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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Victims in their own right?

Babies, children and young people's experience of domestic abuse



April 2025



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Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to the many children and young people who were willing to share their views with me and wish them the very best. I see a bright future for these extraordinary individuals. I hope they can see their voices woven through the fabric of this executive summary and the full report.

I also want to thank the frontline practitioners and organisations who took the time to share their feedback with me, which was crucial to the development of this work.

Dame Nicole Jacobs

Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales

Introduction

In 2021, children were, for the first time, recognised in law as victims of domestic abuse in their own right in England and Wales. Section 3 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 defines a child victim as any child who “sees or hears, or experiences the effects of, the abuse.”¹

Despite this welcome change, it is still unclear what this means in practice.

‘Victims in their own right?’ examines the current response to children and young people who experience domestic abuse at home or in their family across both the statutory and non-statutory response. It draws on extensive engagement and comprehensive insights to support recommendations across seven key themes. The report evidences current gaps in provision, examples of good practice, and provides constructive solutions for a coordinated approach that makes the improvements needed.

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1. *Domestic Abuse Act 2021*. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/contents> (Accessed: 28/03/25).



Prevalence

Estimates of the number of children affected by domestic abuse vary and are hampered by underreporting. The lack of a prevalence survey and limited official statistics in England and Wales makes assessing the numbers of children affected difficult.² This undermines the case for prioritising the prevention, identification and response to this harm, and the resource allocation needed to do so.

The most recent crime survey data found that 2.3 million people aged 16–59 experienced domestic abuse in 2023/24 many of whom will have child(ren).³

Impacts

The impact of domestic abuse on children can be profound, and will vary according to a range of factors, such as gender, age, severity of abuse, and length of time subject to abuse.⁴ A comprehensive summary of the impact of domestic abuse can be found in the full report. This is further compounded by disadvantage, marginalisation, as well as access (or lack of access) to support. Alongside the distress experienced while abuse is occurring, such as increased levels of fear, inhibition, isolation, loss, anxiety and depression,⁵ is the likelihood of longer-term trauma that affects physical and mental health, development, behaviour and emotional wellbeing.^{6,7,8} Negative psychological impacts of coercive control that children are likely to experience include a lack of security and safety, a reluctance to trust others and limited opportunities to choose, feel free and develop a sense of independence.^{9,10}

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2. Office for National Statistics. (2023). *Partner abuse in detail*. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/partnerabuseindetailenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2023> (Accessed: 28/03/25).
 3. Office for National Statistics. (2024). *Domestic abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales: year ending March 2024*. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabuseprevalenceandtrendsenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2024> (Accessed: 28/03/25).
 4. Skafida, V., Morrison, F. and Devaney, J., (2022). Prevalence and social inequality in experiences of domestic abuse among mothers of young children: A study using national survey data from Scotland. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 37(11–12), pp.NP9811–NP9838.
 5. Kitzmann, K.M., Gaylord, N.K., Holt, A.R. and Kenny, E.D., (2003). Child witnesses to domestic violence: a meta-analytic review. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology*, 71(2), p.339.
 6. Stanley, N. (2011). *Children Experiencing Domestic Violence*. Dartington: Research In Practice.
 7. Holt, S., Buckley, H. and Whelan, S., (2008). The impact of exposure to domestic violence on children and young people: A review of the literature. *Child abuse & neglect*, 32(8), pp.797–810.
 8. García-Moreno, C., Pallitto, C., Devries, K., Stöckl, H., Watts, C. and Abrahams, N., (2013). *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence*. World Health Organization.
 9. Mullender, A., Hague, G., Imam, U., Kelly, L., Malos, E., & Regan, L. (2002). *Children's perspectives on domestic violence*. London. Sage.
 10. Buckley, H., Holt, S. and Whelan, S., (2007). Listen to me! Children's experiences of domestic violence. *Child Abuse Review: Journal of the British Association for the Study and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect*, 16(5), pp.296–310.

The potential mental health impact on children and young people is particularly striking. Patients in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) were twice as likely to have experienced domestic abuse compared with the general population, with almost 50% of patients reporting exposure to domestic abuse or child abuse.¹¹

Domestic abuse can bring significant disruption to a child's life. Social and support networks can fall away after repeatedly having to change phones or move school and home to access safety. Children suffer the loss of friendship groups, pets,¹² and possessions, contributing to the confusion and anger about what was happening to them.¹³ Having to keep silent to protect family members can cause a further sense of isolation and, together, these changes create additional layers of complex trauma for children.

The impact of living with domestic abuse cannot be understated. This is why so much more must be done to protect children and improve the access to recovery support for children subject to domestic abuse, so that they can grow up to lead fulfilling, happy lives. This report provides a comprehensive suite of policy and practice solutions that would help to achieve this.

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11. Hultmann, O., Broberg, A.G. and Axberg, U., (2022). Child psychiatric patients exposed to intimate partner violence and/or abuse: the impact of double exposure. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 37(11-12), pp.NP8611-NP8631.
 12. Callaghan, J.E., Fellin, L.C., Mavrou, S., Alexander, J.H., Deligianni-Kouimtzi, V., Papathanassiou, M. and Sixsmith, J., (2023). Part of the Family: Children's Experiences with Their Companion Animals in the Context of Domestic Violence and Abuse. *Journal of Family Violence*, pp.1-15.
 13. NSPCC. (2023). *Helplines insight briefing: The impact of coercive control on children and young people*. Available at: <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/u3bf4glz/helplines-insight-briefing-coercive-control-impact-children-young-people.pdf> (Accessed: 28/03/25).



Methodology

The Commissioner and her team have undertaken literature reviews, conducted primary research, engaged with a range of practitioners and sought input from children themselves in the production of ‘Victims in their own right?’.

