

CROSS-GOVERNMENT DEFINITION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE – A CONSULTATION SUMMARY OF RESPONSES



Home Office

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Contents

- Introduction 3
- Overview of responses 4
- Initial analysis of responses..... 5
- Should the current definition remain the same? 8
- Should 16-17 year olds be included in the definition? 12
- Should all those under 18 be included in the definition? 15
- Should coercive control be included in the definition?..... 17
- Government response 19

Introduction

A commitment to consider changing the cross-Government definition of domestic violence was made in the **Violence Against Women and Girls Action Plan**, published in March 2011, which was as follows:

“Following a recommendation from the Home Affairs Select Committee report in 2008, the Government will consult on a revised definition of domestic violence to include victims under 18 years of age.”

The current definition of domestic violence is:

“any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse [psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional] between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality”.

This definition includes so called ‘honour’ based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group. An adult is defined as any person aged 18 years or over.

This definition is not a statutory or legal definition; therefore, any change to the definition would not mean a change in the law. It is used by Government departments to inform policy development and other agencies such as the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the UK Border Agency to inform the identification of domestic violence cases.

A consultation was launched on 14 December 2011 to seek views on a number of options regarding the current definition of domestic violence. Views were sought from the voluntary sector, Local Authorities, frontline practitioners, Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVA), Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) and the public.

The consultation closed on 30 March 2012. This document provides a summary of the responses and outlines the Government’s proposed next steps.

Overview of responses

We received 506 responses, of which 405 were from the on-line questionnaire posted on the Home Office website, 98 via a dedicated email inbox and 3 by post.

The profile of respondents was as follows:

Which best describes your organisation?

| | |
|---|------------|
| None Given | 229 |
| Charitable and voluntary sector | 103 |
| Community safety partnership | 30 |
| Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA) | 4 |
| Local Authority/Local Government/Local Council | 66 |
| Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) | 2 |
| Other Government | 44 |
| Police | 28 |
| Total | 506 |

Initial analysis of responses

Of the total number of 506 responses:

- 90% of respondents thought the definition should not remain the same;
- 85% of respondents thought 16-17 year olds should be included in the definition;
- 85% thought coercive control should be included in the definition, and;
- 54% thought all those under 18 should be included in the definition.

The breakdown of respondents to the question as to whether the definition should remain the same was as follows:

Q1. Do you think the cross-Government definition of domestic violence should remain the same?

| | Not answered | Don't know | No | Yes | Grand Total |
|--|--------------|------------|------------|-----------|-------------|
| None given | 7 | 7 | 195 | 20 | 229 |
| Charitable and voluntary sector | | 3 | 95 | 5 | 103 |
| Community safety partnership | | | 29 | 1 | 30 |
| Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA) | | | 4 | | 4 |
| Local Authority/Local Government/ Local Council | | 1 | 62 | 3 | 66 |
| Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) | | | 2 | | 2 |
| Other Government | | 1 | 43 | | 44 |
| Police | | | 26 | 2 | 28 |
| Total | 7 | 12 | 456 | 31 | 506 |

The breakdown of respondents who wished to see coercive control included is as follows:

**Q4. Do you think coercive control should be included in the definition of domestic violence?
Please provide comments in the box below to support your view.**

| | Not answered | Don't know | No | Yes | Grand Total |
|--|--------------|------------|-----------|------------|-------------|
| None given | 7 | 7 | 19 | 196 | 229 |
| Charitable and voluntary sector | 1 | 4 | 4 | 94 | 103 |
| Local Authority/Local Government/ Local Council | | 3 | 4 | 59 | 66 |
| Other Government | 3 | 2 | 3 | 36 | 44 |
| Community safety partnership | | 1 | 1 | 28 | 30 |
| Police | 1 | 5 | 10 | 12 | 28 |
| Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA) | | | | 4 | 4 |
| Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) | | | | 2 | 2 |
| Total | 12 | 22 | 41 | 431 | 506 |

The breakdown of respondents who wished to see 16-17 year olds included is as follows:

Q6. Do you think the Government's definition of domestic violence should be extended to include 16-17 year olds?

