

The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer
HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
London SW1A 2HQ



24 September 2020

Dear Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP

Re the Comprehensive Spending Review and funding towards ending and preventing Violence Against Women and Girls

We write as organisations working in the specialist ending violence against women and girls (VAWG) sector regarding the enormous costs of domestic and sexual violence to the state and our communities. We recognise the uncertainty around spending commitments at this time, but ask that allocating specific funding for the support services and work needed to alleviate and ultimately end abuse is considered a priority. We will also submit this letter as a formal representation to the Comprehensive Spending Review.

As this letter will set out, specialist services responding to abuse are currently working significantly over capacity. Many services are operating with no statutory funding whatsoever, relying on individual giving and philanthropy to keep their doors open.

We believe that in addition to the £2.2bn that has been estimated as necessary to tackle domestic abuse alone in this spending period (Safe Lives, 2020), further spending pledges are needed of at least £102.7m¹ annually to ensure specialist sexual violence and abuse services are available for victim and survivors; and £57m annually to ensure that the existing highly specialist support services for Black and minority ethnic (BME) women are sustainable.

The Domestic Abuse Bill, that includes sexual violence within a domestic abuse setting, and the ongoing cross-government work on a Victims Funding Strategy as part of the Prime Minister's Hidden Harms agenda for tackling multiple forms of abuse, mean this CSR is perfectly timed to make the step change needed in public spending which really aims to end violence against women and girls.

The public has been extremely sensitised to all forms of abuse behind closed doors during the Covid-19 pandemic and are likely to support ambitious, strategic pledges in this area (not least when we know we are likely to be living with some amount of household restrictions for some time). The question of long-term sustainable funding to the sector after COVID-19 was highlighted by participants of the Hidden Harms Summit and the Home Affairs Select Committee report on domestic violence and risk of harm in the home. This report called for timely, fair and equitable distribution of funds to the sector, and recognised that specialist BME organisations offer tailored support to the

¹ £52 million is required annually to support accredited Rape Crisis member Centres. £107.2m is required to support all recipients of the Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Fund.

women and girls who use their services and should be equitably funded to offer this support.

The harm and costs of violence against women and girls

Home Office research published last year estimated the economic and social cost of domestic abuse alone at £66bn every year, with direct costs to the Exchequer totalling over £5 billion annually – including £2.3 billion in health services, £1.3 billion in police costs, £550 million in housing costs, £476 million in criminal and civil legal costs, and £724 million for services for victims; and a staggering £14bn in lost working days.

The work to define the £66bn cost of domestic abuse was incredibly important. It would be valuable for the Treasury and relevant departments to work with us to develop a similarly robust figure for VAWG as a whole, so that we could all operate from the basis of a stronger common understanding. While costings are under-developed for sexual violence and abuse, one Home Office assessment looking at the costs of rape and sexual offences to society and the victim, estimated this would cost the UK £12.2 billion per year.² In contrast to this high cost, NHS cost savings alone from VAWG organisations amounts to over £357 million per year.³

Regarding other forms of gender based violence, any expert in these fields would tell you, there are serious financial costs to victims and to the wider community arising from child sexual abuse, harassment, sexual exploitation, including loss of work and educational opportunities, addictions, homelessness, criminal justice costs and much more.

It is not cost effective to allow violence against women and girls to persist at the levels it does and absorb all these costs annually as though it is inevitable and cannot be prevented.

The prevalence of abuse and the ‘demand’ for support services

Alarming prevalence - While the costs above are enormous, they are not so surprising when looked at against the prevalence of crimes of violence against women and girls committed every year. The police in England and Wales receive over 100 calls relating to domestic abuse every hour (HMIC, 2015), a quarter of women experience abuse from a partner in their lifetime, and the murder rate of around two women killed every week by a current or former partner is not coming down. There are estimated to be almost 100,000 rapes and close to half a million sexual assaults every year (ONS, across all recent years), with vulnerable girls and younger women very disproportionately targeted by perpetrators. Younger women, disabled women, BME women and LGBT+ survivors can all find it harder than others to be believed and to access support services and the justice system if they choose to do so.