Any strategy about children subject to domestic abuse needs to include their voices, priorities and concerns. The Commissioner has worked in partnership with eight organisations to develop and pilot ‘Tell Nicole’: a framework to engage with children who have experienced domestic abuse. The children’s insights are included throughout the main policy report, and the Commissioner has published ‘*Tell Nicole: “Our feelings matter”*’;¹⁴ a separate report with full details of the children’s engagement and views.

To explore current commissioning arrangements and the provision of support services for children, the Commissioner conducted two surveys across England and Wales. First, with 168 commissioners of domestic abuse support services and, subsequently, with 266 known service providers of domestic abuse support services for children. The key findings of this are detailed in Chapter 2 of ‘*Victims in their own right?*’ and further details of the surveys and method can be found in the technical report: ‘*Support Services for Children affected by Domestic Abuse Technical Report*’.¹⁵

Additionally, the report draws on insights from:

- 870 professionals working with children in statutory and non-statutory services, including:
 - » All 41 Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) areas in England and Wales.
 - » 97 social workers from across England and Wales.
 - » 130 teachers and Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL) across England and Wales.
 - » 40 professionals from ‘by and for’ services in England and Wales.
 - » 100 Family Hub professionals from England.
- SafeLives Changemakers.¹⁶

14. Domestic Abuse Commissioner. (2025c). *Tell Nicole “Our feelings matter”: Children’s views on the support they need after experiencing domestic abuse*.

15. Domestic Abuse Commissioner. (2025b). *Support Services for Children Affected by Domestic Abuse: Technical Report*.

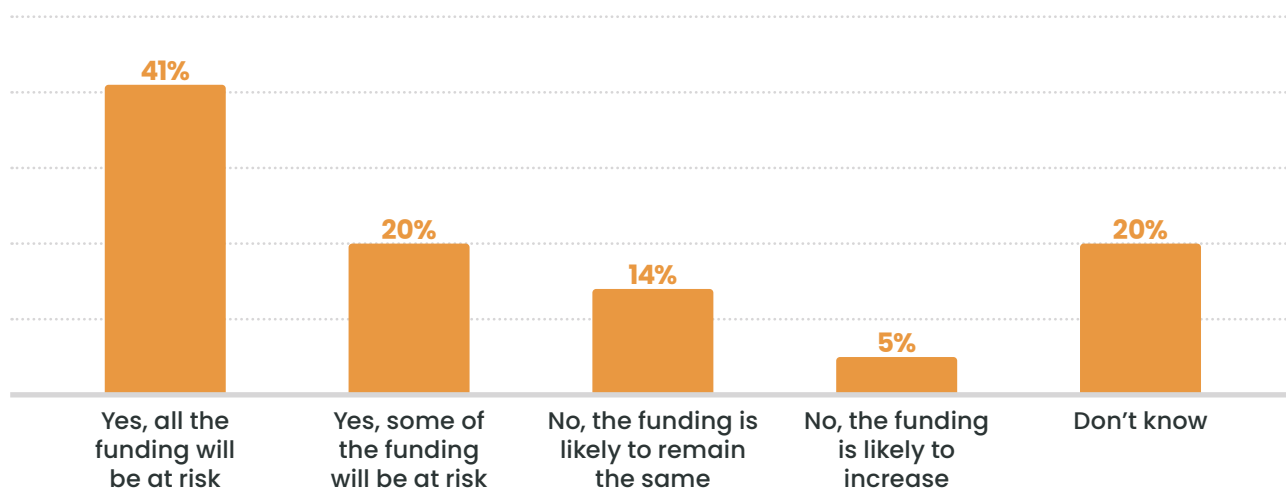
16. The Changemakers are a group of dedicated young people who share a passion to end domestic abuse and tackle the social challenges facing today’s youth, organised by SafeLives.

Key findings

Due to chronic underfunding and patchy provision, most children will not receive the domestic abuse support they need at the time they need it.¹⁷

Research conducted for this report found that funding for the majority of services supporting child victims is precarious. Just one in five services had secure funding arrangements (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Commissioners' views on whether the funding for the service is at risk of being cut or reduced when the current funding comes to an end

