

# Governance

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## Staff and resourcing

Police forces must ensure they have a dedicated structure for the investigation and management of domestic abuse. While arrangements vary between forces, they should ensure they have:

- a body of specialist officers who:
  - are familiar with the dynamics of domestic abuse and with local knowledge of repeat victims and serial perpetrators
  - can be called on to support first responders and other primary investigators
- specialist supervisors who have an overview of domestic abuse within their force area

Forces should maintain specialist domestic abuse capability to ensure consistent, high-quality service to victims. Senior leaders are responsible for determining the most effective model based on local context and available resources.

A force-wide approach should ensure:

- a dedicated team or network of officers and supervisors with advanced knowledge of domestic abuse, coercive control and safeguarding
- clear lines of responsibility for victim care, risk assessment and investigative oversight
- effective coordination between specialist units, response officers and neighbourhood policing teams
- regular review of specialist resourcing levels, recorded on the force risk register where deficiencies are identified

Specialist officers should lead or advise on cases and support non-specialists in applying standards. Oversight may be provided through a central domestic abuse coordinator or equivalent supervisory function with access to data on local trends, serial perpetrators, repeat victims and case progress.

Management responsibilities include:

- maintaining a structured deployment model that allows first response teams access to specialist advice and guidance
- ensuring that specialists manage or oversee serious and complex domestic abuse cases
- establishing clear pathways between domestic abuse, child protection and sexual offence investigations
- maintaining close liaison with the CPS through designated coordinators
- ensuring that all victims have access to support pathways and multi-agency risk management processes
- providing welfare and supervision support for staff routinely dealing with domestic abuse

For further information, go to:

- [Staff welfare](#)

## First responder

Domestic abuse incidents may not be routed through to specialist officers unless they are classed as being of a higher level of risk. Primary responsibility for investigation may, therefore, remain with the first responder or officer.

The first responding officer should apply the 'right first time' principle, conducting a thorough initial investigation to support case development and prosecution. Where available, officers should seek tactical advice from [specialist domestic abuse officers](#).

For further information, go to:

- [First response](#)

## Specialist domestic abuse officer

Specialist domestic abuse officers should provide tactical advice to first responding officers.

Tactical advice to officers may include:

- initial identification of risk factors, including how to look out for signs of controlling or coercive behaviour

- gathering and assessing all available information and intelligence
- developing initial lines of enquiry
- processes of victim and witness identification, interviewing and providing protection and support
- notifying the [child abuse investigation unit \(CAIU\)](#) or equivalent of safeguarding issues
- identifying, preserving, collecting and processing all available evidence
- consolidating evidence from previous incidents
- possible arrest and interviewing strategies for suspects
- post-arrest management of suspects, particularly advice concerning the risk considerations for police bail conditions
- consideration of [domestic violence prevention notices and orders \(DVPNs and DVPOs\)](#)
- appropriate sharing of information with relevant agencies (this should be supervised by the domestic abuse supervisor if the information is sensitive and personal)
- liaison with the CPS
- documenting and recording all required evidence and processes

For further information, go to:

- [Domestic abuse investigator role profile](#)

Specialist domestic abuse officers may also work closely with CAIUs and ensure that incidents involving households with children are referred appropriately to local authority children's social care. They should support information sharing for MARAC, MAPPA and other multi-agency safeguarding processes.

For further information, go to:

- [Appendix A](#)

## **Domestic abuse-related sieges and hostage situations**

Domestic abuse links should be made for any siege or hostage situation. Specialist officers should provide advice to siege commanders and negotiators, contributing intelligence on risk factors. Domestic abuse specialists should be ready to provide the following information to siege commanders and hostage negotiators:

- intelligence or a criminal history suggesting previous domestic abuse or child abuse in current or previous relationships

- any current or past civil order that has been in place
- any known child contact restrictions under the [Children Act 1989](#) or disputes relating to child contact
- factors potentially associated with domestic abuse identified in the case, such as suicide threats or threats to kill
- details of any safety planning carried out with the victim or previous victims
- details of any relevant risk assessments
- suggestions relating to conversation management with the suspect

Training for siege commanders and hostage negotiators should incorporate the potential [risk factors](#) associated with domestic abuse. Table-top training exercises and critical incident training that address siege and hostage-taking situations should include domestic abuse. In particular, they should address the risk factors affecting domestic abuse after separation and where there are child contact disputes.

## Specialist domestic abuse supervisor

Specialist domestic abuse supervisors or shift sergeants should line-manage specialist domestic abuse officers. Specialist supervisors should monitor the following aspects:

- tactical investigative advice to police officers
- carrying out investigations in identified serious and complex or high-risk cases
- risk assessment
- liaison with CAIUs and public protection units
- partnership work in relation to domestic abuse
- tactical advice in siege and hostage situations

## Monitoring and performance

Domestic abuse specialist supervisors should monitor domestic abuse cases across their area, including those dealt with outside the domestic abuse or public protection unit. They should develop strategies to ensure that they:

- are made aware of new cases
- support domestic abuse specialist officers to play an active role in the specialist domestic violence court (SDVC) system

- regularly review progress of ongoing cases
- review recent successful and unsuccessful outcomes to develop learning and improve investigative approaches in domestic abuse cases – this should be done in consultation with the CPS
- work with custody sergeants to monitor relevant custody processes

Relevant custody processes include correct identification of domestic abuse cases at point of charge, so that defendants are bailed to an SDVC, and appropriate use of bail conditions.

