

Senior oversight officers – Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary

Responding to domestic abuse cases involving police as perpetrators, suspects or victims.

First published

29 August 2024

Key details

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Does it work? | Smarter practice |
| Topic | Violence against women and girls |
| Organisation | Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary |
| Region | South East |

Smarter practice

Overview

This is a [smarter practice example](#).

In March 2020, the Centre for Women's Justice (CWJ), working with the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, submitted a super-complaint about the way police forces in England and Wales responded to domestic abuse (DA) cases where the suspect was a police officer or police staff.

The College of Policing, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) worked together to investigate the concerns.

The full findings of the investigation can be found in the [Police perpetrated domestic abuse: Report on the Centre for Women's Justice super-complaint](#).

Problem

A key finding of the super-complaint was that the investigation of DA cases involving police as perpetrators, suspects or victims poses additional unique risks and challenges.

Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary also looked at how it responded to DA cases involving police officers and staff who were victims of DA and cases where the perpetrator was also within the police. Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary adopted the [Domestic Abuse Matters change programme](#) in 2017 with the aim of improving its response.

While running training sessions, staff were disclosing that they had personally experienced DA. To find out the scale of the problem in the workforce, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary commissioned an internal, anonymous staff survey in 2018 (that ran into 2019).

Survey results

Of 391 respondents:

- 48% reported that they had experienced DA while working for Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary
- 40% of those that had experience DA reported that they told someone at work

Some of the reasons for talking to colleagues were that victims felt frightened, desperate and needed help and advice. A key finding from the internal survey was that some victims reported not trusting the force to keep cases confidential.

Response

Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary is committed to tackling police-related DA. As a response, several guides and other resources were created.

- Victims guide: sets out clear options for victims to seek help and different ways to report DA, including options if they are not ready to speak to police yet (for example, DA services). It explains the process once a report is made, so disclosures are made with this knowledge. It also describes how managers will support them and what happens if the perpetrator also works for the force.
- Perpetrators guide: advice for those worried about their behaviour and relationships. The guide makes it clear that Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary will be robust if criminal offences are committed. The guide also provides options to engage with perpetrator intervention programmes or other sources of support.

- Peers guide: information on recognising the signs of DA, what to do if they suspect someone is experiencing DA, how to approach conversations about DA, what to do if they receive a disclosure and what to do if they suspect a colleague is a DA perpetrator.
- Managers guide/toolkit: includes general responsibilities on how to raise awareness of DA, recognise the signs of DA and handle DA disclosures depending on risk level. The toolkit contains information of support for victims, explains the processes once a disclosure has been made and provides information to help the manager assess workplace safety. It also covers reasonable adjustments, leave options, financial support, wellbeing support, and what happens if they suspect a perpetrator in their team.
- Other resources: a wellbeing directory, stalking advice, guides on how DA affects different groups and the pledge and confidentiality promise.

Other key aspects

Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary's pledge and response also included the following aspects.

- Raising awareness of procedures for dealing with DA involving officers and staff (from Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary) as either victims or perpetrators.
- Provision of police specialist independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs). This is specific extra training on policing and misconduct for IDVAs, so that they can best support internal and external victims at all risk levels. This training has reached approximately 150 professionals working within DA support services to upskill them in working with police-related DA cases. To increase capacity and resilience, police single points of contact (SPOCs) are being rolled out within all our DA service providers, rather than relying on one dedicated police IDVA.
- Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary has an internal survivors' network which provides a safe space to share experiences. The network has been vocal and influential in the force to provide better support to victims.
- Part of the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary confidentiality promise includes creating a 'need to know' environment and declaring any conflicts of interest. Breaches of confidentiality will be investigated as possible misconduct. This includes any DA report involving a member of staff whether as a victim, perpetrator or both. This is to build trust and confidence, especially among police officers and staff in the internal workforce. Breaches of confidentiality were a big concern for victims and were a barrier to reporting. This demonstrates how seriously Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary takes any breaches.

- A scrutiny panel, made up of police and partner agencies, that discusses DA cases where there is either a police perpetrator or police victim. The panel sets direction and identifies individual and organisational good practice and learning.
- Senior oversight officers (SOOs), who are of chief inspector rank and act as an independent senior point of contact for all police victims and non-police victims whose perpetrator is a police officer or police staff.

