

All Party Parliamentary Group on Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse

Minutes of Annual General Meeting: One Year on from the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan

Date and time: 10.30 – 11.30, Wednesday 17th May 2023

Location: Room T, Portcullis House

Attendees:

Alex Davies-Jones MP (Chair);
Tonia Antoniazzi MP, Labour (Officer)
Laura Farris MP, Conservative (Officer)
Gavin Newlands MP, SNP (Officer)
Owen Thompson MP, SNP (Officer)
Seema Malhotra MP, Labour (Co-op);
Karin Smith MP, Labour;
Freddie Cook (Office of Alex Davies-Jones MP);
Laurie Sutcliffe (Office of Alex Davies-Jones MP);
Callum Parrish (Office of Rosie Duffield MP);
Sam Kahn (Office of Siobhain McDonagh MP);
Hannah Gousy, Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office;
Sophie Francis-Cansfield, Women's Aid;
Shana Begum, SafeLives Pioneer;
Jo Todd, Respect;
Caroline Bernard, Respect;
Toby North, Respect and The Drive Partnership;
Ailsa Malcolm, The Drive Partnership.

Welcome from Chair and AGM

Alex Davies-Jones welcomed attendees and commenced the election of officers.

Election of officers:

- Alex Davies-Jones MP, Labour (Chair)
- Tonia Antoniazzi MP, Labour (Officer)
- Laura Farris MP, Conservative (Officer)

- Rosie Duffield MP, Labour (Officer)
- Gavin Newlands MP, SNP (Officer)
- Owen Thompson MP, SNP (Officer)

One year on from the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan and its Pursuing Perpetrators Pillar

Jo Todd shared reflections on the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan one year on. Achievements included: £75M investment over three years; increased focus on out of court disposals; proposed bail reforms and a step-change in the bail process to consider victims' views; and empowering local areas to develop their own perpetrator strategies and needs assessments for a more strategic approach to DA perpetrators. While this progress was positive, there remains a need for a sustained cross-government focus on responding to perpetrators of domestic abuse. Departments including the Department for Education, Department for Health and Social Care and Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities must follow lead of Home Office and commit to developing improved responses to perpetrators within their policy areas. Also need better workforce development and training offer (on recognising and responding to perpetrators) across the statutory and voluntary sector; robust focus on quality practice and standards for services and professionals working with domestic abuse perpetrators; and interventions available across all geographic areas for different levels of risk and harm - there is currently no definitive map of interventions working with perpetrators across the country, but we know from the Domestic Abuse Commissioner Office's research and own membership that coverage of services is patchy.

Reflections on the Pursuing Perpetrators Pillar and its impact for victim-survivors

Shana Begum outlined strong support for the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan and its Pursuing Perpetrators Pillar, particularly the positive commitments and investment attached within. However, key focus has to be on ensuring that this investment is effective and used correctly and, similarly, that perpetrator interventions have sustainable and sufficient funding to be longer-term, effective programmes rather than 'quick fixes' which inevitably won't work. Personal experiences have highlighted the

ability of perpetrators to genuinely change and stop using abusive behaviour. Work with many victim-survivors who are strong advocates of perpetrator work, and it is essential that victim-survivors' safety and voice remain at the centre of all perpetrator work.

Next steps for tackling perpetrators and increasing safety of victim-survivors

Hannah Gousy outlined police perpetrated domestic abuse as a key priority for the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office, particularly specific issues such as removal of warrant cards for those under investigation, changes to policing regulations regarding officers under investigation, improving the vetting process, and utilising MARAC and social care to assess who is moving into police forces. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner is already progressing work in this area; particularly in working with the domestic abuse specialist unit with the MET, and through role as Chair of the Strategic Reference Group. Also interested in understanding more about the proposals for a perpetrator register within the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan – if this does go ahead it's essential that a strong community response is embedded within, however much more in favour of utilising existing mechanisms and interventions such as MATAC and the Drive Project. Early interventions and management of intervention within a public health approach is essential. Also interested in the Victims and Prisoners Bill and the opportunity that it presents – the Domestic Abuse Commissioner is specifically focused on amendments to community based domestic abuse services, and wants the Bill to go further so that strategic needs assessments are carried out and the patchwork of provision is assessed.

Sophie Francis-Cansfield outlined key priorities and concerns on behalf of Women's Aid in relation to tackling perpetrators, including concerns regarding the perpetrator register. Progress has been made, but there remain entrenched attitudes across society that need addressing – for example, some types of abuse are still considered to be less serious than others.

Laura Farris raised point within Clare Wade's Review regarding pornography, gendered crime, sexual violence and strangulation and asked what more parliamentarians can be doing to address the tension between the efforts the Government is making and the role of the private sector in enabling content.

Sophie Francis-Canfield highlighted the need for a whole system response – tackling gendered crime won't work if each area of abuse is approached in silos. This is a key focus of Women's Aid – particularly in the run up to the next election.

Jo Todd recommended that Government utilise all of the existing mechanisms and legislation at its disposal to block harmful behaviour from the private sector. Must address the societal impact of the actions of large companies.

Laura Farris flagged Children's Commissioner's report and important findings on link between violent pornography and peer-to-peer violence/violent behaviour towards women.

Discussion on next steps and key focuses for APPG 2023/2024

Alex Davies-Jones suggested focusing on young people and education following above discussion and inviting the Secretary of State for Education.

Hannah Gousy agreed and reiterated call for cross-department collaboration and commitment beyond the Home Office, particularly the Department for Education on this point.

Sophie Francis-Canfield echoed above point, and outlined the need for further engagement with the Violence Against Women and Girls sector within this – there is a wealth of experience in Relationships and Sex Education and existing toolkits that the sector has already developed that can be utilised. Also suggested focusing on Ministry of Justice's mediation consultation and concerns across the sector.

Jo Todd agreed, and suggested focusing on parental alienation and issues across the family courts.

Hannah Gousy shared details of upcoming report from the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office on family courts, and suggested a focus on this at the next meeting.

Alex Davies-Jones confirmed and suggested aiming to secure this meeting pre-recess.