The information collated within the unit should be used to actively identify, target and engage with known victims and perpetrators.

They should also collate any performance indicator data and monitor police performance in domestic abuse cases, using a range of appropriate internal and external measures.

For further information, go to:

- [Partnership working and multi-agency responses](#)

## Coordination with Child Abuse Investigation Units (CAIU)

Domestic abuse specialist officers should maintain regular contact with the [CAIU](#) and refer all relevant cases. Officers should ensure that referrals to local authority children's social care are made sensitively, in a way that does not increase the victim's risk or deter their engagement with police. Officers should be informed about the referral process and what to expect.

Specialist supervisors should review domestic abuse cases to ensure that safeguarding and child protection concerns have been properly addressed. Where domestic abuse and child abuse investigations overlap, activity should be coordinated to avoid duplication and to ensure a unified approach to safeguarding.

For further information, go to:

- [APP on information sharing](#)
- [Child abuse APP](#)

## Leadership

Senior officers and the police and crime commissioner should set the strategic direction for the force's response to domestic abuse. They are responsible for promoting a culture that:

- prioritises victim protection
- holds offenders to account
- embeds domestic abuse as core business across all policing functions
- treats domestic abuse consistently as a priority, whether as a volume, serious and complex, or major crime
- underpins all activity with a multi-agency approach

Senior leaders should define expectations for all officers at all levels. This includes ensuring that:

- responding effectively to domestic abuse is recognised as everyone's responsibility, not limited to specialist teams
- officers understand escalation thresholds and how to identify cases that require specialist or major investigation oversight
- **training**, supervision and governance mechanisms reinforce consistent standards and attitudes
- officers have access to clear victim support pathways and specialist advice when needed
- domestic abuse work is recognised within performance, reward and promotion frameworks
- **staff welfare** and wellbeing support are integrated for those dealing with, or personally affected by, domestic abuse

For further information, go to:

- **[National vulnerability and public protection strategy](#)**

Senior officers should improve the force-wide response to domestic abuse. They should consider some or all of the following options:

- reviewing domestic abuse incidents in daily management meetings at operational and strategic levels
- taking a leading role in partnership working
- facilitating force participation in scrutiny panels
- involving senior members of the command team in focus groups
- encouraging victim and user surveys
- engaging with voluntary and community groups to improve victim confidence

The **HMICFRS Everyone's Business** framework should inform internal audit and PCC oversight processes. Forces should routinely measure performance against key indicators, such as:

- response quality
- arrest and outcome rates
- safeguarding effectiveness
- victim satisfaction

Senior leaders should consider:

- **Nine questions for the force**
- **Nine pieces of data for routine monitoring**

## Domestic abuse as core business

Senior managers should ensure that domestic abuse is embedded as core policing business at both strategic and operational levels. This requires a consistent focus on:

- policy integration
- governance oversight
- victim safety
- risk management
- accountability

Senior managers should ensure that:

- domestic abuse is explicitly included within the force strategic assessment and supported by dedicated governance structures
- the national decision model (NDM) and **Code of Ethics** are embedded as a set of policing principles and standards of behaviour across the force
- all connected policies reference and align with domestic abuse considerations, including the following:
  - child protection
  - sexual offences
  - vulnerable adults

- HBA
  - missing persons
  - homicide
  - offender management
- 
- learning from domestic homicide reviews is reviewed and implemented
  - force media and communication strategies promote consistent messaging and public confidence
  - all policies comply with the [Human Rights Act 1998](#) and [Equality Act 2010](#)

## Oversight in the investigation process

Management and oversight should be built into the investigation process in the same way as for any other area of crime, but with a particular focus on:

- managing risk
- victim safety
- adopting an evidence-led approach to investigation and prosecution

Management considerations, at the respective stages, should include the following:

### Call handling

- Develop systems to ensure that supervisors monitor domestic abuse-related calls.
- Monitor the accuracy of call grading according to local call-grading policies.
- Monitor to ensure that domestic abuse incidents are identified or flagged appropriately at the call-handling stage.

### First response

- Identify domestic abuse cases correctly and dip-sample incidents to ensure that positive action policies are being effectively applied by officers.
- Require officers to record reasons for not arresting suspects when they had grounds for arrest.
- Require officers to record positive action taken in domestic abuse cases to make victims and potential victims safer.
- Comply with the [NCRS](#).
- Ensure that officers clearly understand the requirement to begin evidence gathering on immediate arrival at the scene.

- Provide first response and domestic abuse officers with access to early evidence kits and cameras.

