



HM Government

**Domestic Abuse Commissioner's
Report: "A Patchwork of Provision:
how to meet the needs of victims and
survivors across England and Wales"**
- Government Response

March 2023



Domestic Abuse Commissioner’s Report: “A Patchwork of Provision: how to meet the needs of victims and survivors across England and Wales”

- Government Response

March 2023



© Crown copyright 2023

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/publications

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at VAWGENquiries@homeoffice.gov.uk.

Printed on paper containing 75% recycled fibre content minimum

Printed in the UK by the APS Group on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office

Contents

Contents	1
Introduction	3
Welsh Government	4
UK Government Response to Recommendations in the Report	5
Specialist Domestic Abuse Services (Recommendation 1, 3 & 5)	5
Monitoring demand (Recommendation 2, 4 & 6)	9
Perpetrator Intervention (Recommendation 7)	10
Funding (Recommendation 8)	11
Funding (Recommendations 9 and 11)	12
Public Sector Training (Recommendations 10 and 20)	14
Victims and survivors facing multiple disadvantage (Recommendations 12, 13 &14)	18
Local commissioners (Recommendations 15, 16, 17 and 21)	21
Victim and survivors with learning disabilities (Recommendation 18 & 19)	23
IDVAs and ISVAs (Recommendation 22)	25
Healthcare Professionals (Recommendation 23, 24 & 25)	26
Victim Funding Strategy (Recommendation 26)	28
Conclusion	29

Introduction

The Home Office is grateful to the Domestic Abuse Commissioner (DAC) for publishing her report: [‘A Patchwork of Provision: how to meet the needs of victims and survivors across England and Wales’](#), and the effort the Commissioner’s team and external partners have gone to research this issue.

Domestic abuse is intolerable, sometimes fatal, and far too common. It is high volume; affecting 2.4 million adults every year. It is high harm; one in five homicides is a domestic homicide. And it is high cost; the social and economic costs of domestic abuse are estimated to be in the region of £78 billion (2022/23 prices) over a three-year average period of abuse.

The Government remains committed to supporting all victims of domestic abuse, regardless of where they may live. The [‘A Patchwork of Provision: how to meet the needs of victims and survivors across England and Wales’](#) report aims to improve understanding of what services are in place, for who, and where they are located to highlight existing gaps in service provision.

The report touches on wide ranging issues surrounding the provision of domestic abuse services. This includes the funding available for domestic abuse services, provision of specialist services including for those facing multiple disadvantages and increasing awareness and outreach of the support services already available.

We are already driving forward work which supports victims of these terrible crimes. This includes implementation of commitments in both the Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy and Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan with a £140 million investment to support victims, of which a minimum of £47 million is ringfenced funding for victims’ services over three years.

As set out in the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan published in March 2022, we will use the results of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner’s mapping exercise of support services across England and Wales to identify gaps and better target central government funding to local services. We have already published an updated version of the National Statement of Expectations and accompanying VAWG Commissioning Toolkit which aim to provide clear and consistent guidance for local areas on how to commission effective support services for victims of violence against women and girls.

We also published the Victims Funding Strategy in May 2022, which sets out a framework which will improve the way we fund victim support services across government, seeking to better align and co-ordinate funding to enable victims to receive the support they need.

The Domestic Abuse Commissioner made 26 recommendations in her report. We have carefully considered these recommendations and have outlined the latest Government activity in response to each one. There are also four recommendations aimed at those commissioning local services, which local commissioners will want to reflect on.

Welsh Government

Section 16 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 places a statutory duty on the UK Government to respond to a report from the Domestic Abuse Commissioner published under section 8 of the Act. This Duty does not apply to the Welsh Government and therefore this response is issued by the UK Government. Services for Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) are devolved in Wales under the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015. The Welsh Ministers have powers to provide funding and further, to exercise executive ministerial functions in relation to matters within devolved competence under the Government of Wales Act 2006. We will however continue to work closely with the Welsh Government on any areas of crossover as we implement our Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan and Tackling VAWG Strategy. Devolved bodies and local organisations in Wales should refer to Statutory Guidance associated with the 2015 Act, as well as the toolkit for the commissioning of such services in Wales.

The Welsh Government published its most recent VAWDASV National Strategy in May 2022. The Strategy sets out the overarching objectives that the Welsh Government will deliver in partnership with stakeholders to progress the purpose of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015. The strategy will be implemented through a blueprint approach which sees joint working between devolved and non-devolved organisations as well as the specialist sector. Work on delivering the Strategy will be aligned with the Welsh Government Programme for Government, with workstreams for street harassment and safety in public places; workplace harassment; tackling perpetration; sustainable commissioning, children and young people and older people as well as a separate Survivor Scrutiny and Involvement Panel. The sustainable commissioning group will ensure stability and consistency for service delivery. This will ensure that no matter where a victim, survivor or perpetrator lives in Wales, there is a strong public and specialist service ready to help. Under section 20 of the VAWDASV Act 2015 the Welsh Government has appointed National Advisers to advise and assist Welsh Ministers on pursuing the purpose of the Act: to prevent gender-based abuse including domestic abuse and sexual violence and protect and support victims and survivors.

UK Government Response to Recommendations in the Report

Specialist Domestic Abuse Services (Recommendation 1, 3 & 5)

Recommendation 1: The Ministry of Justice should introduce a duty on local commissioners to collaborate in the commissioning of specialist domestic abuse services, conduct joint strategic needs assessments, and this duty should be accompanied by a new duty on central government to provide funding to adequately meet this need.

The Government recognises the value in a framework to bring local commissioners together when commissioning support services. Through the Victims Bill, we will introduce a duty on local commissioners – namely, local authorities, Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) – to collaborate when commissioning support services for victims of domestic abuse, criminal conduct of a sexual nature and other serious violence. We have also published updated versions of the National Statement of Expectations and accompanying VAWG Commissioning Toolkit to provide clear and consistent guidance for local areas on how to commission effective support services for victims of violence against women and girls, including domestic abuse. The new documents place further emphasis on the importance of commissioning ‘by and for’¹ and specialist services and on working with specialist VAWG organisations to understand what services are required at a local level. In addition, the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 provides for a Serious Violence Duty to ensure specified authorities across England and Wales (including police, fire and rescue services, health, local authorities, youth offending teams and probation services) to work collaboratively, share data and information to put in place a strategy to prevent and reduce serious violence. We therefore think a specific duty in relation to specialist domestic abuse services is not necessary.

