

Baroness Lister  
Baroness Brinton  
House of Lords, London, SW1A 0PW

cc. Baroness Newlove, Baroness Thornton, Baroness Bertin,  
Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle, Lord German, Baroness  
Thornton, Baroness Meacher, The Rt Rev. the Lord Bishop of  
Bristol

MoJ ref: SUB113574

25<sup>th</sup> March 2024

*Dear Baroness Lister and Baroness Brinton,*

### **VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS, MIGRANT VICTIMS AND SPECIALIST SERVICES**

I am writing to follow up on remarks relating to Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), migrant victims and specialist services made during Committee of the Victims and Prisoners Bill on 5 February which the Earl Howe responded to during debate.

#### Police training on VAWG and support for younger girls

In response to remarks made by Baroness Brinton regarding the need for a single global training amendment relating to the way the police respond to domestic abuse or stalking amongst younger girls, I would like to assure Noble Lords that the Government recognises that it is essential that frontline professionals recognise vulnerability in children and young girls, regardless of the circumstances around any interaction.

The government is fully committed to tackling the crime of stalking and is dedicated to doing all that it can to protect victims and robustly target perpetrators. We recognise the devastating impact stalking can have, and the Government expects the police to take reports seriously and take swift action. In 2019, the College of Policing published advice on stalking for police first responders, call handlers and investigators. These make clear, for example, the key differences between stalking and harassment. The Home Office has also provided funding for police-led projects to tackle the behaviour of stalkers and thereby provide greater protection to victims. Funding was provided to several PCCs in both 2021/22 and 2022/23, and in May 2023 we announced awards to ten PCCs to fund perpetrator interventions wholly or partly about stalking, covering the period April 2023 – March 2025.

More broadly, the government is committed to tackling VAWG and improving policing's response, which is why we added violence against women and girls to the revised Strategic Policing Requirement (SPR), meaning it is set out as a national threat for forces to respond to alongside other threats such as terrorism. We also supported the introduction of a National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) VAWG Taskforce which works to provide national coordination in driving the policing response to VAWG. The Home Office are continuing to support the roll out of the specialist 'Domestic Abuse Matters' training, which raises awareness of the various forms of domestic abuse, and provides strategies and skills to

police officers and staff and has been delivered to over 80% of forces to date. The Home Office have also funded the College of Policing to deliver a new module of this training, targeted specifically at officers investigating domestic abuse offences to enable further improvement in the police response to domestic abuse incidents. Government is working closely with the College of Policing to identify opportunities to improve the training and capability of the police in responding to these crimes and in supporting victims.

### Migrant victims

Baroness Brinton also asked for an update on the timescales for consideration of the findings of the **Support for Migrant Victims Scheme pilot**. We have considered the findings of the pilot, alongside other assessments, and taken account of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's 'Safety before Status: The Solutions' report. As a result, the newly expanded Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession (formerly the destitute domestic violence concession) intends to give victims who are here as the partner of worker or student a short period of lawful status, access to public funds and support from specialist services whilst they consider their future options, independent of their abuser.

It is the largest expansion of the concession since its introduction in 2012. Whilst having leave on this concessionary basis will not make the victim eligible for settlement under the Immigration Rules domestic abuse provisions, we believe it to be a positive step to provide support and respite for a greater number of migrant victims with no recourse to public funds.

Furthermore, the Minister of Legal Migration's written statement in the House on the 14th March informed the House that we are expanding the eligibility for the Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC) and the scope of the immediate settlement provisions in Appendix Victim of Domestic Abuse (Appendix VDA) to include a spouse, civil partner or durable partner with pre-settled status under the EUSS (meaning that the relationship was formed before the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020), and their dependent children. This will come into force on 4th April.

We have also allocated up to £5.6 million from April 2021 until March 2025 for the Support for Migrant Victim Scheme, which provides a support net for migrant victims of abuse with no recourse to public funds. The scheme provides wraparound support services for migrant victims of domestic abuse, including accommodation, subsistence, counselling and legal advice.

However, the Home Office continues to review and draw from the evaluation as new policies which address support for migrant victims of domestic abuse develop and are developed.

### Specialist 'by and for' services

Our Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan identified the need for greater access to specialist and 'by and for' services for victims and has invested £140 million of cross-government funding to support victims.

We know that specialist 'by and for' organisations face challenges in navigating local commissioning processes. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has published statutory guidance setting out government's expectations on how local authorities should deliver their duties under Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, regarding the provision of support services in safe accommodation. This guidance is clear that local authorities commissioning process should not exclude smaller voluntary organisations. Local authorities have been given a very clear expectation that they must consider the specific needs of victims with protected characteristics or specialist needs, such as those from Black and Minoritised communities; and that support should be provided by experienced and knowledgeable specialist domestic abuse providers, charities and other voluntary organisations. The guidance also points to local authorities' duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty and set out a clear expectation that 'by and for' services should be adequately represented on Local Partnership Boards

The VAWG National Statement of Expectations (NSE) and Commissioning Toolkit, which we published in March 2022, provide support to commissioners to help them understand the importance of and considerations which apply in relation to the provision of 'by and for' and specialist services.

In 2023, we completed an open commercial competition (VAWG Support and Specialist Services Fund) for 'by and for' and specialist services. Vital services funded as a result are now supporting victims often facing the greatest barriers to getting the help they need. Funding for the services began on 1st April 2023, totalling up to £8.3 million in financial years 2023/24 and 2024/25.

To improve how we can meet the diverse needs of victims, the Victims and Prisoners Bill will require local areas to collaborate when commissioning support services for victims of domestic abuse, sexual abuse and serious violence. Local commissioners will be required to produce joint strategies setting out how they are meeting this duty. As part of preparing these strategies, they will be required to carry out a Joint Needs Assessment, to assess the needs of victims in their local area and whether, and how, those needs are being met by support services. In doing so, commissioners will be required to have regard to the particular needs of children (meaning persons aged under 18) and those with protected characteristics when producing their needs assessments, which will then be fed into the joint strategies. This should result in the local commissioning of 'by and for' services if deemed the most suitable approach to address the needs of specific groups.

I hope this letter provides some reassurance on those points raised during the debate on this matter, and I look forward to working closely with you in the upcoming Bill stages.

I am copying this letter to all Noble Lords who participated in this debate and depositing a copy in the House Libraries.

*Yours sincerely*

*Christopher Bellamy*

**LORD BELLAMY KC**