## Investigation

- Ensure that domestic abuse investigations focus on sources of evidence other than the victim's statement and do not rely exclusively on the victim's support for a prosecution.

## Suspect and case file management

- Supervise investigative interviewing.
- Supervise the custody process.
- Implement [APP on investigative interviewing](#).
- Monitor the pre-charge advice process.
- Develop local service level agreements (SLAs) with the CPS.
- Challenge CPS decisions that may increase risk of harm to the victim.
- Identify risk prior to making police bail decisions.

## Victim safety and support

- Ensure that victims are kept updated on the progress of cases and, in particular, changes in status of the suspect. For example, this includes when the suspect is released on bail and when conditions are attached to bail.
- Ensure that officers conduct early assessments to determine victim eligibility for special measures.
- Develop local systems to ensure that duties, as stated in the [Victims' Code](#), are complied with and monitored.
- Monitor the use of victim personal statements.
- Identify risk prior to making police bail decisions.
- Audit – and increase the availability of – equipment for crime prevention and home security.
- Manage repeat victimisation and risk assessment through targeted policing measures. These measures should be supervised by the police domestic abuse coordinator or supervisor and should involve local or neighbourhood policing teams where appropriate.
- Implement independent domestic violence adviser (IDVA) schemes, where possible.
- Support voluntary sector groups that provide safety-planning advice to victims.

## The role of neighbourhood policing

**Neighbourhood policing teams (NPTs)** or equivalent local policing teams have a key role to play in tackling domestic abuse as a force priority, particularly in relation to perpetrator management. They should be viewed as an integral part of the force response to domestic abuse.

Senior leaders should establish systems to ensure that regular up-to-date information is provided to them on:

- at-risk victims and children
- known perpetrators
- newly reported incidents
- likely domestic abuse hot spots
- newly issued and current protective orders, including:
  - non-molestation and other civil orders
  - restraining orders,
  - **DVPNs and DVPOs**
  - specialist orders, such as **violent offender orders (VOOs)**, sexual harm prevention orders (SHPOs) or sexual risk orders (SROs)

A copy of the order should always be immediately accessible, so that any breach can be quickly identified and the correct paperwork can be made available for court.

The information could, for example, be supplied through supervisors in daily tasking meetings. It could be supplemented by maintaining current lists of the above that are easily accessible to officers, who would be expected to stay up to date with the lists.

Senior leaders should ensure that NPTs, in conjunction with domestic abuse specialists and/or case officers, are involved in safety planning. These roles are best placed to monitor the situation on a regular basis and can assist with follow-up visits to victims.

When beat managers (or equivalent roles) and other NPT personnel visit victims, it is important that they appear knowledgeable about the situation to encourage victim confidence. Senior leaders should also ensure that processes are in place so that these roles are equipped with all relevant information and are clear on the purpose of their visit.

Existing channels of communications should be used to ensure that any current information relevant to managing risk in domestic abuse cases is exchanged in all cases. This includes cases that are not referred to [multi-agency risk assessment conferences \(MARACs\)](#). These channels of communications should include:

- NPTs and statutory partners
- community groups
- schools
- any other relevant agencies

## Performance management

Senior managers should ensure that their force delivers high-quality services to victims of domestic abuse.

Performance management in domestic abuse policing:

- enables both good and poor performance and practice to be identified
- helps to identify gaps in service provision
- provides a structure for ownership and accountability
- facilitates recognition and sharing of good practice and performance
- underpins mechanisms to improve poor performance

Senior manager should build domestic abuse performance into the overall performance management regime that police forces implement. The requirement to measure domestic abuse performance should be stated in policy documents. Senior managers should monitor and review performance at force, divisional and individual levels. Forces should identify managers to take responsibility for monitoring domestic abuse performance at force and divisional levels.

Effective management of performance in domestic abuse policing relies on comprehensive performance measurement processes. These require mechanisms to identify, record, link and analyse domestic abuse information fully and accurately. For self-assessment guidance and templates, senior managers may consider the NPCC [Policing violence against women and girls: The national framework for delivery 2024 to 2027](#).

Forces may consider measures or themes for performance review, including:

- domestic abuse incident statistics
- domestic homicide statistics
- domestic abuse arrest and charge statistics
- domestic abuse-related crime statistics and detections
- repeat reported victimisation statistics (relevant to victims and repeat offending)
- case tracking and attrition rates
- policy compliance information
- service user feedback on service provision
- feedback from other domestic abuse service providers
- successful outcomes as a result of [MARACs](#)
- performance information originating from [community safety partnerships \(CSPs\)](#), such as crime audits
- diversity and equality compliance in the delivery of services
- number of [DVPNs](#) issued and number of [DVPOs](#) applied for and granted
- number of [DVDS](#) applications, analysed by right to know and right to ask
- quality of risk management in domestic abuse reports

Forces should inform all staff of domestic abuse performance measures and actively involve them in maintaining and improving performance levels. Line managers should employ close supervision and performance management.

