

Eddie Hughes  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State  
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

17th March 2021

Dear Minister,

We are writing to congratulate you on your recent appointment and look forward to working with you. We are seeking an introductory meeting and to discuss key policy issues on housing and domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse has significantly increased during the coronavirus epidemic, as victims including children remain trapped in their homes with abusers. As lockdown eases, we anticipate that the risks presented by abusers will only increase, as many victims may attempt to separate from the abuser and seek safety and stable housing.<sup>1</sup> The Domestic Abuse Bill, which is currently making its way through parliament, provides a timely opportunity to address many of the housing and safety needs of survivors that have become even more apparent and critical during this epidemic.

We are the [National Housing and Domestic Abuse Policy and Practice Group](#), led by the [Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance](#) (DAHA). Our group brings together experts from the housing, domestic abuse and violence against women and girls' (VAWG) sectors to share best practice and influence policy and practice in England and devolved authorities.

We have worked closely with your department over the years, including your department's response to the coronavirus: In April 2020, we made recommendations in our [letter to Secretary of State Robert Jenrick](#), to address the legal barriers to accessing settled housing for victims during the first lockdown, and to provide emergency funding for specialist front line domestic abuse services and local authority emergency housing provision. In May 2020, we made further recommendations in our [letter to Dame Louise Casey DBE CE](#), to develop a tailored strategy for providing emergency and move-on accommodation for women experiencing multiple disadvantage and homelessness.

We have also worked closely with your department to feed into the development of the Domestic Abuse Bill and the accompanying statutory guidance. We welcome many measures within the Bill, including granting automatic priority need status to people fleeing domestic abuse and placing a statutory duty on tier one local authorities to provide support to victims within safe accommodation.

We believe these changes have the potential to improve housing and safety outcomes for survivors, but only if it is supported by clear guidance that is drafted in collaboration with the domestic abuse, housing and VAWG sectors, and with the provision of ongoing support to local authorities as they implement the statutory duty. We welcome a meeting to discuss our joint recommendations and how we can work together to ensure the statutory duty effectively delivers access to safety and support for all survivors and their children.

We also believe the Bill could go further to support survivors to achieve safety and housing security through a [Whole Housing Approach](#), referenced within the draft Statutory Guidance, which addresses the multiple and intersecting housing needs of survivors in any housing circumstances or tenure type. Vitality, this includes practical solutions for survivors to be able to remove perpetrators

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<sup>1</sup> Research by Dr K hohl and Dr K Johnson recommends "police forces and other domestic abuse services prepare for a surge in high-risk and high-harm reports when Covid restrictions lift in 2021." <https://www.city.ac.uk/news/2020/december/a-crisis-exposed-how-covid-19-is-impacting-domestic-abuse-reported-to-the-police>

from their joint social tenancy, ensuring the commissioning and funding of specialist 'by and for' services for marginalised survivors, housing solutions that are responsive to the specific needs of women who experience multiple disadvantage and homelessness, and the inclusion of the amendment on migrant women. We believe this could be greatly supported by a working group, including the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance, Standing Together, the MHCLG and Homes England, to discuss a focused housing strategy for survivors of domestic abuse. This could be discussed further during the introductory meeting.

Finally, we worked with your predecessor to highlight the need to address the housing circumstances of perpetrators in order to reduce the risk of harm and homelessness to survivors. Whilst access to safety for survivors must always be the priority, it is important to recognise that without housing solutions for perpetrators, there is an increased risk that they will return to abuse victims, place other family members, and intimate partners at risk, and are unable to engage in proven behaviour change interventions. The absence of such solutions means the onus is placed on the victim to flee, when what we all want to see is that, where safe and possible, the person causing abuse is the one who should leave the family home. We know that the government is keen to take a more strategic approach to perpetrators of domestic abuse and we are eager to work with your department on housing issues for perpetrators. Your predecessor, Kelly Tolhurst MP, encouraged our Perpetrator Housing Subgroup to meet with officials on this, and we will be contacting them soon to arrange this.

I look forward to hearing from you to arrange an introductory meeting to discuss how we can work collaboratively to support the housing and safety needs of victims of domestic abuse. Please feel free to email me directly, [g.burnet@standingtogether.org.uk](mailto:g.burnet@standingtogether.org.uk) and/or Deidre Cartwright ([d.cartwright@standingtogether.org.uk](mailto:d.cartwright@standingtogether.org.uk)) to arrange this.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G Burnet', written in a cursive style.

Gudrun Burnet,

CEO Standing Together

Co-founder of Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance

Chair of National Group