

Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Strategic Reference Group on Perpetrators

Responding to high-risk, high-harm perpetrators

Introduction

The [Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Strategic Reference Group on Perpetrators](#) brings together leaders across a range of sectors, quarterly, to stimulate thinking, build cross-sector relationships, and nurture leadership with regard to responses to domestic abuse perpetrators. Members include representatives across national systems, statutory services, the voluntary sector, and pioneers with lived experience, alongside a range of speakers and attendees at quarterly meetings. The following paper is a summary of the Strategic Reference Group's recent meetings regarding best practice in the management of high-risk, high-harm perpetrators and the most effective future direction in response to this cohort within the context of renewed political interest in the introduction of a national register for convicted perpetrators.

Political context

Proposals for a national perpetrator register resurfaced during political debates within the passage of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. At the time, the Government resisted an amendment that would have seen all serial or high-risk domestic abuse perpetrators managed under Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA); arguing that the management of high-risk, high-harm perpetrators would be better strengthened by changes to MAPPA statutory guidance, alongside wider measures and funding for perpetrator interventions. While the amendment was unsuccessful, a commitment to exploring proposals for a national perpetrator register was included within the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan 2022, and key figures across parties continued to express interest in the development of such, including Sir Kier Starmer during his 2022 Labour Party Conference keynote speech.

In the same year, the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act introduced the Serious Violence Duty, which requires various public agencies to work together to identify, analyse, and actively prevent serious violence within their local communities. Many areas have included domestic abuse within their local interpretation of the Serious Violence Duty, and have utilised it to drive funding and resources towards identifying and responding to high-risk, high-harm perpetrators.

In 2024, proposals for a national perpetrator register – for both stalking and domestic abuse – were raised again within a proposed amendment to the Victims & Prisoners Act. While the amendment was ultimately unsuccessful during the wash-up period of the July 2024 General Election, its initial success within the House of Lords highlighted a recurring political interest in the introduction of a national perpetrator register.

Both during and following the 2024 General Election, the new Labour Government has outlined its mission to use every tool available to target perpetrators and address the root causes of violence against women and girls (VAWG) as part of its goal to halve VAWG within the next decade, including a focus on police forces compiling and utilising intelligence to identify and track high-risk offenders¹. This strategy emphasises enhanced tracking and targeting of perpetrators, taking on an approach inspired by counter-terror tactics, and represents a dynamic, intelligence-led model compared with more static, register-like approaches.

Practice context

Following renewed political interest in the introduction of a national register for convicted perpetrators, the Strategic Reference Group sought to establish and explore existing management approaches to high-risk, high-harm perpetrators to inform discussion on the most effective future direction of responses to this cohort.

The Strategic Reference Group explored a number of existing approaches, including:

- MATAC (Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination), which utilises analysis of ‘Frequency, Recency, Gravity/Harm, Victim’ to identify and tackle the most harmful perpetrators.
- MAPPA, established within the Criminal Justice Act 2003, which requires local criminal justice agencies and other bodies dealing with offenders to work together in partnership to discharge their statutory duties to manage the risk of previously convicted violent and sexual offenders living in the community.

Following the implementation of the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024, automatic

¹ Labour Party policy on crime and antisocial behaviour, June 2024:
<https://labour.org.uk/updates/stories/labour-party-policy-crime-antisocial-behaviour-how-we-will-take-back-our-streets/>

management under MAPPA will also apply to those convicted of coercive and controlling behaviour (CCB) with sentences of 12 months or more².

- The Drive Project, the Drive Partnership's flagship perpetrator intervention for high-risk, high-harm and serial perpetrators, which works with police, probation and wider statutory and non-statutory services in a multi-agency, intensive case management approach to disrupt, challenge, and change the behaviour of those causing harm.

The Strategic Reference Group also explored a number of new developments, including:

- Essex Police's Domestic Abuse Problem Solving Teams, which utilise Artificial Intelligence to identify the domestic abuse risk level of repeat offenders in each area of the county.
- The Metropolitan Police's Top 100 Strategy, which seeks to identify the top 100 most dangerous offenders through analysis and a weighted scoring system associated to existing crime reporting data in relation to recency, severity and frequency.

