



Mark Burns-Williamson OBE
Police and Crime Commissioner for West Yorkshire
Ploughland House
62 George Street
Wakefield WF1 1DL



Office of the
**Police & Crime
Commissioner**
West Yorkshire

My Reference: OPCC/MBW/

Your Reference:

11 January 2018

The Rt Hon Amber Rudd MP
Home Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DP

Dear Home Secretary

Domestic Abuse – impact of government’s proposed supported housing reforms on refuge provision

We are writing to add our voices to those who have raised significant concerns about the severe potential impact of the proposed supported housing reforms on refuge provision. We are aware that Dame Vera Baird, as APCC Victims Portfolio Lead, has already raised these concerns with you and that you are looking into this.

As you know, these concerns have also been highlighted by Women’s Aid and are fully shared by all those who work in the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) sector. The VAWG sector is clear that the DCLG’s proposals, if they go ahead, would lead to a catastrophic reduction in the provision of refuge places. In response to an emergency Women’s Aid survey of refuge services in England, 39% of refuge services who responded said they would have to close their doors for good. A further 13% said they would be forced to reduce the number of bed spaces available. It is also worth bearing mind that these losses to refuge provision would be within a context where demand for refuges already far outstrips supply. As you will be aware, these concerns were shared by Members at the Westminster Hall debate on 12th December, where the view was expressed that half of refuges could close if these changes go ahead.

The work that those in the VAWG sector undertake makes them uniquely well placed to assess the potential impact of these changes and we urge you to listen to the genuine concerns that they have, and we share.

The VAWG Strategy has as one of its aims that by 2020 “no victim is turned away from accessing critical support services delivered by refuges” and these changes will, frankly, make this impossible to achieve. We call on the Government to re-think the proposed

Tel No: 01924 294000

Email: markburns-williamson@westyorkshire.pcc.pnn.gov.uk

Fax No: 01924 294008

www.westyorkshire-pcc.gov.uk

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changes to supported housing in respect of refuges and instead create a long-term and sustainable funding model for a national network of refuges, with the aim of increasing the number of bed spaces and support provision available to match the level of need. Only such an approach will be able to meet the stated aim in the VAWG Strategy that no victim is turned away.

As you know, the primary focus, in our role as PCCs, is on the impact on policing. Without refuges and their support services, advisers and counselling, police could take no appropriate action in the thousands of occasions week to week where a complainant is assessed as at serious risk at home and needs to be removed. Any loss of capacity will undermine police forces' performance on domestic abuse, an area where they have greatly improved in recent years and which HMICFRS are keenly driving forward. Our own obligations, as PCCs, to provide Victims' Services and comply with the Victims' Code of Practice will risk being similarly compromised if the infrastructure for domestic abuse victims is depleted.

We are all strongly committed to the Domestic Abuse Bill and to supporting you in developing a package of non-legislative measures around the Bill. We see this as a once in a generation chance to get strong tools in place to see the end of domestic abuse. But if sustainable refuges are not guaranteed, there is a real prospect of support ebbing away from the Bill which will be seen, at best, as a missed opportunity. Given this, we firmly believe that the proposals undoubtedly present a threat to the success of the proposed Domestic Abuse Bill.

We are happy to assist in working with you to realise the VAWG Strategy's commitment that 'no victim is turned away' from the essential support services, including refuges, which they need.

Yours sincerely,



Mark Burns-Williamson
Lead Labour PCC Representative and PCC for West Yorkshire



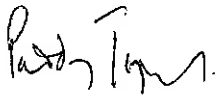
Dame Vera Baird QC
PCC for Northumbria



Barry Coppinger
PCC for Cleveland



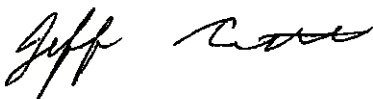
Alun Michael,
PCC for South Wales



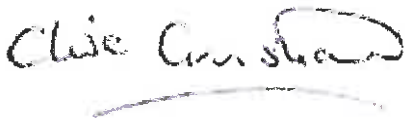
Paddy Tipping
PCC for Nottinghamshire



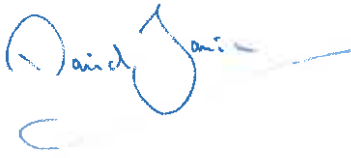
Jane Kennedy,
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Jeff Cuthbert
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Clive Grunshaw,
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PCC for Derbyshire



Sophie Linden,
Deputy Mayor of Policing and Crime for London



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Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime for Greater Manchester



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David Keane,
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Tel No: 01924 294000

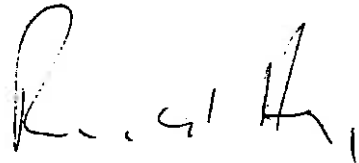
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Fax No: 01924 294008

www.westyorkshire-pcc.gov.uk



Keith Hunter,
PCC for Humberside



Ron Hogg
PCC for Durham



Dr Alan Billings
PCC for South Yorkshire