

Workplace domestic abuse scrutiny panel – Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary

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

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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 concerned with 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 [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 as previously.
- 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.

- [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.
- 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.

The focus of this smarter practice report is the workplace DA scrutiny panel.

Implementation

Workplace domestic abuse (DA) scrutiny panel

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 \(IOPC\)](#).

Senior oversight officer (SOO)

The case coordinator reviews any case history and appoints a senior oversight officer (SOO) for the victim. The role of a SOO has been made a mandatory responsibility for the rank of chief inspector. They are a point of contact for police victims or non-police victims where the perpetrator is a police officer or police staff. They have oversight of the victim's case but remain independent of any investigation.

The role of the 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 staff.

SOOs have oversight from the victim's perspective to ensure cases are progressing appropriately and to 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

presents the case and the investigation to the scrutiny panel, which monitors and has oversight of all police perpetrated domestic abuse (PPDA) cases.

For more details go to [Senior oversight officer smarter practice](#).

The panel

The panel sits monthly and is chaired by Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary's DA lead, a chief superintendent. Other panel members include:

- Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary DA silver lead
- a detective sergeant from the PSD
- an inspector who is the DA victim lead
- a sergeant who is the case coordinator
- a member of police staff who administrates for the panel
- representatives from HR, organisational learning and DA specialists
- up to three representatives from external DA partner agencies
- a representative from an independent advisory group (IAG)

The panel meetings take place on Microsoft Teams, which has an advantage with regards to maintaining confidentiality as access to the meeting is tightly controlled. When a SOO joins the meeting, they join the main room, but the panel discussions take place in a breakout room. Once the panel is ready to discuss their case, the SOO is invited to join the breakout room.

The time slots that cases have at the panel vary. A standard new case is allocated 15 minutes, updates on cases are allocated 10 minutes. Complex cases may be given 30 minutes or more and occasionally given a separate case conference to allow sufficient time to hear the detail and give suitable direction. Panel meetings are scheduled for three hours.

To maintain confidentiality, which is essential for victims, the panel is run anonymously, with no reference to the identities of anyone involved. The panel will look at each case in detail. Depending on the case, the panel's role may be to unpick who is the primary victim and perpetrator, where there have been allegations from both parties. In these cases, external partners have been invaluable.

The panel can also discuss and outline the best steps going forward for the victim and the investigation, as well as identifying any learning or good practice from the investigation. For

complex cases, the panel may ask to see the case again. The SOOs come prepared to discuss their case and answer panel questions.

The panel meeting is not recorded, but actions and themes are noted. The representative from organisational learning will analyse the discussions to identify themes and group these with previous panels to help the panel better understand issues which are coming up repeatedly. Any individual learning or good practice about the case and/or investigation is fed back to the investigation team by the SOO.

At first, only more complex cases were taken to the panel. However, it was felt there had been missed opportunities on other cases to make good progress, intervene and set a different direction due to them coming to the attention of the panel too late.

Depending on time constraints and the number of cases, the panel has sometimes had periods where it sees every case, and sometimes cases have been triaged. Selected cases for the panel are likely to benefit from discussion, either on a case-specific basis or because they highlight wider organisational learning. If there is any doubt, cases are brought to the panel.

Complex cases

There are some cases that are more complex which are taken outside of the scrutiny panel. Cases that typically require a separate case conference involve the following.

- Both the victim and perpetrator being part of the police
- Allegation and counter-allegation and difficulties identifying the primary perpetrator
- Serial perpetrator and victims
- Cases involving a perpetrator in a particular position of power, over and above the fact that they are in the police

Closing cases

Closing cases used to take place during scrutiny panel meetings. Now there is a more efficient approach where the SOO can request case closure through completion of the relevant section on the case update form. The use of this form is more efficient as actions are discussed and agreed in the panel before a case can be closed. Once the actions are complete, the SOO marks them on the form and the case becomes closed.

The process is regularly reviewed to ensure efficiency and maximise learning that can be applied back to investigations and better support victims.

