

Local Government Secretary confirms new support for survivors of domestic abuse

- Government confirms plans for new legal duty for local authorities to deliver life-saving support to survivors of domestic abuse
- New move will end postcode lottery of support for those fleeing violent relationships
- Further £15 million for refuges and safe accommodation projects in 2020 to 2021

Survivors of domestic abuse will be provided with essential, life-saving support in safe accommodation thanks to new legal requirement upon every council in England from next year, Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick has confirmed.

As outlined in the Queen's Speech, the government intends to amend the landmark Domestic Abuse Bill to include for the first time a statutory duty on councils to provide support.

The Bill will transform the response to domestic abuse to better protect victims and their children, ensure they have the support they need, as well as pursuing their abusers.

Many councils are already providing tailored support to those in need, but this move will bring an end to the postcode lottery of support for those fleeing abusive relationships.

This step forms part of a wider government drive to bolster protection for survivors of domestic abuse including the landmark Domestic Abuse Bill which is currently before the House.

Local Government Secretary, Robert Jenrick MP, said:

Domestic abuse destroys lives and leaves victims living in fear in the place where they should feel most safe – their homes.

This duty upon councils will now be brought forward – ensuring survivors get the help they need wherever they are, so they can rebuild their lives away from the threat of abuse.

This government is determined to pursue abusers, better protect victims and their children, and ensure they have the support they need – so we can end this abhorrent practice for good.

Ahead of this new duty coming into force in 2021, the government has also announced a further £15 million in funding to run these essential services in

2020 to 2021 – a 20% increase on 2019 to 2020.

The duty will then be funded from April 2021, subject to future spending review discussions.

In addition, the Domestic Abuse Bill will bring about the first ever statutory government definition of domestic abuse to specifically include economic abuse and controlling and manipulative non-physical abuse.

The Bill will also establish a new Domestic Abuse Commissioner and prohibit the cross-examination of victims by their abusers in the family courts.

Local authorities will also be required to develop and publish strategies which set out in detail the range of support services available for those fleeing violent relationships – including refuge accommodation and specialist support from safety through to independence.

Sandra Horley CBE, Chief Executive of national domestic abuse charity Refuge, said:

This much needed change in the law could mean an end to the postcode lottery of finding emergency accommodation, and would ensure critical specialist services are on a much more sustainable financial footing.

We look forward to working with the government to make sure every woman and child can access the support they need, and that means sustainable funding that meets need and addresses current shortfalls.”

In November last year, ministers awarded a further £22 million for domestic abuse projects across England – ensuring thousands more survivors have access to the help they need as they move towards a safe and healthy future, free from domestic abuse.

Funding is helping to provide over 2,200 new beds in refuges and other safe accommodation, as well as access to education and tailored employment and life skills guidance.

All of this action will help more people understand domestic abuse better and ensure those that need it can access the support they need, while staying safe and protected from future abuse.

The launch of this [consultation](#) received widespread support, including from Women’s Aid, which said “We warmly welcome this announcement, which shows the government’s commitment to the long-term funding of lifesaving refuges.”

In November 2018, the government confirmed that [63 projects across England were to share £22 million](#) to help domestic abuse survivors.

That funding has helped to provide tailored support to more than 25,000

survivors and their families – including over 2,200 additional beds in refuges and other safe accommodation

The Domestic Abuse Bill had its second reading on Wednesday 2 October.

The Bill includes measures such as introducing a statutory definition of domestic abuse, Domestic Abuse Protection Orders and banning the cross-examination of victims by their perpetrators in family proceedings. We have already appointed a Designate Domestic Abuse Commissioner, who will promote best practice and highlight the plight of some of the most vulnerable victims.

Statutory guidance also now strongly encourages councils to prioritise domestic abuse survivors who are ready to move on from refuges when allocating social housing, to free up valuable refuge spaces for others who may need them.

The government published its [response to the consultation](#) on 14 October.

The new £15 million fund will ensure vital safe accommodation services including refuges are maintained ahead of the new duty coming into force.

This builds on other actions being taken by the government to end domestic abuse and tackle violence against women against girls, supporting survivors and ensuring offenders are prosecuted. Such as:

- the criminalisation of forced marriage and the introduction of new stalking laws
- a national roll-out of domestic violence protection orders and the domestic violence disclosure scheme
- the £15 million 3-year Violence Against Women and Girls Service Transformation Fund