

Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Updates, April 2023

DAC Office

We were pleased to launch the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's [Strategic Plan](#) in March. This document sets out the Commissioner's aims, ways of working and strategic priorities. The Commissioner also held her first Advisory Board meeting in February.

Staffing

We are pleased to welcome the following members of staff to the DAC Team in recent months:

Jackie Gilbank, Lived Experience Engagement Lead
Emma Retter, Senior Researcher
Maryyum Mehmood, Research and Policy Advisor
Freya Routledge, Policy & Communications Advisor

We welcome back Hannah Gousy to the team, who is covering as Chief of Staff for a few months to cover Emily Fei, who has taken a short career break.

Practice Team

Festival of Practice

Thank you to those who attended the Festival of Practice last month in Manchester. We were delighted with how the event went and with the impact we hope it will continue to have. A separate follow-up email will be sent to all delegates in the coming weeks with information about how to access slides and materials from the event.

Thematic Focus: Children and Young People

This quarter, between now and the end of June, our Practice and Partnerships will be focussing on the theme of Children and Young People affected by domestic abuse, in addition to and as part of their regular engagement with local areas and services. If you commission, or are aware of any specialist services working to support children specifically affected by domestic abuse, our Geographic Leads would love to hear from you. Please contact them directly or reply to this email to be put in touch with the relevant person.

Policy Team

Victims and Prisoners Bill

The Victims and Prisoners Bill was introduced into the House of Commons at the end of March for first reading, with second reading expected in mid-May/June. The DAC Office will be working to secure amendments in the Bill to develop the Duty to Collaborate on PCC's, Local Authorities, and ICBs to include joint strategic needs assessments which build on existing needs assessments, multi-year funding for specialist domestic abuse services, and a national 'by and for' pot of funding. Please do get in touch with Rhys Hart

Rhys.Hart@domesticabusecommissioner.independent.gov.uk if you would like to be involved in this work.

Department for Education's Stable Homes Built on Love Consultation Strategy

The DAC Office is preparing a response to the Department for Education's Stable Homes Built on Love Consultation Strategy. We are keen to ensure we're representing your feedback on what needs to improve and what good practice looks like. Please get in touch with Rose Wood via email

rose.wood4@domesticabusecommissioner.independent.gov.uk if you have any suggestions for content DAC Office should cover in its response.

We are particularly interested in:

- Issues/ problems with how the new category of children as victims of domestic abuse in their own right is being handled in a children's social care context;
- Issues/ problems currently with how domestic abuse support/ awareness is factored into the children's social care system more broadly;
- Thoughts on how these problems/ issues could be resolved;
- Examples of good practice for domestic abuse support and awareness in children's social care.

Supporting Migrant Victims Pilot

The Home Office has confirmed that the Supporting Migrant Victims Pilot has been extended for a further 2 years. This fund will provide vital support for survivors with no recourse to public funds. We are still waiting for Government to respond to our second report on migrant survivors, [Safety Before Status: The Solutions](#), which contains key recommendations for a long term plan, beyond the pilot, to support migrant survivors of domestic abuse.

Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation National Expert Steering Group

The Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation National Expert Steering Group, chaired by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and the Minister for Housing and Homelessness, has published its first annual progress report on implementation of the Safe Accommodation Duty in England. The report can be accessed here: [Annual progress report from the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation National Expert Steering Group 2021-22 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Government Updates

Community Safety Partnerships (CSP) Review Team

The Home Office are pleased to announce that the phase one of the CSP Review has now been launched, by way of a consultation, alongside the anti-social behaviour Action Plan.

The consultation is focused on three things. Firstly, as part of the CSP Review, the consultation invites views on the relationship between CSPs and PCCs, with the aim of strengthening the accountability model of CSPs. Secondly, the consultation invites views on how CSPs and PCCs work together to tackle ASB and thirdly, it invites views on ASB powers and whether they should be extended.

Phase two of the CSP review will focus on increasing the efficiency of CSPs' ways of working and streamlining roles and responsibilities, we will provide further details on this work in due course.