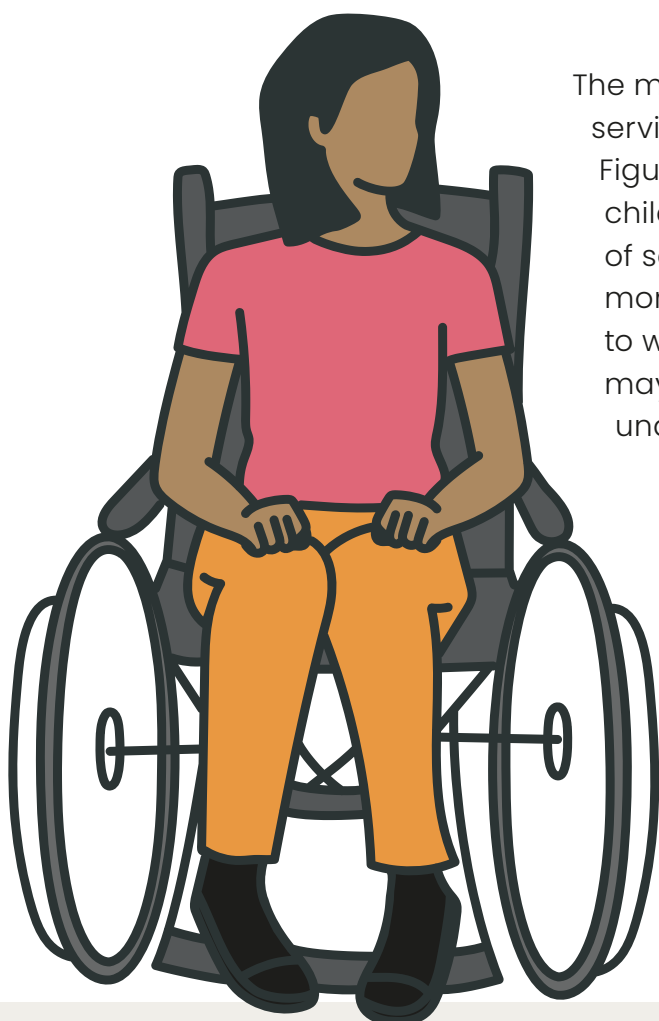
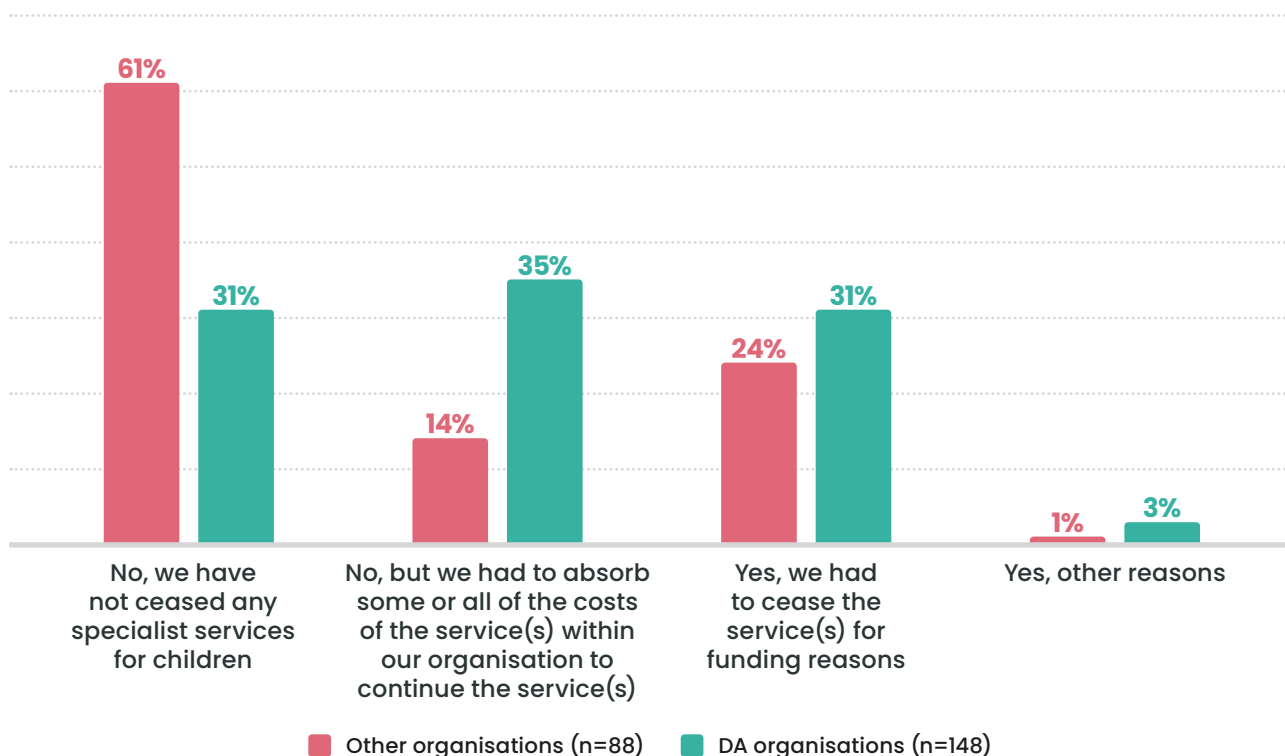


Funding issues are particularly problematic within the domestic abuse sector.

Compared with other organisations, domestic abuse services were far more likely to report that they had to cease specialist services for children for funding reasons (nearly a third within the last five years) or absorb the cost of the service within their organisation in order to continue the service (see Figure 2). This precarity of funding means that expertise, in terms of knowledge and people, is constantly being lost, preventing services from advancing.

17. Domestic Abuse Commissioner. (2022a). *A Patchwork of Provision: How to meet the needs of victims and survivors across England and Wales – Policy Report*. Available at: https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/DAC_Mapping-Abuse-Survivors-Long-Policy-Report_Nov2022_FA.pdf (Accessed: 28/03/25).

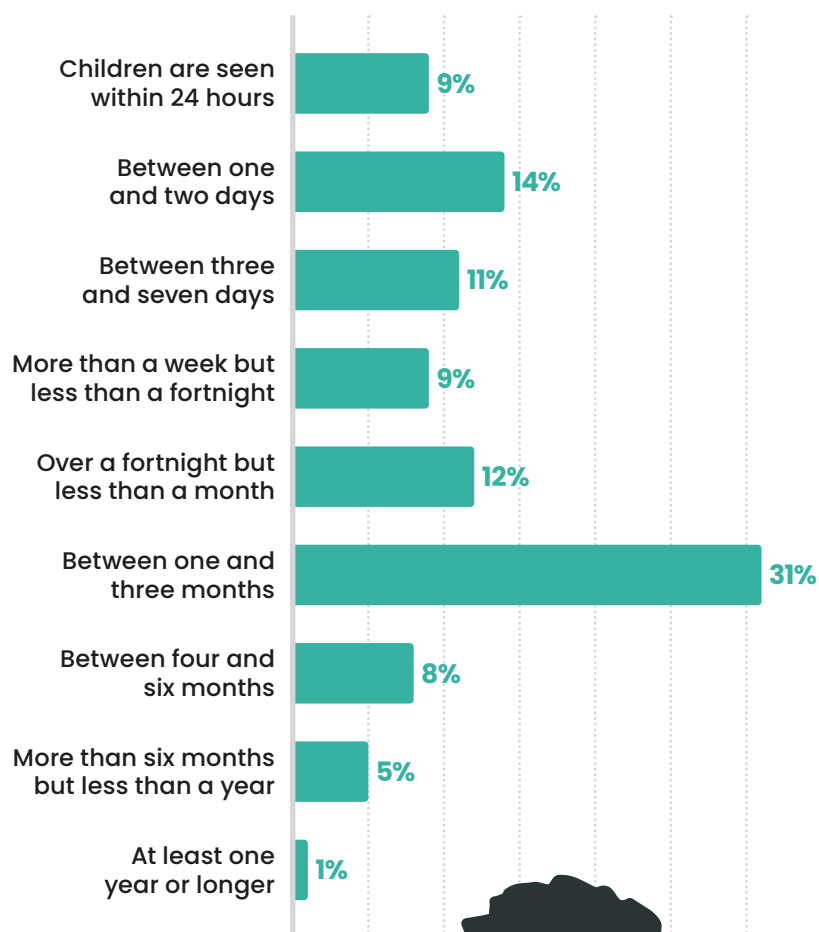
Figure 2: Services that ceased specialist domestic abuse services for children in the last five years