| | Not answered | Don't know | No | Yes | Grand Total |
|--|--------------|------------|-----------|------------|-------------|
| None given | 10 | 14 | 18 | 187 | 229 |
| Charitable and voluntary sector | 5 | 1 | 4 | 93 | 103 |
| Local Authority/Local Government/ Local Council | | 1 | 4 | 61 | 66 |
| Other Government | 2 | 3 | 4 | 35 | 44 |
| Community safety partnership | | 2 | 2 | 26 | 30 |
| Police | | | 4 | 24 | 28 |
| Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA) | | | | 4 | 4 |
| Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) | | | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Total | 17 | 21 | 37 | 431 | 506 |

The breakdown of respondents who also thought all those under 18 should be included in the definition is as follows:

Q7. Do you think the Government’s definition of domestic violence should be extended to include all those under 18?

| | Not answered | Don't know | No | Yes | Grand Total |
|--|--------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| None given | 9 | 26 | 49 | 145 | 229 |
| Charitable and voluntary sector | 5 | 6 | 34 | 58 | 103 |
| Local Authority/Local Government/ Local Council | 4 | 7 | 26 | 29 | 66 |
| Other Government | 5 | 4 | 11 | 24 | 44 |
| Community safety partnership | | 5 | 18 | 7 | 30 |
| Police | 3 | | 19 | 6 | 28 |
| Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA) | | | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) | | 1 | | 1 | 2 |
| Total | 26 | 49 | 159 | 272 | 506 |

Should the current definition remain the same?

The vast majority of respondents (90%) thought the definition should be changed. The main reasons given reflected the fact that most respondents wished to see those aged 16-17, and wording to reflect coercive control, included. It was also clear that a single consistent definition is required across Government departments. Although the current Government definition was agreed in 2004, it is apparent that there is still some confusion where the definition is, on occasion, thought to be the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) or Home Office definition.

Some responses to the consultation showed that some respondents believed that a change in the definition would mean a change in the law. The definition is used to inform policy and to identify domestic violence cases. It is not a statutory or legal definition. As such, any change in the definition will not mean a change in the law.

“Not sure when a relationship with younger children who do not cohabit can be considered domestic violence and when it is just abuse. I don’t know if domestic violence law is the best way to legislate this.”

(West Midlands, member of the public)

Is the definition applied correctly?

Respondents were asked whether they thought the definition was applied correctly by Local Government, Government departments and frontline practitioners.

GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

36% of respondents to the consultation thought that Government departments did not apply the definition correctly. 30% said they did not know. 19% thought the definition was applied properly and 15% did not answer the question.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

38% of respondents did not think the definition was applied properly by Local Government. 22% of respondents thought the definition was correctly applied by Local Government. 23% said they did not know and 16% did not answer the question.

FRONTLINE PRACTITIONERS

40% of respondents did not think the definition was applied properly by frontline practitioners. 30% thought that the definition was applied properly by frontline practitioners, 15% did not answer the question and 16% said they did not know.

Those respondents who did not think the definition was applied correctly raised the following issues:

- domestic violence may be seen to be physical abuse only;
- many organisations or Local Authorities create their own definitions which differ from the cross-Government definition;
- psychological or emotional abuse can be minimised or overlooked, and;
- there may be a general lack of understanding as to what constitutes domestic violence.

Those who felt that the definition was applied correctly commented:

“All Government and Local Authority organisations would use this as they have been trained in these areas and it is important for them to help individuals understand what usually sign posts to relevant agencies as they don’t see service users face to face”.

(East Midlands, charitable organisation)

“I feel the current definition is properly applied but agencies struggle with the limitations imposed by the age reference in particular”.

(East Midlands, Local Authority/ Local Council/ Local Government)

Is the current definition understood?

The majority of respondents thought victims (63%) and perpetrators (66%) did not understand the definition, particularly that non-physical abuse is often minimised or thought not to count as a form of domestic violence. Many respondents suggested that the effects of psychological abuse can be much longer lasting and a number of respondents also suggested that a lack of understanding of what constitutes abuse amongst victims and perpetrators was symptomatic of a lack of understanding across society in general.

IS THE DEFINITION UNDERSTOOD BY VICTIMS?