The Home Office welcome your views to this consultation, which is available on GOV.UK [Community safety partnerships review and antisocial behaviour powers - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) and closes on 22 May 2023. If you have any questions regarding the review, please contact CSPReview@homeoffice.gov.uk.

Controlling and Coercive Behaviour Offence

The Domestic Abuse Act amended the controlling and coercive behaviour offence to remove the 'living together' requirement, and this update came into force on 5 April. The Home Office have also now published the updated Controlling or coercive behaviour statutory guidance, which can be accessed here: [Controlling or coercive behaviour statutory guidance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Other Updates

NHS England

NHSE have provided two documents attached to this email. One is a stakeholder brief about their Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Programme and the other is NHSE's response to the voluntary sector regarding concerns about the Online Access to Medical Records.

Emergency Alerts – phones

On Sunday 23 April there will be a national UK Emergency Alert test. This new Emergency Alert system is being rolled out by the government and will notify all phones with an alert sound - including when they are on silent. Victims and survivors who have a secret phone that they may hide from an abusive partner **must be informed** in order to take action to prevent the phone from activating, like switching it off or putting it on airplane mode.

Please share this message to help inform victims and survivors of the upcoming alert and Refuge have kindly provided a video to inform victims and survivors how to ensure their secret phone does not play the notifying sound and become detected: <https://youtu.be/u7jsz8H-muo>

Flexible Fund announced by the Home Office

The Home Office have agreed a 'flexible fund' of £300,000 for survivors of domestic abuse, to be administered by Women's Aid Federation of England. The fund will offer one-off payments to help survivors flee abusers: survivors will receive £250, or £500 if they have children. This funding comes as part of the previously announced Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan.

The £300,000 fund will be delivered by Women's Aid through their federation of 170 members across the country, working with Welsh Women's Aid to ensure survivors in Wales are also reached. The fund will make direct payments to victims and survivors over the next financial year (FY 23/24) to help them overcome financial barriers which may stop them from leaving an abuser (for example, if they could not afford the first utility bill or grocery shop due to the combination of rising prices and the perpetrator controlling their finances).

New report: Listen to us!

The Violence Against Women and Girls sector has launched a new report: **Listen to us! Communication barriers: How statutory bodies are failing Black, Minoritised, Migrant, Deaf and Disabled women and girls victims/survivors of VAWG.**

The Communications Barriers Working group was formed two years ago by members of the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) sector call group (formed at the onset of the pandemic to formulate coordinated responses to public bodies and government on the realities faced by victims/survivors and the sector). The Group's purpose was to look into communication barriers and what could be done to raise awareness and effect positive change by providing evidence of the lack of accessibility to adequate support and justice for Black & Minoritised/Marginalised Deaf, Disabled and Migrant women survivors.

The report highlights how communication barriers can negatively impact VAWG victims/survivors' experiences of safety and access to justice. The evidence provided by this work shows that victims/survivors with communication needs are more likely to be afraid to contact the police for fear of discrimination and violence.

- More than half of survivors in the 50 case studies from respondents had experienced a failure of the police to communicate at an appropriate level or make reasonable adjustments.
- Nearly half were not informed about the process, or their rights.
- 44% had prior experience of discrimination – racism, ableism and xenophobia, from the police.

Membership of this working group includes - Deaf Ethnic Women's Association, Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office, End Violence Against Women Coalition, Imkaan, IRISi, Karma Nirvana, Latin American Women's Rights Service, Rape Crisis England & Wales, Sign Health, Stay Safe East, Solace Women's Aid, The Traveller Movement and Women's Aid Federation of England.

This report is a collaborative effort between organisations working to improve access to support and justice for victims/survivors with communication needs and provides recommendations, including practical steps to better respond to these.

Read the report here:

Main report <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Listen-to-us.pdf>

Large print report <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Listen-to-us-LARGE-PRINT.pdf>

H.O.P.E Leadership programme for staff from Black and Racialised Communities working within VAWG

The next H.O.P.E Leadership programme for staff from Black and Racialised Communities working within VAWG has officially opened- this 12 week programme starts on Friday 17th November 2023 and finishes in 2024. Attached is flyer and criteria document.

If you or a staff member would like to make an expression of interest please use this booking form: <https://form.123formbuilder.com/6408870/my-form-5>