Forces should use reward and recognition schemes to motivate and encourage good work by individuals or teams in the area of domestic abuse. For example, forces may reward:

- good victim care
- an investigative success
- setting up a new process that proves useful
- particularly effective partnership working

## Training and development

Senior managers should ensure that all staff involved in responding to domestic abuse are appropriately trained and competent for their role. Effective training builds understanding of the dynamics of abuse, supports consistent application of policy, and improves victim safety.

Investigations meeting the threshold for serious and complex offences, such as coercive or controlling behaviour or stalking, should be led by investigators trained to Professionalising Investigation Programme (PIP) Level 2 standards. Where domestic abuse overlaps with other offences, such as rape or child abuse, forces should ensure close coordination between specialist teams to maintain an investigative approach. The PIP Level 2 Investigation course is available on [College Learn](#) (you will need to sign in).

Senior managers should ensure that domestic abuse training is as follows:

- Mandatory for all roles likely to encounter domestic abuse reports, including call handlers, first responders, neighbourhood policing officers, investigators, witness care officers, supervisors, and senior leaders.
- Compliant with College of Policing national standards, ensuring content is evidence-based, quality-assured, and aligned with the Public Protection Curriculum within the National Policing Curriculum.
- Delivered by trainers with subject expertise, supported by evaluation to maintain quality and relevance.

Forces should take a blended learning approach, combining:

- classroom sessions
- case studies
- immersive exercises
- e-learning

While e-learning alone may be insufficient, it can effectively supplement awareness and refresher programmes. The College of Policing provides nationally accredited learning materials through [College Learn](#) (you will need to sign in) to support this approach.

All staff who have direct contact with victims should receive training in risk identification and decision-making, including use of the [NDM](#) and force-approved risk assessment tools. This should include awareness of coercive control, stalking and the wider dynamics of domestic abuse.

Specialist training should be provided for those undertaking specific functions, such as:

- managing [DVDS](#) requests

- preparing **DVPO** applications
- conducting complex domestic abuse investigations
- supervising domestic abuse teams or investigations

Forces should keep records of all domestic abuse training delivered, including attendance and completion data. These records should be reviewed regularly to identify training gaps and to plan refresher or additional programmes as required.

Where possible, forces should also promote multi-agency training, bringing together police staff, **IDVAs** and voluntary sector professionals to ensure a shared understanding of risk, safeguarding and victim care.

Trainers should be mindful that individuals affected by domestic abuse, either as victims or perpetrators, may be present during training sessions. Appropriate support mechanisms and confidential routes for disclosure should be available.

## Welfare

Senior managers are responsible for the welfare of their staff. Dealing with domestic abuse can be demanding and stressful.

Managers should monitor the workload of domestic abuse specialist officers and supervisors. Forces should provide specialists and intelligence-led support to enable them to carry out their duties and ensure the welfare, health and safety of individual staff members.

Managers should focus on monitoring the amount and nature of work being undertaken. Manageable workloads are essential for:

- the safety and welfare of officers
- resilience during periods of sickness, leave and other absences
- ensuring effective and proactive risk management

In recognition of the distressing nature of domestic abuse cases, managers should consider implementing mandatory or voluntary counselling and welfare support for domestic abuse specialists. It should, however, be made clear that such support is intended for staff use. No attempt should be made to provide untrained counselling to victims of domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse specialists with personal experience of domestic abuse may be particularly vulnerable to the stresses of the subject matter, depending on their individual stage of recovery. Where staff have made such a disclosure, managers should ensure that they are offered appropriate support and that their welfare is regularly monitored.

Oscar Kilo, the national police wellbeing service, provides [toolkits for responders and investigators](#) to help them support wellbeing and resilience.

## Information management

Forces should ensure accurate recording of domestic abuse incidents. All reports whether from victims, witnesses or third parties, must be recorded in line with the [National Standard for Incident Recording \(NSIR\)](#) and, where necessary, the [NCRS](#). Accurate recording ensures that:

- risk is correctly identified
- patterns of abuse are recognised
- requests under the [DVDS](#) can be fulfilled

Under-recording or downgrading incidents creates a false intelligence picture and undermines safeguarding.

Forces should ensure that domestic abuse incidents are accurately flagged on the PNC and recorded for both perpetrators and victims. Equality data (such as sex, ethnicity and disability) should be included to support and understand patterns of abuse.

Forces should ensure that information on domestic abuse is kept up to date on the PNC, PND and local force systems, so that data can:

- be searched across forces
- inform strategic assessments and resource deployment
- support statistical analysis, including DVDS requests

Senior leaders should ensure that information systems are accurate, timely, secure and capable of supporting both operational activity and strategic decision-making.

## Information technology systems

Forces should maintain information technology (IT) systems that enable domestic abuse information, in both case and statistical formats, to be:

- recorded
- stored
- flagged
- linked
- analysed
- shared
- presented

Systems should be designed to integrate across relevant internal and national databases, enabling a single-search access point where possible.

