

# Nationwide call for views on tackling violence against women and girls

A nationwide [Call for Evidence](#) to inform a new strategy to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls has been launched by the government today (10 December).

The launch of this Call for Evidence will mean that the experiences of victims and survivors will be at the heart of the government's strategy. As well as urging organisations who directly support victims and survivors – such as frontline professionals and academics – to respond, for the first time the government is also asking victims, survivors, and their families and friends for their views and experiences.

Over the last 10 years, the government has responded to newer forms of crimes against women, such as cyber flashing and revenge porn. Action includes making 'upskirting' a specific criminal offence and commissioning a review of the laws around non-consensual sharing of intimate images, however, the pace of societal and technological change means it is even more critical that we adapt the response to these crimes.

This strategy will be an important step in making sure the government's efforts continue to keep up with societal and technological change.

Given sensitivities, this survey will be carried out in partnership with third sector organisations so that victims and survivors are fully supported when speaking about their experiences. This will be anonymous, enabling respondents to provide as much information as they are comfortable with.

During the 10 week consultation, the government will also seek the views of organisations who directly support victims and survivors, such as frontline professionals and academics.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

Crimes which disproportionately affect women and girls, such as sexual violence, have a devastating impact on those directly affected, as well as on society as a whole.

Sadly, the methods used by perpetrators of these horrible crimes are constantly evolving and adapting, so our response must too.

I am steadfast in my determination to see more perpetrators brought to justice and all victims and survivors receiving the support they deserve.

Safeguarding Minister Victoria Atkins said:

Crimes that disproportionately affect women and girls range from rape and FGM to upskirting and online offences; they can have terrible effects on victims. We want to do all we can to tackle these appalling crimes, through a new strategy to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls.

I know it requires great bravery for victims to come forward, but we want to hear from them and from the public, so that the strategy reflects their views and experiences.

Help us to create a strategy to tackle crimes against women and girls in the 21st century.

Nimco Ali OBE, who was recently appointed as an Independent Government Adviser on Tackling VAWG, will be supporting this Call for Evidence and making sure voices from all parts of society are heard.

Independent Government Adviser on Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Nimco Ali said:

As a survivor of FGM, I know the impact gender based violence can have on your life. How it can eat away at your peace of mind and the ability to feel safe in your body, your home and at times in the world. But I also know that we can prevent Violence Against Women and Girls and we can erase the fear that consumes so many of us.

Today as we launch the consultation on Violence Against Women and Girls, I want you to know this government cares about everyone woman and girl in this country and we want to hear from you.

We want to hear your lived experience and how we can help make you feel safer. Progress is possible and with your help we can create a world free of VAWG and the fear of it.

The 10-week consultation begins today (10 December) and closes on 19 February 2021.

As well as the public survey, the Home Office will set up focused discussions with a range of representatives from charities directly engaging with victims to gather their views. The survey will provide the fine detail of the lived experiences, while the focus groups will inform with more strategic or structural issues.

Statistics show that there were estimated 2.3 million victims of domestic abuse in the last year and it costs society an estimated £71 billion. Domestic homicides count for around 1 in 5 of all homicides and the government is aiming to reduce homicide overall.

This is why the government will next year bring forward a new dedicated

standalone Domestic Abuse strategy which will complement the new VAWG strategy so it will be given the national prominence it deserves with a comprehensive strategy to tackle it.

The Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy will be published early next year, with the Domestic Abuse Strategy due to follow once the Domestic Abuse Bill receives Royal Assent.

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## **New UK Government Covid testing site opens in East Kilbride**

The UK Government has today, Thursday 10 December, opened a new walk-through coronavirus testing centre at the Red Deer Centre in East Kilbride (G75 8AE). The centre is easily accessible for people without a car.

The test centre is part of the largest network of diagnostic testing facilities created in British history. In Scotland, this comprises of six drive through sites, 19 walk-through sites, 21 mobile units, plus the Glasgow Lighthouse Lab which is working round the clock to process samples.

In Scotland, the UK Government is providing all Covid testing and test processing outside of the NHS. Around two thirds of all daily tests are provided by the UK Government, in support of Scotland's health services.

