a superintendent between 1 April and 30 June 2020.¹⁵ For these forces, 91% of DVPNs applied for were granted (1,628 out of 1,797 applications). This compares with 75% of DVPN applications that were granted by a superintendent in the year ending March 2020.

24. A total of 36 forces provided data on both the number of DVPOs applied for and the number granted by a magistrates' court between 1 April and 30 June 2020. For these forces, 88% of DVPOs applied for were granted (1,657 out of the 1,873 applications). This is similar to 91% of DVPO applications that were granted by a magistrates' court in the year ending March 2020 (based on 37 police forces that supplied adequate data).

25. At the start of the pandemic, there were numerous reports made to the DAC that the police were reluctant to issue DVPOs because they were concerned that a perpetrator might become homeless. We now understand that this position has been significantly improved. Many forces switched to applying for DVPOs virtually as part of remand hearings and there has been a heavier focus on finding alternative temporary accommodation for perpetrators. We are still hearing reports however in some areas of the country where the issue relating to making a perpetrator homeless is arising with regards to the issuing of a DVPO.

26. In terms of Police engagement with MARACs, SafeLives conducted a survey between April and June 2020, to which approximately half of all MARACs responded. More than a third of respondents (37%) reported that referrals to the MARAC were lower than usual and some suggested that lower police referrals were a factor in this, due to some forces receiving fewer reports of high-risk abuse.

27. Furthermore, 32% of responding MARACs found that agency attendance had changed during the time period: "the police are no longer attending - but sending updates before the meeting. Housing are not attending, and education are not attending. Agencies who make a referral and usually attend in person to present it are now not phoning in."¹⁶

The response of the wider criminal justice system and family courts¹⁷

¹⁴ Please refer to our previous written submission for further information on Police data:
<https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/22154/pdf/>

¹⁵

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabuseduringthecoronaviruscovid19pandemicenglandandwales/november2020>

¹⁶ SafeLives, England, Wales and Northern Ireland Covid-19 Marac Survey (April-June)

¹⁷ <https://www.cps.gov.uk/publication/cps-data-summary-quarter-2-2020-2021>

28. During the first lockdown period there was a significant drop of 39% in prosecutions for domestic abuse cases between April – June 2020.¹⁸ This is unsurprising, given the vast reductions in court capacity during the first few months of lockdown.

29. The latest data published by the CPS shows that prosecutions are at their highest level since Q2 2019-20, suggesting that courts are prioritising DA cases.¹⁹ However, this is not enough to suggest that backlog is being recovered. The overall long-term trend still shows declining referrals, prosecutions and convictions.

30. In terms of the Family Courts, the latest data from the MoJ shows that Family Court proceedings between July – September 2020 were broadly comparable to the same quarter in 2019, but that there was a 26% increase in domestic violence remedy cases.²⁰ Applications for non-molestation orders rose by 27% and occupation orders up 22%.²¹ Problems with the Family Court remain the single most common issue we are contacted about from victims and survivors, and Covid-specific issues include changes to child contact arrangements rather than necessarily a backlog in proceedings (which are largely taking place virtually). There were increases in the average times taken for care proceedings – taking an average of 40 weeks (up 7 weeks compared to the same period in 2019).²²

31. Given the significant court delays faced by survivors and victims of domestic abuse it is critical that: 1) the CPS continued to prioritise DA cases, and 2) the Government commits to the long-term funding of vital community-based services that support survivors to access and navigate the criminal justice system, including court-based IDVAs. Without this we will see significant attrition rates among survivors and a failure to bring perpetrators to justice.

Support for migrant survivors

32. The specialist ‘by and for’ sector have faced additional barriers during the pandemic, in part because of their even more precarious funding position pre-pandemic. In addition, there have been significant barriers to accessing mainstream services for women for whom English is not their first language. This is due to a lack of interpreter services.

