



Home Office

Home Secretary

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BY EMAIL ONLY

Dame Vera Baird QC
Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales
Office of the Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales
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20 April 2020

Dear Vera,

Further to our conversation on 9 April, I wanted to confirm my announcement of additional Home Office funding for domestic abuse providers and to respond on behalf of the Prime Minister, to your letter to him of 19 March.

I want to reaffirm that I fully understand your concerns about the potential unintended consequences of the current crisis, particularly in relation to potential victims of domestic or sexual abuse and violence. I recognise that for some people their home is not a safe place. This Government is committed to doing all that it can to ensure that the vulnerable in society continue to be safeguarded as we seek to protect public health.

I agree that it is important to ensure a join up of services and planning at local as well as national level. These are essentially local matters, but I know that police forces and Police and Crime Commissioners are engaging closely through their own networks to the sector to monitor local impacts. We will continue to receive feedback also via your own, and the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's networks, as to how events are unfolding at local level.

You will be aware by now that those working with victims of crime both at the front line and via helplines or other services supporting the delivery of key services have already been included in the definition of key worker. I hope this will help to ensure that such staff can continue in their roles.

In relation to funding for the sector at this time, the Chancellor announced a £750m package to support the charitable sector including those organisations responding to domestic abuse. We are working closely with the Treasury and other Departments to develop clear criteria so that organisations will know which is the most appropriate route through which to seek funding. We will also wish to work closely with the sector on determining, for the funds allocated via government

departments, how we can best identify and reach the areas of provision in most need and ensure continuity of support across the range of services.

In the meantime, I hope that the funding I announced on 11 April will ensure that vital helplines and online services continue to be easily accessible to those who need them. This funding may be used for equipment, the further development of applications or tools, capacity building of existing services or associated staffing costs. It should help to support innovative means of enabling victims to seek help when they may have limited opportunities to do so overtly.

Regarding guidance, I understand that Government guidance has been issued to those managing running multiple occupancy buildings on how to operate safely at this time. In addition, a range of operational guidance has been issued across policing, including in collaboration with the sector to ensure that domestic abuse issues continue to be afforded priority at this time.

On testing there is a strategy to roll out testing that includes frontline workers, and this is being done as quickly as possible.

Finally, I fully agree that it is crucial that the police continue to investigate and prosecute offenders, sending a clear signal that the current situation can be no excuse for abusive behaviour. I am working closely with the relevant policing leads to ensure that the police continue to provide appropriate support to victims. I know that the police are aware of the potential risks to vulnerable groups at this time and working hard to ensure that they continue to be prioritised. The police are also ensuring non urgent calls are properly risk-assessed and are working to maintain local multi-agency partnerships which are working with high risk individuals or families.

As part of my announcement the Home Office has launched an enhanced communications campaign, including through social media and posters in retail outlets, to further highlight sources of help, and to drive home that message that domestic abuse will not be tolerated. My officials will also be working with you, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and other key stakeholders on developing a codeword, or similar scheme, that victims of abuse may be able to use at retail outlets if they do not feel safe accessing help by other means. I understand that you have had some preliminary discussions about this.

This is a hugely challenging time for all of us. We will continue to work closely with our Departments, agencies, stakeholders and service providers to ensure that we do our best to support and protect the vulnerable through this extremely difficult period. I am grateful to you for your work on behalf of victims of violence and abuse at this difficult time.

With our good wishes


Rt Hon Priti Patel MP