

One week to go until new domestic abuse law comes into force

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon and Cabinet Secretary for Justice Humza Yousaf visited Glasgow East Women's Aid this morning (25 March 2019) to hear how staff are preparing for the Domestic Abuse Act coming into force in seven days.

The Act creates a new offence of domestic abuse which covers psychological harm as well as physical harm. It is also the first piece of legislation in the UK to contain a specific statutory sentencing aggravation to reflect the harm that can be caused to children growing up in an environment where domestic abuse takes place.

The First Minister and Mr Yousaf met survivors of domestic abuse who have been helped by Glasgow East Women's Aid, and saw training materials that have been developed by the service with £166,000 of Scottish Government funding.

The First Minister said:

"Scotland is leading the way with this new legislation. It will be a landmark moment in our efforts to tackle domestic abuse, including coercive and controlling behaviour, and will strengthen the power of police and prosecutors.

Coercive and controlling behaviour can have a devastating and long-lasting impact on survivors. It is a form of abuse that is often hidden, but can rob victims of their confidence, self-esteem and safety. Organisations like Scottish Women's Aid do vital work supporting victims, and the new training materials they've developed will help them provide even more support to victims of all forms of domestic abuse."

Mr Yousaf said:

"I appreciate the efforts that our justice system partners and third sector organisations have been undertaking to prepare for this change in the law, including development of appropriate training to raise awareness across the justice sector about what qualifies as coercive and controlling behaviour and the different forms this behaviour can take.

"With one week to go until this change in the law, I want to be clear that this behaviour is absolutely unacceptable. We will continue to take steps to safeguard those who are at risk and to prosecute those who engage in abusive behaviour."

Dr Marsha Scott, Chief Executive of Scottish Women's Aid, said:

“What an opportunity stands in front of us as our new ‘world’s gold standard’ law goes into effect. Women and children have been telling us for 40 years that it is the emotional abuse and controlling behaviours of domestic abuse that have the most traumatic effect, that trap them in dangerous relationships with abusive partners and ex-partners. Now these behaviours will be crimes in Scotland, and how well we police and prosecute them will say much about our commitment to ending domestic abuse.

“We have now honed our training materials about coercive control with each of the 36 Women's Aid services across Scotland. The materials and the trainers are now available to violence against women partnerships, community planning partnerships, multi-agency risk assessment conferences, and other multi-agency bodies that are keen to learn about the new law.”

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