



Home Office

Victoria Atkins MP
Minister for Crime, Safeguarding
and Vulnerability

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22nd January 2018

c/o Mark Burns-Williamson OBE
Police and Crime Commissioner for West Yorkshire
Ploughland House
62 George Street
Wakefield
WF1 1DL

Dear Police and Crime Commissioners

Thank you for your letter dated 11 January about refuge provision and the Government's proposed supported housing reforms. I am responding as the Minister with responsibility for domestic abuse.

Firstly, I would like to reassure you that we are committed to achieving a sustainable future for refuges and to fulfilling our aim to ensure that no victim is turned away.

As you will be aware, the Government has launched a consultation on a new funding model for short-term supported housing, including refuges. The consultation closes on 23 January and, if you have not done so already, I would urge you to contribute your views on how the model should work for refuges. It is important to note that the proposed model does not propose to reduce funding levels for refuge provision it only changes the route by which funding is allocated to providers.

We strongly believe that a local approach will ensure the best outcomes for refuges. Local authorities are best placed to understand their residents' needs and we expect them to assess the need for services for victims of domestic abuse in partnership with specialist services and other key agencies, including the police.

That said, we recognise that refuges in particular rely on cooperation across local boundaries. Local authorities are expected to assess and meet the needs of victims from within and outside their local area, recognising that many victims move from their local area to be safe. This was made clear in our Priorities for Domestic Abuse Services, published in November 2016.

We have built safeguards into the proposed supported housing funding model. This includes the requirement for local authorities to produce a supported housing strategic plan and undertake a needs assessment as conditions of the ring-fenced grant.

On the prospect of refuges closing, it is important to emphasise that these proposals will give councils guaranteed funding which will help them drive up standards of accommodation for vulnerable people. All refuges currently funded by the welfare system will continue to be funded at the same level by local authorities in 2020/21.

However, I do want to assure you that we are listening to the concerns raised and are determined to get this right. We are committed to ensuring that the model developed delivers a sustainable future for refuges and meets the specialist needs of those fleeing domestic abuse. Earlier this month I visited a Women's Aid refuge in Lincolnshire and saw, first hand, the vital, life-saving service that refuges provide.

In addition to seeking views through the consultation, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) will be carrying out a detailed audit of local authority commissioning of domestic abuse services. The audit is expected to run from January to March. It will give a robust picture of domestic abuse service provision for all victims across England and will enable us to assess the impact of the Priorities for Domestic Abuse Services and identify any gaps in provision. MHCLG are working with a range of domestic abuse organisations to ensure that the audit is as robust and thorough as possible and would welcome your input to ensure that the audit can also reflect those services commissioned by PCCs. If you would like to discuss the audit further, please contact Miranda Abrey, Team Leader for Domestic Abuse at MHCLG (email: Miranda.Abrey@communities.gsi.gov.uk telephone: 0303 444 2691).

This audit will feed into MHCLG's review of the current approach to refuge provision in England, including the funding of critical care and support costs, which will be completed by summer 2018. As the proposed changes to the funding of supported housing would not come into force until April 2020, there will be time for the review's conclusions to further inform our work on supported housing. I can assure you that we are continuing to explore all options, including a national model for refuge provision, if that is what we conclude is required.

I would also like to welcome the commitment of the signatories of your letter to tackling domestic abuse and to supporting the work led by the Home Office and Ministry of Justice to develop the Domestic Abuse Bill and non-legislative package. Police and Crime Commissioners have a vital role to play in driving improvement in the local response to domestic abuse. We would greatly welcome your leadership in promoting effective commissioning of services; drawing on the tools we have provided to help you, and other local commissioners, to discharge your responsibilities. These include the Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) National Statement of Expectations and the VAWG Commissioning Toolkit published last year. I know that my ministerial colleague in the Ministry of Justice, Dr Lee, has asked his officials to work with the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners and PCCs to develop a consistent framework of indicators for use across all victim support services. Once introduced this should give government an improved insight into provision and performance of all support services, including those for victims of domestic abuse. I am very supportive of this work and welcome the contribution PCCs are making to getting it right.

As the Home Secretary outlined at the APCC summit in 2017, PCCs have a pivotal role to play in cutting crime and delivering on the priorities upon which you were elected. We recognise the key role that PCCs have played in improving the police response to domestic abuse and we urge you to continue to do so. In November last year, the Office for National Statistics published an updated domestic abuse statistical bulletin and accompanying easy to use tools intended for use by forces to examine their performance. We expect police forces, prosecutors and local practitioners to use the data, alongside local knowledge, to ask

hard and critical questions about their performance in order to identify areas for improvement. I would particularly urge you to look at the use of tools such as Domestic Violence Protection Orders and the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme as I am concerned about the variable use of these measures across the country.

As you may be aware, we will shortly be launching a consultation on the Domestic Abuse Bill and non-legislative package. We look forward to you sharing your views through the consultation and hope that we can count on your active support in promoting the consultation widely to your networks.

I am copying this letter to my colleagues, Heather Wheeler MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing and Homelessness in Ministry of Housing and Local Government and Dr Lee MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Youth Justice, Victims, Female Offenders and Offender Health in the Ministry of Justice.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Victoria Atkins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.

Victoria Atkins MP
Minister for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability