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**18 October**

Dear Ms Green,

Thank you for your letter of 29 August about funding for violence against women and girls (VAWG). Your letter has been passed to the Home Office for a response. We are sorry for the delay.

As you have said in your letter, in January the Government published our estimate of the costs of domestic abuse in England and Wales for the year ending 31 March 2017 to highlight the impact of these crimes. It estimates the cost of domestic abuse for victims over this period to be approximately £66 billion.

At the same time, we published our response to our domestic abuse consultation, and our proposed draft bill setting out our intention to take forward domestic abuse legislation that will fundamentally change the way that we as a country think about this insidious crime. The response to the consultation identified nine measures that require primary legislation to implement, and we will now take these forward in our landmark Domestic Abuse Bill.

On 16 July we introduced our landmark Domestic Abuse Bill, following the publication of the Draft Domestic Abuse Bill and consultation response. We have listened to thousands of views through our consultation, including recommendations from MPs and Peers on the Joint Committee, and designed a Bill that puts victims at its heart. We want to see change occur everywhere, including in courts, police, schools, social care, housing, welfare, and healthcare to ensure we respond to the prevalence and complexity of domestic abuse. The Bill had its second reading on 2 October, and after the Queen's Speech was reintroduced on 15 October to carry over into the new parliamentary session.

We know that domestic abuse affects almost 2 million victims every year and the devastating consequences that it has on victims is such that it requires a separate comprehensive programme of cross-Government activity. We believe that having a specific programme of work focussed solely on domestic abuse gives us the best chance of achieving our aims of raising awareness and preventing abuse. As you know, we also refreshed our cross-Government VAWG strategy in March to ensure we are doing all we can to tackle crimes which disproportionately impact on women.

In the current spending review period (to 2019/20) we are providing £100 million of dedicated funding for VAWG services. The pledge to recruit 20,000 police officers over the next three years and the additional funding for prisons and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) starting in 2020/21 demonstrates our commitment to ensure that police forces and other criminal justice agencies have the resources they need to tackle VAWG and other crimes. We will work to ensure that the resources needed to implement the provisions in the Bill are prioritised as part of the next spending review period from 2021/22.

This increased funding also includes £17 million through the VAWG Service Transformation Fund, which is funding projects across 41 areas to support, promote and embed the best local practice and drive major change across all services so that early intervention and prevention, not crisis response, is the norm. We have increased funding for rape and sexual abuse support services by over 50 per cent – with £24 million over the next two years, to provide free advice, support and counselling at 94 rape support centres – more than ever before.

We know that there have been significant improvements to the police response to domestic abuse since HMICFRS's first inspection report in 2014, which highlighted a number of failings. Police recorded domestic abuse crimes have increased by over 60% in the last three years, demonstrating increased victim confidence to report and better police recording of these crimes. A training programme for the police entitled 'Domestic Abuse Matters' has been developed by the College of Policing with support from the charity Safe Lives. An evaluation by the College of Policing has found it has a positive impact on police officers' knowledge of coercive control and attitudes to domestic abuse.

We are providing match funding to Gwent Police to support the further rollout of Domestic Abuse Matters training in 2019/20. We are also providing £47,000 of funding until 2020 to update the Domestic Abuse Matters police training so that it covers economic abuse. In the Victims Strategy, the College of Policing committed to review the National Police Curriculum and develop a central set of learning resources to support learning in relation to victims and witnesses. Police forces should then use this resource as the basis for any relevant locally based training.

As you said in your letter, we know that victims may be more likely to present in a healthcare setting, and so we have put £2m towards expanding a pathfinder programme which will create a model health response for survivors of domestic violence and abuse in acute, community and mental health settings. The NHS provides care and support to victims of domestic abuse and domestic violence through a wide range of health care services, including services for physical and mental health. The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) has funded the Identification and Referral to Improve Safety (IRIS) project; a staff training and support programme to bridge the gap between primary care and voluntary sector organisations to harness the strengths of each, and to provide an improved domestic violence service. NHS England is developing a four-year action plan specifically on Domestic Violence and Abuse. This will both raise awareness amongst NHS staff, ensure that staff have the skill to identify and refer, and address the issue of NHS staff who are themselves victims, or perpetrators.

This plan will include recommended training programme and awareness raising for all staff. One of the tenets of the action plan will be that any and all victims and survivors of domestic abuse and their children will not be unduly disadvantaged in accessing physical and mental health services when they are forced to move to new accommodation in a different area.

You have mentioned our introduction of compulsory Relationships Education for all primary pupils and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) for all secondary pupils. Schools will be encouraged and supported to teach the new subjects from September 2019 – many of them are already teaching the subjects and will be able to adapt to the new guidance quite quickly. The requirement to teach the new subjects will then follow from September 2020. As with other aspects of the curriculum, schools will have flexibility over how they deliver these subjects, so they can develop an integrated approach that is sensitive to the needs and backgrounds of their pupils. We are investing up to £6 million this financial year 2019-20, to develop support for training, resources and tools.

Your letter also mentions the role of the welfare system in identifying and supporting victims of abuse. We are therefore implementing domestic abuse specialists in each Jobcentre to raise awareness of domestic abuse and to support Work Coaches. Each case is unique and, therefore, Work Coaches ensure their methods of support are tailored to best support the particular needs of the individual. Measures include special provisions for temporary accommodation, easements to work related requirements, same day advances and signposting to expert third-party support. Every Jobcentre has local and national links and relationships with a network of charities and organisations to which we can signpost vulnerable claimants to in order to ensure they get the expert help they need.

We are sensitive to the fact that victims of domestic abuse often find it difficult to come forward and disclose. Claimants are assigned to a single work coach, which helps to build trusting relationships, and we make private rooms available in almost all Jobcentres, so individuals can discuss sensitive issues with their Work Coaches in private. All of our work coaches and our child maintenance staff receive mandatory training - developed with input from domestic abuse charities - to help them recognise the signs of abuse.

We have also provided funding to increase capacity in the more specialist VAWG sector. In 2018/19 the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) provided almost £300k to Imkaan to build capacity and strengthen specialist BME organisations, including through training, quality standard accreditation and access to the tools they need to measure the impact and strengthen the evidence base on specialist BME organisations to help the impact of violence against BME women, including domestic abuse.

We have also provided Southall Black Sisters with £1,090,000 from the Tampon Tax Fund to provide support for women with no recourse to public funds through their 'Recourse to Safety' project. It will make essential support and protection available to abused women by providing safe accommodation, subsistence and help including counselling, therapy, immigration advice and community awareness-raising.

Funding for victims and witnesses' services is drawn from a wide and complex landscape. Funding comes from a variety of government departments and agencies. Services are then commissioned through PCCs, local authorities and the NHS.

We have committed in the Victims Strategy to work across government to better align central funding for victim support services and are currently working on a cross-government Victims Funding Strategy.

On 14 October we published the result of the MHCLG consultation on accommodation-based support services, including a new statutory duty requiring Local Authorities to assess the need for and commission support for victims and their children in safe accommodation. The majority of respondents supported the proposed statutory duty as being a positive step. Respondents particularly welcomed the strategic approach – informed by local needs, driven by strategy, with better accountability and a drive for consistency in the provision of support across the country. It is our intention to enshrine the new duty in law through the Domestic Abuse Bill at the earliest opportunity. We will of course ensure that local authorities receive appropriate financial support to meet the proposed new duty. Final decisions on funding will be made as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review, which is now due to take place in 2020.

Thank you for writing to us and we look forward to continuing our work together.

**Public Protection Unit.**

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