



effective practice

Where we see our standards
delivered well, in practice.



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

AN HM INSPECTORATE OF PROBATION EFFECTIVE PRACTICE GUIDE



Effective practice guide

Working with domestic abuse

Based on: **A thematic inspection of work undertaken, and progress made, by the Probation Service to reduce the incidence of domestic abuse and protect victims**

July 2023

Acknowledgements

This effective practice guide is based on information sourced while undertaking *A thematic inspection of work undertaken, and progress made, by the Probation Service to reduce the incidence of domestic abuse and protect victims*. The inspection was led by HM Inspector Noreen Wallace, supported by a team of probation inspectors, and operations, research, communications, and corporate staff. User Voice gathered the views of people on probation, who shared valuable insights about their experiences. The manager responsible for this inspection programme is Helen Davies.

In collaboration with Tammie Burroughs, effective practice lead, Noreen Wallace has identified some of the key themes associated with effective practice when working with perpetrators of domestic abuse and victims.

We would like to thank all those who participated in any way in this inspection; without their help and cooperation, the inspection and effective practice guide would not have been possible.

Please note that throughout the report the names in the practice examples have been changed to protect the individuals' identities.

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Introduction

About this guide

HM Inspectorate of Probation has a duty to identify and disseminate effective practice.¹

We assure the quality of youth offending and probation provision and test its effectiveness. Critically, we make recommendations designed to highlight and disseminate best practice, challenge poor performance, and encourage the Probation Service to improve.

Here, we provide some guiding principles for working with domestic abuse perpetrators and victims, and highlight examples where we have seen our standards delivered well. It is designed to help managers and practitioners improve this area of their work with people on probation.

I am grateful to all the areas that participated in our thematic inspection, and for their additional help in producing this effective practice guide. We publish these guides to complement our reports and the standards against which we inspect youth offending and probation.

I hope this effective practice guide will be of interest to everyone working in prisons and probation services and seeking to improve their practice. We welcome feedback on this and our other guides, to ensure that they are as useful as possible to future readers.



Justin Russell

HM Chief Inspector of Probation



Finding your way



Tools for practitioners



HM Inspectorate of Probation
recorded interview



Useful links



External video

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We would love to hear what you think of this guide. Please find current contact details via the [HM Inspectorate of Probation Effective Practice page](#).

¹ **For adult services** – Section 7 of the *Criminal Justice and Court Services Act (2000)*, as amended by the *Offender Management Act (2007)*, section 12(3)(a). **For youth services** – inspection and reporting on youth offending teams is established under section 39 of the *Crime and Disorder Act (1998)*.

Background

Domestic abuse is widespread. The Crime Survey for England and Wales estimates that 1.7 million women and 699,000 men aged over 16 years experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2022.² SafeLives³ reports that an estimated 4.6 million women (28 per cent of the adult population) have experienced domestic abuse at some point since the age of 16.



The government's [Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan](#) states:

'This is everyone's responsibility. Let's stop domestic abuse now.'

The plan stresses the importance of collaboration and coordination between organisations to reduce the prevalence of abuse. It highlights that when organisations fail to work effectively together, opportunities to identify victims and perpetrators at the earliest possible opportunity are missed. The plan emphasises that sharing information between agencies is crucial.

² Census 2021. [Domestic Abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2022](#)

³ SafeLives is a UK-wide charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse. <https://safelives.org.uk/policy-evidence/about-domestic-abuse#facts%20and%20stats>

The [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) set out a definition of domestic abuse as follows:



Definition of domestic abuse from the Domestic Abuse Act 2021



The Act brought in important changes, including emphasising that abuse is not only physical or sexual but also includes emotional, psychological and economic abuse. The Act also expands the offence of controlling or coercive behaviour to cover post-separation abuse and the offence of disclosing private sexual photographs and films with intent to cause distress. It also covers threats to disclose such material. For the first time, a specific offence of non-fatal strangulation or suffocation of another person now exists. Importantly, the Act also recognises the harmful impact of domestic abuse on children, even when they do not directly witness acts of abuse taking place. The Act also establishes the role of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, whose role is to provide public leadership on domestic abuse issues and play a key role in overseeing and monitoring the provision of domestic abuse services in England and Wales.



[More details about the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 can be found here](#) and [accompanying statutory guidance here](#).



Specialist organisations working to end domestic abuse and develop effective ways of working with perpetrators and victims publish a range of materials to help people recognise the signs of abuse and to promote the safety of victims. These include:

- [Myths about domestic abuse - Women's Aid \(womensaid.org.uk\)](https://www.womensaid.org.uk)

- [Respect Male Victims Toolkit | Respect](#)
- [What is coercive control?: Welsh Women's Aid \(welshwomensaid.org.uk\)](#)
- [Survivor stories | SafeLives](#)



Reflection questions

- Are you confident in talking about all aspects of domestic abuse or more comfortable with some aspects than others?
- Did any of the myths about domestic abuse in the Women's Aid article surprise you?
- What opportunities do you have to identify concerns about domestic abuse when domestic abuse is not part of a person's index offences?
- How does the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 affect your work?

In 30 per cent of the cases we inspected in our core inspection programme in 2022 and 2023 (1,248), there was a concern about the individual being a perpetrator of domestic abuse. Cases with a concern about domestic abuse make up a sizeable proportion of the overall caseload in the probation service.



240,674 people are managed by the probation service



74,996 people managed by the probation service are identified as perpetrators of domestic abuse (31%)



In 2020, HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) published the Domestic Abuse Policy Framework, which sets out the arrangements for working with people whose behaviours include domestic abuse, as well as those with convictions. It confirms that identification of domestic abuse is not a one-off activity that occurs only at the point of a court report or at the start of the sentence. Throughout the sentence, all staff need to take an investigative approach. They should be vigilant and inquisitive in seeking out information from a wide range of sources to inform an ongoing assessment of whether domestic abuse features in the individual's current or previous relationships. Risk assessment requires an analysis of all available sources of information. It takes into account prior known incidents of domestic abuse, such as police call-out information, as well as convictions. Risk management plans must address all the identified risk factors and set out actions to safeguard identified individuals who are assessed to be at risk of serious harm.



[You can access the Domestic Abuse Policy Framework here.](#)

A growing body of research helps us to understand the nature of domestic abuse, the cycles of behaviour involved and the long-term harmful impact on adults and children who experience abuse. Research aims to understand how to address the underlying causes of abuse and how to support victims and survivors.

In the year ending March 2022, there were 134 domestic homicides across England and Wales.⁴ In the 2020 to 2021 financial year, HMPPS received 12⁵ serious further offence (SFO) notifications that identified potential domestic homicides committed by people on probation. Professor Jane Monckton-Smith studied 372 domestic homicides and identified an eight-stage pattern in the majority of the killings (Monckton-Smith, 2021). Professor Monckton-Smith points to the significance of controlling behaviour as a key indicator of the potential to kill. Professor Monckton-Smith also wanted to dispel the 'crime of passion' myth, which encourages us to believe that people kill their lovers or spouses in spontaneous fits of jealousy or rage. She states that it is only once we move past the idea that these murders are 'spontaneous' that we can start to challenge the idea that they are unpredictable. In fact, intimate partner homicide is one of the most predictable forms of homicide.

⁴ [Homicide in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk/homicide)

⁵ This figure was received from HMPPS with the caveats that:

Figures are based on conviction data that was produced on 30 September 2022.

Data are based on the year the notification of the SFO was received by HMPPS and not the date of conviction. These figures were drawn from an administrative IT system which, as with some large-scale recording systems, is subject to possible errors with data entry and processing.

There may be some cases that were not identified as being a domestic homicide because information about the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim was limited.

The timeline is included below with the kind permission of Professor Monckton-Smith.



The video below shows Professor Monckton-Smith explaining the timeline.



[Video \(YouTube, 3.26\): Homicide Timeline – The 8 Stages \(University of Gloucestershire\)](#)



Reflection questions

Questions for managers:

- How do you support your team to keep up with policies and approaches to working with domestic abuse?
- What opportunities do you have to encourage practitioners to consider the nature of abuse and identify signs of abuse at the earliest opportunity?

We define effective practice as:



"Where we see our standards delivered well in practice, with our standards being based on established models and frameworks, and grounded in evidence, learning and experience."

The examples in this guide are drawn from evidence of effective practice identified while undertaking fieldwork in East Lancashire, Surrey, Croydon, Cardiff and the Vale, Hereford, Shropshire and Telford, and Oxfordshire.

Our standards expect that:



Our standards: what we looked for and our expectations

For our thematic inspection, we inspected against the following standards, which were drawn from our core inspection programme and tailored to the topic of domestic abuse.



Organisational delivery

In relation to leadership, we expect that:

Leadership supports and promotes the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all perpetrators and victims of domestic abuse.

This includes the following expectations:

- Strategic decision-making enables and enhances effective practice.
- Structures and operating models support effective practice.
- Appropriate information-sharing arrangements are in place with all relevant agencies to inform domestic abuse work.

- Plans for monitoring, assurance, and evaluation of interventions provide sufficient oversight.

In relation to staff, we expect that:

Staff within the Probation Service are empowered to deliver a high-quality service for all perpetrators and victims of domestic abuse.

This includes the following expectations:

- Staffing and workload levels support the delivery of a high-quality domestic abuse service.
- Domestic abuse cases are managed by practitioners with the right level of knowledge and skill.
- Practitioners are provided with the right guidance, development, support and oversight to ably manage domestic abuse cases.

In relation to services and interventions, we expect that:

A comprehensive range of services and interventions are in place to undertake work with domestic abuse cases.

This includes the following expectations:

- The Probation Service undertakes sufficient analysis to identify and provide an appropriate range of interventions.
- The Probation Service provides the volume, range and quality of services to meet the identified need.
- Appropriate interventions are available to cater for the diverse needs of service users.
- Domestic abuse interventions are sufficiently aligned with the current evidence base.
- Appropriate quality assurance measures are in place for all domestic abuse interventions.

In relation to partnerships, we expect that:

Arrangements with statutory partners, providers and other agencies are established, maintained, and used effectively to deliver high-quality services.

This includes the following expectations:

- The Probation Service participates in strategic partnership initiatives, arrangements and policies relating to domestic abuse.
- The Probation Service contributes effectively to multi-agency arrangements, for example multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC)/multi-agency tasking and coordination (MATAC), and child protection conferences.
- Practitioners work effectively with other agencies to protect and support victims and aid the desistance of perpetrators.
- Information about domestic abuse is gathered and shared with all relevant agencies, including the police and children's social care services, in a timely way, at appropriate points of assessment, sentence delivery and review.

Case management

In relation to case management, when working with domestic abuse, we expect that:

Practitioners support desistance from domestic abuse behaviour.

This includes the following expectations:

- Practitioners sufficiently engage the person on probation at each stage of a case.
- Assessment, planning and reviews are good enough to support the delivery of good-quality, personalised, well-coordinated interventions.
- Service users participate in, and complete, appropriate and timely interventions.
- Practitioners give sufficient attention to preparing service users for interventions and managing their progress and compliance throughout the sentence.