Needs assessments are vital to inform decisions on how to commission local services, which is why these form an integral part of existing commissioning processes. Requiring joint strategic needs assessments for delivery of services to victims of crime could result in duplicative activity, and while the duty to collaborate will allow flexibility to undertake these if needed, we do not consider that specific requirements are necessary.

While the Government recognises that funding for service provision is crucial, this is being addressed outside of legislation. The Government has recently increased multi-year funding for PCC-funded victims services, which includes domestic abuse support, to a minimum of £460 million over the next three years (22/23 to 24/25 inclusive), and NHS England’s funding for sexual and domestic abuse will increase with an additional £20 million over the next three years, up from £42 million in 2021/22.

The Victims’ Funding Strategy aims to drive further collaboration through the establishment of a cross-government oversight board, chaired by the Victims’ Minister.

¹ ‘By and for’ services are specialist services that are led, designed and delivered by and for the users and communities they aim to serve (for example survivors from ethnic minority backgrounds, Deaf and disabled victims and LGBT+ victims).

This will bring together key departments and stakeholders, including commissioners and support sector representatives where appropriate, to ensure challenge and adherence with this Strategy.

Recommendation 3: The Ministry of Justice and the Department of Health, working closely with the specialist domestic abuse sector and relevant professional bodies, should develop plans to address the paucity of specialist counselling and therapeutic support available to victims and survivors, including children.

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) via NHS England is investing at least £2.3 billion of additional funding a year by 2023-24 so that two million more people will be able to access mental health support. DHSC via NHS England also provided an additional £500 million for 2021/22. This included £110 million to expand adult mental health services, implementing the community mental health framework, investment in crisis services and maintaining the delivery of the 24/7 urgent mental health helplines, as well as additional investment in suicide prevention programmes

The Ministry of Justice is more than quadrupling funding for victim and witness support services by 2024/25, up from £41m in 2009/10. We have committed £154 million of this budget per year on a multi-year basis, which will allow victim support services, and those commissioning them, to build resilience into services ensuring consistency in the support that victims receive and will ensure that high quality support is available to victims when needed. Recognising how vital tailored support for victims of domestic abuse is, we are providing ringfenced funding, delivered via PCCs, for local domestic abuse victim support services, including counselling and therapeutic support, and Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs).

There will be continued engagement with the sector and monitoring of the services that are being provided for victims and survivors of domestic abuse with this funding, to consider whether further plans need to be developed.

Recommendation 5: The Department for Education, with the Home Office and Ministry of Justice, should take steps to address the lack of specialist support available for children affected by domestic abuse.

The Government fully recognises the devastating impact domestic abuse can have on children and young people. The landmark Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognises children who see, hear, or experience the effects of domestic abuse, and are related to either the perpetrator or victim, as victims of domestic abuse in their own right for the first time.

The Home Office has actively taken steps to ensure specialist support is available for children affected by domestic abuse. As announced in the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan, we have increased funding for the Children Affected by Domestic Abuse (CADA) Fund and have allocated up to £10.3 million over three years to organisations providing specialist support to children across England and Wales. The interventions provided through this scheme will include direct support for children and families, the delivery of preventative work and engagement with 'by and for' organisations. This builds on the more than £12 million provided through the CADA Fund since 2018. An independent evaluation of the programmes will also be carried out to assess their effectiveness and increase our understanding of what works to support children affected by domestic abuse.

The Home Office has also invested in the Operation Encompass scheme, which enables information sharing between police and schools in cases where a school-aged child has experienced a domestic abuse. We are currently funding a national Teachers' Helpline for

staff in education settings to seek guidance about supporting pupils affected by domestic abuse following an Operation Encompass notification.

As set out in the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan, to strengthen the safeguarding response for children who have experienced domestic abuse, the Home Office has been allocated funding via HM Treasury's Shared Outcomes Fund to review the national police response to children experiencing domestic abuse and evaluate the current Operation Encompass scheme and pilot of the extension of the model to early years settings.

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) funding distributed to local authorities for the provision of support within safe accommodation under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 includes support for children affected by domestic abuse in safe accommodation. So far, we have allocated £250 million to local authorities for the delivery of their duties in each of 2021/22 and 2022/23 and have announced a further £257 million across the next two years.

Local commissioners should already be considering specialist and tailored provision for child victims of domestic abuse when commissioning victim support services. The National Statement of Expectations and VAWG Commissioning Toolkit published in March 2022 provide guidance for local areas on how to commission effective support services for all victims, including children. The Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance published in July 2022 also provides further information about children as victims, including on the response and early intervention measures in education and health settings. We will continue to work collaboratively with local commissioners to understand and share best practice to enhance this support.

A strong multi-agency response to domestic abuse is vital. The Department for Education has provided funding to and commissioned the What Works for Early Intervention and Children's Social Care (WWEICSC) to strengthen our understanding of effective local practice to support children and families experiencing domestic abuse. They are working with four local domestic abuse services to improve our understanding of the multi-agency context in which these services operate and the extent to which services meet the needs of children and families. The work will explore feasibility for impact evaluation and any barriers to this.

The Department for Education's £84 million Strengthening Families, Protecting Children (SFPC) programme (2019-2024) is supporting five local authorities to adopt Hertfordshire's Family Safeguarding model. Family Safeguarding is an innovative approach to children's social care, which focuses on supporting families facing challenges of domestic abuse, substance misuse and/or mental ill-health. Early evaluations of the model show it safely reduces the number of children entering care and/or requiring statutory services².

Family Safeguarding includes multidisciplinary teams of adult specialist workers that help to address the needs of the whole family. These teams include Domestic Abuse Survivor workers, Domestic Abuse Perpetrator workers and Mental Health workers, who all work with families in a strengths-based way to build a sustainable plan for change. Family Safeguarding professionals work together to share their expertise, to support decision making in relation to children's welfare, and advise on treatment or care plans for parents of the children.

² Hertfordshire Family Safeguarding (publishing.service.gov.uk)

The Strengthening Families models, including Family Safeguarding, are evaluated by the What Works for Early Intervention and Children’s Social Care (WWEICSC). Final evaluation reports are due in 2026.

Monitoring demand (Recommendation 2, 4 & 6)

Recommendation 2: Given the limitations of existing evidence, the Government, including His Majesty's Treasury, should develop the evidence and data necessary to enable a cost-benefit analysis of providing support to victims and survivors of domestic abuse, including children.