Tests must be booked in advance at [NHS Inform](#) or by calling 0800 028 2816. People should only book a test if they have coronavirus symptoms (a high temperature, a new and continuous cough, or a loss or change to their sense of smell or taste).

Health Minister Lord Bethell said:

To respond to the coronavirus, we have built a major testing and tracing system from scratch. We are constantly working to expand and improve it with new technologies and innovations so everyone with symptoms can get a test.

New walk-in sites like this one makes it even easier to get a test no matter where you live. If you have symptoms of coronavirus, I urge you to book a test today and follow the advice of NHS Test and Protect if you are contacted to protect others and stop the spread of the virus.

Baroness Dido Harding, Interim Executive Chair of the National Institute for Health Protection, said:

Walk-through sites offer communities better access to coronavirus testing, so everyone with symptoms can get a test. This new site is part of our ongoing work to expand our testing network across the UK which now has the capacity to process more than 500,000 tests a day. We will continue to expand capacity to improve test turnaround times and push forward testing innovations to make sure anyone who needs a test can get one.

Please book a test if you have coronavirus symptoms: a new continuous cough, a high temperature and a loss or change in sense of smell or taste, and follow the advice of NHS Test and Protect if you are contacted.

UK Government Minister for Scotland, Iain Stewart, said:

The UK Government is helping all parts of the UK fight the coronavirus pandemic.

Testing is vital, helping to manage local outbreaks and protecting people's livelihoods. The UK Government is providing the bulk of Covid testing in Scotland, and this new walk-through centre is just the latest in our extensive testing network.

We are pleased to be working with local and commercial partners. These sites are not possible without the hard work of many people. I would like to thank everyone involved for their incredible efforts for the good of the country at this difficult time.

Gabe Docherty, Director of Public Health, NHS Lanarkshire said:

The public health department continues to contact-trace positive cases and clusters in our community and this addition to the UK testing provision is welcome.

I want to thank the public for their co-operation in reducing spread of the virus and ask that they please remain vigilant. The general measures to minimise the risk of Covid-19 remain the same – face coverings, avoid crowded places, clean your hands, two metre distance, self-isolate and go for a test if you have symptoms.

Please do not hesitate if you have symptoms. It's critical that you go for a test and this walk-in centre is a very welcome addition to our testing capacity.

Simon Venn, Mitie Chief Government & Strategy Officer, said:

Our priority during the pandemic is to support the nation's efforts to fight COVID-19 and help keep the country running. Testing is a

critical part of the UK's strategy to combat coronavirus and we're proud to support the UK Government with this vital task. A big thank you to all the NHS staff, Mitie employees and other frontline heroes in East Kilbride, who are working tirelessly to keep us all safe.

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## **New surrender scheme starts to keep dangerous weapons off the streets**

The surrender scheme marks an important development in the government's commitment to tackling serious violence and strengthening police powers to take action against it.

Under the scheme, offensive weapons that will soon be prohibited as well as rapid firing rifles, which fire at a rate closer to semi-automatic rifles, can be surrendered to the police. Lawful owners will be able to claim compensation for the items in most cases.

This follows the Offensive Weapons Act which bans possession of dangerous and offensive weapons in private. The list of weapons includes zombie knives, cyclone knives, knuckledusters, death star knives, flick knives, gravity knives, batons, disguised knives, push daggers and other offensive weapons. It was already illegal to possess a knife or offensive weapon in public.

Crime and Policing Minister, Kit Malthouse, said:

I am committed to ensuring our streets are safe from the scourge of violent crime.

We are prohibiting ownership of dangerous weapons which have a high potential for causing harm – every item surrendered is one which can no longer fall into the hands of criminals.

The government's top priority will always be keeping the public safe and we are ensuring that our laws and police powers deliver on these commitments.

The scheme will run for 3 months from 10 December 2020 to 9 March 2021. Lawful owners will be able to claim compensation if the total value of the claim is more than £30. Claims can be submitted to the police using a [form](#).