Victims and children are supported and protected.

This includes the following expectations:

- There is appropriate information exchange, where required, with victims or their advocates at all relevant stages in the case.
- Victims' needs are given sufficient priority at a strategy and practice level.
- Practitioners monitor non-harassment, restraining and other orders, as appropriate.
- Practitioners use disclosure appropriately, and have a good understanding of the domestic violence disclosure scheme (DVDS, often referred to as Claire's Law).



Reflection questions

Questions for leaders:

- How would you assess your area's arrangements against these standards?
- What existing opportunities are there to test your assessment?
- How would key stakeholders, such as staff, partner organisations, people on probation or victims, assess your area's delivery against these standards?

Learning from people on probation



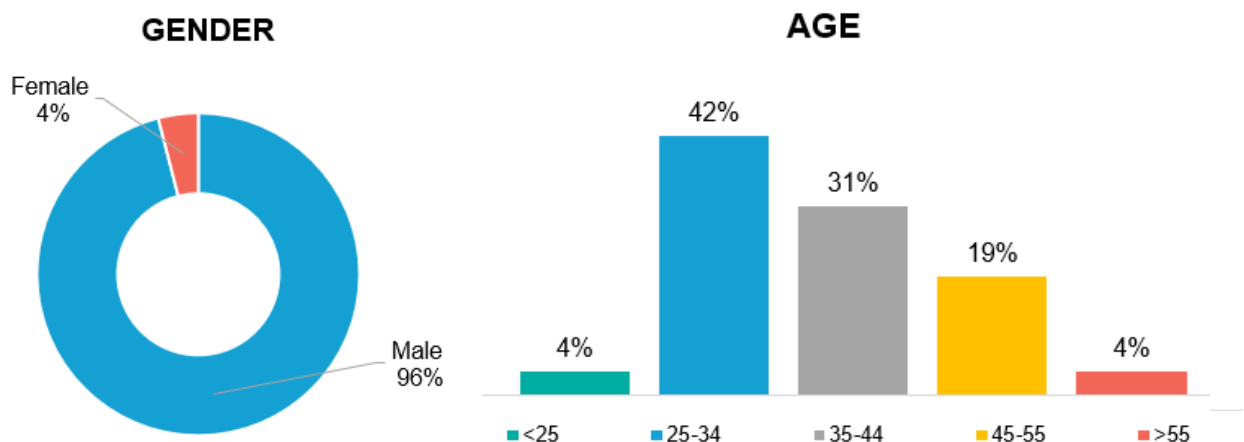
We commissioned User Voice to gather the views of people on probation as part of the domestic abuse thematic inspection. We are grateful for the insights of these individuals, whose feedback we used to inform our findings for the thematic inspection.

User Voice's overall objective was to better understand how the Probation Service was supporting perpetrators of domestic abuse, and how or if the service met their needs. To do this, User Voice sought to:

- understand the experience of people on probation and what support they have (or haven't) had, both in general and in relation to their offence
- understand the effectiveness of intervention programmes in reducing reoffending and helping rehabilitate participants
- collate people on probation's views on what probation needs to do to better help perpetrators of domestic abuse
- highlight any good practice that the service could build on.

55 PEOPLE HAD THEIR SAY:

ALL PARTICIPANTS TOOK PART VIA REMOTE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS



KEY FINDINGS



[The full User Voice report can be accessed here](#)



Reflection questions

Reflecting on this section:

Questions for leaders:

- How are people on probation involved in the design of services in your local area?
- Are there opportunities for you to consult with people on probation, or to co-design services with them?

Organisational delivery

Organisational arrangements set the tone and expectations for the delivery of domestic abuse work. As the government's Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan highlights, collaboration and coordination between organisations to share information is crucial to domestic abuse work to protect victims and ensure accurate assessments of perpetrators are made. Given the high proportion of domestic abuse cases in the probation service caseload, we expect domestic abuse to have a high profile in strategic decision-making. Arrangements should be in place to ensure the quality of domestic abuse work is understood and evaluated, and that steps are taken to improve it where necessary.



Strong leadership

During our inspection we came across different approaches to leading domestic abuse work within regions. Some have dedicated forums for domestic abuse, which are attended by designated probation delivery unit (PDU) leads for domestic abuse. Other regions consider domestic abuse as part of the regional senior leadership team forum, and cascade information about the approach to domestic abuse work through heads of PDU to senior probation officers. Two different examples are provided below.

Example of effectiveness: Strategic approach to domestic abuse, Wales Probation Service

As part of its commitment to ensuring that perpetrators of domestic abuse are managed robustly, the Probation Service in Wales established a Domestic Abuse Board in January 2022. The board's terms of reference state that each probation department across Wales has an operational responsibility to develop systems and processes to address domestic abuse, reduce reoffending, and protect victims. The board is a vehicle for ensuring that the Domestic Abuse Strategy is delivered using the Wales Domestic Abuse Action Plan to manage activity between all departments involved in this area of work. In addition, the board aims to consider all communications from the National Domestic Abuse Reference Group (NDARG) and relating to the Welsh Government blueprint on violence against women, domestic abuse and serious violence (VAWDASV). The terms of reference also state that the board will:

- review and seek assurances from PDUs on the implementation of the Domestic Abuse Policy Framework, and set/review activities and audits
- review findings from SFO reviews, inspections, operational and system assurance groups and domestic homicide reviews to identify good practice and identified need for learning

- commission working groups/activities to take learning forward and develop appropriate delivery mechanisms/reporting through alternative groups, such as best practice learning groups
- signpost practitioners to, and develop, toolkits for working with perpetrators of domestic violence
- share key lessons from the meeting on a quarterly basis to develop our workforce
- seek commissioning opportunities to address any gaps identified through the key lessons learned
- monitor emerging trends in relation to domestic abuse to help support the interventions work
- commission audit work to assess operational effectiveness and to set up activities arising from findings.

The impact of this approach is that there is one forum where all aspects of domestic abuse are considered. Representatives from operational teams, learning and development, and quality and performance work together to ensure a joined-up approach across probation to addressing domestic abuse and sharing information with frontline staff.

[You can find out more about the Wales VAWDASV blueprint here](#)

[Further information about the Wales VAWDASV strategy is available here](#)

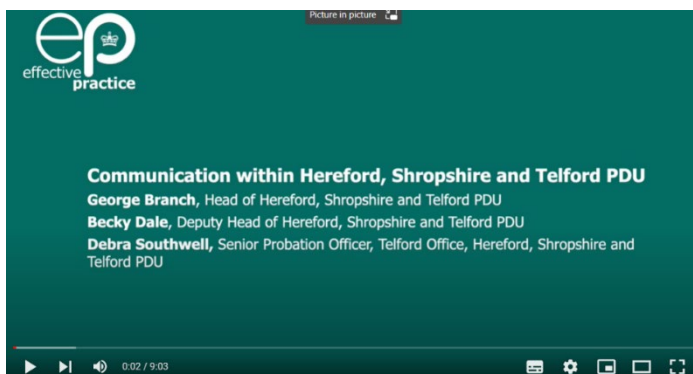


Example of effectiveness: Strong governance and effective information-sharing, Hereford, Shropshire and Telford PDU, West Midlands Probation Region

In Hereford, Shropshire and Telford PDU, we found that practitioners were well informed about domestic abuse, and an effective system was in place to ensure information was shared with and understood by staff. Information from the NDARG or other national or regional sources is collated by the PDU head, rather than via a specialist domestic abuse forum, and shared with the middle manager group, who in turn disseminate information to staff through briefings and meetings. Each office in the PDU determines the meeting structure that works best for them, through consultation between managers and staff. The PDU uses performance meetings to ensure that communication has been effective and that messages have landed. Information is also shared from multi-agency audits that take place on specific topics, such as domestic abuse or child safeguarding.



We spoke to George Branch, PDU head, Becky Dale, deputy PDU head and Debra Southwell, senior probation officer, to find out more about how their approach works. [Video \(YouTube, 09:03\): Communication within Hereford, Shropshire and Telford PDU \(HM Inspectorate of Probation\)](#)



Learning

Practice around domestic abuse is constantly developing, and it is important that probation practitioners have opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge about probation practice as well as learning about the work of other agencies and how to work together effectively to tackle domestic abuse.

Example of effectiveness: Cardiff

In Cardiff we found a number of activities aimed at sharing learning and developing an understanding of domestic abuse among the staff group. Some examples are provided below.

Effective QDO activity: Quality development officers (QDOs) were supporting the learning and development of practitioner staff in Cardiff by delivering sessions jointly with programme facilitators to build confidence in using the practitioner toolkits. Probation practitioners are not always experienced in delivering interventions, and with heavy workloads some had struggled to find time to explore and understand the Skills for Relationship toolkit. The jointly run sessions provided a refresher on topics such as how to work towards a therapeutic alliance, the cycle of change and motivational interviewing. The sessions then introduced the toolkit materials and offered practitioners an opportunity to practise delivering them. Probation practitioners who had attended the sessions told us they valued this input and were more confident about delivering the materials as a result of attending.

Effective engagement with specialist services: Staff in Cardiff had also received briefings from various organisations involved in delivering domestic abuse services. Each organisation presented who they are and what they do to raise awareness of specialist services and the interventions they provide. This type of awareness-raising is essential to support practitioners' knowledge of services that can help people on probation to address domestic abuse. It also provides sources of support and expert information for practitioners.



Respect



change that lasts



In addition, a small number of probation staff had attended training programmes created by Welsh Women's Aid: Change That Lasts and Trusted Professional. An overview of the Trusted Professional training is shown below:

Trusted Professional

A two-day training course for professionals working with survivors and/or perpetrators, who would like to increase their knowledge and skills to be better able to recognise the signs of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, respond appropriately to disclosures and refer survivors and perpetrators to specialist support services.



Aims

To improve professionals' ability and confidence to **recognise** and **respond** to violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence and to **raise awareness of the specialist services available** to refer survivors and perpetrators.

Objectives

- *Recognise the signs and symptoms of violence and abuse*
- *Understand needs-led, strengths-based, trauma-informed work, and how to apply it to your own role and area of work*
- *Know how to make referrals to specialist services and what services are available in your area, for survivors, their children, and perpetrators*
- *Confidently ask questions that work, and take appropriate action*
- *Demonstrate knowledge around data protection and the duty of confidentiality*
- *Be aware of potential risks*
- *Understand how to respond appropriately to disclosures*
- *Understand how to safely engage with survivors and perpetrators*

Feedback from probation staff who had attended the course indicated that it was valuable in helping them to understand the work of other agencies who specialise in domestic abuse work, and increased their understanding of the range of ways that abuse is perpetrated.

Example of effectiveness: Reflective practice sessions, Hereford, Shropshire and Telford PDU

Practitioners spoke about the benefits of the positive support they receive through mentors, regular team meetings, informative briefings about recent practice developments or changes, and particularly through reflective supervision. Supervision meetings between practitioners and their managers can have many purposes and can be conducted in a range of ways. Many practitioners told us that good supervision improves their skills and ability to continue delivering difficult and challenging work that can take its toll on their emotional wellbeing.

