

Ten point plan for change

SafeLives wants to end domestic abuse for everyone, for good.

Government-commissioned research shows that domestic abuse had an economic and social cost of around £66bn in 2016/17. This huge sum includes amongst other costs: the social cost of physical and mental harm, the cost of policing, justice, medical and mental health response and lost economic potential from people unable to be at work.

We welcome the Government's Bill consultation response and its draft Domestic Abuse Bill. Together they provide an important step forward in addressing a crime that affected at least two million people last year. We suggest that within its plans to improve the domestic abuse response in England and Wales, the Government focuses its funding and energies on ten key areas. These are summarised below. Each point is further developed in SafeLives' full alternative white paper.

1. Identify and stop harmful behaviours, with a comprehensive perpetrator strategy

Policy makers need to stop thinking 'why doesn't she leave?' and start asking 'why doesn't he stop?'. We welcome the government's proposals to improve the identification and assessment of perpetrators and increase the use of quality rehabilitation programmes. We'd like to see these measures as part of a more comprehensive, funded, perpetrator strategy.

The strategy should increase the availability and standards of specialist work to tackle abusive attitudes and behaviours. £45 million – 0.07% of the economic and social cost of domestic abuse – would pay for a national programme, holding perpetrators to account and challenging them to change. If this reduces the costs associated with perpetrators by just 20% by limiting re-offending, it represents a break-even case. Beyond that, government will begin to realise savings.

4. Meet the needs of children. Ensure the response is linked with the response to other family members

Domestic abuse has a devastating impact on children and young people that can last into adulthood, and we know that only 50% of children in abusive households are currently known to children's services. We welcome the £8m proposed for children affected by domestic abuse.

It is also important to help children to understand the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships, give them the confidence to seek help with the challenges they face and build a generation less tolerant of domestic abuse. We want to see investment in effective training for teachers so they can deliver the new Relationships and Sex Education curriculum.

£2.5 million would provide Young Person's Violence Advisors (Ypvvas) across England and Wales, who can support teenagers, and link their response to those aimed at the adults in their life.

6. Train people in a position to help, giving them clear policies on their role in responding to domestic abuse

We are delighted to see proposals around additional training for responding agencies and new training on economic abuse. £10 million match funding from the government would mean every police force in England and Wales could be trained to understand the dynamics of abuse and the tactics used by perpetrators. £4.25 million would also train a critical mass of frontline children and adult social care workers to support victims. We urge the government to use its role to encourage other employers and the public to recognise abusive behaviour and respond when something concerns them. The government's plans to work with job centres, banks and building societies are welcome in this regard.

2. The health sector must step up its response, as the first port of call for many living with domestic abuse

We'd like to see deep engagement from the Department of Health and the NHS on an issue that costs them dearly. Amongst other measures, we need two specialist domestic abuse workers in every hospital in England and Wales, so that victims can be supported quickly and effectively. This will generate a per-patient-seen saving of over £1,000, adding up to a net national saving of £16.4m per year. By helping victims early, we change lives for the better and avoid repeat visits to A&E.

Domestic abuse cost around £66 billion in 2016/17*. It's time to invest in prevention and provide an earlier response.

*Government-commissioned research, published by Home Office, Jan19

3. Commission a comprehensive spectrum of specialist support services for adults, working to high standards in every local area and online

We welcome proposed investment in services for people who are currently under-served – such as victims who are disabled, BAME victims, LGBT+ victims, those with insecure immigration status and those who are over 60 years old. Investments are also needed in the 50%+ of survivors who don't plan to leave or separate, and for survivors with complex needs such as substance abuse.

We hope commissioners support victims of all kinds and at all levels of risk, with the new DA Commissioner scrutinising provision. Quality outreach services are needed to support victims before harm escalates or where imminent danger has reduced. At the highest risk levels, we urgently need 300 more Idvas – specialist workers who help victims at high risk of serious harm or murder to become safe, fast. This will cost £15m - the same amount the Government receives annually in VAT from the purchase of sanitary towels and tampons.

5. Streamline the criminal, civil and family courts, holding perpetrators to account and supporting survivors to access justice and be safe

In the year ending March 2017, there were over 1.1 million cases of domestic abuse recorded by the police but fewer than 100,000 prosecutions for these offences and, added to that, the court process is often traumatic.

We therefore welcome proposals to improve support for victims, including the complete ban on cross examination of victims by perpetrators in family courts and a return to more consistent use of specialist domestic violence courts.

We'd like to see the proposals go further, with an end to the presumption of child contact in DA cases, which survivors frequently tell us puts their children in danger. We'd also like to see an end to unsupervised contact during criminal court proceedings once there is a charge with a domestic abuse element and better coordination between civil/family and criminal court processes to increase people's safety and allow them to live the lives they want after abuse has happened.

8. See domestic abuse as part of a whole picture, linked with other adverse experiences

The Cabinet Office should coordinate cross-government work which responds to the need for a more holistic approach to adverse experiences identified for adults and children. We encourage them to oversee a programme to coordinate and streamline national strategies, funding and policy, providing a blueprint for this same change at the local level.

9. Change the public conversation with a campaign highlighting the voices of survivors and supporting and challenging perpetrators to question their own behaviour

£5 million would pay for a public information campaign to shed light on the epidemic of domestic abuse experiences – focusing on the need for attitude and behaviour change amongst those who are using abuse, rather than on the victim/survivor to protect themselves.

10. Make the new Domestic Abuse Commissioner role fit for purpose, with independence, and a comprehensive approach to domestic abuse built in from the outset

We welcome the establishment of a new Domestic Abuse Commissioner post but seek assurance about its independence, which is crucial. The role must recognise and respond to the links between domestic abuse, other forms of gendered violence and other adverse experiences. It should also oversee perpetrator provision, ensuring those causing harm are held to account and challenged to change.