



Ministry  
of Defence

# No Defence for Abuse

## Domestic Abuse Action Plan 2024-2029

### January 2024





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# Ministerial Foreword

Rt Hon Dr Andrew Murrison MP, Minister for Defence People and Families



Domestic abuse takes multiple forms in the context of intimate and family relationships and is commonly characterised by a pattern of controlling and coercive behaviour. It disproportionately affects women, but anyone can be impacted.

We have a clear duty to safeguard our people and their families from domestic abuse. This plan reaffirms our commitment to ensuring our services and support systems, both in the UK and overseas, are up to the task.

This plan sets out what we will do to strengthen our response to domestic abuse through increased coordination, collaboration, and accountability. It calls on our key services to benchmark how they are responding to victims-survivors, and to identify what more can be done to provide effective support, including holding perpetrators to account

This plan builds on our previous strategy, complements government efforts to tackle domestic abuse, and seeks to ensure best practice is embedded across Defence.

As a member of the violence against women and girls (VAWG) inter-ministerial group, I am acutely aware of the harm caused by domestic abuse and fully endorse this action plan.

# Welcome

## Lt Col Elisabeth Roberts, Defence Domestic Abuse Survivor Community and Awareness Network (DDASCAN)



As the Chair of DDASCAN, I would like to thank all those who have been involved in shaping and developing this plan, including our four senior Domestic Abuse Awareness Champions who have all been keen to engage with us, listen to us, and offer their support to our network.

As a survivor, I would like to express my own personal gratitude, not just for this plan but for every bit of work that has been undertaken to date across Defence to address and tackle domestic abuse and support those with lived experience of it. If you are one of those people, please know that you are making an invaluable difference and that you are appreciated. I genuinely cannot put into words how much it means. I regularly ask myself why anyone cares – it overwhelms me that among so many competing Defence priorities this has found a voice... and that voice is loud.

Living through domestic abuse is lonely, and escaping it is costly in so many ways, often triggering a whole new level of abuse. The delivery of this plan, this investment in tackling domestic abuse – raising awareness, educating, equipping leaders, caring about those who are living it – means that the journey to freedom will not be quite so lonely, and the load a little bit lighter.

If you are not directly involved with the delivery of this plan, you can still play a vital role. If you know of someone living through domestic abuse, please be there for them. Simply listening without judgement and believing them will make a difference. I owe so much to those who did that for me; never underestimate the value of being that trusted workplace friend.

It is still very early days for DDASCAN and I am excited about the journey ahead. Within the first 48 hours of launching our membership registration earlier this summer, we already had over one hundred members. We look forward to providing a safe space for survivors, partnering with allies to advocate on their behalf, and doing all we can to help raise awareness and understanding about domestic abuse across Defence, at all levels. You can read more about DDASCAN in this plan.

Finally, I ask all those who are in a position to deliver and influence this plan to be bold and ambitious in the execution of it and to hold each other to account. Every day that something doesn't happen there will be another victim, and for every day that something does, you may just save a life.

Thank you to all those with lived experience of domestic abuse who have bravely shared their stories, and thank you to all those who have listened and responded.



# Introduction

In 2018 we launched our first ever strategy to tackle domestic abuse which detailed our commitment to **prevent, intervene and partner** to support those affected and increase awareness across Defence.<sup>1</sup> We have made steady progress with key achievements including:

- multiple whole force awareness campaigns and tailored materials
- introducing senior domestic abuse awareness roles in the single Services
- establishing the first Defence Domestic Abuse Survivor Community and Awareness Network (DDASCAN)
- publishing a whole force domestic abuse policy, Joint Service Publication 913
- upskilling key staff in domestic abuse-informed practice
- increasing partnership working
- establishing the Defence Serious Crime Command (DSCC), Defence Serious Crime Unit (DSCU) and Victim Witness Care Unit (VWCU)<sup>2</sup>

Building on our work, this plan sets out how we will continue to tackle domestic abuse over the next five years. It aims to strengthen our response and deliver on our key policy principles of prioritising support to victims-survivors, holding perpetrators to account, and developing a whole system response with an informed workforce.

This plan sits alongside multiple strategies and related policies and encompasses review recommendations and learning from research. It has been informed by victims-survivors and key stakeholders including academia.<sup>3</sup> It is written for all Defence people in the UK and overseas, including Regular and Reserve personnel, Service families, and Defence civilians.