Senior managers should ensure that:

- domestic abuse systems are linked with national and local databases, including:
  - command and control
  - custody
  - child protection
  - intelligence
  - crime recording systems
- information can be retrieved quickly and efficiently to inform real-time decision-making
- IT infrastructure has capacity to connect with national information systems and those of partner agencies

## Recording and accessing information

Forces should ensure that domestic abuse information is stored in a way that allows easy retrieval of:

- a clear history of previous incidents, including those with former partners
- all associated risk assessments and intelligence records
- details of suspected management measures, such as bail conditions, retraining orders, [DVPOs](#) and [DVPNs](#), injunctions and prior convictions

This information should be accessible through a single search where possible, with reference to the [Police National Computer \(PNC\)](#) and [Police National Database \(PND\)](#) to ensure that checks are complete and consistent.

## Intelligence management

Forces should ensure that domestic abuse intelligence is accurate, current and effectively analysed to support both safeguarding and enforcement activity. Intelligence should be shared between the force intelligence bureau and specialist domestic abuse units to ensure coordinated activity.

Forces should use intelligence to:

- identify repeat and serial perpetrators
- highlight emerging trends and high-risk locations
- direct operational resources and proactive targeting activity
- support implementation of the [DVDS](#) and other safeguarding measures

Senior officers should ensure that the following draw on domestic abuse intelligence to guide tasking, prioritisation and offender management:

- daily briefings
- tactical tasking meetings
- multi-agency forums, such as multi-agency tasking and coordinating meetings (MATACs), MARACs and [domestic abuse forums](#)

Senior managers should ensure that effective intelligence practice is embedded by:

- recognising and commending high-quality intelligence submissions
- including domestic abuse intelligence activity in performance objectives and key performance indicators
- publicising good practice and successful outcomes internally

For further information, go to:

- [APP on Intelligence management](#)

## Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (Clare's Law)

The **DVDS** enables information to be shared lawfully with individuals at risk of domestic abuse, under the 'right to ask' or 'right to know' processes. All decisions must comply with the existing legal framework, in particular:

- **Human Rights Act 1998**
- **Data Protection Act 2018**
- **Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974**
- established case law

The **NDM** should underpin every stage of the process, ensuring that decisions are ethical, lawful and proportionate. Safeguarding the potential victim and any children must remain the overriding priority.

Managers should ensure that:

- DVDS applications are processed in line with Home Office guidance and local policy
- initial checks (PNC, PND, ViSOR, local intelligence) are completed within 24 hours
- risk assessments, such as DASH, are completed and regularly reviewed
- disclosures are made only when lawful, necessary and proportionate, supported by a robust safety plan
- all actions, decisions and outcomes are recorded and retrievable through national systems to identify patterns of multiple applications or serial perpetrators

When disclosure is not made, applicants should still be provided with safeguarding advice, signposting to local and national support services, and clear information about ongoing risk.

For further information, go to:

- **DVDS principles**
- **Home office DVDS guidance**

## Partnership working

Cooperation between agencies is important to help reduce the risk of cases slipping through the safeguarding system and stopping domestic abuse at an early stage or preventing it from happening in the first place. It makes it possible to see the whole picture, facilitating:

- early effective risk identification
- improved information sharing
- joint decision making
- coordinated action to assess, manage and reduce risk

Senior officers should ensure that their forces have well-developed and clear [information sharing agreements \(ISAs\)](#) with partner agencies. These ISAs should be regularly reviewed at force level. Supervisors should monitor police information sharing to ensure that it complies with the ISA.

Supervisors should review requests from other agencies for information containing sensitive and personal details.

For further information, go to:

- [Striking the balance: Practical guidance on the application of Caldicott Guardian principles to domestic violence and MARACs](#)
- [Information sharing advice for safeguarding practitioners](#)
- [APP on Sharing police information](#)
- [APP on Information management](#)

## Sharing information with the civil court system

Evidence gathered during criminal investigations may also be relevant to family court or civil proceedings, such as:

- child contact hearings
- care proceedings
- applications for civil orders

Police officers should inform victims that their case records may be used to support applications in these processes, particularly where no criminal charge or prosecution proceeds. This includes:

- 999 call recordings
- withdrawal statements
- interview transcripts
- photographs

- forensic reports

If criminal proceedings are ongoing, officers should consult the CPS before disclosing any material to the family court, to avoid prejudicing the criminal case. Information sharing between systems supports safer outcomes for victims and children and helps courts make informed decisions.

Forces should maintain formal protocols with the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) to enable this exchange.

For further information, go to:

- [Related family and criminal proceedings: A good practice guide](#)
- [Checklist: Sharing evidence for family court hearings](#)

## Issues specific to domestic abuse victims in family courts

Police information can be vital in supporting victims seeking civil protection or legal aid. Examples include:

- Civil injunction – Evidence such as police warnings, cautions or officer witness statements can support an application for an injunction.
- Legal aid applications – Under the [Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012](#), victims must provide evidence of abuse to access funding for child contact cases. For example, this evidence may be a caution, conviction or prosecution. See the [Civil Legal Aid \(Procedure\) Regulations 2012 regulation 33](#) for a full list of possible supporting documents.