The Government has considered this recommendation carefully and is happy to discuss the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's findings with her in greater detail on potential evidence gaps.

The Government has taken steps to improve the evidence base on support services for victims and survivors of domestic abuse.

As set out above, the Home Office has increased funding for the CADA Fund and allocated up to £10.3 million over three years to organisations providing specialist support to children across England and Wales. An independent evaluation of the programmes will also be carried out to assess their effectiveness and increase our understanding of what works to support children affected by domestic abuse.

Recommendation 4: The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities should include the impact on community-based services in their evaluation of Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act.

The impact on community-based services will be included in our evaluation of Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act.

Recommendation 6: The Ministry of Justice should play a stronger role in monitoring the demand on services nationally, in order to assess the success of the Victims Funding Strategy and the Domestic Abuse Plan.

It is important that Government monitors the demand on support services, at both a national and local level. As part of the Victims Funding Strategy, we established a core set of metrics and outcomes that we encourage all commissioners who receive Government funding to collect from their commissioned services, this will include grants issued by the Home Office in relation to the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan commitments. These metrics include core referrals data, already required from PCCs, so that we can continue to monitor how many victims are being supported, and where demand for services is increasing.

We will continue to work closely with local commissioners to ensure we are receiving up-to-date information on demand for services at a local level and will work with other Government Departments to ensure these metrics and outcomes are incorporated into commissioned services. We will also be establishing a Ministerial oversight group to oversee implementation of the Victims Funding Strategy, including monitoring the data we receive and the impact of demand on national and local services. This will bring together key departments and stakeholders, including commissioners and support sector representatives.

Perpetrator Intervention (Recommendation 7)

Recommendation 7: Funding for behaviour-change interventions for perpetrators of domestic abuse should be scaled up.

Over the last three years we have been investing in increasing the availability of interventions for domestic abuse perpetrators, including behaviour change and stalking programmes, and expanding projects such as Drive. Our initial investment for interventions was just over £7m and was the first time there had been a dedicated fund for such work.

There is promising evidence to suggest that work with perpetrators can make a difference in reducing the frequency or severity of the abuse. We also know continued investment in this area is so important to improving our understanding of how to prevent individuals reoffending. In the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan we have committed to £75m over three years which will help fund perpetrator interventions, evaluation and further research. From this, we recently launched a new perpetrator intervention fund with a total budget of £36,290,000 over two years.

We absolutely agree that abusive behaviour is tackled directly with perpetrators of abuse in a way that prioritises the safety of those they abuse and their children. This is why, working with the University of Durham, we developed a set of standards that sets out our minimum expectations in terms of quality for perpetrator interventions. The Government Standards will be a useful guidance tool for those who commission these services. We will work closely with Police Crime Commissioners to promote the use of the Standards when commissioning perpetrator interventions.

We are also considering where our approach to identifying and responding to the most dangerous perpetrators can be bolstered. In the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan we set out our intention to consider robust options for improving the management of these individuals to reduce the risk they pose. This includes investigating options for a domestic abuse “register” and exploring how the innovative use of technology can help target the most harmful perpetrators.

Funding (Recommendation 8)

Recommendation 8: In line with the commitment made in the Domestic Abuse Plan, the Government should set out how they will use the results of this mapping exercise to identify gaps and better target funding to local services.

The Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Call for Evidence, which informed both the Tackling VAWG Strategy (published in July 2021) and the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan (published in March 2022), highlighted how important tailored support is for victims. There were clear calls for improved ‘by and for’ trauma-informed provision and for support to be tailored to specific forms of VAWG (for example Female Genital Mutilation), or specific groups of victims and survivors (including those who have additional barriers to accessing services) to ensure they were able to access appropriate and effective support.

The findings from the Domestic Abuse Commissioner’s mapping exercise have further highlighted gaps in provision of service, in particular for specialist and ‘by and for’ support. The Commissioner’s early findings from the mapping exercise, alongside the VAWG Call for Evidence, informed the design of the joint Home Office and Ministry of Justice 2023-25 Violence Against Women and Girls Support and Specialist Services (VAWG SSS) Fund which launched in November 2022. The Fund will allocate over £8.4 million to ‘by and for’ and specialist services over two years, of which the majority (up to £6 million) of funding has been ring-fenced for ‘by and for’ services only.

The purpose of the fund is to build capacity and capability in ‘by and for’ services to better support victims and survivors of VAWG, including through investing in partnerships and improving the geographical reach of ‘by and for’ and specialist services.

The Fund invited bids from the voluntary and community sector, across larger and smaller organisations, and in particular encouraged consortium bids to enable smaller organisations to access funding where they might otherwise not qualify.

We will continue to carefully consider the mapping exercise findings in allocation of grant funding, and in future commissioning with the intention of better targeting funding for local services.

To allow victim support services, and those commissioning them, to build resilience into services, ensuring consistency in the support that victims receive, and that high quality support is available to victims when needed, the Ministry of Justice is more than quadrupling funding for victim and witness support services by 2024/25, up from £41m in 2009/10. We have committed £154 million of this budget per annum on a multi-year basis for the next three years (2022/23 to 2024/25 inclusive). This includes funding for Police and Crime Commissioners to commission local victim support services. We will consider, with local commissioners, how to best utilise the results of the DAC’s mapping exercise to target future funding to local services and will also consider how we address the identified gaps when allocating future funding.

Funding (Recommendations 9 and 11)

Recommendation 9: The Ministry of Justice, with the Home Office and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, should establish a £263m fund over 3 years to support specialist ‘by and for’ services.

Recommendation 11: The Ministry of Justice and the Home Office should jointly fund a specific programme of capacity building to help build partnerships between non-by and for services and specialist by and for services locally.

These recommendations have been grouped together as they pertain to the funding of ‘by and for’ and specialist support services.

As set out earlier, the Government is making significant investments in services for victims, including specialist and ‘by and for’ services. Funding for victims and witnesses is increasing. Over £140 million is being invested to support victims and survivors through the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan, including the VAWG SSS Fund, which provides ring-fenced funding for specialist and ‘by and for’ services.

The Government is committed to ensuring victims and survivors receive higher quality support services. As set out in the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan, in recognition of how important support services are, the Ministry of Justice will ringfence £47.1 million over three years for community-based services supporting victims and survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence and provide £81 million for Independent Domestic Violence Advisers and Independent Sexual Violence Advisers. Both the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice will offer multi-year awards of funding to organisations supporting victims and survivors of domestic abuse.