Staff described supervision that blended opportunities for reflection, skills development, support and action-setting.



We spoke to Dan Jones, senior probation officer, and Jenna Powis, a newly qualified probation officer, about their supervision sessions and the benefits of reflective practice. [Video \(YouTube, 14:22\): Reflective Supervision in Telford, Shropshire and Hereford PDU \(HM Inspectorate of Probation\)](#)



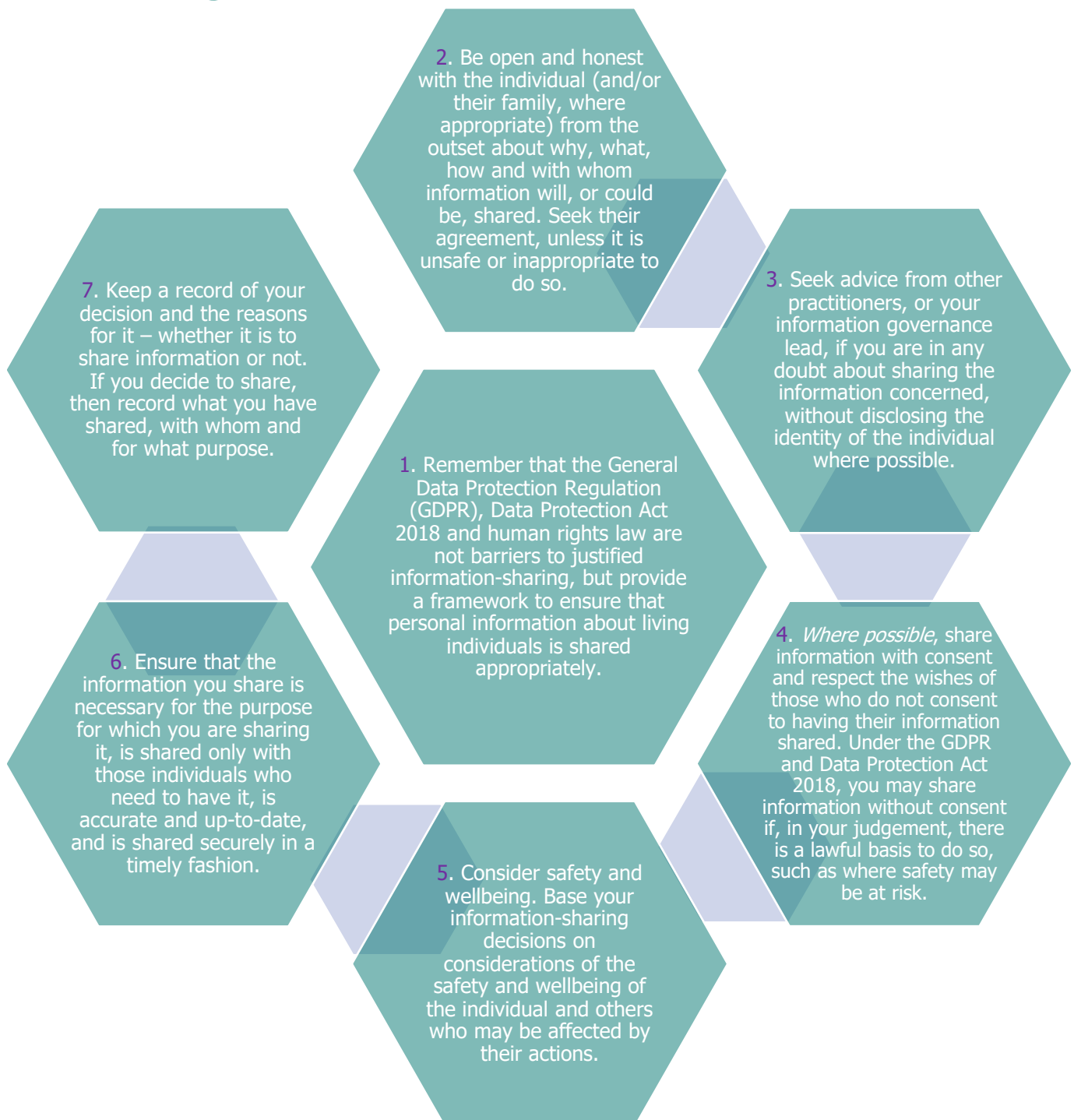
Information-sharing

'Research and various high-profile reports following the commission of serious offences have shown that decisions around risk are often made without using all available information. These reports indicate that risk management decisions would and should be enhanced if information from other sources is made available.'

Information-sharing agreement between the National Police Chiefs' Council and HMPPS on behalf of the Ministry of Justice 2022

To make an accurate assessment of the risks posed by an individual, a probation practitioner needs to draw on as many sources as possible to understand the person's behaviours. Information may be held by the police, prisons, children's social care services, housing, health and a range of other agencies and organisations that could and should inform a probation assessment. Recent high-profile independent SFO reviews, including those of Joseph McCann (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2020), Damien Bendall (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2023a), and Jordan McSweeney (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2023b), have repeatedly highlighted the importance of information being shared between agencies.

Seven golden rules of information-sharing



During this thematic inspection, we identified some examples of effective information-sharing arrangements, which we have detailed below.

Example of effectiveness: Effective police domestic abuse enquiries, Hereford, Shropshire and Telford PDU

In Hereford, Shropshire and Telford PDU, we found good-quality, detailed responses to domestic abuse enquiries that provided probation practitioners with the level of detail they needed to complete robust assessments of people on probation. Staff told us that responses to requests are timely and of a consistent standard that provides important details about any domestic abuse incidents that police have recorded. Responses routinely include details of anyone involved in the incident and whether they were thought to be the perpetrator or victim of domestic abuse. Key information about the circumstances are also included, for example if there was evidence of drug or alcohol use, mental health issues or anyone else present. Crucially, the information provided includes any actions taken.



We spoke to Ross Jones, Detective Chief Inspector, West Mercia Police, Jessica Longland, probation officer and Jessica Wilson, senior probation officer, to hear more about the importance of good-quality information-sharing and how this has been achieved in their area. [Video \(YouTube, 09:41\): Information Sharing between West Mercia Police and Hereford, Shropshire and Telford PDU \(HM Inspectorate of Probation\)](#)



Example of effectiveness: Reportable incidents, Wales Probation Service

The probation service and the police forces in Wales have an agreed semi-automated reportable incidents process for exchanging data on probation caseloads and police incidents. The aim is to ensure that the police force is notified of all people who are under the statutory supervision of the Probation Service in Wales, and that information on any individuals who are involved in a reportable incident is transferred from the police to the Probation Service. Reportable incidents include arrests and incidents that do not result in an arrest. This model supports the proactive sharing of information and intelligence. It aims to ensure that probation staff know relevant risk information and can take appropriate actions to manage that risk. Case administrators receive information and transfer it on to the probation case management system. Probation practitioners are then expected to take action concerning the incident, in consultation with their managers, and record decisions resulting from it. During our domestic abuse thematic inspection, we found that, in the majority of cases, where there had been further domestic abuse or other incidents involving a person on probation, the probation practitioner knew about what had happened and had responded to the new information.



Reflection questions

Reflecting on this section:

Questions for leaders

- How effective are arrangements for information-sharing in your area?
- Do responses to domestic abuse enquiries provide sufficient detail to enable probation practitioners and managers to complete robust assessments in a timely way?

Partnerships: the importance of multi-agency work

The government's Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan identifies a need for greater collaboration and coordination between and within organisations because:

'Research has shown this is crucial to reducing the prevalence of domestic abuse. When organisations do not collaborate and coordinate internally and externally, opportunities are missed to identify victims and survivors and perpetrators sooner. This also helps to curtail abuse. Plus, sharing crucial information about victims and survivors can help tailor and improve the support they receive.'

This message is reinforced via the HMMPS Domestic Abuse Policy Framework,⁶ which states:

'Where domestic abuse is a feature of current or previous behaviour, seek information from key agencies such as the police, children's services, and any other partnership agencies in contact with and relevant to the individual and victim, where the information is not already known.'



Arrangements with statutory partners, providers and other agencies are established, maintained, and used effectively to deliver high-quality services.

Example of effectiveness: MAPPA category 3

For individuals who do not meet the criteria for category 1 or category 2, but who have committed an offence indicating that they are capable of causing serious harm and require multi-agency management at level 2 or 3, a referral can be made for category 3.

This category is for those who do not meet the criteria for either category 1 or category 2 but who have committed an offence indicating that they are capable of causing serious harm and who require multi-agency management at level 2 or 3. The offence does not have to be one specified in schedule 15 of the *Criminal Justice Act 2003* and may have been committed abroad. It is also important to consider whether the pattern of offending behaviour indicates serious harm (e.g. domestic abuse or gang-related violence) or an escalation in the risk of serious harm (e.g. deterioration in mental health or escalation in alcohol misuse) that was not reflected in the charge on which they were convicted. In these circumstances, the individual should also be considered for category 3. Therefore, where appropriate, this should be considered for cases where there is evidence of serial domestic abuse or concerns about heightened risk factors.

⁶ [HM Prison and Probation Service. Domestic abuse policy framework.](#)

The benefits of this can be seen in the case below. Inspectors noted:

"After a thorough pre-sentence assessment, this case was referred promptly to MAPPA level 2, category 3. The report writer ensured that the allocated probation practitioner was aware of the concerns and swift action was taken to convene a MAPPA meeting and ensure all relevant agencies were involved in pre-release planning."



Case illustration⁷

Nathan received a 14-month prison sentence for controlling or coercive behaviour (against his mother) and possession of an offensive weapon. The pre-sentence report addendum was informed by a psychological report and highlighted a range of needs. As a result, Nathan's case was referred to multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) level 2 soon after the sentence, and a pre-release level 2 meeting was held to consider his risks, particularly the risk of non-compliance on release.

The MAPPA level 2 meeting concluded that a referral to the offender personality disorder pathway was appropriate, due to Nathan's diagnosis of personality disorder. A formulation was completed, which provided professionals with ways to work with Nathan, informed by insight into his diagnosis. In addition, he was also referred to approved premises. The chair of the MAPPA meeting took steps to ensure that the prison-based mental health In-Reach team provided information that had not been forthcoming.

The prison-based resettlement officer evidenced good partnership work with housing workers and substance misuse agencies. In addition, work was completed with Nathan while he was still in prison, to address his problematic relationships.

On release, when Nathan disengaged from supervision or it appeared that risk factors were increasing, there was a timely and robust response, including unplanned home visits, police checks and welfare visits. In addition, the probation practitioner contacted the victim liaison officer to identify any concerns at various points, as risks emerged and when a reduction in risk level was being considered.

All relevant risk-related information was added to ViSOR by the police and probation, which provided clear records.

⁷ Taken from the [Effective practice guide: MAPPA \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/mappa/).

Example of effectiveness: Children's social care

The example below demonstrates the impact of an effective relationship with children's social care, where information shared in a timely way had helped to keep a child safe.



Case illustration

Harry was a 28-year-old male sentenced to a 24-month community order with rehabilitation activity requirement days and a requirement to complete the Building Better Relationships programme for an offence of criminal damage linked to domestic abuse.

