



Local Government Association

checklist for local authorities in domestic violence partnership working

learning from domestic violence partnerships

research checklist
September 2005

LGAresearch



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This checklist has been written by Frances Abraham, Senior Researcher/Consultant at the Travistock Institute.

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introduction

Domestic violence accounts for just under a fifth of all recorded violent crime. It is costly (the total cost of domestic violence to services and the economy is £5.7 billion a year, excluding the human and emotional cost to individuals estimated at over £17 billion a year), and has profound and long-term effects across society. As such, work to tackle domestic violence that is appropriately prioritised is crucial. The checklist below aims to help local authorities, within partnerships, work effectively to do this.

1. Leadership and management

Is there championship/leadership at cabinet level?

Sustainability of work in domestic violence, mainstreamed through everyday working practices across departments, is the ideal model for addressing the issue through regular policy review. Leadership at the highest hierarchical levels sanctions those offering leadership at other levels, and can be seen as a precondition for effective partnership working:

- There should be both a named cabinet member and a senior officer with overall responsibility for domestic violence in the authority, as set out in paragraph five of the definition for the Best Value Performance Indicator (BV225)
- Wherever possible ownership of the domestic violence agenda should be secured and shared by other members and officers, for example having a domestic violence lead in each of the relevant departments
- Commitment of resources and prioritisation of needs should be secured at the highest levels and clearly communicated both to local authority staff and managers and to other partnership members.

Is the local authority lead officer senior enough to manage across departmental/portfolio boundaries?

- Leadership at an appropriate level of local government management is required to mobilise commitment and resources across departmental and partnership boundaries
- Having a lead officer who is senior enough is essential, both in the local authority and in the partner organisations, to ensure that priorities can be agreed and progress can be implemented, for example through appropriate training and protocol development.

Does the lead officer have the knowledge and attributes to mobilise commitment across partnership boundaries?

The lead officer will need to work closely with the domestic violence coordinator, and this will be a key part of their job. Alongside this, for example, understanding the culture of voluntary sector groups or the financial constraints of primary care trusts (PCTs) enables lead managers to tailor their style and approach to these different needs. The senior officer designated to support domestic violence response and delivery requires:

- A commitment to tackling domestic violence as a priority
- Knowledge and an appreciation of the contribution of different sectors, and an understanding of their cultures and of local authority departments and
- The attributes to accommodate different sectors' cultures and needs.

Does the lead officer have the knowledge and attributes to mobilise commitment within the local authority?

Similar adaptability will be required in relation to managing domestic violence responses within local authorities:

- Innovation in practice requires an enabling approach to supporting practitioners in trying out new responses
- Standard responses, where agreed, require more closely managed operational styles: for example, this might include the development and use of protocols across agencies for data collection, information sharing, confidentiality, risk assessment and management, and referral
- Having a well understood cycle of domestic violence structures which involve different parts of the local authority in different tasks can act as a driver for cross-organisational progress

- It is important to identify the unique contribution of local authorities in strategic prioritisation, with adequate resourcing, to deliver local authority services - including housing and children's services.
- Access of the lead officer to the lead elected member can be a key to unlocking resources and help resolve dilemmas

2. Domestic violence coordinator role

Do the terms of the domestic violence coordinator post reflect a high level of commitment by the local authority and their partners?

- Funding for the domestic violence coordinator post needs to be permanent and at a level which secures continuity of approach and communication (as defined in the Best Value Performance Indicator, BV225)
- Clarity about the scope and purpose of the domestic violence coordinator role, and its relation to the partnership's aims, needs to be communicated to partners
- Generally speaking, unless it is in an explicit job-share model, splitting the role between different actors is unlikely to be effective in providing a single point of contact for practitioners (see also paragraph four of the definition for the Best Value Performance Indicator, BV225).

Does the location of the domestic violence coordinator align to the current strategic needs of partnership working?

- Location of the domestic violence coordinator will vary according to the stage of partnership development, and good outcomes are associated with location in local authority, voluntary sector and partnership structures
- Periodic review of the location of the domestic violence coordinator role should ensure that it is adapted to the changing needs of the work.

However:

- Proximity to strategic decision-making, for example Local Strategic Partnerships or Local Area Agreement structures, is desirable as this brings links to key local authority departments, such as housing and children's services, and to other partners; and enables the coordinator to contribute to strategic decision-making.