Accurate police information is also crucial in child contact hearings, particularly to clarify:

- whether a parent has been arrested, charged or released without charge
- the nature of any charges
- any bail conditions or breaches

Where officers are aware of ongoing or potential family proceedings, they should identify and provide victims with a named police contact who can confirm accurate details to their solicitor upon request.

## Domestic Abuse Commissioner

The Domestic Abuse Commissioner is an independent voice established under the [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#). Public bodies, including the police, have a legal duty to cooperate with – and respond to recommendations made by – the Commissioner. The role includes:

- holding agencies and government to account for their response to domestic abuse
- raising awareness of domestic abuse across all communities
- improving victims' experiences of both the criminal and family justice systems
- promoting consistent access to support for victims and survivors, including children

Further information, go to [the Domestic Abuse Commissioner website](#).

## Role of police domestic abuse specialist in partnership working

Domestic abuse specialists and coordinators embed multi-agency working and ensure that the police response is coordinated, victim-focused and evidence-led. Their responsibilities include:

- engaging with local domestic abuse forums, specialist domestic violence courts (SDVCs), MARACs and partnership initiatives
- monitoring and improving service delivery to victims through the development and review of service level agreements (SLAs) and joint action plans
- facilitating service user consultation through [IDVAs](#) and voluntary sector providers, ensuring that feedback is used to inform local and force-level improvements

Domestic abuse coordinators should also [share information](#) and intelligence about relevant offenders with MAPPA and other relevant safeguarding systems.

## Multi-agency response and considerations

### Multi-agency considerations

The effective management of domestic abuse risk depends on agencies working together to see the full picture. Senior managers should ensure that multi-agency arrangements are established and maintained to identify, manage and reduce risk. Senior managers should consider:

- actively engaging in multi-agency forums, MARACs, safeguarding boards and other strategic partnerships

- developing multi-agency SLAs and data-sharing systems
- including domestic abuse within local community safety strategies and audits
- incorporating multi-agency intelligence products into the national intelligence model (NIM)
- monitoring and evaluating referrals, outcomes and offender management

## Community safety partnerships (CSPs)

The [Crime and Disorder Act 1998](#) places a statutory duty on a number of responsible authorities to work in partnership to reduce crime and disorder. CSPs are made up of representatives from the responsible authorities, which are:

- the police
- local authorities
- fire and rescue authorities
- the probation service
- health – clinical commissioning groups (England) or local health boards (Wales)

CSPs identify local priorities annually and develop community safety plans in consultation with partners and communities.

Although police and crime commissioners (PCCs) are not statutory members of CSPs, they should work with them under the [Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011](#) to align priorities and coordinate resources for domestic abuse prevention and response.

## Multi-agency delivery of criminal justice services

Police forces should have representation at every level of partnership working. The local policing area commander (or equivalent) should represent the force at strategic CSP level. This commander should have responsibility, together with the key strategic partners, for allocating resources and providing the strategic direction to ensure that the CSP strategy is delivered. Officers representing police in partnerships should have a clear understanding of the partnership purpose, processes and structures for delivery and targets.

Senior officers should monitor and evaluate delivery of targets in crime and disorder partnership working. They should ensure that clear performance criteria is set. Once these criteria are agreed, performance can be evaluated against the shared targets.

Agencies should ensure that their data are comparable, ideally by using the [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) definition of domestic abuse, although agencies could collect additional information for their own purposes over and above the multi-agency core data set.

Senior officers should set police performance criteria, including in a multi-agency context. When responding to domestic abuse, the criteria should support the force's overall objective to make a victim, potential victim and/or their children safer. Senior officers should also regularly scrutinise the performance criteria to ensure that force responses in the context partnership working are achieving the required outcomes.

## Local criminal justice partnerships (LCJBs)

LCJBs or partnerships manage the criminal justice system at a local level, by joining up local criminal justice agencies to achieve common aims and objectives. They are supported by the [Criminal Justice Board](#) at the national level.

Senior officers should use LCJBs to monitor criminal justice responses to domestic abuse within agencies that have key responsibilities and targets. LCJBs should oversee [SDVC](#) performance.

## Service level agreements (SLA) and joint action plans

SLAs establish clear expectations between partner agencies regarding the type, quality and timeliness of services to be delivered. They function as negotiated commitments, either:

- between statutory agencies
- between statutory and voluntary sector partners, where funding or support is provided in exchange for service delivery

Senior officers should ensure that SLAs are routinely monitored, with performance, compliance and delivery timescales reviewed and adjusted as necessary. Police-led initiatives should not impose unreasonable demands on voluntary sector partners.

Joint action plans should define intervention levels, agreed actions, agency responsibilities and timescales for completion. These plans may be case-specific or may form part of broader partnership protocols. They should be applied consistently, both within police units and across multi-agency partnerships to ensure coordinated and timely responses.

## Audits

Audits provide mechanisms for evaluating agency performance and identifying barriers experienced by service users in accessing support.