The probation practitioner was open and transparent in their approach to working with Harry, so he understood their responsibilities and how information about him would be shared with other organisations. Harry responded well to this approach, and they developed an effective working relationship. As a result, Harry took part in planning his sentence and took ownership of his actions.

During his regular appointments, Harry shared information about himself and his life in the full knowledge that relevant information would be shared with other agencies. The probation practitioner made appropriate enquiries with children's social care and the police at points when Harry disclosed changes in his relationship. When Harry disclosed that his partner was pregnant, the probation practitioner proactively shared information and concerns and informed children's social care. The allocated social worker worked closely with the nominated midwife to put a plan in place for the pregnancy and child's birth that kept everyone safe.

The practitioner continued to liaise with children's social care services throughout Harry's supervision, and it was clear that joint reviewing activity took place. In addition, both agencies shared information from home visits, to keep each other up to date.

There was ongoing reviewing at each appointment to establish what had changed and whether any aspect of planning needed to be updated.

The probation practitioner set clear boundaries from the outset of supervision and made Harry aware of how they would work with other agencies. The effective working relationship between Harry and his probation practitioner allowed him to be honest about his life and accept that information would be shared with other agencies. The information he provided was shared in a timely way and allowed children's social care services to put measures in place to protect his unborn child.

Example of effectiveness: Changing Futures – Lancashire

The Changing Futures programme is a joint initiative by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and the National Lottery Community Fund. The project aims to:



- stabilise and then improve the life situation of adults who face multiple disadvantage
- transform local services to provide a person-centred approach and reduce crisis demand
- test a different approach to funding, accountability and engagement between local commissioners and services, and between central government and local areas.

In Lancashire, the Changing Futures model has been co-produced with people who have lived experience of multiple disadvantages. To access the project, people must be over 18 and have three of the five complexities, which are:

- homelessness
- substance misuse
- mental health issues
- domestic abuse
- known to the criminal justice system (currently or in the past).

We heard from probation practitioners in East Lancashire that referring people into the Changing Futures project had multiple benefits, including better compliance with the probation service and meaningful support with practical needs such as housing, health and finances. Stabilising any of these aspects of life can have a positive impact on an individual, and may in turn support desistance from domestic abuse. For example, gaining stable accommodation may prevent the individual from trying to move in with a partner or increase the chances of them engaging with a domestic abuse intervention. The project demonstrated an example of effective practice under our standard, which expects that:

- arrangements with partners, providers and other agencies are established, maintained, and used effectively to deliver high-quality services
- practitioners work effectively with other agencies to protect and support victims and aid the desistance of perpetrators.

A case study is included below, which demonstrates how engagement with the programme supported an individual's compliance with the probation service and helped him to find stable accommodation and access other support services.

"He is regularly engaging with all the services who became involved in helping him change his life. Probation have played an integral part in his initial, and ongoing engagement with all relevant services"



[Access the full case study here](#)



An informative video explaining the approach to Changing Futures in Lancashire can be found here: [Video \(YouTube, 12:00\): Changing Futures Lancashire \(This IsTAE\)](#)



The Changing Futures Project in Lancashire have recorded podcasts with beneficiaries and staff involved in delivering the project which can be found here. <https://open.spotify.com/episode/00JgtVHbF31icvcmN4s3rr>



[Further information about the Lancashire Changing Futures model can be found here](#)



More information about the Changing Futures project can be found [on the GOV.UK website](#)

Example of effectiveness: Drive, Cardiff

Drive was developed in 2015 by Respect,⁸ SafeLives⁹ and Social Finance,¹⁰ who together formed the Drive Partnership. The partnership identified a serious gap in national systems, and came together with a shared ambition to change the way statutory and voluntary agencies respond to high-harm, high-risk perpetrators of domestic abuse.

WE NEED TO STOP ASKING “WHY DOESN’T SHE LEAVE?” AND START ASKING “WHY DOESN’T HE STOP”

Drive believes domestic abuse is not acceptable or inevitable. Drive works with high-harm, high-risk and serial perpetrators of domestic abuse to prevent their abusive behaviour and protect victims.

The Drive Project challenges and supports perpetrators to change and works with partner agencies, including the police, the Probation Service and social services, to disrupt abuse. Its aims are to:

- reduce the number of repeat and new victims of domestic abuse
- reduce the harm caused to adult and child victims of domestic abuse
- reduce the number of serial perpetrators of domestic abuse
- intervene earlier to protect families living with domestic abuse.

The Drive Partnership has an additional aim to help build systems that enable these things to happen beyond Drive sites, across England and Wales.

In each delivery site, Drive forms partnerships with local specialist domestic abuse organisations to design and deliver a programme tailored to the local area. This work is done in partnership with statutory agencies such as the police, public health, and children’s social care.

The intervention incorporates:

- intensive one-to-one work and case management – the Drive case manager works with the perpetrator to challenge them and to support changes in attitudes, beliefs and behaviour; this often also requires addressing additional needs that stand in the way of the change process, such as mental health, substance misuse and housing needs
- a coordinated multi-agency response that disrupts opportunities for perpetrators to continue their abuse, and identifies and reduces risk
- support for the victim/survivor from an independent domestic violence adviser, to ensure joined-up working and safety.

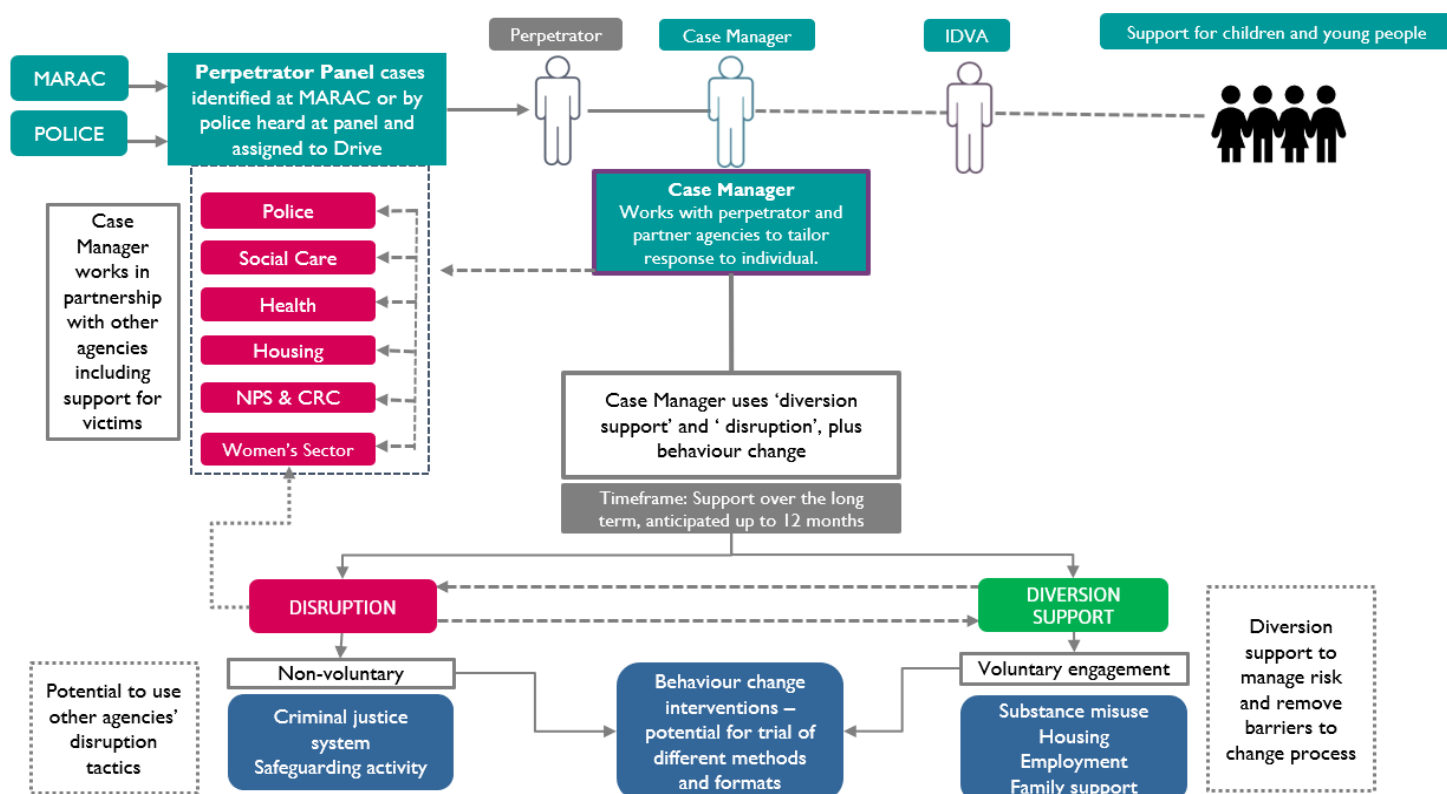
⁸ <https://www.respect.uk.net/>

⁹ <https://safelives.org.uk/>

¹⁰ <https://www.socialfinance.org.uk/>

The Drive Project does not require the direct engagement of perpetrators. Where perpetrators refuse to engage, Drive is still able to reduce risk. The combination of one-to-one interventions alongside a police-led multi-agency response, together with the three-pronged approach of disrupt, change, support, is what makes Drive different from other interventions.

The Drive model



In Wales, the project initially began in Cwm Taff. It was implemented successfully, and the Police and Crime Commissioner commissioned the project to expand into Cardiff and the Vale area. As this also proved successful, Drive now operates across the whole of the South Wales police force area and has recently started to provide a service in HMP Swansea. In Cardiff, the Drive team is co-located in the police station, which provides important and immediate opportunities for information- and intelligence-sharing. Staff from the Probation Service WISDOM team are also located in the same office, which offers further opportunities for joint working.

Drive has been evaluated with positive results.



- [The executive summary of the evaluation of the Drive project can be found here.](#)
- [You can read full report here.](#)

DRIVE >

is making a difference

The University of Bristol's independent three-year evaluation findings, based on the analysis of over 500 cases, are telling us:

✓ Reduction of abuse

There is a **substantial reduction in the use of abuse**. The number of perpetrators using high levels of abuse reduced as follows:

- > physical abuse reduced by 82%;
- > sexual abuse reduced by 88%;
- > harassment and stalking behaviours reduced by 75%;
- > jealous and controlling behaviours reduced by 73%.

✓ Reduction of risk

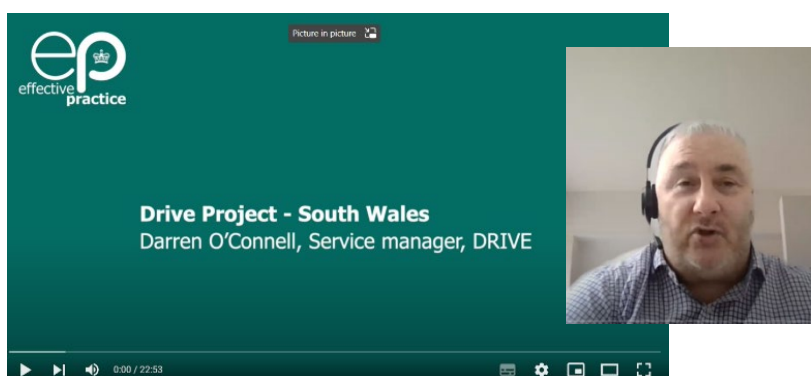
- > For the duration of the intervention, IDVAs reported the risk to the victim reduced in 82% of cases

Drive reduces abuse.