The focus of this smarter practice report is on SOOs.

Senior oversight officers (SOO)

- The role of an SOO is to act as an independent, senior point of contact for all police victims and non-police victims whose perpetrator is a police officer or police staff. SOOs have oversight from the victim's perspective to ensure cases are progressing appropriately. They can pick up early on important issues which risk undermining the victim's confidence in the process, for example lack of updates, changes in investigator and lengthy investigations.
- The SOO will link in with the victim according to an agreed schedule to discuss whether they have any concerns or questions. This may include providing additional explanation, if required, on updates. The SOO does not replace the officer in charge (OIC) of case updates on criminal or conduct case progression, but they can contact the OIC and ask that they update the victim.
- When assigned a case, the SOO receives guidance that includes information about their role as an SOO and what the panel might ask them based on previous cases.
- The SOO regularly reviews the progress and quality of the investigation, whether it is a criminal or misconduct investigation.
- Victims are given the choice of whether to engage with the SOO who has been appointed to them. Most choose to work with their SOO until the case has been concluded.
- The SOO's role is also to make sure the victim receives the right support. This can be in the form of wellbeing support, linking between the police and IDVAs and supporting with DA victim services.
- At first chief inspectors volunteered to become SOOs, which helped build credibility and was positive for the victim that they had volunteered. However, due to the rise in cases and the recognition that supporting vulnerable victims and improving the perception, and reality, of how they deal with police wrongdoing, is part of the core mission of that rank, a decision was made to make the SOO role mandatory for all suitable chief inspectors.

Process

Police-related DA cases (cases that involve a police victim or police perpetrator) can come into the force via multiple routes. This can be externally, via 999 or 101 calls, or internally via line managers, colleagues, the professional standards department (PSD) or the anti-corruption unit.

Sometimes cases can come through Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) or independent domestic violence advisors (IDVA) referrals. Cases can also transfer from another force. Referrals are also forwarded for public complaint recordings from the [Independent Office for Police Conduct \(IOPC\)](#).

All police-related DA cases are sent with the case reference number to the senior oversight officer inbox. This inbox is only accessed by case coordinators (currently four roles) who are DA specialists. The case coordinators monitor the inbox on a rota.

Once a case comes through, the case coordinator will review all systems to gather any previous history on the victim and perpetrator. Relevant information is recorded on a spreadsheet which acts as a database for all cases and is where statistical data can be pulled from. The spreadsheet is held on SharePoint with restricted access to ensure confidentiality. The spreadsheet also has all the SOOs and dates of when they were last allocated a case. On average SOOs will have two cases per year.

Allocation

When allocating cases to an SOO, consideration is given to ensure there are no conflicts of interest, or any other issues which will affect their ability to support the victim effectively and impartially.

Choosing chief inspector rank was deliberate. This rank gives the greatest opportunity to bring about change because they have reach, influence and are a crucial link between chief officers and the wider workforce. They have the awareness and ability to challenge processes in support of the victim.

All individuals of this rank are considered for the role of SOO but it may depend on particular cases. There are processes in place with PSD to safeguard victims and ensure that individuals are suitable for the role. In addition, chief inspectors carrying out certain roles, for example within PSD, or who know either the victim or perpetrator well, are excluded due to the potential for conflicts of interest.

This is navigated carefully.

Once a suitable SOO is identified, they are sent:

- the allocated case
- the case update form
- guidance of their role
- the process

Case coordinators are also available to support the SOO by discussing the case and offering advice and guidance. The SOO must contact the victim within 72 hours of being allocated their case.

The case update form is shared between the SOO and panel members via SharePoint. Using SharePoint is important as you can nominate access (and remove access) to retain confidentiality. This form is live and filled out by the SOO with details of the case. It acts as a record, which is then discussed at the scrutiny panel. Case update forms are anonymised to maintain confidentiality.

Scrutiny panel

At [scrutiny panel](#), the chair may ask for a case to be brought back to a future panel. This request is usually made for complex cases, or for cases in which further work is required. Where a case isn't formally requested back to the panel, the SOO is responsible for determining when it should be closed. This typically takes place once the criminal and/or the misconduct investigations have ended.

