

Louise Haigh (Labour) - standing to be re-elected MP for Sheffield Heeley

I am well aware of the scale of the problem we are facing, particularly in relation to the cuts in support for victims of domestic violence and across the criminal justice system. I remember speaking at a feminist hustings in the 2015 election and detailing how bad the situation was then and it has only got worse over the last two years. Equally cuts to legal aid and the introduction of appalling employment tribunal fees have caused a dramatic reduction in cases being brought forward of sexual harassment in the workplace, leaving cases unchallenged.

One particular area I was working on just prior to the election was around the cuts and the privatisation in probation services, which has meant the service available to domestic violence offenders has reduced significantly. Clearly this is likely to lead to an increase in re-offending and, if re-elected, this will be something in particular I will be returning to.

In response to your questions, the answer is of course yes and I am proud of our excellent women and equalities team in the Labour Party, which has been pushing on all these areas.

Under the Tories, cuts to public services and social security have disproportionately affected women. In total, 86 per cent of the money raised from the Tories' tax and social security changes has come from women's pockets.

In particular, cuts to Universal Credit work allowances will land heavily on women. The next Labour Government will reverse those cuts and take the action needed to address the gender pay gap, which remains too high at over 18 per cent.

Levels of maternity discrimination have risen on the Tories' watch with 54,000 women being forced out of work. Three-quarters of mothers say they have had a negative or discriminatory experience during pregnancy, maternity leave and/or returning to work after having a baby and over half of mothers granted flexible working encountered negative consequences from their boss. That's why the next Labour Government will challenge and tackle discrimination in the workplace against women who are pregnant or a new mother.

And as you say, the level of violence against women and girls is still too high, too many abusers are getting off lightly and not enough is done to support victims.

Labour will ensure the importance of women's safety is emphasised by appointing a new Commissioner to set minimum standards in tackling domestic and sexual violence and make sure that every part of government is playing its part.

A new National Refuge Fund will be established so that women and children have somewhere to turn when they are in need, and we will continue to provide funding stability for Rape Crisis Centres. We will make age-appropriate sex and relationship education a compulsory part of the curriculum in schools so young people can learn about respectful relationships.

We will stand up for the victims of domestic violence by strengthening the law so that more offenders are brought to justice, and we will ban the use of community resolutions for domestic and sexual violence.

The next Labour government will also take bold and positive measures to increase women's representation across public life and we will ensure every policy and legislation will be measured against its impact on women before implementation. I hope you find this response and our policies useful and thanks again for getting in touch.

All the best,

Louise