The number of Drive service users perpetrating abuse types reduced significantly:



DRIVE >



In this recording, Darren O'Connell, service manager for Drive explains what Drive is, how it works and how they measure outcomes. Please access the recording here: [Video \(YouTube, 22.54\): Drive Project – South Wales \(HM Inspectorate of Probation\).](#)

A Drive case manager described joint work with probation in the case of C:

"I had a close working relationship with probation throughout the case. C had a negative experience of professionals coming and going throughout his life. Had he not been introduced via his probation practitioner (whom he respected and trusted), it was unlikely he would have

engaged with Drive. As C progressed through his licence, his practitioner and I were able to alternate weeks that we saw C, so he was having contact with at least one of us once a week. Whilst working with probation, we conducted home visits and shared ideas and resources to address C's various support needs. For example, I supported C in contacting his mental health service, setting up a bank account, assessing a Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) payment and completing the BOSS project (Building Opportunities, Skills and Success) referral. The probation practitioner supported C with a college application and liaising with housing, providing supportive information to ensure C was not made homeless. Information around risk was continuously shared to support risk management. For example, information shared with me by C and information I'd gained from an IDVA was passed on to the practitioner, who was able to update C's licence conditions and exclusion zones as a result."



[A further case study from Drive is available here.](#) It describes a situation where the individual did not engage with Drive or probation but shows the benefits of the project remaining involved.



For more information on Drive, please visit their website: [Drive Project](#)

Example of effectiveness: Wales Integrated Serious and Dangerous Offender Management (WISDOM)



The WISDOM project is part of the Integrated Offender Management (IOM) scheme in Wales. It was developed in response to individuals posing a high risk of harm to the public being identified as a priority group in the Wales Reducing Reoffending Strategy 2014-2016. The focus on this group reflects the impact their offending can have on victims and communities. WISDOM is part of an approach of partnerships working with priority groups in response to the 'Framework to support positive change for those at risk of offending in Wales 2018-2023' who may also pose a high risk of serious harm to the public.

The aim of WISDOM is to better protect the public by preventing serious crime. It seeks to reduce reoffending and the risk of serious harm through a multi-agency team comprising the police, Probation Service, forensic psychological services and other local partners working together to improve public protection arrangements. Through the combined efforts of partners, WISDOM seeks to improve the identification, assessment and day-to-day management of offenders who cause serious harm. The design of the programme is intended to complement MAPPA and act as a support for MAPPA in the day-to-day management of offenders.

Types of offenders who fall within the WISDOM definition of 'high risk of causing serious harm' include, among other dangerous priority groups:

- sexual and violent offenders
- priority domestic abuse perpetrators
- individuals engaged in serious and organised crime
- high-risk foreign nationals.

Probation practitioners in the WISDOM team typically have a lower caseload than other probation practitioners, in recognition of the complexity of the cases they manage. They are co-located with police colleagues and other services that work with the same cohort of people on probation. The WISDOM team draws heavily on advice and support from HMPPS psychological services to understand and work with complex cases. Case formulations are shared with partners to allow all agencies to take a consistent approach with each individual.

The case below gives an example of the work of the WISDOM team and demonstrates the benefits of this multi-agency approach to working with complex individuals.



Case illustration:

Ed was a 25-year-old male sentenced to 13 weeks' imprisonment for breach of a community order and sending malicious communications to his ex-partner. The original community order was in place following a common assault on his mother. She described Ed as having been abusive towards her previously on many occasions. Records indicated that Ed had abused eight victims over six years. Due to Ed's repeated and serious domestic abuse, he was managed by the WISDOM team. Despite the short sentence, there was a high level of pre-release contact through visits, video link and the Email a Prisoner scheme. The probation practitioner was transparent and open about how they would work with him and what was expected.

The practitioner completed a detailed assessment, liaising extensively with other agencies to gather information. They undertook research to obtain records from all relevant agencies, including details of previous restraining orders that had been made against Ed. Licence conditions were added to mirror the restrictions in place through the existing restraining order, alongside rehabilitative requirements, to address his domestic abuse through interventions and other support needs. The practitioner took action in response to identified concerns, including putting measures in place to protect partners and children through MARAC referrals, and requesting DVDS/Clare's Law disclosures and children's social care referrals. Ed was referred to MAPPA level 2 under category 3, due to the number of agencies involved and the case's complexity. The practitioner coordinated all agencies and ensured they were notified of relevant information to manage existing risks.

Concerns arose about Ed's existing and new relationships, following his release from custody. The practitioner again ensured MARAC and children's social care referrals were completed concerning any new potential victims, and considered Clare's Law disclosures. Responses were prompt and well-coordinated on each occasion.

The management of these cases demonstrated a significant amount of work done quickly to understand the risks Ed posed and ensure measures were in place to protect existing and potential victims.



Reflection questions

Reflecting on this section:

Questions for practitioners

- How familiar are you with the specialist organisations that work with domestic abuse in your PDU?
- Considering your caseload, do you think there is additional support that people on probation could be getting to support with domestic abuse needs?
- When managing serial perpetrators of domestic abuse do you consider MAPPA category 3?

Case management: victim safety and support

The HMPPS Domestic Abuse Policy Framework states:

"Protecting the public and preventing further harm to current and future victims is a primary purpose of case management. Victim safety in the context of domestic abuse covers both past victims and identified adults or children at risk of becoming victims in the future. Working together with local agencies, domestic abuse services and specialist services is the most effective way of achieving the safety of partners, an ex-partner's family members and children affected by domestic abuse."



Importantly, this recognises that, when considering victims, practitioners need to go beyond those affected by the individual's index offence and include people who have previously been victims and those who could potentially become victims in the future. Domestic abuse is complicated, and some people may have been identified as both perpetrator and victim of abuse during their lives. In order to work effectively, practitioners need to have a sound understanding of broad nature of domestic abuse, including the topics outlined below.



What is a relationship?

To enable meaningful conversations with people on probation about relationships, we need to be clear about what we mean. Relationships can change quickly; people sometimes return to previous relationships or start new relationships that can progress rapidly. Some relationships can be conducted entirely online, but this does not mean there are no risks, as coercive control and other types of abuse could still occur. Some people have multiple sexual partners and may not consider that they are in a relationship; however, the situation may still present a risk of harm. It is essential to think about the perspectives of both people involved and whether they would view themselves as being in a relationship; for example, one person may believe themselves to be in a relationship, and this may be the mechanism through which the other party exploits them into other harmful or criminal behaviours. While most reported domestic abuse occurs within the context of intimate relationships, abuse also occurs in familial relationships. Therefore, when making assessments, it is vital to consider the whole range of relationships a person on probation has or seeks to have. Professional curiosity and liaison with other organisations are essential to gain a complete picture.



Who are victims of domestic abuse?

When working with domestic abuse, it is essential not to make assumptions about who may be a victim. There are multiple reasons why people remain in abusive relationships; therefore, being in a long-term established relationship does not mean it is not abusive. Domestic abuse is often a hidden offence. It is the responsibility of all professionals to take opportunities to identify abuse and take action to minimise the risks of further harm. Signs of abuse are varied, and often there will be no signs of physical abuse. Therefore, it is vital to become familiar with all types of abuse and be vigilant.



There are multiple resources available to learn more about domestic abuse. Some links are included below.

- [Who are victims of domestic abuse?](#)
- [Why people stay in an abusive relationship | The Hotline](#)



- [Recognising domestic abuse](#)
- [I'm worried about someone else](#)

Meaningfully involving the voice of the victim

Probation practitioners will not usually have direct contact with the victim or potential victims of the person on probation they are working with. However, there may be times when this does happen, for example when carrying out home visits or if the victim makes contact. Contact with victims is usually undertaken as a separate activity from working with perpetrators. This is for good reasons, including confidentiality and the safety and wellbeing of those at risk. Professionals working with victims, including victim liaison officers, domestic abuse safety officers or independent domestic abuse advisers, have specific training and expertise in supporting victims, including those who are vulnerable. Probation practitioners should carefully consider whether their contact with victims or potential victims is appropriate and whether another professional is better placed to have contact to avoid blurring the boundaries of working relationships.

Often, when someone has experienced domestic abuse and the perpetrator has been arrested, convicted and sentenced, a number of organisations can become involved. This can be overwhelming and confusing.

During the course of the inspection, we met Meredith, a survivor of domestic abuse, who spoke to us about her experiences and what she felt was key to her experience of working with the probation service and other organisations in her case. In the early stages of her experience with the criminal justice system, Meredith had an IDVA, who acted as a coordinator for all the other agencies involved, to stop her feeling overwhelmed. Working with the IDVA allowed her trust in services to grow. Meredith's experience of the probation service was mainly through her victim liaison officer, but she was confident that her perpetrator's practitioner liaised closely with them and used information to inform their risk assessment, which she felt was crucial. Meredith told us it is important that the probation practitioner listens to information from the victim:



"...understanding that the victim's feelings of terror never goes away, that safety planning never ends, that the perpetrator was a person the victim had an intimate relationship with – so who knows them best in relation to domestic abuse? It's also important for the victim that the perpetrator receives the right interventions to reduce the risk of harming other people."

Meredith also told us how important it is that services are offered in a flexible way. This flexibility supported her engagement and helped the probation service to accurately assess the perpetrator.



"The probation service has been exceptional – the victim liaison service in particular, I cannot speak highly enough of. I have been able to update my victim impact statement when I needed to, ask questions, raise queries, reassess risk relating to different aspects of my life and it feels like a partnership. We communicate via email, text, face to face, in whatever is the best way for me, and I have built a trusting relationship. I think that helps me to provide probation with what they need as well."



[A full transcript of Meredith's interview can be found here](#)

Domestic violence disclosure scheme

The DVDS, also known as 'Clare's Law' was implemented across all police forces in England and Wales in March 2014. It enables the police to disclose information to a victim or potential victim of domestic abuse about their partner's or ex-partner's previous abusive or violent offending. The scheme is named after Clare Wood, who was murdered by her abusive ex-boyfriend in 2009. It was formally rolled out following a campaign led by Clare's father. Under the scheme, information can be shared via two routes, known as 'Right to ask' and 'Right to know'.

Right to ask:

An individual or relevant third party (for example, a family member) can ask the police to check whether a current or former partner has a violent or abusive past. If records show that an individual may be at risk of domestic abuse from a partner or ex-partner, the police will consider disclosing the information.

Right to know:

This option enables the police to make a disclosure on their own initiative if they receive information about violent or abusive behaviour of a person that may impact on the safety of that person's current or former partner. This could be information arising from a criminal investigation, through statutory or third-sector agency involvement, or from another source of police intelligence.

