

Domestic violence disclosure scheme principles

Principles to help prevent domestic abuse and ensure consistent and effective implementation across UK police forces.

10 mins read

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Introduction

Domestic abuse causes considerable harm to victims. Strategies to prevent domestic abuse, such as the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS), are essential to mitigate long-term consequences. The DVDS ensures that police forces share information appropriately and promptly with domestic abuse victims (or potential victims) about their partner's (or ex-partner's) previous abusive offending.

When police forces disclose information, they must comply with the common law principles established in case law, in accordance with relevant legislation. The DVDS establishes two procedures for disclosing information, safety and risk management:

- 'Right to Ask' is triggered by a member of the public applying to the police for a disclosure.
- 'Right to Know' is triggered by the police making a proactive decision to disclose information to protect a potential victim.

Principles

The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme is made up of six principles.

- [Principle 1: Governance and assurance](#)
- [Principle 2: Performance](#)
- [Principle 3: Training and resources](#)
- [Principle 4: Evidence of a full risk assessment](#)
- [Principle 5: Robust 'right to know' entry route](#)
- [Principle 6: Roles and responsibilities of partner agencies](#)

Principle 1: Governance and assurance

In line with the [**Domestic Abuse Act 2021**](#), the DVDS guidance is now statutory. Any police force that considers deviating from this guidance should do so only on a case-by-case basis, ensuring that each decision is victim-led. Such deviations must be supported by clear and documented justification. In the event of a challenge, forces must be able to demonstrate that they considered the statutory duty and had specific, compelling reasons for not adhering to the guidance.

To support the DVDS, police forces should have robust governance and oversight mechanisms. Regular gap analyses between statutory guidance and current practice should be conducted. Clear action plans should be put in place to address any discrepancies. These measures ensure accountability and uphold a consistent, victim-centred approach across the UK.

Principle 2: Performance

Forces must establish and maintain rigorous performance measures to monitor and improve their implementation of the DVDS effectively, supporting Principle 1. Equitable access to the scheme, particularly for individuals at risk of discrimination due to their protected characteristics, is essential to build trust and encourage engagement.

At a minimum, forces should track and report the following to His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS):

- number of Right to Ask applications
- number of Right to Know applications
- percentage of Right to Ask applications resulting in disclosure
- percentage of Right to Know applications resulting in disclosure

To enhance these measures, forces should document any reasons for non-disclosures. Forces should distinguish between cases where no relevant information is available and those where other barriers to disclosure exist. Accurate recording of protected characteristics is crucial to ensure that no demographics are disproportionately affected and that all groups have meaningful access to the scheme. Monitoring for – and addressing – disproportionality is central to improving trust and engagement.

Delays can deter engagement and undermine the purpose of the DVDS. Forces should work proactively to complete disclosures ahead of the 28-day statutory deadline. As well as ensuring compliance with legal obligations, this will maintain a responsive service that improves public

confidence. This performance data will be integral to future HMICFRS returns and to ongoing oversight.

Relevant practice

South Wales Police

South Wales Police has developed a Power BI dashboard that provides live data on all DVDS applications. The dashboard allows officers to monitor the number of applications submitted under the 'Right to Ask' and 'Right to Know' procedures. Officers can also track disclosure rates and assess the time taken to process each application. By enabling real-time visibility, the dashboard helps to identify applications that are overdue. This ensures that disclosures can be made promptly, ideally within the statutory 28-day timeframe. Cases exceeding 28 days are reviewed monthly in a performance meeting chaired by an assistant chief constable.

Evidence base

In a policy briefing paper, [**Domestic Violence Disclosure Schemes: Ten Years On**](#), Barlow and Walklate (2024) proposed that data gathering should be improved to help police understand who is – and who is not – accessing DVDS, and why. In addition to data on sex and ethnicity, the authors suggest that forces would benefit from collecting data on:

- sexual orientation
- disability
- whether English is a first language

Principle 3: Training and resources

Forces should ensure that all personnel involved in the DVDS receive thorough training. Personnel should have a clear understanding of the statutory guidance.

This training must emphasise that disclosures are applicable to both current and former partners, regardless of the status of the relationship. This will help to address any misconceptions around the scheme's scope.

The format of disclosures should be consistent and comprehensive, providing applicants with sufficient information to assess potential risks. Simply listing convictions and dates does not offer

applicants the context needed to make an informed decision.

Relevant practice

Essex Police

The establishment of a Domestic Abuse Review Team (DART) by Essex Police has enhanced the force's response to domestic abuse cases. This team conducts secondary risk assessments for DVDS applications and actively works with partner agencies to ensure a joined-up approach.

DART members received bespoke training from subject matter experts on various areas, including risk assessments, the DVDS and stalking awareness. Since DART was established, Essex Police has reported a significant increase in the number of DVDS disclosures. This suggests that targeted training and resources can improve service provision.

Evidence base

Hadjimatheou and Grace (2020) carried out a study on police implementation of DVDS in England and Wales. Their findings in the paper **No black and white answer about how far we can go**, identified two contrasting approaches to the disclosure:

- 'risk-averse', where victims received minimal or no information about the criminal histories of their partners
- 'permissive', where victims received lengthy and detailed disclosures

The study showed a significant discrepancy in the way that police forces understand and implement DVDS. Detailed disclosures are more likely to reveal a pattern of the suspect's behaviour and are more likely to resonate with victims.

Principle 4: Evidence of a full risk assessment

Many applicants to the DVDS are at high risk of harm, requiring a dynamic approach to risk assessment throughout the process. Forces should conduct an initial risk assessment that may prompt an urgent disclosure where needed.

