



What is the Government’s proposed domestic violence strategy?

This briefing paper sets out the primary aims of the **Government’s new domestic violence strategy**, which builds on the domestic violence proposals in the 2002 “Justice for All” White Paper.

Domestic violence is defined by the Home Office as “Any violence between current and former partners in an intimate relationship, wherever and whenever the violence occurs. The violence may include physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse.”

The consultation document sets out the nature and prevalence of domestic violence, and examines its impact on victims and its wider cost to society. The Government’s strategy for tackling domestic violence is based on three elements:

1. Prevention

The consultation document discusses:

- The action the Government is taking to educate people (especially young people) about domestic violence, and seeks views on how best to change attitudes that tolerate it;
- Work to help agencies and professionals to address risk factors and identify victims as early as possible;
- The provision of information to victims to help them gain access to support services and legal protection; and
- Preventing domestic violence offenders from re-offending.

2. Protection and Justice

Specific proposals on which the Government would welcome views include:

- Extending the availability of non-molestation and occupation orders under the Family Law Act 1996;
- Criminalising the breach of such orders;
- Increasing the protection courts provide to victims of and witnesses to domestic violence by allowing victims to apply for a measure of anonymity through reporting restrictions;
- Extending the availability of restraining orders under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 to cover all violent offences;
- Allowing the courts to make an order where a person is charged, pending trial, or where there is insufficient evidence to convict but the court considers that it is necessary to make an order to protect the victim;
- Making common assault an arrestable offence;
- Creating a register of civil orders and a register of domestic violence offenders;

- Referring sentencing in domestic violence cases to the Sentencing Advisory Panel;
- Improving the way the law on homicide operates in domestic violence cases;
- Establishing multi-agency reviews after domestic violence homicides to learn the lessons on how agencies might have prevented the death;
- Improving liaison between the civil and criminal courts: and
- Explores the issue of child contact arrangements.

3. Support

The consultation document examines the problems faced by victims and their families when they leave or end violent relationships including:

- The availability of safe accommodation and housing;
- The provision of benefits;
- The introduction of measures to support victims; and
- Support and counselling services for children affected by domestic violence.

How can I respond?

BLF and WRC will be holding a consultation event on 29th August 2003, from 10am-1.30pm, at WRC (76 Wentworth Street, London E1 7SA).

At the consultation event, we will be focusing on the following questions with specific references to the experiences and needs of BMER (Black and Minority Ethnic and Refugee) women:

Does the strategy go far enough? What other measures need to be implemented?

*Do we agree with the Home Office's definition of domestic violence? (Page 8 **of the Government's consultation document**)*

Do we agree with the Government's analysis of domestic violence in/against BMER, communities/women? (Pages 9, 10, 45, 46, 55, 56)

How should the Government best measure the incidence of domestic violence and the success of its strategy to reduce it? (Page 11)

Should the Government require Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) to formulate strategies for the reduction of domestic violence? (Page 12)

What are the most effective ways of raising awareness about domestic violence among the general public and key professionals? (Page 18)

How do we best reach particular groups, e.g. ethnic minority communities, the LGBT (Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) community, children, people with disabilities, the elderly, and those lacking mental capacity?

How can we best provide information quickly, safely and easily to victims of domestic violence? (Page 23)

What should this information cover? (Page 23)

How should professional agencies be involved in supporting victims and supporting the police, Crown Prosecution Service and courts? (Page 28)

Is the best way to ensure that courts treat domestic violence as seriously as other offences to refer the issue to the Sentencing Advisory Panel for them to issue guidelines to courts dealing with domestic violence cases? (Page 30)

Should the Government amend the 'associated person' criteria of the Family Law Act 1996 to provide same-sex couples who are cohabiting with the same level of protection as cohabiting heterosexual couples? (Page 33)

Should the Government amend the 'associated person' criteria of the Family Law Act 1996 to include relationships where the parties have never lived together? (Page 34)

Would changes to the law to allow police to arrest for breach of a non-molestation or occupation order be helpful? (Page 34)

How should "without notice" orders be handled? (Page 34)

How can the risk of applicants for orders being put under pressure to accept an undertaking be reduced? (Page 34)

Should the Government create a register of civil orders, and if so should the register include both current and expired orders? (Page 36)

Should the Government create a register of domestic violence offenders? (Page 36)

Do the current child contact arrangements provide the right level of support and safety for all family members and if not what else should be done? (Page 40)

What more does Government need to do to assist voluntary and statutory agencies to share information for the better protection of victims? (Page 41)

Does the current framework of legislation and guidance provide a sufficient safety net for people who are vulnerable as a result of leaving their homes because of domestic violence? (Page 44)

How do housing policy, safety and support services affect victims' ability to stay in their homes or, in an emergency, to go to refuge accommodation? (Page 44)

What is the unmet need for support services and accommodation options, including for victims from BME and LGBT communities? How could this be met? Is specialist refuge provision the most appropriate support?

How can the Government support people to stay safely in their own homes?

Copies of the Government's proposals 'Safety and Justice' can be downloaded from www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs2/violence.html.

If you are unable to download the document, have any queries or would like to attend the consultation, please complete the following invitation form or contact:

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Tel: 0208 709 9777, Fax: 020 8983 6830, Email rohathi@blacklondon.org.uk

Yes, I would like to attend the Black Londoners' Forum and Women's Resource Centre joint consultation on the Home Office *Safety and Justice* paper on Domestic Violence.

Name _____

Organisation _____

Your Position _____

Postal Address _____

Email _____ Phone _____

Do you have any access requirements? _____

Do you have any dietary requirements? _____

Please return this form by Friday August 22nd to:

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