This scheme is in addition to knife amnesties that are routinely conducted by police forces.

National Police Chiefs' Council lead on knife crime, Deputy Assistant Commissioner Graham McNulty, said:

Tackling knife crime and reducing violence is a top priority for policing. The surrender scheme will enable us to remove dangerous weapons off the streets and assist in keeping our communities safe.

Every weapon removed is possibly a life saved and I urge people to please help us make our streets safer.

The Offensive Weapons Act is part of wider a government commitment to reducing serious violent crime, providing safer streets and neighbourhoods for everyone. This includes:

- introducing Knife Crime Prevention Orders which are intended to be preventative, helping young people at risk of being drawn into knife crime to change their behaviour
- making it unlawful to dispatch bladed products sold online without measures in place to ensure they are not delivered into the hands of a person under 18
- changing the legal definition for threatening someone with an offensive weapon to make prosecutions easier
- banning the sale and delivery of corrosive products to under 18s and making it an offence to possess a corrosive substance in a public place

The government is also boosting police numbers with 20,000 additional officers, almost 6,000 of which have already been recruited. New laws will also make it easier for police to use stop and search powers for those previously convicted of knife crime.

The full surrender scheme applies in England and Wales which relates to certain knives and other offensive weapons, as well as rapid firing rifles, their ancillary equipment and bump stocks. The scheme extends to Scotland and Northern Ireland only with respect to firearms, their ancillary equipment and bump stocks.

[Guidance](#) is available providing a list of items covered, guidance on how to travel with and surrender weapons safely, and compensation levels.

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**River Aire flood defences are winter ready as work continues on permanent**

# repairs

## Press release

Permanent repairs to flood embankments on the lower River Aire are underway after they were damaged during storms last winter.



### Reinforcing the embankment at Poor Bank

The repairs form part of a £10M package of work that will reduce flood risk to communities across North Yorkshire and the East Riding of Yorkshire including Snaith and Gowdall.

Emergency temporary repairs were carried out in the immediate aftermath of the flooding, but now permanent works at locations across the Lower Aire Washlands will repair the damage caused and strengthen defences.

The latest repairs are being completed at Pick Hill embankment near Snaith and Poor Bank embankment near Gowdall where concrete blocks are being installed to make them more resilient to future scour damage if a similar flood was to happen again.

Poor bank and Pickhill embankments are part of reservoirs that help reduce the flood risk to the communities of Gowdall and Snaith.

Kimberley MacPherson, West Yorkshire Operations Manager at the Environment Agency said:

It was the wettest February on record for Yorkshire, with the River Aire catchment receiving three and a half times the average monthly rainfall.

The floods had a devastating impact on communities across North Yorkshire, and our thoughts remain with those affected, especially families who still cannot return home.

After the flood water subsided, we inspected defences in the area

and found damage at 40 locations. We secured £10 million of funding to make repairs and have been working hard to complete them ahead of winter. Where permanent fixes won't be complete by spring, we've installed temporary measures to ensure local communities are protected this winter.

We can never entirely eliminate the risk of flooding. We encourage people to prepare too, by signing up for Flood Warnings and preparing a flood plan. Further information can be found on GOV.UK.

- Repair work has already been completed at Little Airmyn, West Holme, with West Haddlesey due for completion next week.
- Repairs at Pick Hill are complete, and final landscaping at Poor Bank is due to be completed by Christmas.
- Ground investigation works around areas such as Chapel Haddlesey, Birkin Barrier, Hensall Ings, Hensall Pumping Station, Carlton Bridge and Lock Lane, have now finished, so design work has now started to plan what work is needed for these areas.
- Work at two sites at Hirst Courtney will start early next year and will see repairs to flood embankments in the village and work to prevent river channel erosion near The Sloop Inn pub.
- A new flood defence wall is being proposed at Newlands, with work due to start next year. Temporary repairs are in place for the winter period until permanent works can start.
- At Heck Ings, work is being planned for scour damage and seepage repairs with work due to start in the new year.

Since the February floods, the Environment Agency has been working closely with North Yorkshire County Council, East Riding of Yorkshire Council and the Internal Drainage Board to learn from the floods and plan for the future.

