



## INFORMATION ABOUT YOU

### **Are you responding on behalf of an organisation or as a member of the public?**

- On behalf of **Refuge**, the country's largest provider of specialist domestic violence services for women and children. Our services support over 1,600 women and children on any given day.

### **Which of the following best describes you/your organisation:**

- Charitable and voluntary sector

## OPTION 1: CONTINUE CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS UNDER EXISTING LAW

### **1. To what extent do you believe that the current arrangements are effective in preventing domestic violence?**

Refuge is concerned that existing disclosure laws are reactive rather than proactive: that they place responsibility on the potential victim (most often a woman) to seek information, and give the police too much discretion regarding disclosure. We are concerned that this leads to inconsistent and ineffective practice. Our understanding is that disclosure by the police varies greatly between forces, and that some officers are reluctant to disclose because they do not fully understand their rights, or the circumstances in which they should, or can, disclose.

Refuge is also concerned about poor police practice around domestic violence in general (ie. beyond disclosure). Although we believe that existing laws are sufficient, we are concerned that police forces across the country are not implementing them consistently and effectively. As a result, we frequently encounter examples of poor practice in the following areas: responding to 999 calls; investigating allegations of abuse; collecting evidence; completing rigorous risk assessments; arresting and charging perpetrators; referring victims to specialist agencies like Refuge. The consequences of these failings can be fatal. Refuge believes that disclosure schemes cannot be made a priority when there is still so much work to be done to improve the basic police response to domestic violence. We detail our suggestions for improvements in the next answer.

Refuge is also concerned that "prevention" is a somewhat misleading term to use in the context of disclosure schemes, since domestic violence perpetrators very rarely only abuse one victim. If disclosure results in a woman leaving her partner, the likelihood is that he will go on to be abusive in his *next* relationship – as the tragic case of Clare Wood has shown. Thus, domestic violence is not "prevented" but merely "displaced" or "deferred". Refuge maintains that true prevention strategies must challenge the behavior and attitudes of the abuser – not place responsibility for action on the victim.

## **2. How could the current arrangements be improved?**

### **1. Clarify existing powers**

Refuge believes that further **guidance** should be issued to the police to clarify their existing powers. **Training** on when, and how, to safely disclose information to potential victims must be made mandatory. This training must also address the potential conflict between disclosing information and upholding confidentiality and data protection laws, since Refuge believes that officers may not disclose out of fear of violating these laws. Refuge believes that the safety of potential victims must be their foremost concern.

### **2. Establish clear post-disclosure protocols**

Refuge acknowledges that disclosure of any kind is likely to create an expectation that the potential victim will, or should, leave the relationship after she learns of her partner's history of violence. This expectation may be stronger in cases where the woman has children. Refuge is concerned that this expectation places an unrealistic responsibility on the woman, because it fails to take into account the considerable barriers to leaving a violent partner. We foresee situations where a woman may be 'blamed' by social services - and wider society - for failing to protect her children if she chooses not to leave her partner following disclosure. Refuge therefore recommends that clear, **post-disclosure protocols** are established to safeguard against these outcomes. Whatever the form of disclosure scheme, it is essential that:

- The police and any other disclosing individual/agency (eg. an IDVA/MARAC) supports the woman to make her own choices with the information she receives
- Those choices are respected – including the choice to stay with a violent partner
- The woman and her children are given ongoing, specialist support from domestic violence professionals following disclosure. This must include supporting the woman to escape her partner (eg. by helping her to access refuge space) as well as supporting her to remain safely in the relationship (eg. by providing emotional support, ongoing safety planning)
- Ongoing risk assessment processes are put in place to monitor women and children's safety during and following disclosure, and to adjust their support package accordingly
- Consideration is given to the specific risks and support needs of children. Most domestic violence incidents occur in households with children, so it is essential that disclosure schemes address the needs of adults and children equally

### **3. Improve basic police response to domestic violence**

Refuge believes that disclosure schemes will not help to protect women and children until the basic police response to domestic violence is improved. We recognise that some forces and individual officers do treat domestic violence seriously, and we are pleased that ACPO and the Home Office are working at a strategic, national level to improve policy and procedure. However, the fact remains that Refuge regularly hears from women who have received a poor police response. We are concerned that a 'canteen culture' of negative attitudes persists, and that the positive work undertaken at more senior levels is not filtering down to individual officers - the people who are often an abused woman's first point of contact.