In addition, the Ministry of Justice has committed to more than quadrupling funding for victim and witness support by 2024/25, up from £41m in 2009/10.

The Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan sets out a multi-year funding package to deliver, amongst other things, community-based support services. This is in recognition of the added stability; delivery assurance and consistency of service multi-year grants can provide: With both the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice offering multi-year awards to organisations supporting victims and survivors of domestic abuse where possible and appropriate to do so.

The Government recognises the value of ‘by and for’ and specialist services in providing the tailored support for those with protected characteristics and those who experience the highest levels of exclusion from mainstream services.

The VAWG SSS Fund encourages bids from partnerships and consortiums to help further distribute funding to smaller specialist and ‘by and for’ organisations.

The cross-Government Victims Funding Strategy aims to tackle barriers to sustainable funding and drive consistent commissioning, so that victims get the right support at the right time. The Strategy re-affirmed the principle of multi-year funding across government to ensure that services have stability and can invest in building capacity to support victims effectively. The Strategy also introduces national commissioning standards and core metrics and outcomes, to ensure that Government can measure the impact of funding and commissioning so that victims can access high quality support when they need it.

To support victims of crime, and their families, the Ministry of Justice provides funding to Police and Crime Commissioners, who commission local practical, emotional and therapeutic support services for victims of all crime types according to local needs – this includes through ‘by and for’ services.

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities funding distributed to local authorities under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 is to commission support within same accommodation for domestic abuse victims and their children. This includes commissioning specialist ‘by and for’ services. So far, we have allocated £250 million to local authorities for the delivery of their duties and have announced a further £257 million across the next two years.

Although the Government cannot commit to setting up a new, additional fund, the Home Office, Ministry of Justice and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities will continue to work together to understand the capacity of ‘by and for’ services in both safe accommodation and in community-based support. This will enable the Government to understand the need and formulate a sustainable long-term solution.

Public Sector Training (Recommendations 10 and 20)

Recommendation 10: The Home Office, coordinating across Government (particularly with the Department for Education, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Ministry of Justice, and Department for Work and Pensions) should develop a strategy for improving the understanding of the intersectional needs of victims and survivors for frontline public sector staff.

Recommendation 20: The Home Office should work with the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office to develop an agreed framework for assessing the training needs of public sector bodies with regards to domestic abuse, and Government Departments should conduct a training needs assessment of priority professions as identified by this mapping report.

These recommendations have been grouped together as they pertain to the training of public sector staff.

Whilst we do not think a dedicated strategy or framework is required, there are several different live programmes aimed at improving the capability of the public sector when encountering victims of domestic abuse. Some examples are set out in more detail below.

The Government has committed to set up effective interventions to identify domestic abuse and refer victims to appropriate support, as set out in our Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan. Within the Plan we make the case for a whole-of-Government and whole-of-society approach, with different professionals and agencies working together to effectively tackle domestic abuse. The importance of adopting a coordinated response is also set out in the National Statement of Expectations and accompanying VAWG Commissioning Toolkit.

The Government's Forced Marriage Unit delivers monthly training workshops on forced marriage (which generally falls within the definition of domestic abuse) to police officers and social workers, as well as bespoke presentations to a range of professional audiences on request. In 2022, 1,537 professionals received such training. The unit also provides a free e-learning course on forced marriage, for a range of professionals.

Examples of training and initiatives for frontline services

Healthcare

We have committed to investing up to £7.5 million in domestic abuse interventions in healthcare settings over three years, including upskilling healthcare professionals to ensure that they can effectively identify and refer victims to support systems.

Education

A strong multi-agency response to domestic abuse is vital. The Department for Education is currently considering how best to support the needs of children and families experiencing domestic abuse and has funded the What Works for Early Intervention and Children's Social Care (WWEICSC) to help identify effective local practice. As set out above, the Home Office has also invested in the Operation Encompass scheme and is currently funding a national Teachers' Helpline for staff in education settings to seek guidance about supporting pupils affected by domestic abuse following an Operation Encompass notification. Through the What Works to Prevent VAWG Fund, the Home Office has also awarded Women's Aid Federation of England with funding over a three-

year period to educate and inform children and young people about violence against women and girls and the consequences of abuse and to increase awareness of these issues amongst practitioners.

Policing

The College of Policing have developed a range of training products, including the Domestic Abuse Matters programme, to improve the police response to domestic abuse and achieve national consistency in the service police forces provide. In the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan we committed up to £3.3 million to update the training and support the rollout to forces who have yet to undertake it. We are also funding the development of a new module of the training targeted at officers investigating domestic abuse offences to enable further improvement.

Employers

The Government is committed to making domestic abuse everyone's business, including employers. That is why our commitments in the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan include calling on more organisations and employers to follow suit and join the Employers Initiative on Domestic Abuse (EIDA) and sign the Employers Domestic Abuse Covenant (EDAC), continuing to raise awareness of domestic abuse and drive best practice amongst employers – this includes Government departments and public sector bodies. The Home Office will also be pursuing Beacon status as members of EIDA.

The Child Maintenance Service (CMS) has also substantially strengthened its procedures and support to customers who are experiencing domestic abuse. With input from Women's Aid, a programme of domestic abuse training has been designed and is delivered to CMS caseworkers. This training takes the form of:

- Recognising domestic abuse can take various forms including physical, psychological, emotional and financial abuse
- Appropriate signposting to domestic abuse support groups
- Advice on contacting the police if necessary and, if customers do not feel able to do this, then to ask whether customers were content for the Child Maintenance Service to call the police on their behalf.

The CMS also has a Complex Needs Toolkit for its caseworkers, which includes clear steps to follow in order to support customers who are experiencing abuse. This Toolkit is regularly reviewed and strengthened on the basis of customer insight.

The CMS will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of its guidance and training with regards to domestic abuse.

Social Housing

DLUHC has completed its review of professional training and qualifications for social housing staff which has led it to take a power to direct the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) to set a standard on competence and conduct. Further details will be set out in the Secretary of State's Direction to the RSH. The Direction will reflect the need to ensure staff are equipped to support vulnerable tenants, including domestic abuse victims.

