



Title: Improving Local Domestic Abuse Services: A Web Resource for Local Commissioners and Practitioners

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Document and resources available to download at: <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/communitysafety/nationalstudies/domesticabuseservices/pages/default.aspx> (accessed September 2011)

SCS topic headings: Personal Safety; Home Safety; Safety of Vulnerable Groups; Partnership Working; Community Engagement; Evaluation and Monitoring

This document is a REVIEW of effective intervention approaches.

Summary of the intervention's aim

Domestic abuse services are facing budget reductions, and with less funding, partnerships need clear priorities. For example, an organisation may want to focus more on using mainstream staff and resources so it will be important to show existing managers (as well as new health and police commissioners) how domestic abuse services can support mainstream statutory work and save money for partners, as well as helping victims.

This web resource can help you to do this. If you are involved in domestic abuse services either as an officer or a councillor, there should be something here for you. The links below walk you through the characteristics of a successful service and show you how to make practical changes with your partners to improve your own service.

Outcomes

The online tool includes case studies that illustrate approaches to improving domestic abuse services. It also identifies common themes of effective approaches and some of the barriers to success.

The tool helps local commissioners and practitioners evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their local services and partnerships. It uses self-assessment techniques to focus on priority issues, such as:

- shaping services around the needs of the victims and recognising their differing needs
- constructive and complementary working between different agencies
- making the best use of limited funding
- effective prevention.

The tool looks at seven areas: **joint work; victim centred approach; costs and outcomes; prevention; early identification; advice and support; and perpetrators.** Areas need to work in partnership to obtain the best outcome for victims and their families. This section looks at how effective partnerships approach the main aspects of a local service:

- preventing abuse from happening
- raising awareness, early identification and intervention
- providing advice and support for victims
- dealing with perpetrators.

There is a short introduction to each aspect of service for those who are not specialists in the area. Case studies illustrate more effective practice or actions that have helped partnerships to overcome weaknesses- 'effective' practice is summarised in four tables. These are also available as part of the self-assessment tool.

The research also informed analysis of the following aspects of domestic violence and associated services:

- Advice and support for victims: Initial information and advice; Help with safe housing; Support through prosecution and longer-term rehabilitation
- Preventing abuse: Local work on prevention; Primary: preventing abuse from happening; Secondary: Preventing repeat abuse and victimisation
- Raising awareness: Training; Multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs)
- Dealing with perpetrators: Preserving victim safety; Work with perpetrators; Other probation service work e.g. Probation and the Prison Service use a Spousal Assault Risk Assessment tool (SARA) to monitor the risk of domestic abuse.

What works locally?

Data and evidence from the research present three linked approaches by area partnerships that underpin better local outcomes for victims of domestic abuse. A review of each area highlights issues and common concerns and the short case study examples illustrate effective responses. These eleven examples can be accessed at <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/communitysafety/nationalstudies/domesticabuseservices/pages/casestudies.aspx> (accessed September 2011). The three inter-related approaches are:

- 1) An inclusive, joint agency strategy and approach. Better multi-agency partnerships have:

- senior level commitment across agencies and a shared culture, with a common understanding of domestic abuse and a shared goal of victim safety (case study 1)
- well-established and efficient partnership arrangements
- clear commissioning priorities, with victim input to strategy and operations and an understanding of the role of data for development and improvement.

Good partnerships work jointly on concerns and identify shared solutions, for example collaborative work to collect evidence and support victims in court. There may be co-location of services, for example through a Family Justice Centre model. Partners understand and use local data (see case study 2). For example, they understand historical under-reporting means awareness raising is likely to increase referrals.

2) A victim-centred approach including an understanding of diversity. Areas with a strong victim-centred approach:

- actively seek to prevent future abuse and reduce risks to victims; such a culture gives victims and front-line workers more confidence
- take a holistic view of victims and their needs, recognising that abuse affects whole families and that accessible single points of contact are important
- involve victims/survivors in developing and improving services (case study 3).

Barriers to a victim centred approach include:

- inadequate information about the local extent of domestic abuse and associated needs
- inadequate diversity of provision and support, meaning victims cannot find what they need
- a lack of dedicated workers tasked with helping victims of domestic abuse who can act as a 'go to' point for professionals and victims alike
- a criminal justice system (CJS) that can fail to support all victims.

3) An approach to value for money that considers costs and outcomes across agencies. There are barriers to achieving savings and making the most effective use of funds. However, few savings are immediately cashable and those who fund prevention may not directly benefit. This makes it essential to look across agencies to get best value. Partnerships that make better use of funding within local areas have:

- a cross partnership understanding of local costs and benefits
- clear strategic priorities, supported by needs data and budgeting and commissioning arrangements

- a balance between developing mainstream responses and using specialist services ([case study 7](#)).

There are a range of barriers inhibiting more effective use of funding. It is difficult to measure the costs of partnerships, especially of staff time. It is also hard to find measureable outcomes as opposed to outputs. Particular issues for domestic abuse services include:

- A lack of comparative costs and outcomes across services makes it difficult to compare value for money between services
- A historic reliance on short-term funding limits long-term evaluation
- Time and resources wasted chasing replacement funding.

Summary of evaluation conclusions

Each local domestic abuse partnership will have its own challenges, so the self-assessment tool (in XLS format) was designed to help identify areas for improvement in practitioners' partnerships. The self-assessment tool can be used in a variety of ways depending on requirements. For example, either independently or with colleagues, to:

1. spend approximately ten minutes filling in questions about one area of work, such as prevention. A report can then be generated which will identify areas for improvement
2. spend approximately an hour answering all the questions in the self assessment and generating reports, which can be used to develop an action plan for the partnership
3. run a workshop for members of a local partnership; begin with the slideshow [Slides \(PowerPoint, 1.5mb\)](#), then together fill in the tool, discuss the results and develop an action plan.

As an alternative to the tool, tables which contain the same information that the tool uses, are available in a checklist format. (See [All tables \(PDF, 118kb\)](#))

The evaluation gathered information for findings and conclusions including:

- a review of evidence and literature
- reports, information and comments from individuals at the Audit Commission and other inspectorates with experience of aspects of domestic abuse work; (Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission, Her Majesty's Inspectorates of Constabulary, Prisons and Probation)
- visits to eight areas to interview local practitioners involved in tackling domestic abuse
- local practitioners contributed to a focus group discussion on early findings and national organisations involved with domestic abuse work were asked for comments

- service examples given come from local field visits carried out in 2010.

Further details about the SCS evaluation of this report are available on request.
Please contact info@scsn.org.uk

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