



Briefing for Domestic Violence & Abuse Bill Home Office Consultation Events

EVAW has urged the government to go further with their proposals for this Bill, if they truly want this to be 'landmark' legislation which transforms responses and challenges attitudes that underpin domestic violence and abuse. We wrote to the Home and Justice Secretaries last October recognising this important opportunity but pointing to areas where the Bill could be strengthened: <http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/womens-groups-urge-government-to-go-further-with-proposed-domestic-violence-bill/>

As part of their consultation process they are holding a number events, where you might want to raise some of the following key issues.

Covering other forms of violence against women and girls

We think it will be a missed opportunity if the new legislation doesn't address other violence women and girls are experiencing including how we respond to rape and sexual violence, or how protection against FGM and so called 'honour-based' violence can be improved. National policy framework has centered on VAWG since 2010. This Bill must explicitly link to this strategy and ensure the **gendered nature of DV and VAWG** are incorporated.

A legal definition of domestic violence

We would like to see coercive control at the centre of a new definition which has regard for all forms of abuse.

Beyond the actual definition we need a commitment to training for police and frontline public services in recognising coercive control - there have been relatively low levels of referrals, charges and prosecutions for the coercive control offence since Dec 2015.

Specialist advocacy for victims, and ensuring migrant women are protected

This Bill provides an opportunity to progress a response across agencies that addresses the risk and needs of **all** victims.

We would like this new Bill to recognise that victims often need very specialist help, including emotional or practical support, whether or not they report crimes to the police.

The Bill should contain a commitment to provide specialist advocacy for everyone who seeks help – so that victims don't fall through the gaps between public services. This support is particularly vital for women whose immigration status is insecure. Too often these women



are reluctant to report abuse because they risk being treated as immigration offenders when they are trying to keep themselves and their children safe.

Support services for survivors of abuse

This recognition of specialist services as vital comes when the services women and children rely on up and down the country are under extreme strain – many have closed, and local authorities are often not able to meet demand for them.

If the vision is that “no victim is ever turned away” the government must look again at the scale of need and how money can best find its way to the specialist women’s refuges and centres that are proven to be the best at this work. The bill must address the fact that women are being turned away from support every day.

Abusive behaviour where a child is involved

The government wants sentencing to reflect the harm caused to children in domestic violence households. However, if the Bill is truly to change women’s and children’s experiences it needs to get to the heart of problems in the family courts. Too often these courts ignore the fact that abusers have already been sanctioned for domestic violence, including in criminal courts, and still insist the abusive parent should have contact with their children. The Bill is an opportunity to change this.

We want to see a full review of the family courts and put in law measures that require civil courts to have regard to criminal proceedings and other safety based measures and end direct cross examination of domestic violence victims by alleged perpetrators in the family courts.

A new Domestic Abuse Commissioner

We want a new commissioner to have powers to ensure commissioning of services is effective and crucially to work across all forms of VAWG.

The commissioner should have a role in ensuring there is a national system of data collection, investigate the problems which housing policy and practice are creating for survivors of abuse, and look at standards for services and perpetrator interventions, to ensure programmes put women’s safety at their heart, such as Respect accreditation requires.