The most frequently reported wait for accessing a service was between one and three months (see Figure 3). Over a third of services were able to see children referred within a week, while over half of services were able to see the child within a month (55%). Forty-five per cent of children had to wait over a month – which for a child in crisis may feel unimaginably long, and they may not understand why.

And that is for the children and young people able to access a service – albeit after waiting. Shockingly, over a quarter of services (27%) said that they had to turn away referrals because they received more referrals than they had the capacity or funding to support.

Figure 3: Waiting times for services reported by service providers



A call to action

Coordinated action is crucial and this is a critical moment for the new Government. The forthcoming Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy, Spring 2025 Spending Review and Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill present opportunities to revolutionise cross-government working and build a robust multi-agency response at the local level.

Bold leadership is needed for the Government to meet its ambition to halve VAWG within a decade. This requires contribution from the whole machinery of the Government, requiring buy-in and coordination across each of its missions – specifically, *An NHS Fit for the Future*, *Safer Streets* and *Break Down Barriers to Opportunity*.¹⁸

The Commissioner’s recommendations represent a blueprint towards supporting children subject to domestic abuse and preventing future harm; as such, they should be considered in full as a meaningful contribution to the ambition to halve VAWG.

Below, are the report’s key messages and the Commissioner’s recommendations, split into seven themes which are a consistent thread throughout the report. These are:

- Centring children’s voices.
- Stronger cross-departmental working and strategic leadership.
- Holistic funding.
- Data and evidence.
- Specialist training for every frontline professional who may work with babies, children or young people.
- Safeguarding.
- Ensuring practice is informed by specialists.

In addition to the recommendations detailed below, we have developed a set of practice recommendations, for frontline practitioners, commissioners and strategic leads at a local level, contained in Appendix 1 of the main report. These can and should be implemented locally.

18. His Majesty’s Government (2024). *Plan for Change: Milestones for Mission-led Government*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plan-for-change> (Accessed 28/03/25).

Recommendations

1. Centring children's voices

The problem

Children and frontline practitioners told us that children's voices are not being considered or sought in risk assessment, decision-making about their lives, nor represented in national and local strategies. Where children's voices are sought, it does not take account of their needs or vulnerability and can be retraumatising.



Children told us that:

- To help them recover from domestic abuse, they needed physical and emotional safety and space where they can talk to someone who will believe them and listen to them in a non-judgemental way.
- Their accounts of what was happening may differ from those of their parents, carers and siblings.
- Adults often had unfair expectations of children who had experienced trauma.
- Their views have often been sidelined or considered secondary to those of adults – sometimes, children had to keep their views hidden or hold on until they could be given a chance to speak.
- Schools could help them to understand domestic abuse by including more discussion of domestic abuse through assemblies and the RSE curriculum and by intervening at an earlier stage, providing specialist support and counselling.

Recommendation 1

The Home Office and the Department for Education jointly funds the DAC Office to pilot the creation of a national youth panel, to inform policy, in England and Wales.

Recommendation 2

The Home Office updates statutory guidance to require Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews to include the authentic voice of the child victim.

Recommendation 3

Every member department of the proposed cross-Government working group (see recommendations under 'Stronger cross-departmental working and strategic leadership') reviews and develops their response to children as victims, to reflect that children's voice is paramount in any interaction or policy development. This must include a review of the public bodies that they are responsible for.

Recommendation 4

The Ministry of Justice develops a national framework for pre-interview preparation and needs assessment of all children and vulnerable witnesses, with regular training, monitoring and quality assurance to ensure that children can be supported to have a voice in their own cases.

Recommendation 5

The Ministry of Justice develops a specific Victims' Code for children and statutory guidance for professionals who are key to supporting children to access their rights under the Victims' Code and best practice in Achieving Best Evidence.

Recommendation 6

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government publishes guidance requiring each local authority to capture the views and experiences of children in safe accommodation within their needs assessments, data monitoring forms and strategies, and commits to ensuring children's voices are represented.

Recommendation 7

The Department for Work and Pensions strengthens the DWP Family Test Policy to include domestic abuse, and specifically, children's experiences of domestic abuse, to ensure that in any policy testing, children's experiences are considered.



2. Stronger cross-departmental working and strategic leadership

The problem

The consideration of babies, children and young people subject to domestic abuse is dispersed across the national policy and local multi-agency response. There is a lack of coordinated strategic leadership nationally, which has created a fragmented local response, and a postcode lottery of support.



Children told us that:

- We should take their messages to those at the very top of government: “We want the BIG BOSS!”
- They felt that those in charge did not fully appreciate the impact that domestic abuse can have on children’s lives and were not listening to children.
- Some children may not be aware that what they were experiencing at home was domestic abuse.
- All children needed to have basic information about domestic abuse, how to recognise that something is abusive if it is something other than physical abuse, and who to tell if it is happening to you.
- If the subject of domestic abuse could be demystified and made less taboo, more children would have awareness.

Recommendation 8

Government appoints a domestic abuse strategic lead role at the Cabinet Office, whose role it would be to:

- Strengthen the cross-Government response to domestic abuse.
- Make links between the missions.
- Lead on the children’s elements of the upcoming VAWG strategy.
- Centralise and coordinate the cross-Government response to domestic abuse.
- Feedback progress directly to Number 10.