Police forces should:

- establish clear terms of reference for the audit
- agree the audit process and methodology
- consult with practitioners across all participating agencies
- seek feedback from both service users and non-users

In the context of domestic abuse, forces should fully participate in audit processes to ensure that collected data is comprehensive and accurately reflects the scale, nature and outcomes of domestic abuse service provision.

Forces should structure their audits to:

- monitor levels of reporting and indicators of offending
- assess the effectiveness of existing domestic abuse responses
- identify gaps in service provision and opportunities for improvement

Chief officers should ensure that processes are in place for the accurate, ethical and consistent collection of domestic abuse data to:

- establish the scale and nature of domestic abuse within their force area
- identify areas where service provision or partnership working can be improved
- inform strategic assessments and local delivery plans
- evaluate the effectiveness of current service models

## **Domestic abuse forums**

Local domestic abuse strategies may include a domestic abuse forum or focus group for the purpose of improving performance in how domestic abuse is tackled across the agencies. Chief officers should establish clear aims, objectives and plans against which their forces progress can be assessed. All forces should have specific domestic abuse policies and procedures that can be coordinated and monitored by forum members.

The main activities of a forum are:

- liaison and networking
- coordinating local services
- developing and improving local service delivery
- coordinating domestic abuse training for agencies
- engaging in public education
- establishing direct services for victims and children
- consulting victims
- review of identified cases
- public education and prevention projects, including perpetrator programmes and work in schools

Police representatives should ensure that this does not lead to the marginalisation or exclusion of key voluntary sector groups, as these groups often have expertise in the field of domestic abuse. A police-led forum works best when:

- the police do not chair all the meetings or control the agenda
- the forum does not meet in a police station
- they have dedicated domestic abuse units or specialist officers
- the voluntary sector is fully involved

Each domestic abuse forum should develop:

- a statement of policy
- information for victims of domestic abuse
- a resource pack, including detailed guidance for service deliverers
- training for service deliverers in meeting the needs of victims and holding offenders accountable
- a protocol on information sharing between organisations
- a MARAC process

## **Multi-agency safeguarding arrangement (MASA)**

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children requires strong local coordination between statutory and partner agencies. Each local authority should establish multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASA) to ensure that agencies work effectively together to protect children and promote their welfare.

The police, local authority and integrated care board (ICB) are the statutory safeguarding partners responsible for leading and overseeing these arrangements within each local area.

MASA provides the statutory framework through which safeguarding partners:

- agree local protocols for cooperation and information sharing
- coordinate joint action to prevent harm and protect children
- monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding practice across agencies

Relevant agencies should be engaged in MASA to ensure a comprehensive, joined-up safeguarding response. These agencies include education providers, health organisations and voluntary sector services.

For further information, go to:

- [Working together to safeguard children](#)

## Safeguarding adults boards (SABs)

Under the [Care Act 2014](#), every local authority must establish a SAB to lead and coordinate adult safeguarding across its area.

The SAB's purpose is to help and protect adults where the local authority has reasonable cause to suspect that an individual:

- has needs for care and support (whether these are met by the local authority)
- is experiencing or at risk of abuse or neglect
- as a result of those needs, is unable to protect themselves from the risk or experience of harm

SABs are responsible for overseeing and assuring the effectiveness of local safeguarding arrangements and ensuring that partner agencies work collectively to prevent and respond to abuse or neglect. The Board may take any action necessary or desirable to achieve these objectives.

Membership of the SAB, as set out in [Schedule 2 of the Care Act 2014](#), must include:

- the local authority
- a clinical commissioning group (or its successor, the ICB)
- a chief officer of police

Where a local authority area includes more than one police force or clinical commissioning group, one representative may act on behalf of multiple bodies. The SAB may also include other organisations deemed appropriate to its function, and all members should be selected for their relevant skills and experience.

Under [section 44 of the Care Act](#), the SAB must initiate a safeguarding adult review (SAR) when there is concern about how agencies worked together to safeguard an adult who either:

- has died as a result of suspected or known abuse or neglect
- is alive but has experienced serious abuse or neglect

All statutory members, including the police, must cooperate with and contribute to SARs. This will help to ensure that lessons are identified and embedded into future practice. The findings and actions from SARs should be reported annually by the SAB.

For further information, go to:

- [Care and support statutory guidance](#)

## **Multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA)**

Under [sections 325 to 327B of the Criminal Justice Act 2003](#), the police, probation and prison services must jointly act as the responsible authority in each area of England and Wales. Together, they are required to establish, coordinate and review arrangements for the assessment and management of risks posed by relevant violent and sexual offenders, as well as potentially dangerous persons. These arrangements are known as MAPPA.

The Criminal Justice Act 2003 also requires a range of other agencies to cooperate with the responsible authority in the delivery of the assessment and management of risk, to the extent that it is compatible with their statutory duties. For further details about MAPPA, go to the [MAPPA guidance](#).

[MARACs](#) are not part of the MAPPA structure but there should be links between the two systems.