63% of respondents thought that the definition was not understood by victims. Only 12% thought that the definition was understood by victims. 16% did not answer the question and 9% said they did not know.

“The majority of victims may never have seen the definition of Domestic Abuse written down, or indeed, had it explained to them in detail. The majority of victims will not identify the behaviour of the perpetrator as fitting under the domestic abuse umbrella and will not recognise that domestic abuse encompasses psychological, sexual, financial and emotional abuse, as typically they will only identify physical abuse as constituting domestic abuse.”

(Police Force)

IS THE DEFINITION UNDERSTOOD BY PERPETRATORS?

66% of respondents thought that perpetrators did not understand the definition. 6% thought that they did understand the definition, 17% of respondents did not answer this question and 11% said they did not know.

“Many of the perpetrators I work with are still hazy about what behaviours constitute abuse. Many have been brought up with the maxim ‘you don’t hit women’ but see anything else as fair game. For example, many see controlling behaviour (such as constantly checking up on partners when they go out) as justified and normal. Likewise many victims will not see this kind of behaviour as abusive because of the lack of physical violence, even if it negatively effects their quality of life.”

(South East Local Authority/Local Government/Local Council)

IS THE DEFINITION UNDERSTOOD BY FRONTLINE PRACTITIONERS?

42% of respondents thought that the definition was understood by frontline practitioners. 30% thought that the definition was not understood by frontline practitioners. 17% did not answer this question and 10% said they did not know.

IS THE DEFINITION UNDERSTOOD BY GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS?

32% of respondents believed the definition was not understood by Government departments. 26% believed that the definition was understood by Government departments. 24% said they did not know and 17% of respondents did not answer this question.

IS THE DEFINITION UNDERSTOOD BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT?

32% of respondents thought that the definition was not understood by Local Government. 29% of respondents thought that the definition was understood by Local Government. 17% of respondents did not answer this question and 22% said they did not know.

IS THE DEFINITION UNDERSTOOD BY THE GENERAL PUBLIC?

66% of respondents thought that the definition was not understood by the general public. 5% thought that the definition was understood by the general public. 16% of respondents did not answer this question and 13% said they did not know.

Should 16-17 year olds be included in the definition?

THOSE IN FAVOUR:

A clear majority (85%) of respondents supported the inclusion of those aged 16 and 17 in the definition. Their justification was that early intervention was important, as was raising awareness amongst young people as to what constitutes abuse. There were suggestions that this could be covered by schools teaching about healthy relationships. A number of respondents commented that there can be a level of acceptance about abuse in young people's relationships as it may sometimes be the first adult type relationship they have entered, so they may be unaware of what is acceptable and unacceptable. It was also suggested by some respondents that teenage mothers should be afforded the same access to services as adults. It was noted that this group may be particularly vulnerable as they may be co-habiting for the first time.

“A large number of the victims I have worked with have been under the age of 18, a lot of them young mums with young babies. Once they have their own child they see themselves as adults and should be entitled to the services just as 18+ year olds are.”

(West Midlands, Local Authority, Local Council, Local Government)

“There are a large number of under 18's who experience 'dating violence'. They need support and advice and the wider population needs to understand this experience and young people need to understand that this is not acceptable.

This applies to both male and females. Anecdotally there appears to be a rise in relationship violence with both sexes amongst younger people and an acceptance of this.”

(London, member of the public)

Several respondents noted the importance of ensuring that an expansion of the current age limit of the definition does not result in the voluntary sector being disproportionately burdened with the task of providing additional services. It was also proposed that with proper training, those agencies already working with young people would be better placed to spot the signs of abuse and signpost to relevant support allowing for problems to be tackled before they escalate.

It should be noted that 20 respondents who answered 'no' to this question answered 'yes' to the option to include all those under 18. This shows that the inclusion of all those under 18 is their preferred option.