33. We recommend a single, dedicated, cross-government ringfenced pot of funding for specialist ‘by and for’ services for survivors who face the highest levels of exclusion (including BAME, LGBTQ+ and disabled survivors) that is administered directly from national

¹⁸ <https://www.cps.gov.uk/publication/cps-data-summary-quarter-2-2020-2021>

¹⁹ <https://www.cps.gov.uk/publication/cps-data-summary-quarter-2-2020-2021>

²⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/family-court-statistics-quarterly-july-to-september-2020/family-court-statistics-quarterly-july-to-september-2020>

²¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/family-court-statistics-quarterly-july-to-september-2020/family-court-statistics-quarterly-july-to-september-2020>

²² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/family-court-statistics-quarterly-july-to-september-2020/family-court-statistics-quarterly-july-to-september-2020>

government straight to frontline services. We recommend that this includes an allocated proportion for capacity building.

34. In addition, as it currently stands the Domestic Abuse Bill fails to provide support for migrant women who are subject to domestic abuse. We strongly recommend that the Bill is amended to provide recourse to public funds for survivors and to create a firewall between public authorities and immigration enforcement to ensure that women are not deterred from coming forward for help.

35. In terms of providing recourse to public funds for migrant survivors, the Home Office published the draft bid prospectus for the Support for Migrant Victims scheme (SMV) pilot last October. The prospectus is the outcome of a review that was carried out by the Home Office (the Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Review). The pilot is due to run for 14 months (we expect until March 2022) and will inform the government's decision about further funds to support migrant survivors of domestic abuse. The contract for this has not yet been awarded.

36. Ample evidence on the need for change, and the support required, already exists to support these amendments, and it is not therefore necessary to wait for the report from the Home Office's SMV pilot in order to make further recommendations on the support needed for migrant victims of domestic abuse.

37. The amount of £1.4m that is on offer will be able to support only around 500 women, for three months each, over a one-year period. This means that many women will continue to be excluded from protection and crisis support. In 2019, Southall Black Sisters was awarded £1.09 million by the Tampon Tax to support women with NRPF across England and Wales over two years (April 2019-March 2021), with both accommodation and holistic, wrap-around support. However, this amount is only able to meet the housing needs of around 130 women over a two-year period. The Tampon Tax funding is due to end in March 2021, which means that for the many women who cannot access the Support for Migrant Victims Scheme due to its limited funding, there will be no access to a safety net.

38. Furthermore, a joint investigation by HMICFRS, the College of Policing (CoP) and the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) found that victims of crime with insecure or uncertain immigration status are fearful that, if they report crimes to the police, their information will be shared with the Home Office.²³ Liberty and Southall Black Sisters say that these features deter domestic abuse victims and witnesses engaging with the police because of their unsettled immigration status. As a consequence, victims and survivors are denied justice, while offenders go unpunished and remain a threat to the public.²⁴

39. The Domestic Abuse Bill has been presented as a 'once-in a-generation opportunity' to support all victims of domestic abuse. If the Government is to meet its equality and human rights obligations (particularly Article 3 of the ECHR concerning the right not to be subjected

²³ <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/liberty-and-southall-black-sisters-super-complaint-on-policing-and-immigration-status/>

²⁴ <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/liberty-and-southall-black-sisters-super-complaint-on-policing-and-immigration-status/>

to inhuman and degrading treatment), it must use the opportunity presented by the Domestic Abuse Bill to put protection for all migrant women on a statutory footing.

The coordination of the government's response

40. We would have welcomed greater coordination from central government in the distribution of emergency funds, through the establishment of one single funding pot. Indeed there were instances of organisations having to make four separate funding applications to central government for emergency funding.

41. We understand that the inter-ministerial group on violence against women and girls has not met during the last ten months, impacting the scope for coordinated work during this period. In light of the current development of the forthcoming VAWG strategy, as well as the short and long-term impacts of the pandemic on those experiencing domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG, we recommend that this group meets as a matter of urgency.