Work has been done with communities to help them become better prepared for any risk of flooding, with improvements made to flood warning and informing, and the recruitment of community flood wardens.

# UK Government provides £400m package for Northern Ireland in post Transition deal

Today £400 million of new money has been guaranteed by the UK Government in a 'New Deal for Northern Ireland'.

As part of the Northern Ireland Protocol, the UK Government committed to implement this 'New Deal' to help boost economic growth, increase Northern Ireland's competitiveness and invest in infrastructure.

This substantial financial package is aimed at supporting businesses to operate after the Transition Period, whilst also ensuring that Northern Ireland is ready to seize the trade and investment opportunities ahead.

This package comes on top of the £650 million of UK Government investment announced in August to deliver the Trader Support Service, investment in new technology, and our contribution to the PEACE Plus Programme. It is in addition to funding that has been provided to meet costs from the UK's obligations under the Northern Ireland Protocol. The UK Government also committed £2 billion to the NI Executive in January 2020 under the 'New Decade, New Approach' agreement.

Taken together, in a year which has also seen unprecedented increases in UK Government funding for the Northern Ireland Executive, this is the largest new investment the UK Government has committed to Northern Ireland and its trade, in any year, for decades.

**Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Brandon Lewis, said:**

"The New Deal is wonderful news for Northern Ireland and underlines the UK Government's commitment to supporting and protecting the interests of the people and businesses in Northern Ireland.

"Fostering economic growth and social cohesion is key to building a stable and prosperous future for Northern Ireland and this additional £400 million will support Northern Ireland after the end of the Transition period enabling NI businesses and its people to innovate and invest.

"As announced at the Spending Review, Northern Ireland will also benefit from more than £100 billion of capital investment across the UK in 2021/22. This includes the Gigabit and Shared Rural Network programmes for better mobile coverage, investment in new green industries and access to a £14.6 billion UK-wide research and development fund.

"I look forward to working with the Executive to deliver all of this funding, to continue to grow the economy, and support people and businesses across Northern Ireland."

**Chief Secretary to the Treasury Stephen Barclay said:**

"This significant funding further reinforces the strength of UK action to support Northern Ireland. It builds on £900 million allocated at the Spending Review through the Barnett formula, which can be used to grow the economy, improve public services and support people and business across Northern Ireland. Protecting jobs and livelihoods in Northern Ireland remains a priority for the UK Government."

Through this 'New Deal', we will:

- support initiatives to promote Northern Ireland's goods and services to export markets from GB and Ireland to the rest of the world
- support the development of systems that will enable supermarkets and other small traders to manage the new trading arrangements and coordinate trade between Northern Ireland and Great Britain \*ensure resilience in medicine supply chains
- promote Northern Ireland's potential as a leader in innovative technology and invest in the skills of the people of Northern Ireland in key growth areas such as cybersecurity, fintech and green/clean technology
- invest in social development across Northern Ireland, strengthening social cohesion and building stronger, safer communities – including by supporting initiatives to enable children from different community backgrounds to be educated together
- improve the flow of goods and travel to and from Great Britain and across Northern Ireland, boosting access to opportunities
- enable Northern Ireland's businesses to compete in the global market, driving forward future growth and prosperity

**Notes to Editors:**

- As part of the New Decade, New Approach deal, the UK Government committed to ensuring that there is a New Deal for Northern Ireland at the end of the Transition Period maximising trade opportunities & investment. The UK Government further committed to a New Deal for Northern Ireland as set out in the Command Paper for the NI Protocol in May.
- The UK Government has shown time and time again that they are committed to supporting Northern Ireland, levelling up across the UK and strengthening our Union.
- The £400m New Deal package comes on top of our significant recent investment in Northern Ireland: £2 billion committed in New Decade, New Approach; £650m in August for the Trader Support Scheme, investment in new technology and Peace Plus contribution;
- This is on top of the unprecedented upfront £2.8bn funding guarantee

available to help the Executive respond to Covid-19 this year with a further £900m uplift provided at the Spending Review for next year.