Recommendation 9

Government focuses on child victims at the VAWG Ministerial Board, culminating in an annual progress report and agreed metrics to assess accountability. This should be done through the creation of a cross-Government working group, specifically focused on child victims of domestic abuse, jointly led by the Department for Education and the Home Office.

Recommendation 10

Government commits to stronger governance and coordination in the response to child victims and development of an RSE taskforce, which:

- Includes children and young people, teachers, and the specialist domestic abuse and VAWG sector.
- Replaces the current Review Panel.
- Co-produces updated RSE guidance with the Department for Education.
- Provides clear direction and a strategic framework for local stakeholders on how RSE must be delivered in every school.
- Considers what is age appropriate, based on intelligence and data from the local level and evidence.
- Conducts regular consultation with children about their experiences and the efficacy of the RSE curriculum at their school, using insights from localised feedback groups, to ensure that changes to the curriculum are rooted in children's experiences.
- Provides an oversight lens to the quality and standard of the Whole School Approach and RSE delivery, by directing the development of a Whole School Approach and RSE network of best practice providers (see Recommendation 14).

Recommendation 11

Every Government Department contributes to ensuring that the new statutory guidance accompanying the current Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill includes substantial detail for frontline practice on what Section 3 of the Domestic Abuse Act means in practice, alongside a child-friendly version of this guidance. (For detail on what this guidance must include, please see the main report.)

Recommendation 12

The Department for Education makes implementing both the 'Minimum Expectations' and the 'Go Further' sections of the Family Hubs Service Expectations document in responding to domestic abuse mandatory and holds Family Hubs to account in the implementation of these.

Recommendation 13

The Department for Education commits to rolling out and embedding a Whole School Approach across England, accompanied by clear guidance and strategic investment.

Recommendation 14

The Department for Education commits to funding a Whole School Approach and RSE practitioner network, the direction of which is set by the proposed RSE taskforce. This network will develop practice, pool resources and drive the formulation of better standards. For the benefit of this to reach every child, each school must have a member of its leadership team responsible for embedding the learning from the network.

Recommendation 15

The Department for Education creates a clear, evidence-based framework that sets out how to sequence and order RSE topics. This would help to model what age-appropriate teaching involves, but with added flexibility where necessary to meet the needs of children.

Recommendation 16

The Department for Education develops updated RSE guidance. (For detail on what should be included, please see the main report.)

Recommendation 17

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport ensures that the Youth Strategy includes improving joint working between domestic abuse and youth organisations, at both a policy and practice level, to acknowledge the overlap between childhood exposure to domestic abuse, and involvement in serious youth violence.

Recommendation 18

The Department for Health and Social Care consults on and publishes a 10-year strategy to implement a Public Health Approach to Domestic Abuse across England, which has a dedicated focus on the needs of children and young people, alongside the Government's stated commitment to halve VAWG in a decade.

Recommendation 19

The Department for Health and Social Care ensures Integrated Care Board (ICB) Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Leads, are giving adequate attention to child victims in their own right and taking a public health approach to domestic abuse across their areas.

Recommendation 20

The Department for Health and Social Care holds ICBs accountable for the representation of health professionals at Domestic Abuse Partnership Boards (DAPB) and Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (Marac).

Recommendation 21

The College of Policing amends their APP Guidance, to ensure consistency and clarity as to what children as victims in their own right means, and the roles and responsibilities of police officers and forces.

Recommendation 22

Ofsted, Care Quality Commission (CQC), His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) carry out bi-annual joint thematic inspections of local areas focused on domestic abuse, which assess:

- The multi-agency arrangements for:
 - » Responding to children who are victims of domestic abuse, at the point of identification.
 - » Assessment, planning and decision making in response to notifications and referrals of children who are victims of domestic abuse.
 - » Protecting, supporting and caring for children who are at risk, or have been victims, of domestic abuse.
 - » Preventing children from becoming victims of domestic abuse.
- The centralisation of children's voices and experiences alongside those of the non-abusive parent across all statutory processes and multi-agency working
- How domestic abuse informed each agency is, including (but not limited to) the provision of independent, specialist domestic abuse services, and the training available to practitioners
- The governance and strategic leadership of domestic abuse within the arrangements and within each agency
- The quality of work with perpetrators of domestic abuse

Recommendation 23

Ofsted adds criteria to school inspections to assess:

- The components of a Whole School Approach to domestic abuse and other types of VAWG.
- How Operation Encompass notifications are addressed, what support is offered within school and onward referrals.
- How domestic abuse disclosures are handled, and support is offered within school (not as a result of an Operation Encompass notification).
- How safeguarding referrals for domestic abuse are handled.
- What training is offered on domestic abuse and VAWG, and to which staff.

Recommendation 24

Ofsted captures local information about the RSE curriculum and shares the findings with the Department for Education, to ensure the curriculum and statutory guidance remains as relevant as possible.

3. Holistic funding

The problem

There is a significant lack of funding for independent specialist support services for children and young people subject to domestic abuse. It is unacceptable that so few children get the support they need; not only does this cause untold harm to individuals but it has huge economic and societal costs.



The Government could help by understanding what services help children affected by domestic abuse and ensuring that these are available.

Recommendation 25

Government introduces a statutory duty and pools funding for community-based services for all child and adult victims and survivors of domestic abuse, based on local needs assessment, taking into account increased referrals as a result of the recognition that children are victims in their own right. (To see the full detail of this ask, please see the main report.).

Recommendation 26

The Home Office updates the guidance on commissioning services to support victims and survivors of VAWG, to significantly strengthen the content related to child victims of domestic abuse and consider their individual, intersectional needs.

Recommendation 27

The Home Office and Safer Streets Mission Board fund the scoping, development and roll out of gender-specific and masculinity aware interventions for male child victims of domestic abuse.