² https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/732110/the-economic-and-social-costs-of-crime-horr99.pdf

³ This is a conservative estimate, cited from “Value of the Women’s Voluntary and Community Sector Delivering Health Services” 2017.

Fragmented and inadequate victim support spending - Funding of voluntary sector support services, and the financing of public services which are frontline responders to abuse, is currently extremely fragmented and any individual trying to access justice or support is very likely to face a postcode lottery, long waits and will often find no provision available to them. Women's Aid Federation of England (WAFE) reports that in 2018-19 one in five of the referrals to refuges in England were refused because the refuge had a lack of space or capacity to support the survivor. The BME women's sector, run by women who are expert in the needs of women from different communities and where there are very high levels of self-referral because the services are known and trusted, is chronically under-funded with close to half of its services at risk of closure. Rape Crisis Centres are oversubscribed with demand and waiting lists continuing. It is beyond time for central Government to intervene in and ensure strategic and sustainable funding for the specialist voluntary sector such that no woman is turned away.

To meet the multiple and complex needs of LGBT+ survivors, specialist services often work outside of their geographical remit and beyond their capacity. In addition to supporting LGBT+ survivors, these specialist services often work on many intersecting social issues and frequently support public, private and voluntary sector bodies and inform policy agendas. Despite a demonstrated need for LGBT+ specialist services, funding and commissioning remain major challenges⁴.

What would sustainable long-term funding look like? The Domestic Abuse Bill, which is now making its way through the final stages in Parliament, includes the UK's ratification of the Istanbul Convention (on ending domestic abuse and violence against women) which will be a moment of pride for the UK after our input into and championing of the treaty. The Istanbul Convention strongly recommends that states have minimum levels of support provision including:

- at least one family place in a shelter or refuge for every 10,000 women;
- a community based advice or advocacy project for every 50,000 women;
- and a specialist sexual violence centre for every 200,000 women and in every region.

England and Wales are nowhere near these levels of provision, with victim support services struggling to meet demand. These local support services are usually run by women with deep knowledge of the dynamics of abuse, and they have strong track records and high self-referrals rates. The specialist voluntary sector is unequivocally the best at helping women rebuild lives and get back to independence, including being good parents and getting back to work in many cases. We cannot afford not to fund these services sustainably.

Proposal for strategic investment now to bring down harms and costs long-term

Our colleagues at Safe Lives recommend that £2.2bn is invested by government to tackle domestic abuse alone, in the areas of support services, including for disabled and LGBT+ survivors, work with perpetrators, children's services, training for frontline workers and public awareness work. This figure is very significant but still very modest when

⁴ <http://www.galop.org.uk/recognise-respond-strengthening-advocacy-for-lgbt-survivors-of-domestic-abuse-2/>

contrasted with the estimated economic and social cost of domestic abuse. It incorporates WAFE's cost estimates for women's specialist domestic abuse services, including £173million for the national network of refuges in England which is essential for delivering the proposed statutory duty in the Domestic Abuse Bill.

We estimate that in addition to this:

Sexual violence: Around £102.7m annually is needed to ensure that the current rape and sexual abuse support services are able to continue to offer services to the victims and survivors (and their families) who are currently seeking it. In the longer term, our Istanbul Convention obligation would require the creation and development of 320 Rape Crisis Centres to meet the needs of the population, which would require an investment of £416 million.

The specialist counselling and therapy, advocacy, and outreach services offered by accredited Rape Crisis Centres are often life-saving. Rape Crisis Services help women and girls to reduce anxiety and depression related to their sexual violence, improve self-management of mental health problems, reduce isolation, understand healthy and unhealthy relationships, and empower women to find independence. Services also reduce the number of acute crisis admissions into NHS mental health services which are both costly and not well suited to traumatised rape survivors' needs.

