**All Party Parliamentary Group on Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse**

**Minutes of roundtable discussion on a proposed national domestic abuse register**

**Date and time:** 2 – 3pm, Wednesday 18th January 2023

**Location:** Room M, Portcullis House

**Attendees:**

* Alex Davies-Jones MP (Chair);
* Liz Saville-Roberts MP;
* Anna Ryder (on behalf of Jess Phillips MP);
* Kelly Grehan (on behalf of Ellie Reeves MP);
* Laurie Sutcliffe (Office of Alex Davies-Jones MP);
* Jo Todd, Respect;
* Caroline Bernard, Respect;
* Toby North, Respect and The Drive Partnership;
* Kyla Kirkpatrick, The Drive Partnership;
* Rhys Hart, Office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales;
* Kate Reader, Home Office;
* Cindy Keehner, His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service;
* Lizzy Dobres, Women’s Aid Federation England;
* Hermione Greenhalgh, Safelives;
* Ella Thomas, Association of Police and Crime Commissioners.

**Minutes**

**Chair, Alex Davies-Jones MP, welcomed attendees and set out the policy context for government proposals to introduce a national domestic abuse register:**

* The Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan, published in March 2022, set out Government’s commitment to exploring options for the creation of a national register of domestic abuse offenders. The stated aim of such a register would be to actively manage the most harmful perpetrators and prevent re-offending.
* The DA Plan stated that the government will consider the following:
	+ Requiring the most dangerous domestic abusers to report certain matters to the police, such as when they start new relationships, open a bank account with a partner, or change address.
	+ Exploring the most effective multi-agency forums for sharing information and creating plans which target perpetrators in order to protect victims and their children. These could also help us better understand patterns of behaviour, including whether the harm and severity of abuse escalates over time.
	+ Looking into ways to formally label these offenders as ‘domestic abusers’ so they are more easily identifiable.
* During the passage of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 members may recall a very live discussion about the possibility of introducing a national domestic abuse register through an amendment which would have seen all serial or high risk DA offenders managed under Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). At the time, the government strongly resisted such a change- arguing that changes to MAPPA statutory guidance, combined with wider measures and funding for perpetrator interventions, would better strengthen the management of high-harm domestic abuse and stalking perpetrators.
* However, beyond this, little has been discussed about how a register would sit alongside existing mechanisms, such as Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) or the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS), in order to be effective in reducing the risk which perpetrators pose to victim/survivors.

**The Chair opened discussion on the potential benefits and challenges of such a register.**

**Liz Saville-Roberts MP** recalled discussion of the proposed amendment to the DA Act which would have introduced a register through changes to MAPPA, and noted that the police had raised a number of concerns about their capacity to effectively manage such a register. However, she felt that those concerns could be overcome if policing recognised domestic abuse as a priority and part of their core activity. Also recalled a previously published London Assembly report which clearly set out the benefits of such a register.

**Jo Todd** recognised the ambition behind establishing a register, and that all present would be in agreement that more must be done to identify high-harm, high-risk and serial perpetrators and manage the risk they pose to victims. However, Respect and other stakeholders have previously been sceptical about the introduction of a register, as there is a risk it could divert attention and resources away from other effective mechanisms of managing this cohort of perpetrators. A register of domestic abuse offenders would do little to reduce the risk they pose to victim/survivors unless there is dynamic risk assessment of those placed on the register and effective multi-agency working to manage that risk. There were also serious considerations around the definition of relevant offenders, and thresholds for being added to the register.

**Ella Thomas** stated that amongst Police and Crime Commissioners there was not an agreed position in relation to a domestic abuse register, but the APCC and policing partners were keen to understand who would be responsible for maintaining it, and who would be accountable when things go wrong.

**Alex Davies-Jones MP** asked what comparisons and lessons could be drawn from the operation of the sex offenders register, as there would likely be many parallels in terms of notification requirements and electronic monitoring. It was recognised though that the number of domestic abuse offenders to be included would likely be significantly larger than those on the sex offenders register, and that would have implications in terms of capacity and resource to manage this cohort of offenders.

**Rhys Hart** stated that the Domestic Abuse Commissioner shared concernsabout resourcing, and the possibility that development of a register would detract from getting other measures put in place to manage the most harmful perpetrators right. MAPPA, the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS), and Domestic Abuse Protection Orders were all examples of such measures. The application of these tools to effectively manage the risk that perpetrators posed varied from police force to police force, and this inconsistency could just be replicated with use of a register.

**Lizzy Dobres** noted that admission to a domestic abuse register would need to be based on criminal conviction. From the perspective of services that support victims, only a minority of perpetrators would be known to police or convicted offenders, so a register was unlikely to be effective in many cases.

**Liz Saville-Roberts MP** reiterated that it would not be the register alone which would reduce risk, but the police response to notifications and change of risk.