Refuge is extremely concerned by the significant number of reports from the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) which highlight serious police failings in domestic violence cases. To cite a few examples:

- In August 2011, an IPCC investigation into Dorset Police's handling of Katarzyna Ryba's allegations of domestic abuse prior to her murder found that the force's domestic violence policy and procedures were "out of date".
- In August 2011, an IPCC investigation into Lincolnshire Police's handling of the murder of Isabel Trindade concluded: "Some officers failed to complete risk assessment forms when they should have done and control room staff wrongly closed a number of incidents as anti-social behaviour rather than domestic matters. This combination of factors led to specialist domestic abuse officers being unaware of a pattern of increasing harassment, and an opportunity to identify an escalation of risk to Ms Trindade was missed."
- On 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012, three women were shot dead by Michael Atherton, a man who was previously known to Durham Police for domestic violence. Durham Police attended four domestic incidents between 2002 and 2004, two of which resulted in the arrest of Atherton. Despite his history of violence, Atherton was granted a gun licence.

**Refuge is extremely concerned that the police, in cases like this, are unable to identify obvious risk factors for lethal violence, such as access to weapons and escalation of violence.**

In light of this pressing evidence, Refuge believes that funding and resources should be prioritised to **get the basics right**. We believe that the priorities should be:

- Increasing and improving the quality of domestic violence **training** for police officers. Reports from our service users illustrate that too few officers truly understand the **complex dynamics of abuse**. Negative attitudes which blame victims and excuse perpetrators still persist. Training should be delivered by specialist domestic violence service providers such as Refuge.
- Strengthening **risk assessment** processes. Refuge is currently tracking 11 domestic violence homicides: in many of these cases, the police failed to undertake rigorous risk assessment procedures with the victims.
- Greater recognition of the **needs of children experiencing domestic violence**. Refuge's own research<sup>1</sup> indicates that very few areas have developed **integrated adult/child risk assessment procedures** or established formal links between MARACs and Child Safeguarding Boards. Other research<sup>2</sup> indicates a need to **improve basic information** sharing between the police and social services, in order to identify and protect children at risk from domestic violence.
- Developing the skills needed to respond to children at the scene of domestic violence incidents.
- Improving the police's ability to offer **safety planning**. This includes further training on how/when to refer women on to specialist services such as refuges and Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy (IDVA) services.
- A rigorously enforced '**arrest and charge**' policy.
- More rigorous **collection of evidence**, to support successful prosecutions.

#### **4. Increase provision of specialist domestic violence services**

Post-disclosure action plans will necessarily include referring women on to a wide range of specialist services, including refuge accommodation, IDVAs, community

<sup>1</sup> *Meeting the needs of children living with domestic violence in London*. Radford L., Aitken R., Miller, P., Ellis J., Roberts, J., Firkic, A. (Refuge, NSPCC 2011)

<sup>2</sup> *Children and families experiencing domestic violence: Police and children's services' responses*. Stanley, S. Miller, P., Richardson Foster, H., Thompson, G. (NSPCC 2009)

outreach, psychological support and other specialist services. These vital services act as a ‘safety net’ following disclosure; without them, women will continue to be at risk of violence. Refuge is concerned, however, that the current, national provision of domestic violence services is inadequate. For example:

- One in three local authorities offers no specialist domestic violence provision<sup>3</sup>
- There are significant gaps in services which address the needs of children and young people living with domestic violence<sup>4</sup>
- There is a lack in the range of specialist support available for abused women and children; only 5% of local authorities provide four or more services<sup>5</sup>

Refuge recommends that the government urgently address these gaps and ensure that a full continuum of sustainable, specialist services exists to support the diverse needs of victims.

We believe that there is a particular need to expand IDVA services across the country, since the success of disclosure schemes will depend heavily on expert IDVA involvement. IDVAs have been shown to be a cost-effective way of supporting high-risk women and children, and improving local police responses to domestic violence<sup>6</sup>. Refuge believes that IDVA posts should be made mandatory in police stations across the country, and that Children’s IDVAs should also be seriously considered. No disclosure should be performed without an IDVA present.

## 5. Expand awareness raising work

Whilst Refuge is heartened that the government is showing a commitment to preventing domestic violence, we do not believe that disclosure schemes are the most effective form of prevention, since they place the burden of action on the victim, rather than holding the offender to account, or encouraging him to change his violent behaviour.