Recommendation 28

The Home Office funds the comprehensive provision of behaviour change interventions for perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Recommendation 29

The Department for Education funds the specialist domestic abuse sector to support prevention activity work with schools in every local area, in addition to carrying out their other roles to support victims and survivors.

Recommendation 30

The Department for Education invests in specialist domestic abuse work in Family Hubs as a priority and ensures co-locations and opportunities for domestic abuse support services to play more of an active role in each Family Hub.

Recommendation 31

The Ministry of Justice ensures that the Victims and Prisoners Act allows local areas the autonomy to select the best placed agency within the Duty to Collaborate to hold convening powers.

Recommendation 32

The Ministry of Justice takes national oversight of the convening power within the Victims and Prisoners Act's Duty to Collaborate, knows which agency is responsible in each area and holds them accountable for fulfilling their duties under the Act.

Recommendation 33

The Department for Work and Pensions creates flexibility in funding to allow local areas to use Reducing Parental Conflict funding as needed for domestic abuse services, as well as any RPC programme that is needed.

Recommendation 34

The Department for Health and Social Care invests in embedding domestic abuse and other types of VAWG expertise and specialism into health settings – by funding the provision of specialist domestic abuse services within health settings to support prevention activity and response work to child victims of domestic abuse.

Recommendation 35

The Department for Health and Social Care funds counselling and therapeutic support for child victims of domestic abuse within specialist community-based services.



4. Data and evidence

The problem

A lack of data, official statistics and targeted attention, has meant there is little understanding of the prevalence of children experiencing domestic abuse, outcomes for children or what works to support them. Better data must drive accountability for local areas to deliver on efforts to support children and halve Violence Against Women and Girls in a decade.



The Government could make things better for children by ensuring that availability of support services is consistent across the country, quick for children who need them, and suitable for children with differing needs.

Recommendation 36

The Office for National Statistics commits to rolling out the Child Abuse Prevalence Survey, with specific questions on childhood exposure to and experience of domestic abuse.

Recommendation 37

The Office for National Statistics continues to explore the development of questions about babies and children experiencing domestic abuse within the Crime Survey for England and Wales.

Recommendation 38

The Ministry of Justice ensures that the statutory guidance underpinning the Duty to Collaborate makes clear that safeguarding partners must include annual data on children subject to domestic abuse in Joint Strategic Needs Assessments.

Recommendation 39

The Ministry of Justice ensures that the statutory guidance underpinning the Duty to Collaborate makes clear that every effort must be made to collate data about the needs of children and victims of domestic abuse who are not known to statutory services and the barriers they face in accessing support.

Recommendation 40

The Department for Education amends the Child in Need categories to ensure that children who are victims of domestic abuse are categorised as so, and not just as experiencing 'neglect', to understand the prevalence of child victims and to ensure that their needs are properly identified.

Recommendation 41

The Department for Education commits to analysing outcomes for children and young people on a Child in Need Plan, to understand the impacts the plans are making by area, and reasons for case closure.

Recommendation 42

The Home Office and Ministry of Justice conduct a rapid evidence review of the experiences of children bereaved by domestic abuse, including a review of the statutory and voluntary sector provision available to them.

Recommendation 43

The Home Office rolls out a phased approach to evaluation, which enables capacity building, creating a shared understanding across the sector that prioritises embedding the views and needs of children, domestic abuse specialist expertise, and then evaluating interventions only when they are ready.



Recommendation 44

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government collects better data regarding child victims of domestic abuse residing in safe accommodation. This should include outcomes for children and families, the ages of children, reasons why children cannot be supported, and the type of child-specific support service accessed in the accommodation. This must include the experiences of teenage boys, and the specific number of children who could not be supported, as opposed to just at a household level.

Recommendation 45

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government conducts a review of the Safe Accommodation Duty and the response to children and young people subject to domestic abuse, including the types of child-specific support offered in safe accommodation, how that support can be extended, the reasons why children are turned away, as well as specifically, the experiences of teenage boys accessing support.

Recommendation 46

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government ensures that adult and child victims and survivors who are living in temporary accommodation are included in the Safe Accommodation Duty data, concerning families who were unable to be supported in safe accommodation, to ensure an accurate measure of the scale of the problem. At present, these families are not included in the data, representing a significant undercount.

Recommendation 47

The Ministry of Justice includes Early Help data in its requirements for Joint Strategic Needs Assessments under the Duty to Collaborate in the Victims and Prisoners Act. This should include the number of children subject to domestic abuse referred into, and accessing, Early Help services.

Recommendation 48

The Ministry of Justice commissions research that undertakes a systematic review of domestic abuse cases in public law proceedings. This research should mirror the Harm Report and consist of a literature review, consultation and published findings.

5. Specialist training for every frontline professional who may work with babies, children and young people

The problem

The lack of training professionals receive on domestic abuse can be tolerated no longer. The absence of compulsory domestic abuse training for social workers is a huge problem, impacting the identification and response to child victims, and the confidence of the workforce to provide support.



Children told us that:

- The Government could help by educating adults about the impact of domestic abuse upon children.
- To help them recover from domestic abuse, children need professionals to recognise that children's accounts of what was happening may differ from those of their parents and carers.
- They wanted workers to recognise that they as adults have more power, which can be unfair to children.
- Domestic abuse was either not taken seriously by the police or was interpreted very narrowly and that an improvement in knowledge and attitudes towards children affected by domestic abuse was needed within the police force.
- They wanted to keep their personal information confidential and retain control over what information about them or their family is shared with others.
- Schools needed to take a much greater role in supporting children affected by domestic abuse. This could be done through training teachers to update their knowledge on trauma and the impact of domestic abuse on children, and signs of abuse, including within young people's relationships.

Recommendation 49

Government funds the development and delivery of comprehensive and specialist training for every frontline professional who may work with babies, children and young people, including identifying domestic abuse and responding safely through a tiered, building block approach (for example, anyone training at the higher levels must first have completed the lower levels chronologically). (For details as to what is included at each tier of training, please see the main report.)