**Rhys Hart** agreed, but highlighted that police forces are often ill-equipped to assess how notifications impact risk- citing the example of sexual harm prevention notices which have previously had a requirement for the offender notify the police if they intend to have sexual intercourse.

**Kyla Kirkpatrick** cited the Drive Project as a model of effectively managing high risk, high harm perpetrators of domestic abuse already being delivered. It is an intervention currently operating in 8 police force areas, involving a police-led multi-agency perpetrator panel to manage and assess risk, along with intensive case management in order to disrupt abuse and change behaviour. A similar approach is also being delivered – referred to as multi-agency agency tasking and coordination – in a number of other police force areas. Crucially, it can be adapted to meet different local arrangements and ways of working, and does not rely on a criminal conviction to engage/manage a perpetrator – cases can be referred via MARAC based on their current level of risk. It can also It would be preferable to see this type of approach rolled out more widely, rather than the implementation of a register that risks “shining a light on the tip of the iceberg”.

**Alex Davies-Jones MP** referred to her understanding of Drive operating in her constituency and South Wales more broadly. She noted that it has proved incredibly effective, but it was dependent on the focus and commitment of the police and crime commissioner working alongside the local police force.

**Anna Ryder** queried whether having a national register could help overcome some of the variable responses to managing perpetrators that we currently see- achieving a response that is both more consistent and more effective.

**Liz Saville Roberts MP** felt that an overarching national register was needed, but that it would mean little unless it was underpinned by action and the type of interventions discussed.

**Caroline Bernard** queried how a register could be implemented in a way that incentivised local areas to improve their coordinated response to perpetrators, and hold them accountable if they did not.

**Ella Thomas** highlighted the variation in current local delivery models, and that placing additional duties and responsibilities on police forces would be challenging. It would therefore be preferable if existing mechanisms for managing high risk perpetrators could be built upon, rather than an additional requirement introduced. She also queried what the impact of the register would be on programmes working with perpetrators – was there a risk it would reduce the capacity of policing to engage with multi-agency work?

**Jo Todd** felt that having a register that was specific to domestic abuse could be useful if it raises the profile of the need to respond better to perpetrators, but the reality is police forces will already have a reasonable knowledge of high-risk and prolific perpetrators in their area. The value of a register could be the potential it has to focus minds and budgets in local areas on responding to those perpetrators. The £75million of funding which has been made available for perpetrator interventions as part of the DA plan was very welcome, but in reality it is still only a drop in the ocean. Case levels are significant- both in terms of volume, but also in level of harm. If a register is to be implemented then it may be useful in leveraging more funding for the response to perpetrators.

There does also need to be a consideration of pathways for convicted offenders vs those who are not – currently programmes can work with perpetrators based on risk, not criminal record, and we shouldn’t undermine that. But there would be clear civil liberties obstacles for including non-convicted offenders on a register. Although DAPOs are a civil order, so perhaps inclusion on a register could be considered as part of the positive requirements element of DAPOs?

**Kyla Kirkpatrick** also reflected on the Drive Partnership’s experience of working with different police forces, and that much more needs to be done in terms of culture change so that police forces see domestic abuse as part of their core business.

**Rhys Hart** highlighted learning from the gangs matrix implemented by the Met some years back, and how it disproportionately impacted some minoritised groups – this would be a concern regarding admission to a register without a conviction or order. The DAC’s office was also very focussed on looking at the whole system- their mapping report had found that only 7% of victim survivors had seen their perpetrator access a behaviour change programme, and they too are mindful that many perpetrators won’t be picked up by the criminal justice system.

**Liz Saville-Roberts MP** highlighted the important of police forces and multi agency partners joining incidents together to recognise patterns in abuse. It may be that individual incidents don’t meet a threshold for risk or harm, but a pattern of behaviour does.

**Cindy Keehner** reflected that the probation service recognises both opportunities and challenges with a potential domestic abuse register. It could duplicate mechanisms dealing with some cohorts though, leaving no response for others. Probation do currently work with those offenders not convicted of a domestic abuse related offence, but who might be considered a DA risk, so there may be valuable lessons from that work. Consideration must also be given to what the implications would be if a perpetrator on the register breached an order or notification requirements, and whether that would be the most effective use of resources to track. Furthermore, what would need to happen with information gathered through notification requirements? What risk assessment would take place? Would a victim-survivor be involved or notified, and what safeguarding activity might need to take place?

**Alex Davies-Jones MP** summarised that this reflected a key question from our discussion- whether investment in a perpetrator register would be worthwhile, or whether other mechanisms could prove more effective.

**Ella Thomas** highlighted the need for increased evidence and understanding on what mechanisms currently are proving effective, and sharing of best practice to drive improvements in the response to perpetrators.

**Alex Davies- Jones MP** thanked all for attending and brought the discussion to a close. Suggested that as a next step in this discussion the APPG/Secretariat should work up a set of principles to inform the development of a perpetrator register. This is something that parliamentarians could then utilise further and put to the relevant Ministers.