**True prevention strategies must challenge and dismantle those deeply entrenched social attitudes which lead men to abuse women in the first place.** Refuge believes this work must begin in schools. We believe that teaching on domestic violence, healthy relationships, respect and consent must be embraced as part of a ‘whole school’ approach. Refuge also believes that the government must invest in far-reaching **public awareness campaigns** to challenge the destructive myths about domestic violence and educate women. We were pleased to have worked closely with the Home Office on its ‘This Is Abuse’ campaign, targeted at teenagers, and would like to see more frequent and more extensive prevention work of this nature.

## OPTION 2: A “RIGHT TO ASK” NATIONAL DISCLOSURE SCHEME

### 1. Should a system be put in place to enable A to ask the police for information about the previous violent behaviour of B?

Refuge does not support the proposal for a “Right to ask” national disclosure scheme. We believe that resources should be spent on improving the basic police response to domestic violence – not introducing new laws.

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<sup>3</sup> *Map of Gaps 2*. Coy M., Kelly L., Foord J. (End Violence Against Women, Equality and Human Rights Commission 2009)

<sup>4</sup> *Meeting the needs of children living with domestic violence in London*. *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Map of Gaps 2*. *Ibid*

<sup>6</sup> *Safety in Numbers: a multi-site evaluation of IDVAs*. (The Henry Smith Charity 2009)

## **2. Do you agree that the Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme, with appropriate modifications, is a suitable model to apply under this option?**

Refuge is aware that, in some instances of the Child Offender Disclosure Scheme, the offender is informed when police make a disclosure about their previous convictions to an applicant. Refuge would welcome clarification on whether perpetrators would be granted similar knowledge, since this would, undoubtedly, place the woman in further danger.

Refuge has read the independent evaluation report of the 12-month pilot of the Child Offenders Disclosure Scheme (which took place between 2008-2009). We were interested to learn that some people using the scheme felt that they had not received appropriate follow-up support: "Anxiety sometimes remained following applications when some individuals were left to cope with difficult situations. This highlights the need for appropriate follow-up support."<sup>7</sup> Refuge is concerned that women accessing the "Right to ask" scheme could be at very severe risk of further violence or homicide if they are not given robust safety planning advice and follow-up support from a trained domestic violence professional.

## **3. What do you see as the potential risks and benefits of such a scheme? How might any risks be minimised?**

### **1. Unrealistic expectations**

Refuge has concerns about the underlying premise of the "Right to ask" scheme - that knowing about a partner's history of violence will somehow empower a woman to leave him and seek safety. We are concerned that this **expectation simplifies the complex reality of domestic violence**. Leaving a violent partner is an incredibly difficult step to take. It is also extremely dangerous: women are at greatest risk of homicide at the point of separation or after leaving a violent partner<sup>8</sup>.

Women make the decision to stay with violent men for a multitude of complicated reasons, including fear that the perpetrator may kill her, or her children, if she attempts to leave. Discovering that her partner has a history of violence would not necessarily empower her to leave him. He may be controlling her emotionally, psychologically and financially to such an extent that she still feels dependent on him. If confronted by his partner, an abusive man may make excuses or swear that it was a "one-off". The emotional abuse may be so entrenched that a woman may truly hope and believe her partner when he promises that things will change. Abused women rarely identify themselves as "victims"; all too frequently they blame themselves for the violence.

### **2. Incomplete data**

Refuge is concerned that, since the majority of perpetrators are never known to the police, the "Right to ask" scheme will rest on misleading data. According to the British Crime Survey, only a small minority of domestic violence - 16% - is reported<sup>9</sup>. Many perpetrators who are reported to the police escape conviction, partly because their victims are too terrified to testify in court or pursue the prosecution. In 2009/10, over 6,500 (equivalent to 1 in 3) domestic violence cases failed because the victim either did not attend court or retracted their statement<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> *Child Sex Offender Review Public Disclosure Pilot: a process evaluation* (Home Office, 2010)

<sup>8</sup> *Marital Rape and Marital Murder*. Lees, S (2000)

<sup>9</sup> *British Crime Survey* (2008-09)

<sup>10</sup> *Domestic violence: the facts, the issues, the future*. (Speech by the Director of Public Prosecutions, Keir Starmer QC, April 2011)

The fact that many domestic violence perpetrators will not be flagged in the Police National Database may create a **false sense of security in some women**. Discovering that their partner does not have a recorded history of violence may make vulnerable women feel “safe”. It may encourage them to think that the violence they are suffering is “imagined” or “exaggerated”. Refuge is also concerned that police officers may not treat reports of domestic violence seriously if a man isn't flagged as a serial perpetrator. All too often, we hear from women that police officers trivialise their claims and treat violent assaults as "just another domestic". Refuge is therefore concerned that police officers could easily disregard violent incidents as "one-offs" if a man doesn't have a recorded history of violence.