Recommendation 50

Social Work England commits to a rigorous inspection of Social Work degrees and the domestic abuse content in degree programmes and ensures that those delivering this curriculum are themselves trained in domestic abuse. The inspection criteria should be developed in close collaboration with the specialist domestic abuse sector and the Domestic Abuse Commissioner.

Recommendation 51

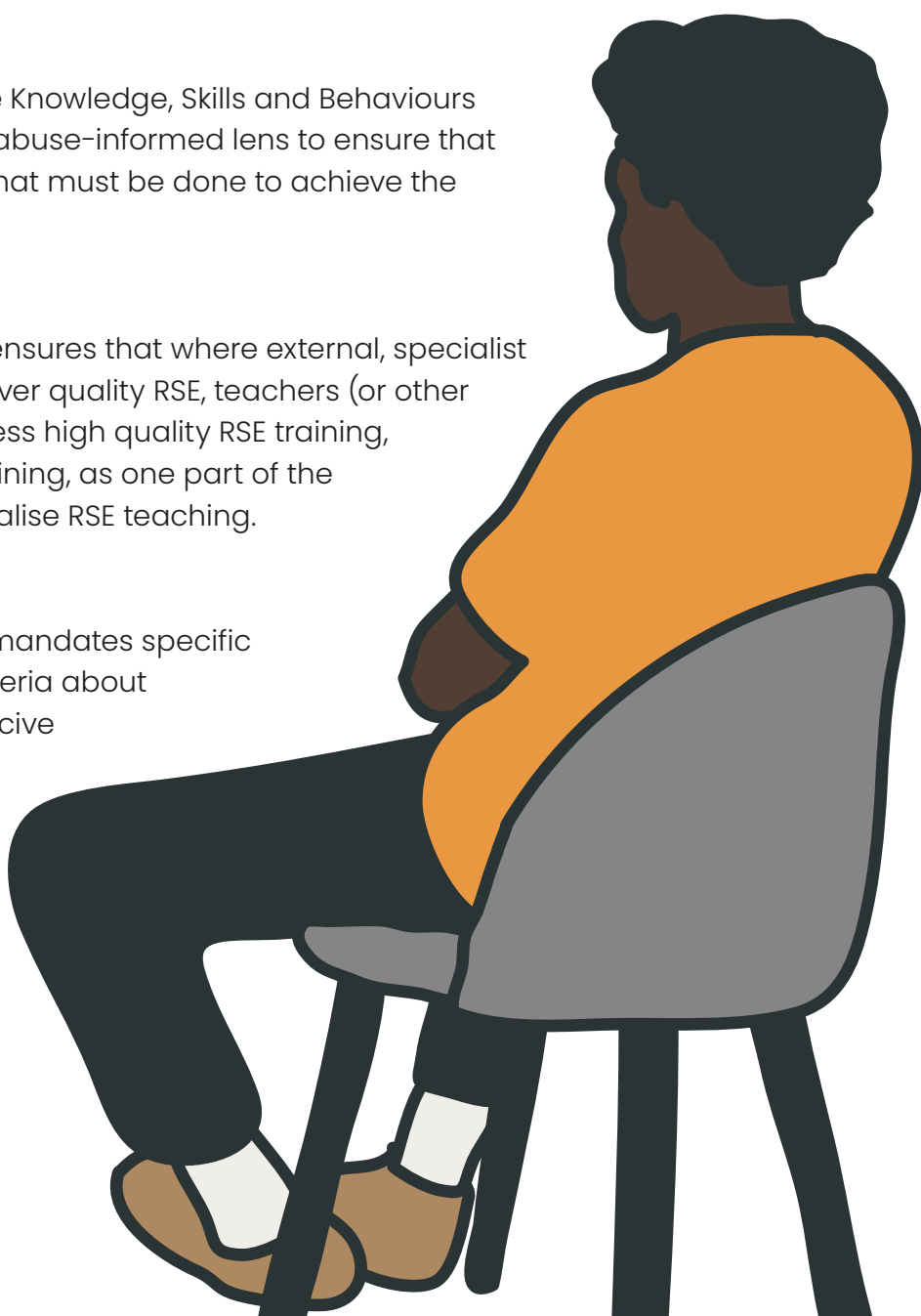
Social Work England reviews the Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours standards through a domestic abuse-informed lens to ensure that course providers understand what must be done to achieve the standards.

Recommendation 52

The Department for Education ensures that where external, specialist experts are not available to deliver quality RSE, teachers (or other school staff) are funded to access high quality RSE training, as part of their core teacher training, as one part of the overarching effort to professionalise RSE teaching.

Recommendation 53

The Department for Education mandates specific curriculum and assessment criteria about domestic abuse, including coercive and controlling behaviour, through the 2025 Early Careers Framework and develops practice directions to accompany this.



6. Safeguarding

The problem

There are gaps in the safeguarding functions of statutory services and teachers told the Commissioner that they are unable to fulfil their safeguarding duties properly. As a result, children are falling through the cracks and not receiving the support they need. This must be rectified.



Children told us that:

- The Government could help by placing a greater role on schools to support children affected by domestic abuse.
- They wanted workers who are experienced and have a good understanding of domestic abuse, and who are kind and respectful to children, as well as good listeners and non-judgemental.
- Information on domestic abuse or healthy relationships needed to come from workers with specialist knowledge in these topics, not their regular teachers.

Recommendation 54

The Department for Education makes education the fourth statutory safeguarding partner through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

Recommendation 55

The Department for Education publishes guidance setting out the expected response that child victims of domestic abuse will receive as part of the new Child Protection and Family Help offer.

Recommendation 56

The Home Office and Department for Education funds the introduction of Education Domestic Abuse Advisor roles, as part of the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership, who can provide training and guidance to schools and share best practice across local areas. This role would entail:

- Taking a strategic role in the coordination of the local Education sector's ability to respond effectively to child victims of domestic abuse.
- Representing the education sector at Domestic Abuse Partnership Boards (DAPB), Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (Marac) steering groups and other relevant fora.