Is management of the domestic violence coordinator role provided by the local authority or partnership lead officer or manager?

- Line management should provide knowledgeable and consistent support, given the range of tasks and agencies which may need coordination, so that the domestic violence coordinator can be enabled to respond to demands from diverse partners
- While line management arrangements may vary, it is important that there should be direct lines of accountability to and authorisation from the local authority's or strategic partnership's designated lead officer and Cabinet member.

3. Partnership working

Are all the partners involved appropriately?

- Partner agencies need to be involved in appropriate roles and structures, to reflect both their contribution and their needs. This requires a shared understanding of different partnership members' potential contributions and constraints. For example, voluntary sector members will not always have the resources to provide attendance at frequent meetings but local authorities should ensure they are included in strategic as well as operational deliberations (and enabled to do so, if necessary)

- A range of different structures, such as the Domestic Violence Forum, strategic groups and bilateral arrangements, is usually required to mobilise partners' commitment and contribution effectively
- Representation of partners needs to match the needs of the agenda in different structures
- A set of structures which provide opportunities for members to take up different roles is likely to enhance working relationships, allowing partners to become less set in particular relationships.

Do partnership structures support the contribution of members?

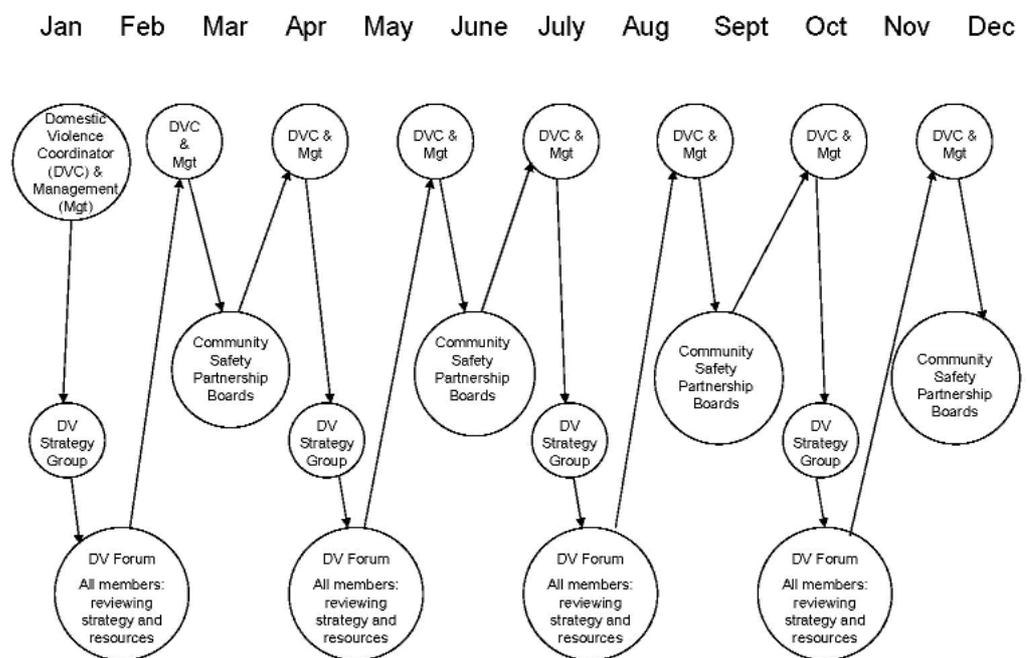
The contribution of different partnership members in domestic violence work and the constraints in which they operate need to be reflected in the style and role of partnership structures.

- A formal business style, with agendas circulated well in advance, will best match strategic decision-making and reaching agreements about relative financial contributions and is also likely to help facilitate appropriate attendance
- Deliberations around service needs, gaps in services and service development would benefit from a more participatory style of discussion. This is likely to facilitate the contribution of community and voluntary sector partners in particular, but all agencies will benefit from participation
- An optimal set of structures is one which includes a broad strategising group, an executive group capable of implementing strategy in different sectors, and a structure for sharing ideas about practice and service development (see diagram on page 5).

Are partnership structures well-linked and understood?