### **3. Promoting victim blaming**

Refuge is concerned that a disclosure scheme of this type could also unwittingly promote attitudes which blame victims for abuse. If a woman discovers that her partner has a history of violence and chooses not to leave him, police officers may consider it to be “her fault” if he goes on to attack her, and they may fail to provide a sensitive and appropriate response. They might also blame her for any violence witnessed by her children. We already find that these unhelpful attitudes prevail in many areas and we work very hard to counter them.

Refuge is aware that some perpetrators of domestic violence inform the police that the violence was mutual, or that their partner was the primary aggressor, which results in the victim being arrested. In some cases, women may be cautioned, arrested or charged for using violence in self-defense against their perpetrator. We are therefore concerned that this scheme has the potential to penalise the victims it intends to protect.

### **4. Under-use**

Refuge believes that women embarking on new relationships will be unlikely to use the scheme to 'vet' their partners. Typically, perpetrators are rarely violent from the outset: control and abuse tends to build gradually. Too few women are aware of the more subtle forms of abuse which may occur in the earliest phases of a relationship. A survey by Refuge into young women's understanding of domestic violence showed that 95% of respondents recognised physical abuse but only 25% understood the more subtle techniques of control, such as jealousy and possessiveness, as indicators of domestic violence<sup>11</sup>. By the time an abuser uses violence to control his partner, the woman may feel too isolated and terrified to consider appealing for help. We must also clarify at which point a woman may be entitled to make an application? How would she prove, in confidence, that she was considering embarking on an intimate relationship with him?

There is a further risk that women will not use the “Right to ask” scheme if it is not **publicised effectively**. Many abused women - particularly disabled women and women from black and ethnic minority backgrounds - are not aware of their legal rights as it stands. Refuge is interested to learn how this scheme will be made **accessible** to all women. We understand from the evaluation report of the Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme that there was concern over ineffective marketing strategies: "Applicants heard about the scheme from a range of sources but primarily TV and radio and word of mouth. However, the total number of enquiries was small and there was some evidence to suggest that some individuals had not understood the remit of the pilot

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<sup>11</sup> *Starting in school: Findings of a YouGov survey to explore young women's understanding and recognition of domestic violence.* (Refuge, 2008)

when making applications, thus indicating a need to review the targeting and effectiveness of marketing strategies."<sup>12</sup>

## 5. Concerns over costs

Refuge has read the Home Office's Impact Assessment and cost analysis, and we have additional **concerns over the projected costs vs. savings** of "Right to ask". We are particularly concerned that the central expenditure estimate of £50,000 is too low to achieve the projected crime reduction saving of up to £80million. Refuge believes that – if the scheme were to go ahead - every single disclosure should be made with an IDVA present, in order to ensure that appropriate, specialist support is given to the potential victim during and following the actual disclosure. It is absolutely vital that potential victims are given **ongoing support**, and are not just 'left' to deal with potentially dangerous information on their own. Each 'applicant' would need to be given thorough safety planning and support throughout the whole process, from the moment she makes an application to the actual disclosure – and beyond. She will need professional IDVA support to help her cope with the information she receives, and know how to act on it safely. Refuge believes that this process will take much more time than the projected **three hours per case** – and that the ensuing costs will therefore be considerably higher. Extra funding would be needed to **make IDVAs mandatory in police stations across the country**. CAADA estimates that 1,500 permanent posts are needed for **full national coverage** (at present they have trained 1,000 IDVAs).

Refuge believes that the "Right to ask" scheme will also place **considerable pressure on already over-stretched MARACs**, which will be obliged to consider whether to make a disclosure for each applicant. MARACs are already operating at full capacity, and we are concerned that insufficient funding has been allocated to allow for their increased caseload.

