

Respect

Holding perpetrators to account, empowering survivors

A briefing for local decision makers

Introduction

Domestic abuse impacts millions of people each year: the Crime Survey for England and Wales estimated 2.4 million adults experienced domestic abuse in the year 2021–2¹ and it is estimated that 1 in 7 children and young people under the age of 18 will have lived with domestic violence at some point in their childhood².

To prevent future harm and improve the safety and well-being of survivors, we need specialist services to hold those causing harm to account, offer them the chance to change, and reduce the risk that they pose. This work isn't, and never will be, an alternative to supporting survivors. Nor are perpetrator interventions an alternative to an effective policing and criminal justice response to domestic abusers. They are, however, an essential part of a coordinated community response to domestic abuse and a vital tool if we are to turn the tide on abuse for good, and ensure that survivors can live safe and free.

About Respect

Respect is a pioneering domestic abuse membership organisation developing safe, effective work with perpetrators, male victims, and young people who use violence. Our vision is a world where domestic abuse is not tolerated, where perpetrators are held to account and survivors' safety and wellbeing is centred. Through our influence work we use our expertise, and that of our members, to help shape thinking and to influence policy, practice and legislation. We advocate for strategic, well-funded, cross-government and multi-agency responses to domestic abuse that centre the needs of adult and child survivors.

Policy context

The policy and practice response to domestic abuse has historically focused on meeting the needs of survivors, but in recent years there has been an increased focus within national policy on how domestic abuse can be better addressed through safe and effective intervention with those who are causing harm. The UK Government's Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan, published in 2022, set out how 'Prioritising Prevention' and 'Pursuing Perpetrators' were central to the Government's approach to driving down the prevalence of domestic abuse³. Welcome changes have since been implemented, such as the provision of £75 million of dedicated funding for domestic abuse perpetrator interventions, the introduction of minimum national standards, and the planned introduction of Domestic Abuse Protection Orders (DAPOs) which can mandate perpetrators to take part in a perpetrator or behaviour change programme.

¹ ONS, Domestic abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales: year ending March 2022

² Women's Aid Federation England - The impact of domestic abuse on children and young people

³ Home Office, Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan - Command paper 639

The availability of interventions

Despite this significant progress in national policy and the investment of longer term funding, there remains a postcode lottery in where domestic abuse perpetrator interventions are available. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner's recent mapping report found that of the 51% of survivors who wanted their perpetrator to have access to a perpetrator programme, only 7% had been able to access one⁴. The list of Respect-accredited services also reflects these findings, with many areas currently having no quality assured provision in place⁵. Ultimately, we need specialist interventions to be available across all areas of the country, to address different levels of risk, and to be tailored to meet the needs and characteristics of the local population.

Types of interventions and standards

Interventions targeting the whole cohort of perpetrators have been piloted and proved to be successful at reducing levels of risk and harm. These include targeted prevention, early intervention work, high-risk, complex needs interventions, women's, and young people's use of violence, and abuse by those in same-sex relationships. All quality-assured perpetrator interventions must also include separate but parallel support for survivors.

Given the levels of risk which services are managing, it is absolutely vital that interventions working with perpetrators are robustly quality-assured. The Home Office has introduced standards to set out a base level of what services need to be achieving in order to be commissioned, but Respect-accredited services still represent the recognised standard for practice, safety and outcomes.

A multi agency approach

In addition to the availability of specialist interventions, there remains a further need to ensure that a range professionals, services and agencies who may engage with perpetrators can recognise them and work in a multi-agency approach to respond. Professionals across children's services, adult social care, housing and health should have access to training and workforce development opportunities which equip them with the confidence and skills to hold perpetrators to account.

Recommendations

- Local councillors should learn about the quality-assured services in their area which are working to reduce the risk which domestic abuse perpetrators pose;
- All councils should have a local domestic abuse strategy in place which both supports survivors and holds perpetrators to account;
- Councillors should use their position to advocate for an improved local response to domestic abuse – so professionals, services and agencies can recognise perpetrators and work to reduce the harm that they cause.

⁴ Domestic Abuse Commissioner, 'A patchwork of provision' (2022)

⁵ Respect Accredited Services (Respect Accredited Services)