

CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

November 2016

Dear Constituent,

Thank you for contacting me about domestic abuse in Family Courts

Domestic abuse is appalling and tackling such abuse is a priority for the Government. The Women's Aid report makes for harrowing reading. No child should ever die or live in such dreadful circumstances, and it is incumbent on all of us to consider whether more can be done to prevent such tragedies. The report underlines the need to prioritise the child's best interest in child contact cases involving domestic abuse, and to make sure that known risks are properly considered. The law is clear on that: the family courts' overriding duty is the welfare of the child.

Judicial guidance makes it clear that the court should only make an order for contact if it is satisfied as to the safety of the child and the parent with whom the child is living. Compliance with judicial guidance is the responsibility of the independent judiciary. The most senior family judge, the president of the family division, has asked a High Court judge to review the practice direction in the light of recommendations made by Women's Aid and the all-party parliamentary group on domestic violence.

The Ministry of Justice is acutely aware of the particular responsibilities of supporting victims of domestic abuse going through the family justice system. Ministers have taken a number of steps to ensure that victims of domestic abuse in the family justice system are supported and protected: protecting legal aid for individuals seeking protection from abusers; investing in the court estate to improve the security and support available; and improving training for those who work in the family justice system.

Ministers are working closely with the judiciary in particular to consider what additional protections may be necessary for vulnerable victims and witnesses in the family justice system.

Once again, many thanks for taking the time to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris'.

CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY