

# LIBERTY

## ABORTION BUFFER ZONES

**NOVEMBER 2020**

The Head of Policy and Campaigns presented a paper on abortion buffer zones. The paper advanced the position that a tightly defined buffer zone backed by primary legislation is the best way of resolving what is a difficult balancing exercise. Liberty should support tightly defined buffer zones in very limited circumstances as the most effective and proportionate means of upholding the fundamental rights of the women and girls seeking medical assistance at such facilities, while also extending some protection to the staff and clinicians providing it.

Any interference with expression of religious belief should be closely scrutinised before Liberty endorses a particular piece of legislation. Interference with protest rights should also be kept to a minimum. Liberty's view is that legislation should only go as far as necessary to enable people to access abortion services safely.

A tightly defined buffer zone should: (i) have the smallest area necessary; (ii) forbid protestors from filming, taking photographs or approaching those using the services; (iii) forbid loudspeakers and chanting; (iv) keep any interference with expression of religious belief to a minimum.

Council endorsed the proposal set out in the paper. Members acknowledged the difficult balance of rights issues and considered the limits on interference with religious belief. Members noted that in this difficult space, any recommendation Liberty might bring forward as to the nature of a buffer zone would have to be accompanied with careful explanations, especially where other rights are restricted.