KEY POINTS RAISED WERE:

- that as people can marry at 16 and leave the parental home to co-habit with a partner, they should be entitled to the same range of services as those over 18;
- research by the NSPCC¹ has shown this age group to be a high risk group in terms of the prevalence of abuse in relationships, and as such it was felt they should be included in domestic violence guidelines;

1 In 2009, the NSPCC conducted research with young people aged 13-17 in mainstream education which examined their experiences of physical, emotional and sexual forms of violence in their partner relationships (Barter et al, 2009). The research found that:

- 25% girls (the same proportion as for adult women) and 18% boys experienced some form of physical abuse;
- 75% girls and 50% boys reported some sort of emotional abuse; and
- 33% girls and 16% boys reported some form of sexual abuse.

- this age group can slip between the net for services as it may not be appropriate to refer them to safeguarding or child protection services, but they may not meet the age criteria for adult domestic violence services;
- early intervention was identified as being key to help prevent domestic violence in this age group, and it was felt that this would have a positive impact on the number of domestic violence cases in future and help to address issues before they become more serious;
- many respondents commented that they felt there were increasing levels of abuse within this age range, and;
- the need to be able to refer high risk cases in this age range to MARACs.

“Intervening at an early age will help the young person to stop normalising Domestic Violence in their relationship, therefore, recognising what a healthy/positive relationship looks like.”

(ANON response)

“The National Domestic Violence Helpline (run in partnership between Refuge and Women’s Aid) frequently receives calls from teenage girls. Between 2010 and 2011 it received 1,397 calls from girls aged 16-20, which represents 11.2% of total calls during that period (our helpline monitoring system does not allow us to break down data into more specific age bands).

39 of our 42 refuges accept women of all ages, including 16-17 year old victims.”

(Refuge)

THOSE AGAINST:

Thirty seven respondents did not support this option. Of these 16 responses answered ‘no’ to both the inclusion of those aged 16-17 and the inclusion of all those aged under 18.

“Children under the age of 18 are being abused either emotionally, physically or sexually, and the risks to them need to be addressed via the child protection systems.”

(North West, Other Government department)

“This group are covered by the Children’s Act and Working Together to Safeguard Children and altering child abuse to domestic abuse when perpetrated by a family member would cause great confusion and would require alterations to child care law.”

(Yorkshire and Humberside, member of the CSP)

The reasons given were that there is already an agreed definition and that discretion could be used locally in making referrals to services without the need to change the definition. There were also suggestions that perpetrators under 18 were still developing and learning about life and so should not be included in such a definition. Some people felt that all those under 18 should be considered under child protection rules. Some respondents also noted that a change in definition may increase the number of people requiring services which would put pressure on existing services and may be costly.

20 respondents answered ‘no’ the option to include 16-17 year olds but answered ‘yes’ to the option of including all those under 18 which shows that was their preferred option.

“The NSPCC wants to stress that drawing the line at 16 would be an arbitrary cut off point. There is evidence of young people under 16 experiencing threatening behaviour, violence and abuse inflicted on them by their intimate partners who are young people themselves”

(NSPCC)

One respondent answered ‘no’ to the inclusion of 16-17 year olds and ‘don’t know’ to the inclusion of all those under 18.

Should all those under 18 be included in the definition?

Just over half (53%) of respondents supported the inclusion of all those aged under 18 in the definition. This view was supported by key stakeholders such as the NSPCC and Barnardos.

31% of respondents believed that all those under 18 should not be included in the definition. The remainder of respondents either did not answer the question or said they did not know.

THOSE IN FAVOUR:

A number of those in favour of this option said that those under the age of 16 could also be in a relationship and suffer from relationship abuse. Others suggested domestic violence could happen to anyone and therefore the definition itself should be age neutral.

Some key points were:

- having a cut off point may result in younger victims not being able to access specific domestic violence services;
- children much younger than 16 could enter into an intimate partner relationship and therefore should be afforded the same protections;
- there was also the suggestion that the inclusion of all those under 18 should also highlight domestic violence perpetrated by children and directed towards parents or grandparents, and;
- in order to address violent behaviours and prevent them from being normalised, all age groups should be included in the definition.

“Defining domestic abuse as abuse between adults not only creates barriers to young victims accessing appropriate services and the specialist support that they need but also hinders the identification of young victims who do not recognise that they are a victim or who may be reluctant to disclose their abuse, by services and agencies who are there to safeguard them. It is vital that services with a responsibility to protect children and young people fully understand the full extent of domestic violence so that the right questions are asked.”

(Barnardos)

“The cross-Government definition should be extended to reflect the fact that many young people under the age of 18, who are intimate partners, currently experience such violence. Their experiences are currently not reflected in the cross-Government definition.

This issue is relevant to the NSPCC’s core mission of ending cruelty to children because:

- There is compelling evidence that young people are abusing other young people in intimate relationships – this peer to peer is child cruelty.
- We know that peer on peer abuse is normalising violent behaviour within relationships. This not only impacts on them but also on children who may be raised in these or subsequent relationships.” (NSPCC)

THOSE AGAINST:

159 respondents were against the option of including all those under 18. Of the 159 there were 56 respondents who did not say which organisation they were responding from (it may be assumed that they were responding as members of the public), 34 were responding on behalf of the voluntary sector, 26 were either Local Government or Local Council, 19 were police, 18 were community safety partnerships, 11 were other Government and 2 were IDVAs.

Some argued that the existing safeguarding duties already cover this age group. There was also concern that the inclusion of this age group could blur the lines between domestic violence and child abuse. A number of respondents commented that this option may result in sibling violence being regarded as domestic violence.

“Child abuse is quite distinct from domestic violence. Lowering the age to include all those under 18 would confuse the differences between child abuse and domestic violence.”

(South East, Local Authority/ Local Government/ Local Council)

“We feel that the inclusion of 16 and 17 year olds in the Government definition should be a sufficient action. Extending to all those under the age of 18 will most certainly blur the boundaries between childhood and adulthood and raise concerns about when such issues should be viewed as child protection/safeguarding issues.”

(North East, Local Authority/ Local Council/ Local Government)

We recognise that there will be different combinations of age ranges within relationships where there is domestic violence. We also recognise that those under 16 can also be victims of domestic violence either in their own relationships or as a result of violence in the home. Prolonged and/or regular exposure to domestic violence can also have a serious impact on children’s safety and welfare. Whether they are physically harmed or not, children may be emotionally affected by the situation and the extent of this can differ according to their age, individual resilience or vulnerability.

Should coercive control be included in the definition?

THOSE IN FAVOUR:

A clear majority of respondents (85%) wished to see the inclusion of coercive control within the definition. 8% did not think it should be included, and the remaining respondents either said they didn't know or did not answer the question.

Many respondents noted that psychological and emotional abuse are the most likely to be minimised or thought not to count as domestic violence. As detailed above in the analysis of responses to whether or not the definition is understood, many respondents noted that victims of non-physical abuse may not see themselves as victims. It was also noted that perpetrators may not consider that non-physical abuse is domestic violence. However, a repeated pattern of emotional or psychological abuse by which one party seeks to control another can be harmful to a persons well being.

“Domestic violence is defined as an act or a pattern of acts by which an adult partner or family member seeks to coerce and/or control another by intent, design or consequence. Coercion includes an act or a pattern of acts of assault, sexual coercion, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim. Control includes a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.”

(Against Violence and Abuse (AVA))

“Abuse is abuse, in any form. Verbal, physical or psychological.”

(South West, member of the public)

“What concerns me is that people experiencing abusive behaviours that are not (yet) physical violence, may not identify themselves as suffering domestic violence, and so may not seek help. Equally perpetrators will often say in mitigation that they never hit the victim, so they do not see that the controlling and jealous behaviour is abusive.”

(Yorkshire and Humber Local Authority/ Local Council/ Local Government)

THOSE AGAINST:

Of the 41 respondents that didn't support this option, the main concerns were that the inclusion of coercive control might weaken the definition as it was felt to be an abstract concept. Some suggested that this was already adequately covered under the wording of 'psychological' and 'emotional' in the current definition.

Some key concerns raised were:

- that it would be difficult to police such a definition;
- that it may result in a broader category of victims;
- that there may be confusion as to what constitutes abuse and what does not and where there is not an act of violence, and;
- that it may result in people being labelled as violent when they are not.

Other issues relating to re-wording the definition

Aside from the options that the Government was consulting on, a number of further issues for consideration have been raised during the course of this consultation. Some of these concern the myths or stereotypes that surround domestic violence.