- Partnership structures for domestic violence benefit from strong mechanisms for linking into other strategic frameworks, such as homeless strategies or the local Children's Strategic Partnership. This brings reinforcement to domestic violence partnerships from other local shared partnership working. Such links are needed to provide a more joined-up approach across the authority, and eliminate gaps or inconsistencies: for example, to ensure the needs of children living with domestic violence are addressed rather than falling between two strategic agendas
- The way partnership structures are linked needs to be communicated between all members of the partnership. Having a well-understood cycle of domestic violence structures which involve different partners in different tasks can act as a driver for cross-organisational progress. A suggested cycle of partnership structures (see diagram) takes into account different requirements and provides a recognisable rhythm to interactions over an annual cycle.

Diagram: Suggested cycle of partnership structures for domestic violence



Note: Domestic Violence Strategy Group is the broad strategising group; the Domestic Violence Co-ordinator and Management form the executive group capable of implementing strategy in different sectors; the Domestic Violence Forum is the structure for sharing ideas about practice and service development; the Community Safety Partnership Board is the overarching body with statutory powers to which it links.

4. Strategy and resources

Do partnerships know the total sums which are available through different members and whether these match their strategic needs?

Development of a domestic violence strategy is important, but needs to be realistic and bring about quantifiable results, rather than being seen as an end in itself:

- Domestic violence strategies have to balance demands with local needs and requirements and guidelines set out for local authority performance
- Domestic violence strategies developed by partnerships need to reflect the level of resourcing which is available. If available resources are inadequate to meet needs, then these need to be revisited or a plan for raising the funding included within the strategy
- Local authorities can usefully take the lead in clarifying financial resources for domestic violence, through communicating their own budget allocations and identifying the contributions they propose partners contribute
- A useful first step in agreeing financial contributions for domestic violence is to help partners identify domestic violence costs incurred by different partners should they do nothing (and therefore the number of domestic violence cases continues to follow the existing trend). For example, the costs of a mother and children being made homeless
- Strategy formulation not founded in available resources is likely to be seen as an unrealistic paper exercise, which risks the commitment of partners.

Is the strategy agreed with partnership members realistic and are there arrangements for regular review?

- Strategies need to be seen in terms of increasing safety, holding perpetrators to account and providing services, identifying service gaps and service development options

- Partnerships should be encouraged to adopt a 'good enough' strategy with ring-fenced time for review and adjustment rather than trying to get everything right first time. Monitoring should include survivor feedback, to identify the impact for service users
- Partners need to understand the strategic cycle which underpins the work and the timing for its review so that they can contribute appropriately, for example, challenging resource allocations at the time they are being assessed.

5. Practice development and service delivery

Is practice development and service delivery kept on the partnership agenda?

- Practice development and service delivery needs to be targeted on gaps in current service provision. Mapping the full picture of services provided by different partners can help identify these gaps and make explicit where practice development or service delivery needs to occur, avoiding duplication of effort
- There are many examples of good practice, which partnerships should build on rather than reinventing the wheel. Services should also meet existing service standards, such as those being developed by Women's Aid and Respect
- A commitment should be made by the partnership to consider practice development and service delivery on a regular basis, both in terms of any grants or service level agreements developed, but also in relation to new or relatively new practice which may be developing elsewhere, such as:

- Work with black and minority ethnic groups (minimally translation and appropriate distribution of information)
- Advocacy services and their appropriate location
- Children's services
- Evaluation of new initiatives in terms of their costs and benefits and appropriate location is essential before agreeing forward commitments.

Identifying the unique contribution of local authorities in strategic prioritisation with adequate resourcing, and in delivery of local authority services, including housing and children's services, will help to model what can be achieved through partnership working.

These lessons are drawn from research conducted by the Tavistock Institute with 10 developing domestic violence partnerships. The full report, 'Learning from Domestic Violence Partnerships' is available from the LGA website at www.lga.gov.uk, or contact LGconnect on 020 7664 3131, e-mail info@lga.gov.uk.

For further information, please contact
the Local Government Association at:
Local Government House
Smith Square, London SW1P 3HZ

**or telephone LGconnect,
for all your LGA queries, on 020 7664 3131**

Fax 020 7664 3030

Email info@lga.gov.uk

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