Immigration

As part of the Immigration Enforcement's commitment to protecting vulnerable people, all staff are mandated to complete the Vulnerability Baseline Training which empowers staff to identify a broad range of issues affecting vulnerable adults and children. The training covers a variety of indicators to identify a vulnerable individual, including victims and survivors of crime, and upskills staff in taking action to safeguard and reduce the risk to the individual. Adopting a person-centred approach and the use of professional curiosity is a key thread to the content.

The training content will be reviewed in early 2023 and refresher sessions will be launched for all existing and new staff during 2023 to maintain this awareness and expand knowledge.

Within the Home Office's response to the police super complaint on migrant victims with insecure status, the department committed to introduce a Migrant Victim's Protocol for migrant victims of crime that have been referred to Immigration Enforcement from the police. As part of this work the department will ensure staff are given the correct tools and mechanisms to respond effectively to migrant victims of crime, including through guidance and a tailored training package.

The Home Office has led work to embed a trauma-informed practice for staff in Asylum and protection. This is to be employed at two key junctures: the initial encounter and the asylum interview (from screening interview to asylum decision).

The ultimate aim here is to adopt an approach that recognises the prevalence of trauma amongst asylum seekers, recognises the impact this has on asylum seekers, addresses the barriers that those affected by trauma can experience and seeks to avoid re-traumatisation by embedding practices that are flexible.

They also developed a Domestic Abuse checklist with third sector partners over a year ago to assist first responders in supporting victims. In this checklist it was made clear that support should be victim led. Asylum and protection also hold a quarterly Domestic Abuse Stakeholder forum with partners.

In addition, the Home Office Migration and Borders Group are overseeing ongoing work at strategy and system design level to examine the approach applied across the system, including for vulnerable victims. This examination includes areas of both consistency and differentiation and includes explicit recognition of, for example, female victims of trafficking.

Jobcentre Plus Staff

DWP Jobcentre Plus staff/frontline staff have existing domestic abuse training to support customers who are experiencing domestic abuse. Universal Credit (UC) training includes things like spotting and responding to the signs of complex needs through signposting, recording notes and proactive disclosure where there is a risk of harm.

During training all agents are made aware of domestic abuse and the support they are able to provide to victims who identify themselves.

At a local level, jobcentres have links and local agreements with a network of charities with whom we work in partnership to provide support for victims of domestic abuse. Each site has a District provision tool to enable colleagues to support claimants with complex needs.

Currently Complex Needs is covered within Universal Credit Training, which includes 'Claimants experiencing harm or abuse'. There are cross government instructions for delivering advanced customer support.

DWP are currently prioritising the relaunch of Subject Matter Leads, this includes Domestic Abuse Subject Matter Leads (SPOCs) across all jobcentres - supporting them in delivering DWP's Domestic Abuse policy commitments. As part of this agenda, we will seek to ensure effective learning that is in line with our new Trauma Informed Approach that aligns/supports and compliments the Ask for ANI pilot training.

Currently DWP and UC guidance explains the different forms of domestic abuse and how we support those in need through tailored services, easements, application of relevant policy (such as the Two Homes Policy, easements, etc.). There is also a drive/focus on effective signposting and visible/effective escalation routes where a risk of harm has been identified.

Victims and survivors facing multiple disadvantage **(Recommendations 12, 13 &14)**

Recommendation 12: The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities should conduct a needs analysis of the provision of accommodation-based services for victims and survivors with multiple disadvantage. This should then be used to establish a funded programme of capacity and capability building, making use of examples of best practice already in place.

DLUHC already collect data to enable an analysis of the needs of victims and survivors who may face multiple disadvantage and will be sharing best practice from the Respite Room Programme. The Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation National Expert Steering Group will consider how best to address any barriers in accessing support. We have already funded Local Authorities to meet the accommodation-based support needs of all survivors including those with multiple disadvantage.

We collect data annually on the support provided to those with multiple disadvantage. This includes figures on those with a history of offending, drugs, alcohol or mental health support needs, and young victims who have been supported in accommodation-based services, as well as those who could not be supported due to these needs. Data is collected on households who have not been supported due to having No Recourse to Public Funds. The full evaluation of Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 will examine whether services are meeting the needs of survivors, including those with multiple disadvantage.

In addition, we have provided £5.7 million to 12 local authorities to pilot an 18-month Respite Rooms programme to help rough sleepers affected by domestic abuse and sexual violence to get off the street and out of danger. This cohort are especially vulnerable and experience multiple disadvantage. As part of this pilot, we have commissioned a robust evaluation of the programme to be published in April 2023, providing examples of best practice and models of delivery. This will assist local authority commissioners in deciding whether Respite Rooms is a good fit for their area, and in understanding what works in supporting these very vulnerable survivors.

Furthermore, victims of domestic abuse facing multiple disadvantage are being supported through the Changing Futures programme led by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). The Changing Futures programme is funded by the Shared Outcomes Fund – in partnership with other government departments including Home Office and Ministry of Justice – and aims to test innovative approaches and improve outcomes for people experiencing multiple disadvantage, including survivors and victims of domestic abuse. Changing Futures funded local areas link up trauma-informed support services, so that people facing multiple problems get the joined-up help they need to change their lives for the better. The Programme also pilots local and national systems-level improvements for supporting people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

The Supporting Families programme works to ensure vulnerable families, including those facing domestic violence or conflict in the home, are provided with effective, joined up support to build their resilience and prevent them from reaching crisis point. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) leads this programme and is currently working to support up to 300,000 more families to make positive changes in their lives across the current spending review period up until 2025, backed by £695m in funding. Some councils use this funding to deliver community-based specialist domestic abuse services in their area.

Ensuring families and children are safe from domestic abuse is a key priority for Supporting Families and is an outcome indicator in our Outcomes Framework. This is the tool local authorities use to assess family need and measure what success looks like across a range of criteria. Our outcome on domestic abuse recognises need across adults, children, victims and perpetrators, and encourages areas to support families until victims have a clear safety plan in place, are safe in the home and both victims or perpetrators are receiving appropriate support.

Recommendation 13: The Ministry of Justice should conduct a needs assessment of support available to victims and survivors with a history of offending, and take steps to address the lack of support available to this group of victims and survivors.

Needs assessments are vital to inform decisions on how to commission local services. The Victims' Code establishes the principle that all victims are entitled to be referred to support which is tailored to their needs including, where appropriate, specialist services. Furthermore, the Victims' Funding Strategy encourages commissioners to ensure that needs assessments capture the diverse range of support that is required in any local area, including the needs of offenders who are victims or survivors and may require support in prison or otherwise.

