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Rt Hon. Tessa Jowell, MP
House of Commons
London
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Your Reference: 01093609

08 DEC 2009

Thank you for your letter of 11 November on behalf of several of your constituents about women with no recourse to public funds.

Your constituents may appreciate that the no recourse to public funds policy is part of a general immigration rule and that is to ensure that entitlement to services such as housing and other payments are accessible and benefit claimants within the rules.

In 2002, the rules were amended to widen the category of evidence which victims of domestic violence may use as proof of domestic violence. Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) applications from victims of domestic violence are now prioritised and an assessment of whether the applicant is destitute is carried out, which can lead to the usual fees for their ILR application being waived. Although victims of domestic violence who are still subject to immigration control cannot access public funds until their application has been decided, they can however, get access to housing-related support through the Supporting People arrangements.

In March 2008 we announced plans for a new scheme where victims of domestic violence whose applications for ILR are successful, may qualify for a contribution towards their housing and living costs. This commitment was reaffirmed by the

then Home Secretary at the launch of the Violence Against Women and Girls Consultation on 9 March.

Although we had planned to launch this scheme in the spring, stakeholders, including Amnesty, and some MPs, raised concerns about elements of the scheme. We listened carefully to all of our stakeholders and service providers and in light of this, have taken further time to consider these concerns and develop a scheme which will fully support this group of victims.

I am pleased to inform you that the Home Office will be running a pilot from 30 November for a three month period for victims of domestic violence who entered the UK on a spouse or partner visa and subsequently have no recourse to public funds.

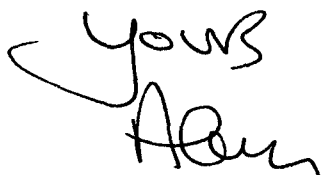
Eaves Housing for Women Limited will act as the national co-ordinating body during the pilot, which will identify and manage refuge provision for victims under the pilot. Refuge providers supporting the victims will be provided with 4 weeks (20 working days) of funding to cover essential housing and living costs incurred in supporting the victim whilst they complete an application for ILR under the Domestic Violence Rule.

Once an application is submitted to the UK Border Agency (UKBA), the refuge will be provided with further funding for a maximum of 4 weeks (20 working days) whilst the UKBA come to a decision on their application.

Underpinning this pilot is therefore a UKBA commitment to decide ILR applications within 20 working days of receipt by the caseworker, provided that all the required supporting information has been provided with the application.

The pilot will be monitored and evaluated throughout with an overall evaluation being conducted in March 2010 which will assist in informing our next steps in supporting this group of victims. We remain committed to working closely with the No Recourse to Public Funds Network and our stakeholders in developing a longer-term solution to the issue.

I hope this information provides some reassurance that we are working hard to seek solutions for this group of women.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Yours Alan". The word "Yours" is written in a cursive style, and "Alan" is written below it in a similar style.

Alan Johnson