Some respondents felt that it should be made clearer that men can also be victims.

We have always been clear in our definition that domestic violence is gender neutral and applies to both men and women. We recognise that men can also be the victims of domestic violence and that is why we fund the Men's Advice Line and the Male Victim's Fund.

“The current focus on incidents, whilst understandable from a criminal justice system (CJS) perspective and its need for evidence, is problematic for several reasons:

- It reinforces a public understanding that DV is a problem of heterosexual men being physically violent and/or physically coercively sexually violent towards women and makes it harder for those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or trans gender (LGBT) to recognise or identify their experiences as DV; and for those victim/survivors (across gender and sexuality) whose experiences are primarily of non-physical violence (emotional, threatening, undermining, isolating, financial and so on) from recognising their experiences as DV); and for practitioners to recognise the experiences of these groups as DV.
- It makes it particularly difficult for the police and other CJS agencies to recognise and name the experiences of LGBT victim/survivors and male victim/survivors as DV and respond appropriately.
- In some cases ‘positive policing’ about DV has resulted in a pro-arrest policy that has resulted in dual arrests of victim/survivors who, in that incident, has violently retaliated (Johnson, 1996) but who is actually the victim/survivor of DV.” (North East, Charitable organisation)

We have also been clear that our definition applies to everyone regardless of sexuality. We recognise that domestic violence can also occur in same sex relationships and that is why we fund the charity Broken Rainbow to provide support and advice to lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or trans gender (LGBT) victims of domestic violence.

Government response to the consultation

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have contributed to this consultation. We will continue to engage with our partners in both the statutory and voluntary sectors as we develop our plans following this consultation.

We have considered all of the responses to this consultation and we agree that we need to amend the current definition of domestic violence.

The majority of respondents to this consultation felt that the definition should be changed to include 16-17 year olds, and that the wording to reflect coercive control.

We have carefully considered these views and we will be taking both of these options forward. We will also be changing the title of the definition to 'domestic violence and abuse'.

Following the consultation we have worked across government departments to agree the new definition:

THE CROSS GOVERNMENT DEFINITION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE IS:

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass but is not limited to:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.

This definition includes so called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

This definition will be implemented by March 2013. This will be overseen by the Inter-Ministerial Group on Violence Against Women and Girls.

In order to support the inclusion of 16-17 year olds we will:

- work with partners to develop an understanding of the different situations in which domestic violence may occur and how it may be experienced by young people. This will enable for signposting frontline professionals, who work with young people affected by domestic violence, to appropriate resources and supporting them to use their judgement to identify the right response for the individual victim, which may encompass a holistic approach involving child protection, safeguarding and domestic violence services;

- explore whether further training is needed in relation to conducting risk assessments with the 16-17 year old age group;
- recommend that practitioners build working with younger victims into existing training on domestic violence;
- roll out training to all Home Office funded Young People’s Advocates and a number of IDVAs and ISVAs on working with young people who have been affected by sexual abuse and exploitation, domestic violence and abuse from street gangs;
- continue our commitment to awareness raising via communications campaigns such as the ‘This is Abuse’ campaign;
- work with CAADA so it is clear that those who are at high risk from intimate partner violence and who are currently beneath age threshold can also be referred to MARAC;
- consider how best to incorporate the change in definition into existing guidance and training, and;
- highlight best practice in order to empower local areas to use their discretion in such cases to ensure that domestic violence services can be provided to younger victims where appropriate.

It is key that the focus of any service delivery is on the needs of the individual concerned. We believe it is important to invite young people to express their views and preferences about policies that are developed for them. In order to demonstrate our commitment to this, we are creating a young people’s panel in partnership with the NSPCC. This panel will feed in to Government policy on domestic violence and violence against women and girls and inform our work to develop the commitments made in this consultation. We hope that Local Authorities will follow our lead and seek to engage with their young people about the services that are being delivered for them.

We recognise the views of those that wished to see all those aged under 18 included in the definition. As a first step we intend to include those aged 16-17 and we will review this decision in two years in order to assess the impact the changes to the definition have had and whether there is a need to include those below the age of 16 in the definition.



Home Office