Risk assessments should be revisited at each stage, to ensure that any emerging risks are promptly identified and addressed. Safety plans must be put in place as necessary. This includes

referrals to specialist services, multi-agency arrangements and safeguarding authorities.

Risk assessments must be conducted for every Right to Ask application, regardless of whether there is information to disclose. A high percentage of domestic abuse incidents are never reported to the police, so applicants may be at risk even if there is no police information on their partners or ex-partners. As outlined in statutory guidance, the use of multi-agency panels is essential for fully understanding and jointly managing identified risks, so that applicants can be safeguarded effectively.

Relevant practice

DVDS is a pivotal opportunity for safeguarding. Ongoing research has highlighted that a notable percentage of individuals applying for DVDS had not previously sought help for domestic abuse (see the following Evidence base section). The dynamic nature of risk assessments throughout the DVDS process is crucial. Forces should continuously reassess risks at every stage, including during the initial application and following any disclosure. This ensures that escalating risks can be promptly addressed, safety plans can be implemented and appropriate referrals can be made to specialist services.

Evidence base

Preliminary findings of research on people who had been through a DVDS process (Hadjimatheou, forthcoming) found that 8% of participants had never previously sought help from anyone for domestic abuse. This indicates that disclosures are an opportunity to protect and safeguard this group. Similarly, 38% of the respondents to the survey had not sought help from police before.

Additionally, Barlow and others (2023) found that the vast majority of the victim-survivors interviewed in their research, '[Rendering them responsible: victim-survivors experiences of Clare's Law and domestic violence disclosure schemes](#)', did not receive any follow-up support or wrap-around services after the disclosure. They concluded that responsibility for safeguarding and seeking support appeared to be placed on the victims, or even expected of them, once the disclosure had been made.

Principle 5: Robust 'Right to Know' entry route

The Right to Know entry route depends on the proactive review of intelligence gathered from various policing activities, including:

- investigations into criminal acts where there is reason to believe someone may be at risk from a perpetrator
- information provided by partner agencies
- intelligence collected during routine operational activities

Forces are encouraged to examine and refine their processes for identifying and acting on relevant intelligence, ensuring consistency and effectiveness in their Right to Know cases.

Forces should be vigilant for DVDS Right to Know opportunities in secondary risk assessments and multi-agency forums, such as:

- multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs)
- multi-agency tasking and coordination (MATAC) meetings

Forces that have implemented secondary risk assessment processes often report higher rates of Right to Know applications. This indicates that robust assessment is effective for identifying individuals at risk.

Relevant practice

South Wales Police

South Wales Police adopted a secondary risk assessment model, with every high-risk case referred for a Right to Know consideration. Consideration for Right to Know applications has also been listed as a standard agenda item in most partnership forums, including child protection and multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) cases.

Principle 6: Roles and responsibilities of partner agencies

Relevant practice

The following forces ensure that independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs) and other agencies are substantially involved during engagement and disclosure. Please contact each force

for more information and for evidence to support commissioning.

Greater Manchester Police

Greater Manchester Police has implemented a joint working model for DVDS disclosures, which includes the option of involving IDVAs or social workers where appropriate. This collaborative approach ensures that victims receive emotional and practical support during the disclosure process, as well as the necessary information.

Sussex Police

In cases where trust and confidence are a barrier to engage with the police, Sussex Police works closely with local IDVAs. The IDVA conducts an in-person meeting with the victim and then connects via video call to police caseworkers, who relay the disclosure information. This method allows for a supportive environment, while ensuring that the police can manage the sensitive information effectively.

Humberside Police

Humberside Police prioritises face-to-face disclosures and always includes an IDVA in the process. This practice is critical in ensuring that victims receive comprehensive support immediately after the disclosure. This enables a better understanding of the information provided and the next steps.

North Yorkshire Police

In North Yorkshire Police, DVDS procedures are managed by a civilian team, which includes a safeguarding manager. The force aims to work with IDVAs and other relevant agencies to provide disclosures, ensuring that victims receive a collaborative and multi-faceted response to their needs.

Kent Police

Kent Police holds a weekly multi-agency panel that includes representatives from probation, social services and IDVAs to review and agree on the wording of disclosures. This collaborative effort ensures that all relevant information is considered before disclosure, particularly in cases involving children or complex safeguarding needs.

Evidence base

In research on police officers in England and Wales, Hadjimatheou (2022) found that the disclosure process is increasingly being shaped by a child protection agenda that places responsibility on

victim-survivors to protect their children from domestic abuse. In the light of competing pressures and the responsibilities of child protection, Hadjimatheou noted the challenges that police faced in implementing an empowerment approach to domestic abuse safeguarding.

In a policy briefing, Barlow and Walklate (2024) highlighted that DVDS is a police-led response in England and Wales. The authors considered whether police forces are the most appropriate disclosers of information, particularly for marginalised victim-survivors. Barlow and others (2023) also found that victim-survivors would welcome the provision of information with the support of IDVAs.

References

Barlow and others (2023) [Rendering them responsible: victim-survivors experiences of Clare's Law and domestic violence disclosure scheme](#), Bristol University Press Digital

Barlow and Walklate (2024), [Domestic Violence Disclosure Schemes: Ten Years On](#), University of Liverpool and University of Central Lancashire

Hadjimatheou (2022), [Social Care Told me I Had to': Empowerment And Responsibilization in The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme](#), British Journal of Criminology, Oxford Academic

Downloadable resources

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- [Domestic violence disclosure scheme principles \(pdf\) 260.14 KB](#)

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