

Carolyn Harris MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0PW

3<sup>rd</sup> March 2020

Dear Carolyn,

### **Domestic Abuse Bill**

You will recall that in my letter of 24 October 2019 following the Second Reading debate on the Domestic Abuse Bill, I indicated that I would make enquiries with the Office of National Statistics (ONS) regarding the concerns you raised, namely that data in the Crime Survey for England and Wales relating to domestic abuse does not account for victims over the age of 74. I have now had a response from Professor Sir Ian Diamond, National Statistician and Chief Executive of the UK Statistics Authority.

Professor Diamond has advised that when asking sensitive questions as part of the Crime Survey, including those on domestic abuse, ONS use a self-completion method whereby the respondent completes the survey questions on a tablet computer. This allows respondents to feel more at ease when answering questions on sensitive issues, due to increased confidence in the privacy and confidentiality of the survey. Traditionally, these questions were only asked to respondents aged 16 to 59 years.

In 2016 ONS assessed whether the then 16 to 59 years age limit should be expanded (considering uptake, ease-of-use and other factors in doing so). Testing showed that self-completion acceptance declined as age increased, with the proportion of people completing the modules being much lower for those aged 75 and over.

When they considered raising the upper limit, ONS balanced data quality and “respondent burden”. The testing supported raising the upper age limit from 59 to 74 years which was implemented from April 2017. Their assessment was, however, that the lower response rate for those aged 75 and over would prevent the production of sufficiently robust estimates while increasing respondent burden.

Nonetheless, Professor Diamond confirmed that the ONS Centre for Crime and Justice will test whether it is possible to increase further the upper age limit in a future review. I welcome this commitment.

I hope you would agree that in the light of Professor Diamond's explanation there are sound reasons for the current upper age limit of 74 for the purposes of collecting Crime Survey data on domestic abuse. Of course, we all recognise that those aged 75 and over can also be victims of domestic abuse and the definition in clause 1 of the Bill encompasses such victims. It is also the case that elderly victims will also benefit from the other provisions in the Bill, including, for example, the new Domestic Abuse Protection Order.

I will arrange for a copy of this letter to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Victoria Atkins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Victoria Atkins MP**  
**Minister for Safeguarding**