Workplace domestic abuse scrutiny panel logic model

- Problem**

 - 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 when 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**

 - Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary set up a scrutiny panel, which has oversight and scrutiny of DA cases involving a member of the workforce and the investigations. The panel is run anonymously to ensure victim and perpetrator confidentiality for all persons involved, including the victim and perpetrator. Cases are presented by the SOO. The panel can set direction on cases and feed back good work to the investigations team. They also strive to continually improve their service for PPDA cases by identifying any learning. The panel also sets actions that need to be completed before a case is closed.
- Response – resources**

 - The panel is chaired by the head of DA, a chief superintendent.
 - Other panel members include:
 - force DA silver lead
 - detective sergeant – PSD
 - inspector – DA victim lead
 - sergeant – case coordinator
 - police staff – administrates for the panel
 - representatives from HR, organisational learning and DA specialists
 - up to three representatives from external DA partner agencies
 - IAG representative
 - SOOs join to present their case

**Response –
technology**

- The use of Microsoft Teams has advantages for confidentiality. The panel can be in one virtual room discussing a case and a SOO, who is the next slot, can join the meeting early and wait in another room, meaning they do not automatically join the room where discussions are taking place.

**Response –
documentation**

- Case update form is used to record the actions that are discussed and decided at panel that need to be completed before a case is closed.
- The panel meetings are not recorded but comprehensive notes are taken of the discussions and action points.

**Response –
meetings**

- The panel sits monthly and the meetings are scheduled for three hours.
- Each SOO has an allocated time slot to present the case. Typically this is 15 minutes for a new case and 10 minutes for an update. Sometimes there are longer time slots for more complex cases.

Outputs

- Number of cases referred to a panel.
- Number of panels held.
- Number of SOOs involved in cases.
- Number of partner agencies attending panels.
- Number of actions to be completed.
- Number of themes arising from cases.

Outcomes

- An increase in cases reported due to greater confidence in the process.
- An increase in the quality of PPDA investigations.
- An increase in the number of cases that have victim support throughout the investigation.
- An increase in the number of perpetrators who are held to account.
- Improvement in the quality of service provided due to continually learning and applying themes into organisational learning.

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

Enablers for implementation

- Confidentiality is crucial. The panel works anonymously and precautions are taken. Cases at the panel are discussed anonymously, case update forms are filled out anonymously and the SOO cannot join the meeting room where discussions are ongoing – they must wait to be invited into the breakout room.
- Excellent partnership working – a positive and key aspect of this work has been inviting partners to the scrutiny panel to give honest feedback in panel meetings. This feedback has helped organisational learning and informed future cases. Partners volunteer their time to be involved in the scrutiny panel and do not require funding from Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary. They work with the police to help improve the service offered to police victims and victims of PPDA.
 - The partner agencies use their DA expertise to advise police on cases that are seen at the panel, for example, identifying who is the primary victim and primary perpetrator.
 - The partners view cases through a different lens and provide external scrutiny.
 - The close collaborative working between Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary and partner agencies has built up a good rapport where honest conversations can happen. Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary has been able to manage partner agencies' expectations on the criminal justice side of the process and partners have greatly appreciated the transparency.
 - Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary works closely with internal and external services to ensure victims receive the support they need to continue in their roles.
- [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 PPDA awareness raising in regular frontline training on DA. SOOs also have continuing professional development sessions tailored to help them carry out their specific roles with victims.
- Senior officer buy-in is 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.
- Provision of police specialist IDVAs, who have received 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 by 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 single points of contact in all DA service providers, rather than relying on one dedicated police IDVA as they did previously.

- All victims are offered a referral to work with IDVAs, who help raise the issue of confidentiality and anonymity, which has been taken seriously by the police.
 - IDVAs also went on patrol with officers and had drop-in sessions at the station to help and share their expertise. Demand for IDVAs has gone up due to the increase in disclosed PPDA cases.