The Government believes that this approach will ensure the adequate provision of specialist services, and that a separate centrally conducted needs assessment for this group would duplicate work underway at a local level.

In terms of those offenders supported by the Probation Service, who are either a victim or perpetrator of domestic abuse, once an offender is sentenced then they are assessed using the Offender Assessment System (OASys). All sentenced individuals, (except for those who receive standalone requirements, such as standalone Unpaid Work Orders) will receive a full assessment which includes a specific question on whether there is evidence of current or previous abuse, whether as a victim or perpetrator, informed by self-declaration and information gathering from previous HMPPS and partnership agency records. OASys is amended and updated where there are any significant changes in circumstances (relapse into substance misuse, reoffending, loss of accommodation, new relationship etc). This enables the Probation Practitioner to tailor support to best assist the individual offender.

The Probation Service works closely with organisations providing support services, including those focused on domestic abuse. Since June 2018, the MoJ has invested £9.5 million in grant funding to organisations supporting women in, or at risk of contact with, the Criminal Justice System, of which £2 million was explicitly for those who have experienced domestic abuse, with a further multi-year grants competition launched in September 2022 for up to £24 million. This is in addition to the over £45 million awarded by probation to organisations to deliver wraparound support in the community to women between June 2021 and March 2025, which will include support for victims and survivors of domestic abuse.

Recommendation 14: The Home Office should encourage Serious Violence Prevention Duty holders to ensure that domestic abuse is included within work to address a range of high-risk factors in the involvement of public space serious violence.

During the parliamentary passage of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, the Government amended the Serious Violence Duty measures to clarify that domestic abuse (DA) and sexual offences (SO) are included within the meaning of the term 'violence' for the purposes of the Serious Violence Duty and that local areas can consider whether these crimes amount to serious violence.

The Serious Violence Duty Statutory Guidance has since been updated and published to clarify that action on DA and SO is encouraged, where preventative activity is directed at risk factors shared across crime types. It will, ultimately, be for specified authorities to determine what forms of violence amount to "serious violence" in their local area, in line with the legislation, and to develop strategies to target that violence.

Local commissioners (Recommendations 15, 16, 17 and 21)

The above recommendations are for Commissioners at a local level and therefore the Government is not directly responding to these. However, the Government is supportive of the general aims and would recommend local commissioners read and consider these carefully.

We know how important it is for victims to receive a holistic support package, which is easily accessible. The Government agrees that local commissioners need to consider this at the centre of supporting local victim support services. The Ministry of Justice provides annual grant funding to Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) to commission local support services, based on their assessment of need. As part of Ministry of Justice's grant funding conditions, PCCs are able to use their funding for any associated costs in relation to the process of commissioning or delivering victim support services, which can support them to take a full cost-recovery model with their providers. As part of the commissioning guidance under the Victims Funding Strategy, we will explore what more we can do in this space to encourage commissioners to consider a full cost-recovery model.

It remains important to set a national standard for the commissioning of these local strategies and services. The Government acknowledges its role in ensuring this consistency.

In March 2022 the Home Office published updated versions of the National Statement of Expectations (NSE) and accompanying VAWG Commissioning Toolkit. These documents provide clear and consistent guidance for local areas on how to commission effective support services for victims of VAWG (including domestic abuse).

As part of the NSE, the Government set out its expectation that local strategies and services are locally led and safeguard individuals at every point. This includes ensuring commissioned services make use of local initiatives and services already in place to utilise resource, share best practice and ensure there are coordinated pathways of support.

It also advises that commissioners raise awareness of the issues and involve, engage and empower communities to seek, design and deliver solutions.

In October 2022, DLUHC published statutory guidance on support for victims of domestic abuse in accommodation-based services. This was developed after a full consultation with the sector.

Recommendation 15: Commissioners should fund services using a model of full cost-recovery, including access to interpreters, communications support, and clinical supervision. Any statutory or non-statutory guidance issued by Government should reflect this expectation.

The DLUHC Statutory Guidance includes a directive that 'Tier one authorities should ensure support services are provided in locations and ways which are accessible to all victims, including their children'. This includes adjustments such as translation services, British Sign Language interpreters and easy read documents for those with learning disabilities and speech and language issues. It is also clear that support should be delivered by knowledgeable and/or experienced specialist providers, charities, and other voluntary organisations.

Recommendation 16: Commissioners should ensure services are funded to proactively raise awareness of their services and conduct outreach. Local commissioner websites should also be clear about what services are available in their area, and to whom.

The Government agrees that local commissioner websites should be clear about what services are available in their area, and to whom, to ensure services are easily accessible. As part of our work to refresh the commissioning guidance available, we will consider how we can encourage and work with commissioners to take note of this recommendation.

Recommendation 17: Local commissioners, and commissioned services, should be clear on their websites who can access their services, and provide clarity about whether services are inclusive.

Recommendation 21: Local commissioners should work with statutory agencies and services in their area to develop join-up and seamless pathways of support for victims and survivors with multiple needs, particularly for those facing multiple disadvantages.

As set out above, the Government agrees that local commissioners, and commissioned services, should be clear on their websites who can access their services, and provide clarity about whether services are inclusive. The MoJ provides annual grant funding to PCCs to commission local victim support services. The grant conditions are clear that victim support services commissioned using MoJ funding should include tailored support for victims of crime with protected characteristics.

As part of the Victims Funding Strategy, we introduced a set of national standards that we expect all commissioners of victim support services to meet, to provide the best possible support to all victims. One of these standards is 'clear and consistent mechanisms for reporting and evaluation.' To meet this standard, commissioners are required, as far as possible, to ensure and encourage collection of demographic and equalities data of the victims being supported. The Victims Funding Strategy also introduced a core set of metrics for all departments, commissioners and services to collect, which included demographic metrics.

Another of these standards is 'a whole-system approach to commissioning', which outlines the expectation that commissioners will work closely with other commissioners, agencies, and services in their area, to reduce the need for victims to share their experience multiple times, and to offer a seamless journey through the support system. This includes data and information sharing where possible. We encourage commissioners to be part of at least one local board or strategy to support this standard. In addition to this, as part of the refreshed commissioning guidance work, we will engage with local commissioners to explore the best ways to encourage join-up, and how we can help to build better partnerships.