There should be clear lines of communication and contact between MAPPA, public protection units, child abuse investigation units and domestic abuse specialists. Domestic abuse specialists should work with intelligence officers to provide information relating to the domestic abuse offending

background of all offenders subjected to a MAPPA process.

Domestic abuse and child abuse investigation officers should receive local training on the MAPPA process and the need to refer some domestic abuse offenders.

## **Multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASH)**

MASHs are arrangements whereby services are co-located to improve information sharing and respond more effectively to safeguarding needs. They are usually, but not always, focused on the needs of children. Some areas have separate arrangements for sharing information relating to adults, while some have joint units. Other information sharing arrangements exist in some forces under different titles but with similar objectives. The key feature is the effective sharing of information.

For further information, go to:

- [MASH guiding principles](#)

## **Multi-agency risk assessment conferences for domestic abuse (MARAC)**

MARACs are meetings where agencies share information on the highest-risk domestic abuse cases to coordinate actions that improve victim safety and manage perpetrator behaviour.

The police often chair MARAC meetings or attend as key representatives, usually at sergeant or inspector level within public protection units. Representatives must:

- have access to relevant information and authority to make decisions or allocate resources on behalf of their agency
- bring comprehensive information to support risk assessment and safety planning, including:
  - full details of victims, perpetrators and children
  - recent and relevant police involvement
  - intelligence and risk markers from PNC and PND
  - details of any licences (for example, firearms, security, taxi)
  - relevant vulnerabilities, such as language needs or disabilities

Police-led actions agreed at MARAC should focus on victim safety and perpetrator management, including but not limited to:

- diverting or disrupting the perpetrator through proactive policing activity
- reviewing or removing relevant licences
- coordinating joint visits with partner agencies to assess safeguarding needs
- progressing or reviewing criminal investigations and restraining orders
- liaising with the CPS to review or strengthen case outcomes

Forces should ensure that a MARAC flag is added to local systems for all victims subject to a MARAC. This ensures that critical risk information is available to officers during future incidents or investigations.

For further information, go to:

- [Principles of an effective MARAC](#)
- [Toolkit for police officers on the MARAC process](#)
- [Video demonstrations](#)

## Specialist domestic violence court systems (SDVCs)

SDVCs provide a coordinated, multi-agency approach to the prosecution and management of domestic abuse cases. They bring together the police, prosecutors, court staff, probation services and victim support agencies to deliver a consistent, victim-centred and effective criminal justice response.

For further information, go to:

- [SDVC programme resource manual](#)

Police forces should play an active role in the SDVC system by ensuring the following:

- Procedures are in place to accurately identify and flag cases as domestic abuse, so that they can be properly directed into the SDVC system from the outset.
- Relevant data is collected, so that the performance of the SDVC system and its component agencies can be analysed. This data includes equality data relating to both victims and perpetrators.
- Custody processes support the system by consistently bailing domestic abuse cases to SDVC lists and imposing appropriate bail conditions.

- Domestic abuse specialist officers routinely attend SDVC sessions to provide up-to-date information relevant to bail, sentencing and the availability of evidence or other matters that may assist the court. These specialists should also facilitate prompt communication with victims, particularly those not supported by an IDVA.

## Domestic homicide reviews (DHRs)

DHRs were established under [section 9 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004](#) and became a statutory requirement in 2011. A DHR is a multi-agency review carried out locally when a person aged 16 or over dies as a result of violence, abuse or neglect by:

- a person who was related to the victim, or who was or had been in an intimate personal relationship with them
- A member of the same household as the victim

The purpose of a DHR is not to assign blame but to identify lessons and improve future prevention and safeguarding responses. Reviews seek to:

- understand what happened
- assess the effectiveness of the agencies' responses
- identify what must change to reduce the risk of future domestic homicide

The police have a statutory duty to participate in DHRs, alongside local authorities.

Officers conducting individual management reviews for the force before the writing of a multi-agency DHR should consider [guidance on supporting learning from statutory reviews](#) to ensure consistency and quality.

For further information, go to:

- [Multi-agency statutory guidance for the conduct of domestic homicide reviews](#)
- [Domestic homicide reviews: Common themes identified as lessons to be learned](#)

## Domestic abuse joint justice plans (JJP)

Joint justice plans set out shared principles between the police and CPS to raise standards, improve consistency and strengthen the foundations for delivering justice for victims of domestic abuse. These plans also establish local governance arrangements and expectations for multi-

agency collaboration. Chief officers should ensure that forces:

- implement the activity required under JJPs to meet agreed standards and improve outcomes for victims
- participate in local governance through joint operational improvement meetings and inform the national Joint Operational Improvement Board
- engage with other governance structures and multi-agency partnership boards, such as local criminal justice boards and adult safeguarding boards, to strengthen domestic abuse governance and avoid duplication

## Domestic abuse scrutiny panels

Forces should establish domestic abuse scrutiny panels to provide local insights into joint handling of domestic abuse cases, including investigation, decision making, timeliness and proportionality of action plans.

## Tags

APP Domestic abuse