To end a case, the SOO simply fills out the closure paperwork on the case update form and informs the SOO coordinators that the case is closing. The SOO will also have a final conversation with the victim and will make it clear there will not be any further contact unless future incidents occur.

If there is a new report, it is likely that the same SOO will be appointed to the victim because the SOO already has a relationship with them. However, a new SOO may be appointed in some cases – for example, if the SOO has been promoted or if they feel a new SOO would benefit the victim.

Complex cases

In complex cases, there may be an SOO allocated to both individuals who present as victims and are going to the scrutiny panel to identify who is the primary victim and who is the primary

perpetrator. The panel used to have these discussions consecutively with the SOOs, but now they are moving towards bringing both SOOs to the panel together to facilitate an informed discussion around who is the primary perpetrator.

For more information, go to [Workplace DA scrutiny panels smarter practice](#).

Implementation

Senior oversight officers logic model

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Problem | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A super-complaint made by the Centre for Women's Justice, who were concerned with the way police forces were responding to domestic abuse (DA) cases in which the perpetrator is an officer or police staff.• Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary ran an internal survey to find out about their own workforce's DA experiences. It was found that some of the workforce did not feel supported or have the confidence to report their abuse. |
| Response – overview | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary created the position of senior oversight officer (SOO) for police victims or non-police victims of DA where a police officer or police staff were the perpetrator. The SOO acts as an independent, single point of contact (SPOC) for the victim and ensures they receive the right support throughout the course of the investigation. The SOO also has sight of the criminal and/or misconduct investigation but is independent of it. |
| Response – resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is mandatory for chief inspector rank to take on the role of a SOO.• When new cases come in, a SOO coordinator investigates any case history and appropriately allocates an SOO to a case. |
| Response – meetings | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Initial contact is made between the SOO and victim within 72 hours.• At this initial contact meeting, the SOO and victim will agree a contact schedule. |

Response – technology

- SharePoint is used to provide restricted access to documents to help maintain confidentiality in the process.
- Using Microsoft Teams to facilitate the meetings helps ensure confidentiality. SOOs can join the main meeting room for their time slot, and then are brought into the breakout room where the panel discussion takes place. This means the SOO can join the meeting but does not hear any discussions relating to other cases.

Response – documentation

- The case update form that is live and what the SOOs use as a record. Conversations between the SOO and victim are recorded on this form, as well as any decision making from the panel and actions agreed before a case is closed.

Outputs

- Number of cases being reported.
- Number of cases a SOO is allocated per year.
- Number of meetings between the SOO and victim.
- Number of cases where the victim supports an investigation.
- Quality of service for the victim.
- Feedback by the SOO to those involved in the investigations.

Outcomes

- An increase in cases reported due to greater confidence in the process.
- An increase in number of cases a SOO (on average) is given per year due to an increase in reporting.
- An increase in disclosures made from the victim to the SOO.
- An increase in the number of cases that have victim support throughout the investigation.
- An improvement in the quality of service provided to the victim to better support them throughout the investigation.
- Positive or individual learning is fed back into those involved with the investigation, which feeds into the wider organisational learning and used to plan future work.

- [View the logic model as a poster](#)

Enablers for implementation

- Confidentiality is key – this was a strong finding that came out of the workforce survey. Police victims reported feeling that they could not report any abuse as they feared being the subject of workplace gossip. Therefore, confidentiality is prioritised. Only the SOO and SOO coordinators know who the victims and perpetrators are. The panel does not know the names (with the exception of the PSD representative, who is usually called to give an investigation update and therefore needs to know the names).
- The use of SharePoint allows limited access to documents. Only the SOO coordinators have access to the documents. As cases are allocated, access is granted to the SOO and, for the panel, the specific attendees for that meeting are granted access to the document.
- Senior officer buy-in was instrumental. Supporting victims and pursuing police perpetrators is a force priority and supports the force's objectives. Therefore, support for the SOO and scrutiny panels came from the top of Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary.
- Excellent partnership working – partner agencies who are panel members can provide feedback to the SOOs. The panel emphasises the importance of a learning culture which can then be applied to future cases. The views from partners can help the SOO ensure that the best support and service is given to victims. The SOO can feedback good practice that has taken place during the investigation, or highlight aspects where improvements can be made to the investigations team.
- DA Matters and DA Champions training supported this work by ensuring officers and staff had a better understanding of DA, and of criminal and misconduct investigations.
- To further this, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary has run comprehensive awareness raising and signposting programmes, designed to reach as much of the force as possible. This included police perpetrated domestic abuse (PPDA) awareness raising in regular frontline training on DA and SOOs having continuing professional development (CPD) sessions tailored to help them carry out their specific roles with victims.
- Provision of police specialist IDVAs – this is specific extra training on policing and misconduct for IDVAs so that they can best support internal and external victims at all risk levels.
 - This training has recently been completed and reached approximately 150 (non-police) DA professionals working for commissioned services and other trusted partner agencies to upskill them in working with PPDA cases. To increase capacity and resilience, they are rolling out