Refuge is also extremely concerned that no extra funding has been allocated in the cost analysis for **training**. If the "Right to ask" scheme were to go ahead, we strongly believe that the police would need extra training on how to implement it safely. We do not believe that they receive sufficient training as it stands and, as a result, frequently – and fatally - fail to properly assess risk to women.

We would also dispute the projection that the scheme will create savings on such a large scale (up to £80million). Unless a perpetrator is arrested, charged and convicted, the likelihood is that he will go on to abuse his *next* partner, and so on. In reality, costs are not saved at all, but simply deferred.

## 4. What are your views on placing such a scheme on a statutory footing?

Refuge would not support the scheme being placed on a statutory footing.

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<sup>12</sup> *Child Sex Offender Review Public Disclosure Pilot: a process evaluation* (Home Office, 2010)

### OPTION 3: A “RIGHT TO KNOW” NATIONAL DISCLOSURE SCHEME

#### 1. Should a ‘right to know’ system be put in place to ensure that the police proactively share information to A about the previous violent behaviour of B?

Refuge does not support the proposal for a “Right to know” disclosure scheme.

#### 2. What do you see as the potential risks and benefits of such a scheme? How might any risks be minimised?

Refuge believes that proactive police disclosure could, in theory, increase the safety of potential victims. We are, however, concerned that certain improvements would need to be made before any proactive disclosure scheme were introduced. As per our response to Option 1 (‘Improving the basic police response’) the priorities are:

- Improving domestic violence training for police officers, to deepen their understanding of the complex dynamics of abuse.
- Strengthening police risk assessment processes.
- Greater recognition of the needs of children experiencing domestic violence. Developing integrated adult/child risk assessment procedures; establishing formal links between MARACs and Child Safeguarding Boards; improving information sharing between the police and social services; expanding Children’s IDVA services.
- Developing the skills needed to respond to children at the scene of domestic violence incidents.
- Improving the police's knowledge of how/when to refer women on to specialist services.
- A rigorously enforced 'arrest and charge' policy.
- More rigorous collection of evidence, to support successful prosecutions.

The importance of establishing clear post-disclosure protocols (as per our response to Option 1) should also be recognised. Specifically, that:

- The police and any other disclosing individual/agency (eg. an IDVA/MARAC) supports the woman to make her own choices with the information she receives
- Those choices are respected – including the choice to stay with a violent partner
- The woman and her children are given ongoing, specialist support from domestic violence professionals following disclosure. This must include supporting the woman to escape her partner (eg. by helping her to access refuge space) as well as supporting her to remain safely in the relationship (eg. by providing emotional support, ongoing safety planning)
- Ongoing risk assessment processes are put in place to monitor women and children’s safety during and following disclosure, and to adjust their support package accordingly
- Consideration is given to the specific risks and support needs of children. Most domestic violence incidents occur in households with children, so it is essential that disclosure schemes address the needs of adults and children equally

It is essential that an IDVA is present each time the police proactively disclose to a woman, which means that further investment will be needed to increase IDVA provision across the country. The IDVAs will play a vital role in ensuring that:

- Risk assessment processes are implemented during and following disclosure
- Women are given ongoing, specialist domestic violence support to help them act safely on the information they receive

No disclosure should take place without an IDVA present. It is absolutely vital that women are given expert support from an IDVA so that post-disclosure action plans are devised with the victim's safety – and the safety of her children - as the main priority.

### **Risks**

Refuge is concerned that the “Right to know” scheme will put IDVAs and MARACs under further pressure, since they would need to spend additional time identifying/contacting potential victims. We do not believe that adequate funding has been allocated to allow for the increased caseloads of both IDVAs and MARACs. As above, significant investment would need to be made to make IDVAs mandatory in police stations across the country. IDVA involvement has been shown to be a cost-effective way of significantly increasing prosecutions for domestic violence perpetrators: a sample of 693 clients accessing Refuge's IDVA services over a year-long period showed that 70% of perpetrators were found guilty. IDVAs also work closely with the police, helping to raise their awareness of domestic violence and improve local standards.

We are also concerned, as per our response to Option 2, that most violent offenders will never be the subject of disclosures under “Right to know”, since many domestic violence perpetrators do not have convictions or even cautions - and do not come into contact with the criminal justice system at all.