Support services for 'BME' women: At least £57m is needed annually to ensure the small network of highly specialist support centres for Black and minority ethnic women stays open and is able to offer refuge spaces, outreach support in the community, specialist advocacy, counselling and support to children. These services are precious social assets where women from different communities are able to get advice and support from workers who understand the implications for them of leaving a marriage or making an allegation of abuse. They make a huge difference in terms of women moving on and being safe. We cannot afford not to fund them.

Spending in relation to other forms of gender based violence: We urgently need costs and public spending estimates in relation to the best ways to end and prevent forced marriage, FGM (female genital mutilation), trafficking, sexual exploitation, child sexual abuse, and a range of online harms. Some of the most cost-effective solutions are community based specialist women's organisations such as those above who can reach into local places and build awareness and offer preventative work in relation to forced marriage and FGM for example. Recognition of this 'by and for' specialism in policy making and spending decisions should be there for deaf and disabled women, who are very disproportionately targeted for abuse, including in institutional settings, and commitment to capacity building for this specialism in particular is urgently needed.

Local women's organisations also provide the most holistic services for outreach and supporting women who are being sexually exploited, who have been in prison, and who have addictions and other problems. We are at a critical point for determining some future policy and practice in relation to online harms (from image based abuse, to harassment online and 'grooming' of children and vulnerable adults), and it has been suggested that some of the digital services tax should be allocated here. We urge the

Treasury to become a key participant in the Home Office led Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, which is about to be renewed for 2021 onwards, and to support the development of truly strategic and costed aims and action plans.

Public services reform, and ensuring policy matches well costed spending plans to end abuse

It is critical of course that there is radical public services change in several key areas if we are to better support victims of abuse and prevent abuse in the first place. In particular we need: significant reform to social security policy; a radically reformed Family Court⁵; housing reforms to protect refugees and move on accommodation, and pathways to enable the removal of perpetrators where this is safe, effective and what the victim wants; reform of adult social care; the ending of 'no recourse to public funds' for abuse survivors which puts enormous pressure on support services; parity of esteem for mental health in the NHS; non-means tested legal aid for survivors, and mandatory training for frontline public services staff who are likely to come into contact with survivors of abuse. All of these, alongside sustainable funding for specialist services, would reduce the complexity of need and costs across systems in the long term.

Crucially early intervention to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls can prevent future costs, to the individual, wider society and the Exchequer, but the current funding allocation for VAWG services is too small to have a transformative impact. Work with boys and men, as disproportionate users of abusive behaviour across the whole VAWG spectrum, need to be part of this early work. Strategic investment now is imperative for building back a society better able to respond to violence against women and girls in all its forms, and is something the public – with their consciousness of violence against women and girls significantly raised during this period – would expect and welcome.

We look forward to receiving your response and we are available to provide further briefing on the figures and recommendations in this letter as necessary.

Yours sincerely,

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Nicki Norman, Acting Chief Executive, Women's Aid Federation of England
Carole Easton OBE, Chief Executive (interim), Refuge
Sara Kirkpatrick, CEO, Welsh Women's Aid
Gudrun Burnet, CEO, Standing Together
Pragna Patel, Director, Southall Black Sisters
Gisela Valle, Director, Latin American Women's Rights Service
Gabriela Quevedo, Director Advocacy and Influencing, Latin American Women's Aid
Suzanne Jacob, CEO, SafeLives

⁵ There are strong recommendations in the Ministry of Justice report: *Assessing risk of harm to children and parents in private law children cases* (June 2020)

Donna Covey CBE, CEO, AVA (Against Violence and Abuse)
Dr Nicola Sharp-Jeffs, CEO, Surviving Economic Abuse
Fiona Dwyer, Chief Executive, SOLACE
Estelle Du Boulay, Director, Rights of Women
Natasha Rattu, Executive Director, Karma Nirvana
Dr Jasna Magić, National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Project Manager, Galop
Jo Todd, CEO, Respect
Kyla Kirkpatrick, Director, Drive
Frank Mullane, CEO, AAFDA (Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse)
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