Whilst the MoJ does not prescribe how commissioners should work with their services and statutory agencies, the upcoming duty to collaborate in the Victims Bill and the Serious Violence Prevention Duty in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act (2022) both aim to facilitate better multi-agency collaboration between commissioners. These may prove a useful basis from which commissioners can work with their local providers as they consider victims' multiple needs at different stages.

The establishment of Integrated Care Systems and Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) provides an opportunity for greater understanding of local health needs of victims of abuse. ICBs are required to set out how they will address the needs of victims of abuse in

their Joint Forward Plans. NHS England is developing guidance to assist ICBs in doing so ahead of publication this year.

Victim and survivors with learning disabilities **(Recommendation 18 & 19)**

Recommendation 18: The Home Office should consider how national communications campaigns can be linked with local campaigns, including to raise awareness of the availability of services locally.

The Government launched its long-term, nationwide tackling VAWG behaviour change campaign, 'Enough', in March 2022, with a further phase of campaign activity in October. The campaign has three strands: challenging perpetrators; educating young people and supporting victims.

The campaign website offers a signposting service for national support organisations covering a range of abuse types and guidance on how to report abuse.

The team works closely with the National Police Chiefs' Council, individual police forces and local authorities on promoting the campaign at a local level. This includes providing editable assets that can be amended to include information on the provision of local support services.

Recommendation 19: The Home Office and Department for Education, working with the Department of Health and Social Care, should conduct an awareness raising campaign focused on raising awareness of domestic abuse amongst people with learning disabilities.

The Government is committed to tackling abuse of people living with disability. As stated earlier, the Home Office has committed with the Ministry of Justice that the VAWG SSS Fund will allocate over £8.4 million to 'by and for' and specialist services over two years, of which the majority (up to £6 million) of funding has been ring-fenced for 'by and for' services only.

According to the ONS for the year ending March 2022, around 1 in 10 (10.3%) disabled people aged 16 and over in England and Wales experienced domestic abuse in the last 12 months, compared with about 1 in 25 (4%) non-disabled people. Disabled women (13.1%) were more than twice as likely to experience domestic abuse in the last year than non-disabled women (5.6%) (year ending March 2022).

Linking to Recommendation 18, the Home Office commits to ensure that all engagement is alert to the needs of people living with disability and older people when developing national communication strategies. In particular, linking to statutory agencies in local authority safeguarding teams, local policing and health partners. The Home Office will promote awareness campaigns that meet the specific needs of all people in line with the Equality Act taking onboard the DAC's particular concern about people with learning disability. The Government's long-term, nationwide tackling violence against women and girls' campaign, 'Enough' has been created with stakeholders assisting disabled victims of domestic abuse. Campaign assets include people with disabilities whilst the campaign website includes an Easy Read summary, a British Sign Language video summary and a support page that signposts organisations that work with disabled victims.

The Home Office and DHSC are also conducting the Safe Care at Home Review into the existing protections for adults with care and support needs abused in their own homes by people providing their care and the support available to victims of such abuse. The Review has engaged with a range of stakeholders, collecting input from groups representing people living with disability and people providing care to understand their lived experiences.

Local authorities have operational responsibility to deliver social care and safeguarding in communities so are best placed to develop cross-cutting support services that link with housing, health and policing through social care safeguarding teams.

The Department for Education continues to raise awareness through relationship, sex and health education. School pupils with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) are now taught statutory relationships, sex and health education.

As part of the 'being safe' topic, pupils are taught about boundaries, privacy and how to recognise and report when somebody makes them feel unhappy or unsafe. At secondary school pupils are taught about the concepts and laws relating to all forms of abuse, including domestic abuse. This will need to be differentiated appropriately for pupils with SEND and to support teachers to do this we will have developed a teacher training module.

IDVAs and ISVAs (Recommendation 22)

Recommendation 22: Funding bodies should consider the need for enhanced support through one-to-one caseworkers for victims and survivors who might not meet the threshold for an IDVA, in order to hold cases and coordinate the range of support and services needed by victims and survivors.

We recognise that tailored and specialist support for victims of domestic abuse is crucial to enable victims to cope and recover. We are more than quadrupling funding for victim and witness support services by 2024/25, up from £41m in 2009/10. Within this, we are providing PCCs with ringfenced funding for ISVAs and IDVAs as well as ringfenced funding for broader domestic abuse and sexual violence support services – it is at the PCC's discretion how they allocate this funding, based on their assessment of local needs.

While the Victims Bill will focus on formalising the role of IDVAs and ISVAs, given that they are some of the most common and well-known advocate roles, we remain committed to continuing to consider how government, if appropriate, can further support other advocacy and support roles. When drafting the IDVA statutory guidance which will be provided for by the Victims Bill, we will ensure that these roles are framed as part of a broader landscape of domestic abuse support.

Healthcare Professionals (Recommendation 23, 24 & 25)

Recommendation 23: The Department for Health, with NHS England, should develop an ambitious programme of work to improve health professionals' awareness of and response to domestic abuse within healthcare settings, and to build partnerships between specialist domestic abuse services and health services.

The Department of Health and Social Care recognises the vital importance of adequate training on domestic abuse for healthcare professionals as research shows that victims are more likely to disclose domestic abuse to a healthcare professional than to other services. That is why all NHS staff undertake mandatory safeguarding training which includes a focus on domestic abuse. NHS England continue to review training to ensure that healthcare professionals are fully equipped with the key skills, knowledge, and principles to protect all citizens.

As was recognised in the Women's Health Strategy (DHSC, 2022), domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women and girls can have a significant impact on the health of victims and survivors. DHSC and NHS England committed in that strategy to ensure that there is a wider acknowledgement and understanding that violence and abuse is a public health issue. The establishment of Integrated Care Systems and Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) provides an opportunity for greater understanding of local health needs of victims of abuse. ICBs are required to set out how they will address the needs of victims of abuse in their Joint Forward Plans. NHS England is developing guidance to assist ICBs in doing so ahead of publication this year.

In addition, the Women's Health Strategy has a commitment that NHS services and staff are able to support victims of violence and abuse and are well equipped with the knowledge and skills to identify and respond to victims and perpetrators. Health and care workers understand the impact of trauma and have the tools available to engage in trauma-informed practice.