Outcomes and impact

Currently, there no formal measure of impact in place for the scrutiny panel. Assessments of the outcomes and perceived impacts come from feedback from those involved, as well as force data. Since the implementation of the scrutiny panel, indicators 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.
- 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.

Partner agencies have also reported that they have gained insights from the experience of being on the panel and working more closely with the police. They have reported an improved understanding of police organisation, processes and decision-making, which is beneficial to their wider work.

Learning and recommendations

Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary highlighted the following considerations for implementing a DA scrutiny panel.

Increased organisational learning

The representative from organisational learning will analyse the discussions from panel meetings to identify themes and group these together to better understand issues that arise repeatedly. The panel discuss the organisational learning themes which require wider training and upskilling across the force and actions are set by the DA lead. There have been different examples of organisational learning.

- Responding officers' and investigators' extreme empathy for police victims, particularly when the victim does not want any action taken. This led some officers and their supervisors to make decisions they would not make for the public, for example, early no further action, offering a volunteer interview instead of an arrest, or giving informal warnings instead of taking formal action.
- Some cases also showed the opposite, where officers had too much sympathy for the perpetrator and may have been more willing in the first attendance to accept the perpetrator's explanation for their behaviour, for example poor mental health. They may then struggle to arrest the perpetrator.
- Before the change in the investigation model, sometimes a PPDA case was allocated to an inexperienced professionalising investigations programme (PIP) level one investigator because the offence was deemed as low level, such as common assault. This was done without consideration of the impact for the investigator and case when interviewing a suspect who was an experienced investigator and interviewer with a wealth of policing experiencing, knowledge and skills.
- The line for police victims, between being a victim while working in policing was blurred.

Sometimes the following instances occurred:

- the assumption that police victims could safeguard themselves because of their professional knowledge
 - failing to update the police victims because they should understand the pressure their colleagues are under and could therefore wait longer for an update
 - confusion around how best to contact police victims. Sometimes an assumption was made that it was OK to use work contact details rather than this being specifically agreed with the victim or copying the victim's manager into case updates without their consent
- These themes were collated by organisational learning and specific tasking given from the panel to address the issues force wide.

Other considerations

- There was some early feedback that the tone of the panel was critical. There was a conscious decision to address this and adopt a supportive approach which emphasises learning and continuous improvement, which comes from analysing cases.
- 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 within district criminal investigation department (CID) teams, and the misconduct investigation sat within the professional standards department (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 within PSD, which investigates both the criminal and misconduct cases together.
- The internal survivors' network has been instrumental in shaping Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary's response to PPDA. Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary has listened to their 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.
- One of the challenges Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary had to navigate was around confidentiality and anonymity. This was of crucial importance to the victims and an issue which Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary took seriously and addressed. The panel tackles this by keeping cases anonymous at panel and only certain members having access to the names of those involved in the cases.
 - Due to the anonymity, sometimes it can be difficult to remember exactly when referring to cases, particularly if a case comes back to the panel after a few months, or if the panel had previously heard the other side of a case. This is managed by using other means such as time of case, who the SOO is and other known factors in the case details.
- Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary has started to be more vocal around sharing their good practice with the public. It has run training sessions and workshops with local DA service providers where it explains its approach, outlines some of the barriers victims of PPDA face and how it is tackling them. 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 they hope will give the victim confidence to report it to the police.

- Having excellent working relationships with partner agencies, whose expertise is invaluable to the panel, especially when discussing complex cases and identifying who is the primary victim and primary perpetrator.
 - Inviting partner agencies to join the panel enables Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary to ensure there is an external scrutiny and important aspects of cases are not missed. Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary is open to learning how external partners view DA cases and have applied a lot of this learning to improve the service they provide for victims.
- Streamlining efficiencies, for example SOOs can now request case closure, which is more time efficient than previously doing this on the panel.
- Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary has a transparent, open and strong working relationship with the [Independent Office for Police Conduct](#) (IOPC).

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