police SPOCs within all DA service providers, rather than relying on one dedicated police IDVA as they did previously.

- Good rapport between the SOO and victim. This is important for building up trust, which in some cases has led to further disclosures.
- Ongoing learning for the force, encouraging feedback to the PPDA team.

Outcomes and impact

Currently, there is no formal measure of impact in place for SOOs. Assessments of the outcomes and perceived impacts are from feedback from those involved and force data.

Since the implementation of SOOs, there have been factors that suggest Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary has improved how it is investigating PPDA.

- A consistent rise in the number of reported cases involving police perpetrators and police victims since the introduction of these new processes in June 2021. Cases have more than doubled annually, which has been attributed to a perceived increase in trust and confidence.
- Victims being allocated a SOO and building up a good rapport with them has led to further disclosures. It is felt that this is due to the victim feeling more confident to report incidents to the police.
- Both internal police victims (for example those in Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary's survivors' network) and external victims (those who are not in the police workforce) have reported positive feedback. Having a senior ranking officer who provides updates on their case and the investigation has meant they feel they are being taken more seriously.
- Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary reports SOOs have had a positive effect on the culture in the organisation. SOOs reported they had learnt a lot in the role and it was the first time in years they had had in-depth conversations with victims and really thought about the victim experience, which they found valuable. The role has enabled them to refresh their knowledge and skills in DA which is a priority across policing.
- There have also been more reports of perpetrators above a police constable/police staff equivalent rank, which suggests an increasing confidence in victims to report.
- Strong support from partners. Partners have publicly shown support for Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary and how it is investigating cases of PPDA from its own workforce.

Learning and recommendations

Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary highlighted the following considerations for implementing SOOs.

- When the SOO role became mandatory, it was important to offer CPD and training to the SOOs so that they had the knowledge and skills to support victims. The demand for the SOO coordinator role also increased as SOOs with little DA experience sought advice and guidance in their first few cases.
- Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary has started to be more vocal around sharing its good practice with the public. The force has run training sessions and workshops with local DA service providers where it explains its approach, outlining some of the barriers victims of PPDA face and they are being tackled. When a victim of PPDA seeks help and support from an independent DA specialist, they can explain Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary's approach, which it hopes will give the victim confidence to report it to the police.
- Setting up the SOO role and scrutiny panels led to a review and a change of Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary's investigation model. Previously, criminal cases were investigated in district criminal investigation department (CID) teams, and the misconduct investigation sat within PSD. This led to investigative delays and flawed conduct investigations, meaning that a criminal no further action (NFA) often led to a conduct NFA. Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary then set up a dedicated PPDA investigation team in PSD, which investigates both the criminal and misconduct cases together.
- The SOO will feed back any good practice and learning to the investigations team that could improve future investigations. The SOO can also provide feedback and recognition of good practice to line managers. The panel also considers themes it repeatedly sees to inform future work, contributing to wider organisational learning.
- The internal survivors' network has helped shape Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary's response to PPDA. Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary has listened to the network's thoughts and concerns and has worked hard to implement factors to help build trust and confidence. It is also strongly felt that the survivors' network has been an important support system for police victims.
- Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary has a transparent, open and strong working relationship with the [Independent Office for Police Conduct](#) (IOPC).

Copyright

The copyright in this shared practice example is not owned or managed by the College of Policing and is therefore not available for re-use under the terms of the Non-Commercial College Licence. You will need to seek permission from the copyright owner to reproduce their works.

Legal disclaimer

Disclaimer: The views, information or opinions expressed in this shared practice example are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or views of the College of Policing or the organisations involved.