NHS England has set up a dedicated Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Programme and appointed a national lead to provide dedicated leadership and support for NHS England, Integrated Care Boards and the wider NHS. It is currently developing an ambitious programme of work to transform the NHS's response to domestic abuse and sexual violence informed by lived experience, clinical experts and working collaboratively across stakeholders including third sector organisations.

The Home Office has also committed to investing up to £7.5 million in domestic abuse interventions in healthcare settings over three years, including upskilling healthcare professionals to ensure that they can effectively identify and refer victims to support systems.

Recommendation 24: The Department for Health should ensure the availability of timely and appropriate mental health interventions to support the mental health needs of victims and survivors of domestic abuse.

DHSC via NHS England is investing at least £2.3 billion of additional funding a year by 2023-24 to expand and transform mental health services in England so that two million more people will be able to access mental health support.

DHSC via NHS England also provided an additional £500 million for 2021/22, to accelerate our NHS mental health expansion plans. This included £110 million to expand adult mental health services including talking and psychological therapies (IAPT), implementing the

community mental health framework, investment in crisis services and maintaining the delivery of the 24/7 urgent mental health helplines stood up earlier in the pandemic, as well as additional investment in suicide prevention programmes.

Over the Spring the government ran a 12 week call for evidence on what more we can do to support Mental Health and Wellbeing and Suicide Prevention in the longer term and will respond in due course.

Local 'pathfinder' projects for enhanced trauma-informed mental health support for sexual abuse victims and survivors with the most complex needs are underway. As an NHS England Long Term Plan priority for delivery, the 7 NHS regions continue to progress the Enhanced Mental Health pioneer sites. This is with the aim of better supporting victims/survivors to be referred to appropriate sexual assault and abuse therapeutic pathways including complex trauma interventions. Clinical Teams are being appointed in the South West with other regions either following through mobilisation or undertaking procurement processes. Examples are emerging of innovative multi-agency partnerships between ICS, Voluntary and NHS mental health providers and all pioneer sites will be subject to full evaluation.

Recommendation 25: Health services should record referrals they make to MARAC in order to monitor health performance and response at Trust level.

NHS England commits to the development of monitoring health performance and response at Trust level. Due to varying maturity of ICBs, some may already have developed reporting systems outside of MARAC and we want to allow ICBs to determine locally how they develop their performance and monitoring systems.

ICBs must set out how they will address the specific needs of victims of abuse, including domestic abuse and sexual abuse, in their Joint Forward Plans. NHS England has developed guidance for ICBs that will be published shortly which includes data collection options as part of the Serious Violence Duty.

MARAC referrals are one among many datasets that can provide information on the prevalence of domestic abuse. MARAC data is already submitted to SafeLives, by individual MARACs on a quarterly basis and includes number of cases referred by each agency. Each quarter the data is collated and published to create a national dataset. Although not providing Trust level data, it does provide data on referrals by health within police force areas and regions, broken down by primary care, secondary care/acute Trusts, and mental health.

Work on understanding and recording prevalence of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) health data is underway. The Women's Health Strategy (DHSC, 2022) included a public commitment to work with Office for National Statistics (ONS) to better understand health data on VAWG with an aim to improve service experiences. The first two phases of this project have been concluded. DHSC will take forward this project and conduct a prioritisation exercise to determine which key findings to explore further. Findings from the first two phases of this project centred around improving understanding around codes within health datasets that could indicate VAWG, and the main barriers for recording and recognising VAWG in healthcare settings.

Victim Funding Strategy (Recommendation 26)

Recommendation 26: The Victims Funding Strategy, and national guidance for commissioners on the commissioning of services, should set out clearly the importance of independent services in any statutory or non-statutory guidance. Where services are brought in-house, this information should be shared with the Ministry of Justice, Home Office, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and with the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office to understand why and to monitor changes over time.

We recognise the importance of independent victim support services to ensure that all victims, regardless of the crime or when it happened, feel comfortable accessing support. As part of the Victims Funding Strategy, MoJ committed to reviewing and refreshing existing commissioning guidance for commissioners of victim support services. We will use this opportunity to explore with commissioners and the sector how services are currently commissioned and where improvements could be made, including looking at the prevalence of in-house support services and how we can work with commissioners to monitor these services. However, we consider that whilst local commissioners should be more accountable for the services they commission, they still remain best placed to decide which services should be commissioned in their area.

As part of DLUHC's Annual data collection to monitor the domestic abuse support in safe accommodation duties, we will include a question to ask local authorities whether they have any services in-house, or plan to bring them in-house. Our primary focus however will always be on the quality of service provision, rather than the type of provider.

Conclusion

We would like to thank the Domestic Abuse Commissioner for her work in producing this report. The responses to the recommendations in her report demonstrate the Government's continued commitment to supporting victims and survivors of domestic abuse.

Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls remains a priority for this Government. As per our commitment in the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan, we will continue to reduce the prevalence of VAWG by supporting victims (and survivors), prioritising prevention, pursuing perpetrators and creating a stronger system.

We understand the importance of support services for victims and survivors of domestic abuse, and we continue to invest funds into building their capacity. It is also vital that support is not only available, but effective. We continue to fund grants and projects to research the effectiveness of support services. We are aware that victims and survivors may also seek support elsewhere, such as confiding in health professionals. We continue to invest in training of frontline staff to ensure that when this happens, victims and survivors are signposted to the correct support.

As this report has highlighted, victims and survivors often rely on services close to home. It is vital that such services are accessible to all victims and survivors, including those in rural communities who contend with the added challenges posed by rurality. We acknowledge that issues around poor public transport and broadband connectivity, as well as a lack of anonymity in smaller communities, can hinder the ability of rural victims to access support services or even report their abuse. These challenges must be taken into account in the design and distribution of support services to meet the needs of rural victims and survivors.

We acknowledge the important role local commissioners, such as Police and Crime Commissioners, play in ensuring the right support is available. Departments across government have issued guidance to provide a standard that the Government expects to be reached across the country. It is, however, ultimately decisions that need to be made at a local level. The Government strongly recommends local commissioners consider the recommendations put forward to them.

Ultimately, we want to prevent VAWG crimes, including domestic abuse, from ever happening. We are working hard to challenge the attitudes that lead to such crimes and have invested in a national communications campaign "Enough". This, combined with other efforts such as teaching statutory Relationships and Sex Education (RSE), are helping to challenge these behaviours.

We understand there is more to be done and look forward to working with the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office further to help achieve this.