Similarly, we have concerns that the “Right to know” scheme - like “Right to ask” - could also unwittingly lead to victim-blaming. If a woman is told that her partner has a history of violence, but chooses *not* to leave him, will she be ‘blamed’ if he goes on to attack her? Will she be accused of failing to protect her children if she does not leave him? Implementation of “Right to know” must ensure that women are given sensitive, specialist support, whether they choose to leave their partner or not following disclosure. Victims must be able to access a broad range of specialist services which are responsive to their diverse needs.

### **3. What are your views on placing such a scheme on a statutory footing?**

Refuge would not support the scheme being placed on a statutory footing.

### **4. What other mechanisms for disclosing information about a subject's violent behaviour do you consider appropriate?**

Refuge agrees that the MARAC is the best forum for deciding whether disclosure should take place. No disclosure should be performed without the involvement of an IDVA. Post-disclosure protocols must include specialist domestic violence support; no woman should be left to deal with potentially dangerous information on her own.

## **SCOPE OF DISCLOSURE**

### **1. Should disclosure cover all violent behaviour by B or only those relating to domestic violence instances?**

If the disclosure scheme/s were to go ahead, Refuge believes that disclosure should cover all violent behaviour. Many of the most serious domestic violence perpetrators do not have convictions or cautions for a domestic violence related offence.

## **2. Should disclosure of B's violent behaviour be extended beyond convictions to encompass intelligence?**

Yes. Domestic violence perpetrators often escape conviction, partly because so many victims do not report violence in the first instance, or are too scared to testify in court. Refuge therefore believes that, if the above scheme/s were to go ahead, disclosure should include relevant intelligence as well as convictions.

## **3. Do you agree that information should be disclosed to third parties other than A?**

Disclosure should always be made to the victim or potential victim. In some circumstances, however, it may be necessary to disclose to responsible third parties, for example, if the potential victim is 16 years of age<sup>13</sup>, or has additional needs around mental health, substance abuse or disability. In all cases, an IDVA must be involved in the decision to inform third parties.

## **4. Do you agree with the Government's proposed criterion that any person can make an application about a person with whom they have entered an intimate relationship?**

Refuge does not support the proposed "Right to ask" scheme.

## **5. What in your view are the circumstances where a disclosure should not be made?**

Refuge believes that a disclosure should only be made if it will enhance the safety of the victim or potential victim. Disclosure should not be made in any circumstances which place the victim at further risk of violence. We do not believe that disclosure schemes should be used as a substitute for criminal justice responses, eg. where the police use disclosure instead of arresting and charging a violent man.

## **GROUPS AFFECTED BY THIS CONSULTATION**

### **1. What are your views on the impact of the current arrangements under existing law for different groups?**

Refuge is concerned that the existing arrangements do not effectively protect vulnerable women and children, because police officers often do not fully understand or practice their powers of disclosure. Guidance and training needs to be introduced to address this. We also believe that more work needs to be done to improve the basic police response to domestic violence across the country, including more robust training on the dynamics of abuse, improved risk assessment procedures and better safety planning.

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<sup>13</sup> Refuge is aware that the Government is currently consulting on expanding the definition of domestic violence to include victims under 18 years. As these young people fall within the remit of child protection services, decisions must be made about the most appropriate safeguarding route eg. referral to LSCB or MARAC. This decision will have implications for the forum for disclosure and the type of professional follow-on support offered.

## **2. What are your views on the impact of a “right to ask” scheme for different groups?**

Refuge is concerned that many domestic violence perpetrators do not come into contact with the police/CJS at all, and will therefore never be the subject of a disclosure. The “right to ask” scheme will therefore not be a useful resource to the majority of domestic violence victims, or potential victims.

Refuge is concerned that the “right to ask” scheme places the burden of responsibility on women, instead of holding perpetrators to account. We believe it may create an unrealistic expectation that women should ‘vet’ their partners, and that it may lead to false reassurance, i.e. finding out that a partner does not have a conviction when, in fact, he is still extremely dangerous. Refuge is also concerned that this scheme could contribute to a culture of victim-blaming; if a woman discovers that her partner has a history of violence but chooses to stay with him, she may be ‘blamed’ for further violence (by herself and the police). We also think it will place already over-burdened and impoverished support services (such as IDVAs and MARACs) under further pressure, without additional resources.

## **3. What are your views on the impact of a “right to know” scheme for different groups?**

Refuge recognises that proactive disclosure via a MARAC/IDVA could increase the safety of potential victims if it is based on a thorough assessment of risk, and if ongoing, specialist support is offered to the individual during and following disclosure.

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**For further information please contact:  
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