The Strategic Reference Group concluded with an exploration of proposals for the introduction of a national register for convicted perpetrators, including insights from academics at the University of Essex, who published research in September 2024 which explores what a perpetrator register might look like, how a perpetrator register might work alongside existing mechanisms and approaches, and the potential benefits and risks of introducing a perpetrator register. Their conclusions were that such a register would do little for victim-survivors and that the proposed register would cost between £8.6m to £11.2m in the first year alone, but only apply to a fraction of domestic abuse and stalking offenders. The research further outlines that only 4.4% of domestic abuse and 1.7% of stalking perpetrators receive convictions, let alone custodial sentences, yet the register would only apply to those who have served time

² The Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 (Commencement No. 4) Regulations 2025, Implementation of measures which will make controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship a Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) eligible offence: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2025/95/pdfs/ukxi_20250095_en.pdf

in prison.³ The report⁴ also warns of false reassurance for victims, noting that victim-survivors who hear about the register might assume that their perpetrator is being monitored and tracked by police, when the likelihood is that they won't be.

Reflections on best practice

Following exploration of current approaches to high-risk, high-harm perpetrators, the Strategic Reference Group reflected on the core elements of best practice in response to this cohort. For best practice in response to high-risk, high-harm perpetrators, there must be effective and consistent multi-agency working across all areas from a range of partners both within and beyond the criminal justice system, including:

- Effective information gathering and sharing between all multi-agency partners;
- Consistent identification, assessment, and risk management of perpetrators, including addressing wider risk factors such as housing through perpetrator pathways that enable victim-survivors to remain safely in their homes;
- Engagement with, and available pathways into, evidence-based, quality-assured perpetrator interventions with effective wraparound support for both adult and child victim-survivors.

To ensure best practice across all areas, the core elements of this approach must be consistently applied nationally whilst also tailored locally to meet the needs of local communities. Within discussions on best practice, the Strategic Reference Group also identified ongoing system-wide challenges in relation to capacity, resourcing, and training which, although can impact consistency and effectiveness across current approaches, do not detract from the core principles of best practice outlined above. Members agree that these core principles of best practice must be central to any new developments in response to high-risk, high-harm perpetrators, and that national systems, statutory and non-statutory services, and the domestic abuse sector must

³ University of Essex, News: 'Domestic abuse and stalker register will do little to help victims – report', 2024: <https://www.essex.ac.uk/news/2024/09/26/domestic-abuse-and-stalker-register-will-do-little-for-victims>

⁴ University of Essex, A Register for Domestic Abuse and Stalking Offenders in England and Wales? A Report to Inform Policy and Practice, 2024: https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/departments/sociology/da_stalkers_register_report_essex_university-accessible-appendix-final.pdf

work together to address ongoing challenges and build upon existing best practice approaches.

Reflections on proposals for a perpetrator register and future direction of management

In light of the Strategic Reference Group's discussions on best practice in response to high-risk, high-harm perpetrators and the specialist expertise held by its members, the Strategic Reference Group is concerned by renewed political interest in the introduction of a national register of convicted perpetrators, which, as a standalone tool, would do little to identify, co-ordinate management, or reduce the risk of perpetrators. As such, the Strategic Reference Group is concerned that the introduction of a national perpetrator register would not only do little to strengthen current best practice approaches or address existing challenges, but also has the potential to offer a false sense of security around dangerous perpetrators whilst drawing attention and resources away from effective mechanisms and services that already exist and are in urgent need of sufficient and sustainable funding.

As such, the Strategic Reference Group agrees that proposals for a perpetrator register should only be introduced as part of a wider package that locates it within an effective national system of perpetrator responses and victim-survivor support, including consistent approaches to identification, assessment and intervention, addressing existing gaps and challenges in the system, and facilitating the consistent implementation and expansion of best practice approaches, such as the establishment of domestic abuse perpetrator panels in each police force area.

Following renewed political interest in proposals for a national perpetrator register ahead of the General Election in July 2024, and a new Government now in place developing a refreshed VAWG strategy, the Strategic Reference Group is keen to engage with the Government to ensure the most effective and consistent response to high-risk, high-harm perpetrators. Central to this is ensuring that decision-making on any new proposals for a national perpetrator register has been informed by existing research and sector expertise, and that any successful proposals would include a robust and evidence-based framework that works effectively alongside existing

mechanisms to strengthen responses to high-risk, high-harm perpetrators, rather than detract from them.