Refuge provision

42. We welcome the additional £10 million of emergency funding from the MHCLG and the £125 million secured in the Spending Review to deliver Part 4 of the DA Bill. The new statutory provision in the bill should – if accompanied by a tight definition of specialist safe accommodation and support in the statutory guidance – lead to greater stability of funding for refuge accommodation and other forms of specialist safe accommodation.

43. However, we are concerned that whilst additional bed spaces have been created as a result of emergency funding, a significant percent have been created in temporary, non-specialist forms of accommodation, such as student halls of residence. This will not address the longer demand for accommodation created by the pandemic. It is important to note that even pre-pandemic, there was a significant shortfall in the number of refuge spaces required by survivors. In the year ending May 2020, there were 3,935 refuge spaces in England. This figure falls short by 1,629 (30.1%) of the Council of Europe's minimum recommendation (one refuge space for every 10,000 people).²⁵ During the full lockdown period from 23 March to 31 May 2020, there was a 42% reduction in the number of refuge vacancies.²⁶ This has largely been caused by a lack of move on accommodation for those already in refuge, a fear of spreading the virus in communal accommodation, a lack of PPE during this period and a lack of interpreters to survivors for whom English is not their first language.

44. We are also concerned about the increase in the number of non-specialist exempt accommodation providers claiming the higher rate of housing benefit who do not provide the specialist support required by survivors. Evidence suggests that these services are more

²⁵ <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/The-Domestic-Abuse-Report-2021-The-Annual-Audit.pdf>

²⁶ <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/A-Perfect-Storm-August-2020-1.pdf>

likely to be accessed by survivors who face the highest levels of exclusion from mainstream DA survivors, including BAME, LGBTQ+ and disabled survivors.

Requested information following oral evidence session (3rd February 2021)

1) What is the funding gap between the resource available to services and what they need to meet current demand?

- The pandemic and subsequent surge in demand for services has further exposed the vulnerability of the sector with regards to funding. This has left many services – who have been relying on piecemeal funding – struggling to cope with the increased number of survivors requiring support. This is particularly the case for specialist ‘by and for’ services and smaller grass roots organisations.
- Independent research has shown that local authority spending on domestic abuse has decreased during the past decade. Of 178 authorities that responded to FOI requests from the Guardian in 2018, 65% had cut funding for refuges in real terms since 2010, amounting to an average fall for each of £38,000, or £6.8m in total.²⁷
- FOI requests to all London councils by Novara Media found that refuges led ‘by and for’ Black and minoritised women lost around half of their annual council funding between 2009 and 2016.²⁸ Independent research carried out for Imkaan on the impact of Covid-19 found that 75% of their members entered the pandemic with less than three months reserves.
- Research from SafeLives with frontline practitioners in June found that many services were already experiencing financial difficulties. Over half said that this was due to funding opportunities having dried up, and almost one in six (16%) due to local commissioning changing due to Covid-19. Comments from practitioners highlighted that the funding pots they would usually apply to in order to fund core services had become Covid-19 specific, leaving their service ineligible.
- Pre-existing capacity issues within the sector have been compounded by Covid-19, and particularly the third lockdown. Sector partners are reporting increased sickness by workers who are already at full capacity and at breaking point – either through Covid, through the need to self-isolate, or burnout due to excessive workloads.

2) If the current Government funding support is not carried over to 2021/22, what will happen in terms of service provision, and how quickly?

- For specialist domestic abuse services, emergency funds can take a long period of time to translate to frontline support because of the length of time to provide new members of staff with the specialist training required to fulfil those roles. The retention of additional specialist staff is even more challenging when the funding for their posts has only been provided on a temporary basis and their jobs cannot be guaranteed beyond March 2021.
- The Commissioner’s Office have also recently been in touch with a number of local authorities and PCCs who have still yet to confirm funding to some of their VAWG contracted services beyond April 2021.

²⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/mar/23/council-funding-womens-refuges-cut-since-2010-england-wales-scotland>

²⁸ <https://novaramedia.com/2017/10/02/bme-womens-refuges-in-london-have-lost-half-their-annual-council-funding-since-2009/>

- The problem of guaranteed funding into the next financial year for DA services has already been a significant challenge for services during the pandemic, with many not being able to guarantee their workforce – who are working with significantly higher case-loads and facing high levels of burnout – a position beyond March next year. Despite the November Spending Review and the allocation of departmental budgets, there are still a significant number of services who are operating without a guarantee of their funding situation beyond March. Given that the departmental budgets have broadly stayed the same following the Spending Review, we recommend that Government departments give a clear guarantee to services that they will continue to receive the same levels of funding into the next financial year rather than them having to wait for the outcome of commissioning decisions.
- Again, it is important to emphasise the existing financial vulnerability of the sector and the sharp increase in demand during the pandemic. Services will not be able to meet demand if funding is not carried over. Furthermore, this will hit specialist 'by and for' services the hardest, with independent research carried out for Imkaan finding that 75% of their members entered the pandemic with less than three months reserves.

3) What trend in demand for services is forecast for 2021/22, and what further funding does the sector need to support the demand for services?

- In the forthcoming Spending Review (Autumn 2021) the Treasury must put forward a full funding settlement for the DA – and wider VAWG – sector, for the next three years to allow us to provide the effective response we know victims and survivors need. This funding package must take into account the chronic problems of underfunding in the sector (particularly for specialist 'by and for' services), and the long-term impact of the pandemic on the high number of survivors who will require support.
- We also call for a single, dedicated, cross-government ringfenced pot of funding for specialist 'by and for' services for survivors who face the highest levels of exclusion (including BAME, LGBTQ+ and disabled survivors) that is administered directly from national government straight to frontline services
- The Government should amend the Domestic Abuse Bill to include a new statutory duty on public bodies to commission community-based services, to mirror the statutory underpinning of refuge provision. Community-based services provide a crucial lifeline of support to survivors of domestic abuse and their children – around 70% of people experiencing domestic abuse and receiving support will do so via community-based services. These services include specialist Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (who advocate on behalf of survivors with regards to court support, health services, housing advice and are a crucial source of emotional support), helplines and perpetrator programmes, as well as specialist local agencies offering drop in services for children. The statutory duty on local authorities to provide accommodation-based services is strongly welcomed. However, without a similar statutory underpinning in the Bill for the provision of specialist community-based services, there is a risk that local authorities may redistribute their funding simply to meet the statutory duty for accommodation-based services. Community-based services can prevent a survivor from being forced to flee to a refuge. To deprioritise these services would undo years of work to move towards prevention and early intervention. Government has previously stated that this provision cannot be made in

the Bill until the Domestic Abuse Commissioner has completed the mapping research off all domestic abuse services (due to be completed by the end of 2021). This mapping will be vital in helping to end the postcode lottery faced by victims and survivors of domestic abuse. However, it is our strong recommendation that the government does not wait for the outcome of this exercise to make this provision because we already have strong evidence on projected demand and actual provision.

4) What is it possible to say about the demand for services and the requirement for funding support in the medium term, e.g. in financial year 2023/24?

- The pandemic will have a significant long-term impact on the nature and rates of domestic abuse. The sharpest surges in demands for domestic abuse services have followed the periods of the tightest national lockdown restrictions. Research from the Home Office in 2019 found that the average length of abuse for a victim is three years.²⁹ Emergency funding is therefore no substitute for increased longer-term funding to meet the high demands for services as a result of Covid-19.
- We support the submission made by Women's Aid and SafeLives which estimated that £2.2bn is required to support victims of domestic abuse for adults and children, as well as interventions for the perpetrators who cause the harm over a three-year period. A significant proportion of this spend, £1bn, would be to support adult victims' services, with those for children approximating £330m, and those for perpetrators totalling £680m. This settlement covers both community-based services and refuge accommodation.

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²⁹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/918897/horr107.pdf