A disclosure can be made lawfully by the police under the scheme if:

- the disclosure is based on the police's common law powers to disclose information where it is necessary to prevent crime
- the disclosure also complies with established case law, as well as data protection and human rights legislation
- it is reasonable and proportionate for the police to make the disclosure, based on a credible risk of violence or harm.

In the year ending March 2020, 11,556 'right to ask' applications were applied for in England and Wales, and 4,236 (37 per cent) of these resulted in disclosure.¹¹ In the year ending March 2020, 8,591 'right to know' applications were applied for in England and Wales, and 4,479 (52 per cent) resulted in disclosure.

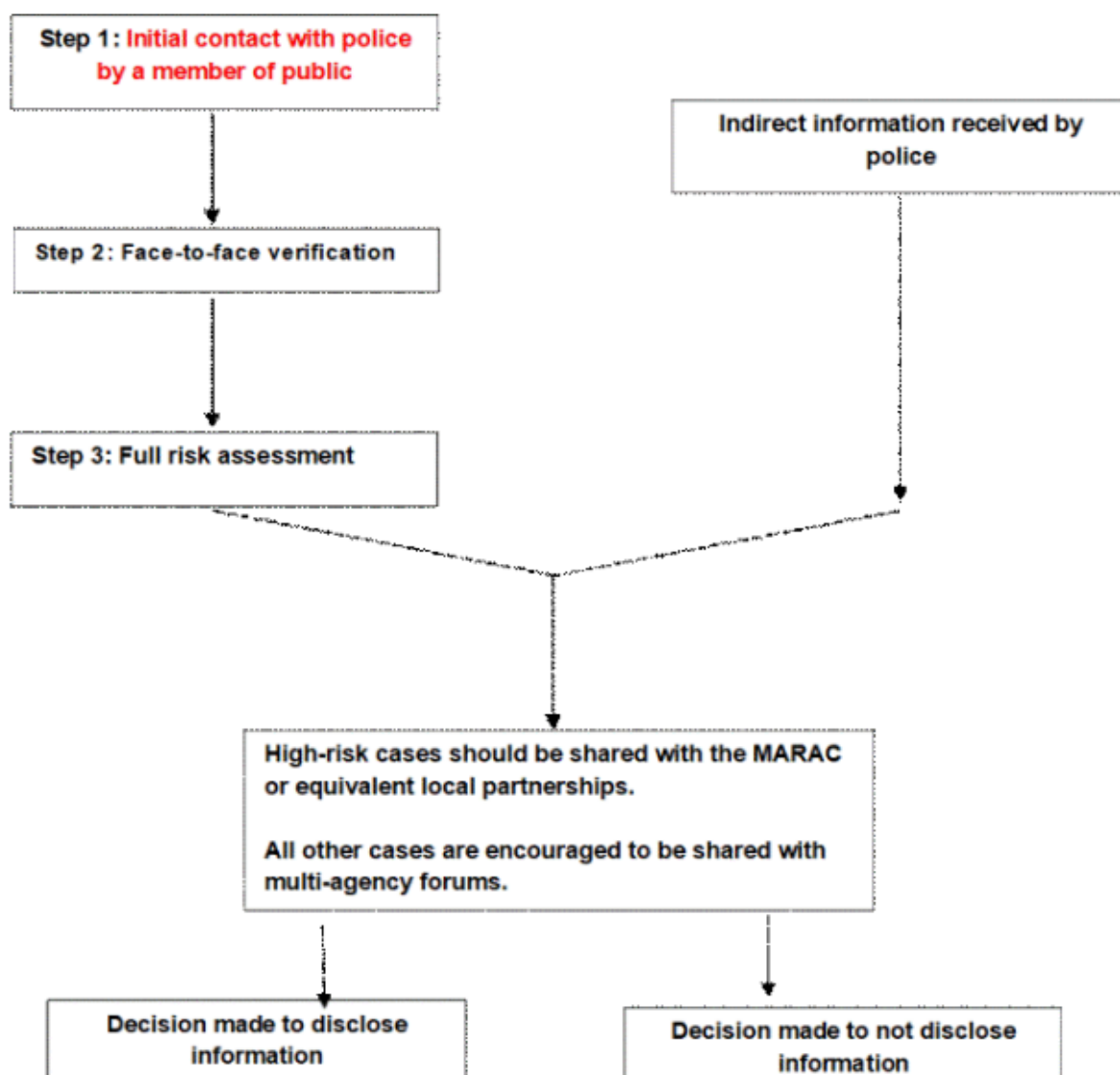
In order to protect the person receiving the information, the guidance on the scheme is clear that all disclosures **must** be accompanied by a robust safety plan, tailored to the needs of the victim or potential victim and based on all relevant information available.



¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-bill-2020-factsheets/domestic-violence-disclosure-scheme-factsheet>

[Detailed information about the DVDS can be found here.](#)

DVDS process



In this video, an IDVA talks about her involvement with the DVDS scheme and provides examples of its use.

[Video \(YouTube, 04:35\): Clare's Law - Eilish Kagbo - Independent Domestic Violence Advocate - West Yorkshire Police \(West Yorkshire Police\)](#)

HMPPS guidance issued in June 2023 confirms that probation services do not have the legal power to make disclosures to members of the public, including about domestic abuse history, to new partners.¹² Disclosures must therefore be made by an organisation with the legal powers to make them, for example the police. Probation practitioners should work closely with other organisations to determine when a disclosure is needed and how best to do it. They should contribute to the safety and support planning that should always accompany any disclosure.



[The current HMPPS guidance on disclosures can be found here.](#)

¹² The only exception to this is where the person on probation has committed sexual offences against children.

Victim safety measures: pre-release

Understanding the risks an individual poses and who may be harmed by them is a crucial part of pre-release planning to ensure that safety measures can be put in place ahead of release to protect victims or potential victims. Licence conditions can be put in place to support other civil orders that may be in place, such as restraining orders or non-molestation orders. This can reinforce that any contact will result in licence enforcement and prosecution for breach of ancillary orders in place. It is equally important to understand and mitigate the risks that still exist despite someone being in prison.

The example below illustrates how collaborative working between prison and probation staff not only informed safety measures in the community but allowed victims to be protected while the individual was in prison. A good relationship with children's social care was established at an early stage and relevant information was shared regularly to protect children who may be at risk from the person on probation.



Case illustration:

Adrian was a man in his early twenties who had been sentenced to 4 months' imprisonment for breaching a restraining order that restricted contact with his ex-partner. He was already on licence when the current index offence was committed, having been released from custody one month earlier. He was recalled as a result of the new offences. He was on licence following violent offences against his ex-partner's neighbour. These offences formed part of a pattern of behaviours related to domestic abuse.

The probation practitioner had regular contact with Adrian before his release and made referrals to try to obtain accommodation for him. They assessed that having stable housing in a suitable location could put some geographical distance between Adrian and his ex-partner and reduce the chances that he would try to move back in with her to avoid homelessness. The practitioner also recognised the importance of building a working relationship with Adrian to support his compliance after release. They discussed plans to look at Adrian's substance use and education, training and employment as a goal for release.

The practitioner liaised extensively with prison staff and children's social care services to ensure measures were in place to protect Adrian's ex-partner and her children. Concerns arose that Adrian was contacting his ex-partner from prison in breach of the restraining order that was in place. With the support of prison staff, they made sure that his ex-partner's telephone number was blocked across the prison to ensure that Adrian could not get other prisoners to make contact on his behalf. In addition, the practitioner confirmed that the social worker involved with his ex-partner's children was aware of this contact. The practitioner made a MARAC referral to ensure that all professionals involved shared information and contributed to a risk management plan.

On release, Adrian quickly failed to comply, preventing any meaningful work. The practitioner proactively shared information about missed appointments with children's social care and MARAC. The practitioner instigated breach action a month after release, and Adrian was returned to prison. The practitioner became aware that Adrian had started a new relationship, and took appropriate action, including informing prison staff, completing a MARAC referral, and sharing this information with children's social care.

In this example, the practitioner worked well with partner agencies to share information and ensure that as complete a picture as possible was gained about Adrian and his behaviour. This supported a robust risk assessment and plan, which was followed. Actions taken ensured that the original victim and her children were protected, and new potential victims were identified at the earliest opportunity.

Victim safety measures: in the community

Victims of domestic abuse may be offered a range of support services. If they are considered to be at a high risk of further abuse, they will be offered support from an independent domestic abuse adviser, whose role is to offer support and safety planning and help with navigating the criminal justice system. Depending on their offence, once a perpetrator is sentenced, and if they are given more than 12 months in custody, the victim may also be offered a victim liaison officer. They will keep the victim informed about the criminal justice process and offer them an opportunity to request that conditions are added to a licence on release. If a perpetrator is required to complete the Building Better Relationships accredited programme or one of the structured interventions specific to domestic abuse, a domestic abuse safety officer will also offer support and information about the intervention. It can be overwhelming for a victim to understand who each of these people are and how their roles differ. If a victim chooses to engage with any of the sources of support, it is important that probation practitioners fully consider the roles of those working with victims and how their information could contribute to assessment, planning and reviewing activities.

The case below provides an example where the victim chose not to engage with the dedicated support services offered, but other mechanisms were identified to support her safety.

Case illustration:

Eryk was a male in his early thirties who had recently received confirmation of pre-settled status in the UK, having moved from another country. He was sentenced to a suspended sentence order with an accredited programme, rehabilitation activity requirement days and an alcohol abstinence monitoring requirement for an assault on his female partner. Eryk and his partner had been homeless, and his partner had not received pre-settled status and relied on Eryk for accommodation. They had been living together in a room allocated to Eryk by the local authority.

While this was Eryk's first conviction for domestic abuse, the police had attended numerous call-out incidents involving the couple. In addition, they had arrested Eryk and his partner on previous occasions due to reported concerns over the last five years. Eryk was on police bail at the time of the index offence, following a recent incident where it was alleged he had assaulted his partner. Incidents of abuse are triggered when Eryk is intoxicated. Following the index offence, there was a further incident where Eryk and his partner were both arrested. Eryk was remanded into custody before his sentencing.

At the court stage, information was gathered from various sources, including the police and housing services, to understand more about Eryk's alcohol use and reasons for homelessness. Housing services had classified Eryk and his partner as one household, and it was apparent that Eryk used his partner's lack of settled status and inability to obtain her own accommodation to manipulate her. A spousal assault risk assessment was completed as part of the court assessment to inform the pre-sentence report. Following the sentence, a home visit was swiftly completed, further informing the assessment of Eryk's risks and needs. Planning addressed the identified risks and broader needs and identified actions to address domestic abuse risks through the Building Better Relationships (BBR) accredited programme, alcohol support, thinking skills and housing needs.

In addition to the victim's vulnerabilities due to her immigration status, she also had mental health issues. The victim was offered IDVA services but turned down this offer. As Eryk was due to attend BBR, she was also offered support from the domestic abuse safety officer but turned this down too. The probation practitioner worked closely with the police

domestic abuse risk officer, a housing officer, and another support worker the victim was already engaged with to progress a safety plan for her, including trying to expedite gaining independent accommodation. The probation practitioner continued to complete home visits to monitor the home circumstances and shared information regularly with the police and housing support workers.