- Collating and analysing key data from safeguarding referrals, to feed into Joint Strategic Needs Assessments.
- Monitoring the provision of RSE and share best practice in the delivery of this curriculum across an area.
- Providing or sourcing domestic abuse training and guidance to education staff.

Recommendation 57

The Department for Education introduces dedicated safeguarding provision in every school. The Department for Education should fund a two-year pilot of 'Dedicated Safeguarding Leads', whose role is solely safeguarding (across all harm types) and family liaison and support work within schools and building effective partnerships.

Recommendation 58

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government considers plans to amend the homelessness legislation to change the definition of temporary accommodation, for households found to be in priority need because they are deemed to be homeless as a result of domestic abuse, to mirror the definition of safe accommodation as per the Domestic Abuse Act (2021).



Recommendation 59

The Home Office conducts a full review of risk identification tools and Marac, through a whole-systems lens, including the extent to which the needs and risk to child victims are considered and have a voice in decisions that affect them. This must extend to research into, and the development of, child-specific tools and guidance to assess both risk and need alongside each other, with age-appropriate variations to cover all babies, children and young people.

Recommendation 60

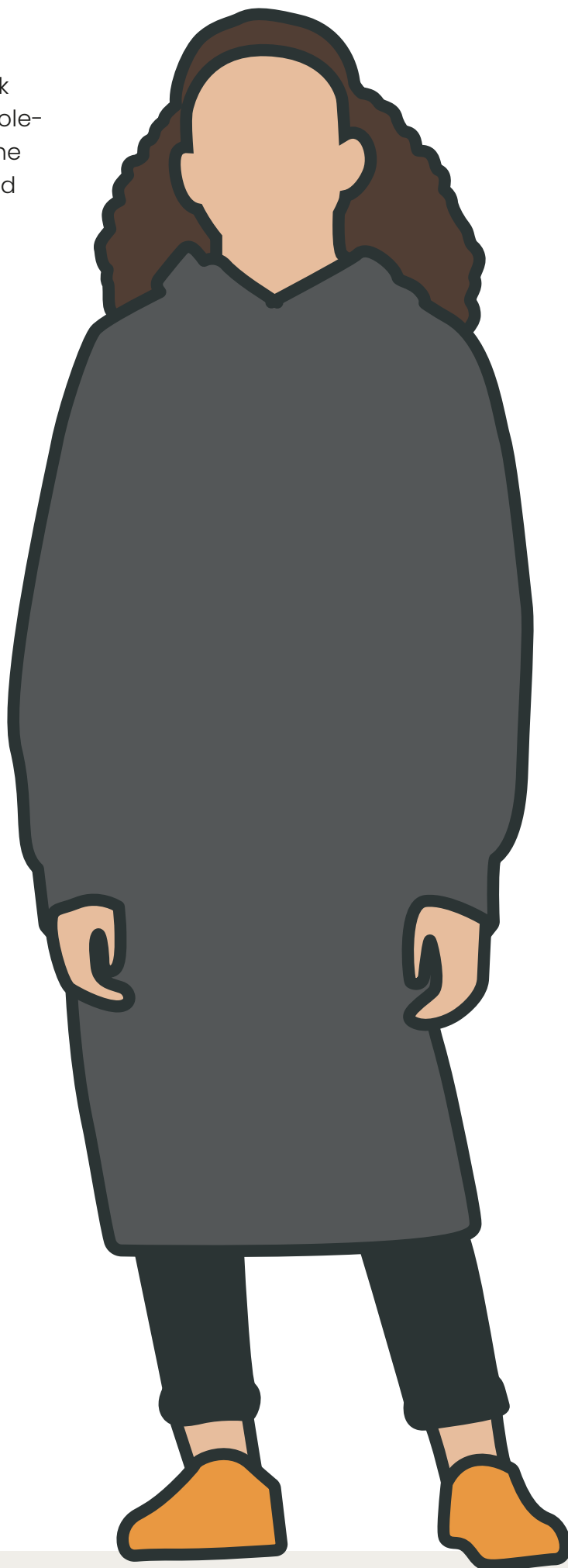
The Ministry of Justice places a duty on education settings to act on Operation Encompass notifications and put in place support for the child that best suits their needs and takes their views into account. This support should include a referral to a specialist domestic abuse service, additional support in school and be backed by guidance.

Recommendation 61

The Ministry of Justice expands the statutory duty for Operation Encompass to early years provision.

Recommendation 62

The Department for Health and Social Care increases CAMHS capacity to understand and respond to child victims of domestic abuse with mental health needs and ensure all CAMHS professionals have a solid understanding of domestic abuse.



7. Ensuring practice is informed by specialists

The problem

The expertise of specialist services is not being routinely sought, meaning that statutory services miss opportunities to support children and fail to accurately assess risk. Without the voluntary sector, statutory services are unable to function effectively or carry out their statutory duties. This is a false economy.



Children told us that:

- To help them recover from domestic abuse, they needed greater choice over the length, location and type of support they receive (for example, group or one-to-one).
- They want workers who understand domestic abuse and who are good at working with children and young people.

Recommendation 63

The Department for Education implements learning into the new Child Protection and Family Help Offer, including models that partner with the non-abusive parent and hold the perpetrator to account, such as Safe and Together.

Recommendation 64

The Department for Education funds co-located independent specialist domestic abuse services in the new Family Help and Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams.

Recommendation 65

The Department for Education funds the co-location of independent domestic abuse specialist services in children's social care.

Recommendation 66

The Department for Education ensures that all Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams are fully domestic abuse informed through robust guidance, strategic leadership, and the funding of support services to provide clear referral pathways to independent specialist services.



**domestic
abuse
commissioner**

The Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales
2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4JA

commissioner@domesticabusecommissioner.independent.gov.uk

www.domesticabusecommissioner.uk