This case demonstrates effective practice in addressing safety concerns about a victim who has turned down several sources of support. However, the practitioner, police and housing workers continued to work together to try to keep her safe, using the services she was willing to engage with to gather information.



Reflection questions

Reflecting on this section:

Questions for practitioners and managers

- How well is the victim voice included in assessments?
- Do you make full use of information from professionals working directly with victims to inform assessments, plans and reviews?

Case management themes

Effective domestic abuse work first requires an accurate assessment that recognises the presence of or potential for abuse. Domestic abuse is often hidden, and it is the responsibility of all practitioners to take opportunities to uncover incidents of abuse and take steps to minimise future harm. On the surface, some offences may not appear related to domestic abuse, but the circumstances surrounding them may indicate otherwise. The HMPPS Domestic Abuse Policy Framework states:

"The identification of domestic abuse is not a one-off activity that occurs at the start of the sentence. Throughout sentence all staff need to use an investigative approach, being vigilant and inquisitive in seeking out information from a wide range of sources to inform an ongoing assessment of whether domestic abuse features in current or previous relationships, looking more widely than the index offence and approaching the issue with professional curiosity."

Planning activity needs to identify appropriate interventions to address domestic abuse issues and set out how information will be shared with other organisations involved with the person on probation and victims. Domestic abuse cases require multi-agency work to make sure that police, children's social care, probation and other organisations have the information they need to work effectively with perpetrators of domestic abuse and those at risk from them. Crucially, the delivery of sentences needs to have meaning and purpose and actively address the potential for further harm through domestic abuse. This should be reviewed regularly to consider an individual's progress, motivation and compliance and any changes to the planned work in light of new information or emerging risks.



Pre-release work

Information about an individual's behaviour is an essential part of assessing their risks and needs. In domestic abuse cases, details of who visits an individual or who they contact can reveal important information about new relationships or continued abuse of previous victims.

The prison offender manager (POM) to community offender manager (COM) handover guidance includes a checklist of documents that the POM should send to the COM. This includes the OASys/risk of serious harm assessment and NOMIS transfer report, adjudication report and key dates screen, with an advisory note that:

"All the above reports should be read thoroughly by the receiving officer."

These were not consistently seen across the inspection, however. Where they were present, their value was clear in terms of providing useful information on risk, and information that was helpful in further understanding risk, for example behaviour on visits, the resources available to the individual, or who is visiting them. The Inspectorate recommends that probation practitioners ask for a copy of the NOMIS transfer report before an individual's release, if it is not received as part of the handover process.

This information would undoubtedly inform practitioners' assessments and risk management plans, as the report provides the following information:

Physical attributes	Height, weight and ethnicity.
Physical marks	Such as tattoos and scars. <i>Be mindful that tattoos can provide a useful insight into an individual's life and potentially what is important to them. Therefore, this could be a useful opening for a conversation on identity.</i>
Personal information	Security categorisation, date of birth, age, sex, place of birth, home address, next of kin, emergency contact, personal level, incentive and earned privileges scheme level, domestic status, number of children, sexual orientation, nationality. <i>This can be helpful in gathering details of family members. It could help you explore the support available from family members.</i> <i>It may also provide a useful insight into risk behaviour, for instance considering who they have identified as their emergency contact.</i>
Physical characteristics	Hair colour, eye colour, facial hair, build.
Alerts	Any risks, restraining orders, MAPPA referral, OASys level, ACCT details, security alerts. <i>It would be useful to cross-reference this with the information you have available. If there are differences, seek additional information by pursuing enquiries with the prison, police and/or social care, as appropriate.</i>
Non-associations	Including the name of the individual, location, reason, type of non-association, effective date and if this is active. <i>This may provide useful information that you can explore with the individual regarding their social networks.</i>
Case notes	

Visitor details	Separated by social and professional contacts. This includes the name of their visitor, date of birth and if the visit was approved. <i>This may provide useful information that you can explore with the individual regarding their social networks.</i>
Prisoners visiting	
Visit history	<i>This may provide useful information that you can explore with the individual regarding their social networks.</i>
Assessments	Cell-sharing risk assessment and reviews, where appropriate.
Education history and achievements	<i>This may provide useful information about their future goals and motivation.</i>
Home detention curfew	Relevant sentence dates and outcome of eligibility checks.
Key dates	Includes home detention curfew, parole eligibility date, licence eligibility date and sentence end date.

The example below describes good pre-release work that used the necessary resources in a complex, high-risk case. Although the work started later than would be ideal, the practitioner managed to develop an effective and appropriate pre-release plan.



Case illustration:

Frank was a male in his fifties, sentenced to 12 years in prison for a section 18 wounding offence against his wife. He was intoxicated when the offence was committed. Frank's children and mother-in-law were present during the offence. The victim sustained multiple stab wounds to her body.

Frank was reallocated to a new practitioner three months before release. Although this was later than ideal, despite the time pressures, a comprehensive assessment was compiled that drew on a number of different sources of information. The new practitioner picked up pre-release work straight away, and implemented relevant restrictions and interventions for a safe release. There was a detailed handover from the prison offender manager to the community offender manager. Frank was referred to an approved premises, and referrals were also made to the relevant multi-agency safeguarding hub, MARAC and MAPPA. The practitioner also involved the victim liaison officer in discussions about release. All of the information gathered identified the need for a critical public protection case referral to be made to provide additional resources to support Frank's safe release. A professional meeting was held to share information and discuss risk management strategies, and a MAPPA meeting was held a day before release. These activities ensured that a robust risk management plan and appropriate licence conditions and restrictions were in place to manage the risk of harm to all potential victims.

Planning balanced restrictive and rehabilitative activities, and set out the expectation that Frank would complete the Building Better Relationships accredited programme. In addition, the practitioner planned a consultation with the offender personality disorder team to consider strategies to support Frank in making good progress in the community. Frank was included in his assessment and planning to ensure transparency and promote compliance post-release.

Frank was released to approved premises outside his home area, and caretaking arrangements were put in place when he moved on from the approved premises, as he did not return to his home area.

In this case, despite the late start to pre-release planning, appropriate arrangements were made for Frank. He was kept up to date about plans and the reasons for them. The practitioners engaged in multi-agency forums to make sure all agencies knew and understood the risks posed by Frank, and measures were put in place to protect victims. Rehabilitative activity was also included to support Frank's longer-term progress.

In the case below, clear expectations were set with the person on probation about the work that would be expected as part of release on licence. Preparatory work in prison provided an opportunity for the individual to start thinking about domestic abuse, to support their compliance with an accredited programme on release. Licence conditions were used to support the restraining order that was in place to reinforce the importance of not contacting the victim.



Case illustration:

Femi was a male in his forties, sentenced to 36 months in custody for violence against his ex-partner. The offences included false imprisonment and physical assault on multiple occasions in front of their children. He was also made subject to a seven-year restraining order. Femi committed these offences while already subject to licence for drug and firearm offences. He was recalled following the new offences.

While in custody, Femi was engaged in work using a domestic abuse workbook. This aimed to start addressing his behaviour as well as prepare him to complete Building Better Relationships (BBR) on release. The probation practitioner's assessment of Femi drew on past probation assessments and his behaviour while in custody. It included security information to identify patterns to his domestic abuse behaviours. The practitioner made contact with Femi before release to start to build a working relationship.

Planning for release included setting licence conditions that mirrored those in the restraining order. The practitioner outlined further information that needed to be gathered from the planned MARAC. Femi was released to an approved premises, but early police enquiries and a home visit were completed to assess the suitability of Femi's proposed follow-on address.

On release, there was effective communication between the probation practitioner and approved premises staff which provided results from drug testing and curfew monitoring. Femi was offered support in applying for housing. The probation practitioner engaged with the programmes team at the earliest opportunity to arrange a prompt start date for BBR, and encouraged Femi to attend the programme during supervision sessions. At the time of inspection Femi was making good progress on BBR.

Professional curiosity

Professional curiosity encompasses all aspects of work in probation practice, including the quality of assessments, planning, implementation and delivery and reviews; therefore, it cuts across every department. It also relates to how people remain curious about their practice and pursue continuous professional development.

Professional curiosity is a combination of looking, listening, asking direct questions, and clarifying and reflecting on information received to analyse what it means in context for that individual. It is vital that we do not use a single source of information but instead seek multiple sources. This is so we can triangulate information from a range of sources, analyse

behaviour and make informed decisions. These skills, implemented in an empathic manner, allow the practitioner and manager to understand more about the individual, including their identity, motivations, capacity, resources, strengths and risks. A better understanding of the individual's identity, and what motivates them, will strengthen engagement (bearing in mind that people on probation do not choose to attend) and ensure that practitioners implement the most effective strategies to manage risks and/or change behaviour, thus promoting desistance.

This is summed up in the following quote from Sonia Flynn, former Chief Probation Officer:

"Professional curiosity features as a cornerstone of all probation practice ... it should be front and centre of our core purpose to assess, protect and change.

We can only conduct good assessments if we have all the available information, and have collated that into a good, robust evidence-based assessment.

We can only protect if we're professionally curious, so that we are checking and validating the information that we have about the individual.

We can only support them to change if we see the whole person and really understand what's important to them and what's going to drive their change journey, their move away from crime to develop a different sense of purpose and identity."



The Inspectorate has produced a guide on [professional curiosity for practitioners](#) and [middle managers](#). An overview of the contents of the guide is available in the video clips here:



[Professional curiosity middle managers video highlights](#)

[Professional curiosity practitioners video highlights](#)

Holistic assessment, personalised approach and blending risk and desistance.

"Most simply, personalisation means that public services respond to the needs of clients, rather than offering a standardised service."

(Fox et al, 2018)

Research has identified multiple benefits of personalising the delivery of services in the public sector, and some pilot studies have also shown the benefits of personalised probation work, where people on probation reported a more positive experience of probation supervision compared with their previous experiences (Fox et al, 2018).

A rounded or holistic assessment must consider an individual's risks, needs and strengths. To build a rounded view of the individual, the practitioner should use a diverse range of sources of information. Wherever possible, the individual should be meaningfully involved in their assessment.

A rounded approach:



The examples below demonstrate different ways that sentence management had been personalised to adapt to the needs of the individual being supervised and a full picture had been gained about their life and their needs.

In addition, a growing body of research has advocated the need for a blended approach to working with people on probation. This recognises that focusing solely on desistance or risk management does not achieve the best results. Professor Hazel Kemshall has referred to this as a protective integration approach. Approaches need to be flexible; at times they may need to focus on one aspect more than another. For example, a stronger focus on safety may be needed when indicators of risk of serious harm are increasing.



You can read more about the blended approach in the following Academic Insights papers:

- [Reconciling 'desistance' and 'what works'](#) Shadd Muruna and Ruth Mann
- [Risk and desistance: a blended approach to risk management](#) Hazel Kemshall
- [Desistance, recovery, and justice capital](#) Hazel Kemshall and Kieran McCartan

The first example below demonstrates how a trauma-informed approach to working with a person on probation, and recognising their specific needs, led to a personalised approach to delivering their sentence. This supported their needs while also addressing their problematic behaviours.



Case illustration:

Craig was a 30-year-old male sentenced to a 12-month community order with rehabilitation activity days for assault by beating committed against his ex-partner. A pre-sentence report was completed, which identified links between Craig's offending, a lack of emotional control, and poor decision-making, affected by excessive alcohol consumption.

Following the sentence, the allocated probation practitioner recognised Craig's emotional problems. They took time to build a working relationship with him, using a trauma-informed approach that they had become skilled in through working in a youth offending service. Craig disclosed that he had been a victim of sexual abuse. The probation practitioner found appropriate resources to support Craig and helped him understand the negative impact that his experiences were having on his current behaviour within relationships. The practitioner supported Craig to recognise that his actions towards his partner were abusive and unacceptable. The practitioner assessed that a formal intervention, such as a structured intervention or accredited programme, was not appropriate for Craig, given his complex needs. Instead, they worked with him on a one-to-one basis to address domestic abuse issues. Craig was involved in planning and reviewing activities that examined his motivation to change.

In this example, due to an effective working relationship developed with his practitioner, Craig felt able to address the underlying causes of his behaviour. This offered the potential for long-term meaningful change in his life.

The following case is an example of a practitioner making good use of a range of resources, including the offender personality disorder pathway and NHS materials, to help a person on probation to understand their own experiences and the effect of these on their adult life and relationships.



Case illustration:

David is a male in his mid-twenties sentenced to a short period in custody for assaulting his ex-partner, threatening to damage her property and contacting her via the telephone in breach of an existing restraining order. David had already breached the restraining order on several previous occasions. The offences occurred when the victim attended David's family address to pick up their daughter, following agreed contact arrangements.

The court did not request a pre-sentence report. The allocated probation practitioner met David before release via video links, and gathered information from previous supervising practitioners to form an in-depth analysis of previous domestic abuse incidents against the same victim. Planning activity included detailed checks to assess the suitability of the planned release address. The practitioner contacted other services to support David's broader needs and consulted with the programmes team to determine whether he was suitable for the Building Better Relationships (BBR) accredited programme. Licence conditions were set, including a requirement to complete BBR and have no contact with the victim.

The practitioner consulted the offender personality disorder pathway team and, together, they completed a case formulation during which they considered David's life experiences and hypotheses about his current behaviours. Key aspects of this were that David had witnessed domestic abuse as a child and had not received emotional attention from his parents. The formulation provided an approach to working with David that used praise to support and engage him and promote physical and emotional stability. In addition, the

practitioner liaised with partner agencies and identified a 'stabilisation pack' as a potential resource to support continued work with David.



[Here is a link to the stabilisation pack](#)

The pack had some psycho-educational and skills practice materials to support David in reducing the distress he experienced from early emotional experiences.



A link to an informative video was also shared with David as a conversation starter to discuss childhood trauma - [Video, \(YouTube, 05:10\): Childhood Trauma and the Brain | UK Trauma Council \(Anna Freud, UK Trauma Council\)](#)

The example below illustrates a case where the person on probation was both a perpetrator and victim of domestic abuse. The practitioner recognised the range of diverse needs that needed to be met to achieve positive change, and used referral pathways to support and motivate the person on probation.



Case illustration:

Fran was a 50-year-old woman given a suspended sentence order with rehabilitation activity requirement days and unpaid work for an offence of affray. The victims in the offence were her adult sons, who were living at her address. While intoxicated, Fran had taken a knife and attempted to stab the victims during an argument.

Following the sentence, the initial comprehensive assessment recognised Fran's diverse needs, making links to her abusive behaviours. It was recognised that Fran's experience of family stresses triggered the index offence, and that she is experiencing negative symptoms related to menopause. Comprehensive planning activity followed, which included liaison with partner agencies and services. In planning, the probation practitioner recognised and set out the need to adjust how the work was delivered, taking into account Fran's problems with reading, writing and numbers. The probation practitioner recognised that Fran was both a perpetrator and victim of domestic abuse, and delivered tailored one-to-one sessions addressing this. The practitioner referred Fran to MARAC to instigate IDVA support for her once it was known that her partner was domestically abusing her.

Fran was also referred, through Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS), to the women's personal wellbeing service provided by the [Nelson Trust](#), and contact was made with her GP. When Fran declined the CRS service and stopped communicating with her GP, a three-way meeting was planned with the CRS provider to encourage Fran to take up health and wellbeing services.

This case provides an example of the probation practitioner blending risk management and safety concerns with desistance.



Case illustration:

Gary was a 33-year-old male sentenced to six months' imprisonment for common assault of his partner. His son was present during the offence, and Gary was intoxicated at the time. Gary was released but recalled following non-compliance with his licence. The probation practitioner remained in contact with Gary through his recall period to promote compliance when he was released. Gary was released on a post-sentence supervision licence.

Following his re-release, Gary had a new probation practitioner, who set clear boundaries with him and explored in detail what had led to his previous recall. The new approach resulted in an improvement in his engagement during probation appointments, and Gary became more open about his offending behaviour. His compliance improved and his thinking began to change, including his willingness to make disclosures about his relationships. This in turn improved risk management, as the probation practitioner was more aware of who was in Gary's life and able to take steps to keep them safe through appropriate liaison and referrals to children's social care. The practitioner was also proactive in sharing information with the police.

The practitioner made links between Gary's adverse childhood experiences and his adult behaviour. Multi-agency working arrangements were already established during the first release, and these continued throughout the recall period to ensure the safety of the victim and child on release. Risk management actions while Gary was in prison included monitoring his telephone and letters. The practitioner also made referrals for accommodation, recognising this was important to support Gary on release.

In this case, the practitioner paid appropriate attention to factors linked to risk and those aimed at rehabilitation.

Reviewing to respond to the dynamic nature of risk

As aspects of a person on probation's life change, so can the risks they pose. Changes in behaviour, such as increased drug or alcohol use, can indicate increased risk, as can external factors such as world events or sporting fixtures. Research into domestic abuse during the FIFA World Cup football tournament showed the risk of domestic abuse rose by 26 per cent when the English national team won or drew, and by 38 per cent when the team lost (Kirby et al, 2014). As more is learned about an individual, the assessment of what triggers their risks and behaviours may change; therefore, it is crucial to keep reviewing hypotheses.

Hypotheses



With thanks to [@creative.clinical.psychologist](#) on Instagram for the use of this image. The example below demonstrates how a practitioner remained vigilant about the potential for increased risk and adapted their management of an individual in response.

The case below demonstrates the effective use of a range of resources to increase understanding about what was driving the behaviours of a person on probation.



Case illustration:

Ray was a 36-year-old man sentenced to an 18-month community order with requirements to complete rehabilitation activity days, an accredited programme and unpaid work for offences of sending threatening and abusive communications to his ex-partner. There was an established pattern of domestic abuse, including stalking and harassment towards same victim in the five years since their relationship had ended. He had served three periods in custody as a result of these behaviours. The probation practitioner had a strong focus on addressing the risks of domestic abuse and liaised with the programme facilitator, the DVSO, a domestic abuse outreach worker who was working with the victim, and MARAC. The practitioner started one-to-one domestic abuse work with Ray while they waited for an opportunity for him to start the Building Better Relationships programme.

The practitioner responded to periods where they assessed that Ray's risk may increase, including during the football World Cup. They increased his reporting and focused sessions on his own welfare and managing his emotions.

This case provides an example of a probation practitioner responding to internal and external factors that could increase the risk of the person on probation and taking clear steps to mitigate against further harm.



Case illustration:

Sam was a 20-year-old male sentenced to an 18-month community order with a rehabilitation activity requirement and unpaid work for offences including criminal damage, stalking, and assault of an emergency worker. The offences were part of a pattern of behaviours towards Sam's female neighbour and her parents. While subject to this order, Sam reoffended and was convicted of common assault against his mother. As a result, he was sentenced to a concurrent 12-month community order.

From the outset, Sam expressed rigid views and discriminatory beliefs, including derogatory thoughts about women and minority groups and transphobic and homophobic attitudes. His attitude prompted the practitioner to refer Sam to the Prevent team and engage in a consultation. The consultation was reflective, and, although it was felt that Sam did not meet Prevent criteria, some helpful actions and guidance were provided to the practitioner. Activities that followed included a consultation with the offender personality disorder (OPD) team, autism screening, and liaison with children's social care to find out whether Sam had been involved with them in the past. The resulting information supported the practitioner in understanding Sam's behaviour and further improved the assessment and understanding of his case.

Following the OPD consultation and subsequent adoption onto the IOM scheme, there was a change in Sam's compliance and behaviour. The new probation practitioner took a different approach and showed appropriate flexibility to engage Sam in several interventions. For example, Sam volunteered to engage with the Drive programme to address offending behaviour related to domestic abuse. The change in approach resulted in Sam becoming more respectful and displaying fewer negative attitudes and beliefs. In addition, the controls and monitoring via the IOM scheme

supported additional risk management and promoted constructive activities. As a result, the practitioner recognised Sam as becoming more confident with others and less isolated.

Contingency planning

At the time an individual is sentenced, the factors that contributed to their offending and were linked to their risk of harm may no longer be present; for example, they may no longer be in a relationship or may have reduced their substance use. This does not mean that those factors will not re-emerge. Therefore, a robust contingency plan is essential to good risk management. To be effective, the plan should cover factors that are foreseeable, for example what would be needed if they were to begin a new relationship or if they returned to substance use.

The case below provides an example of an effective risk management plan that includes a contingency plan tailored to the specific risks and needs of the individual.



Case illustration:

Alek was a 33-year-old man who had lived in the UK for approximately seven years. He was sentenced to a 12-month community order for an offence of assault. Alek was intoxicated and assaulted his father-in-law by head-butting him during an argument at a family party.

Alek's circumstances had changed by the time he was sentenced, and many of the factors in his life at the time of the offence had changed. However, a comprehensive, personalised contingency plan was drawn up, addressing the specific areas that could potentially increase the risk of harm. These factors included:

- a deterioration in his mental health
- the breakdown of his current relationship
- alcohol use
- entering a new relationship
- accommodation problems
- loss of employment
- failure to engage with his probation practitioner.

The plan set out the steps that should be taken or considered should these factors occur.

During his order, the practitioner monitored all factors included in the contingency plan to assess whether action needed to be taken. For example, when Alek failed to attend his unpaid work appointments, doorstep visits were carried out, and the probation practitioner contacted Alek's employer to understand if his circumstances had changed, following steps set out in the contingency plan.



Reflection questions

Reflecting on this section:

Questions for practitioners and managers

- Do you routinely receive NOMIS transfer reports for individuals being released from custody and draw on them to build release plans?
- Do you regularly use the range of available options (Email a Prisoner, letters, video links) to engage individuals in their release plans?
- Considering a recent risk management plan, can you identify elements of desistance and elements of safety being considered to demonstrate protective integration?
- How often do you revisit your hypothesis of why an individual offends and test your theory against any changes in their lives?

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