As senior awareness champions, we will continue to play our part by fully supporting the implementation of this plan and by calling on the Defence community to view tackling domestic abuse as being everyone's business.

While much has been achieved, we know there is more to do to ensure there remains no justification, no place among our community, and no defence for abuse.

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1 This plan adopts the term 'domestic abuse' to capture the broad nature of abuse as defined in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. Where there is reference to 'domestic violence' or 'interpersonal violence', this relates to terminology adopted by other organisations.

2 The DSCC and DSCU were established to improve serious crime policing within Defence with an emphasis on increasing victim confidence, care and safeguarding, resulting in the VWCU.

3 Not everyone who has experienced, or is experiencing, domestic abuse chooses to describe themselves as a 'victim' or sees themselves as a 'survivor'. As such, the term 'victim-survivor' is used throughout this action plan.

**Lucy Bogue**

Director, Security and Estate, DIO,  
**Senior Domestic Abuse Awareness  
Champion**



**Rear Admiral Jude Terry**

Director, People and Training,  
**Domestic Abuse Awareness  
Champion**



**Brigadier AJ Smith**

Chief of Staff, HQ Regional Command  
**Domestic Abuse Awareness Champion**



**Air Marshal Paul Lloyd**

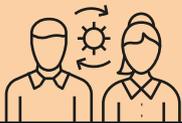
Deputy Chief of the Air Staff  
**Domestic Abuse Awareness Champion**



# Domestic abuse in numbers



More than **1 in 10** Armed Forces personnel have experienced intimate partner violence and abuse (research by Kings College London).



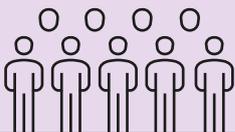
Data supplied from **28** police forces showed that of domestic abuse-related crimes recorded by the police in the year ending March 2023, 73.5% of victims were female and 26.5% were male (CSEW March 2023).



**1.4 million** women and **751,000** men aged 16 years and over experienced domestic abuse in the last year; this equates to 5.7% of women and 3.2% of men (CSEW March 2023).



Based on the CSEW March 2023, the ManKind Initiative charity estimate that between **2,000 to 2,300** male armed forces regulars are victims of partner abuse every year.



Approximately **1 in 5** people aged 16 years and over (9.8 million) had experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16 years (CSEW March 2023).



Domestic abuse-related crimes represented **16.2%** of all offences recorded by the police in the last year (CSEW March 2023)



Police made almost **245,000** referrals to social services for domestic abuse in 2020/21, with an average of **669** child protection referrals to social services every day (NSPCC).

# The problem

“ Domestic abuse is a complex and multi-faceted form of crime. It can be physical, verbal, sexual, emotional, psychological, economic, a combination of these, and include many other forms of harmful behaviour. There is no one type of domestic abuse, nor is there one solution to remedy it...”

– Home Office Domestic Abuse Plan 2022

Domestic abuse can involve:



**Controlling or coercive behaviour**



**Violent or threatening behaviour**



**Physical or sexual abuse**



**Economic abuse**



**Technology-facilitated abuse**



**Psychological, emotional or other abuse**



**Stalking**

“ Domestic abuse can happen against anyone, and anybody can be an abuser. When I look back it’s easy to see that my relationship was abusive from the start and followed a textbook pattern. ”

– MOD victim-survivor

Domestic abuse usually occurs behind closed doors and can be difficult to detect. Perpetrators are adept at using control tactics, often inducing fear to silence and restrict the actions and agency of victims-survivors.

In stark recognition of the scale and impact of violence against women and girls (VAWG) which involves domestic abuse, it is now included in the 2023 Strategic Policing Requirement as a national threat alongside that of terrorism and serious and organised crime.<sup>4,5</sup>

While there is recognition and evidence that the most effective way to tackle domestic abuse is by preventing violence towards women and girls (which includes male victims affected by these crimes), we also recognise there is no typical victim-survivor. As detailed in our whole force policy,

Joint Service Publication 913, support will be offered to anyone in Defence who seeks it, irrespective of gender or any other personal characteristics.

## Defence context

“ In Defence, we are in a particularly vulnerable position to be abused by partners. Whether you are the serving half of the relationship or not, or if you both are, isolation from our support network due to posting and moving around is commonplace among our community. We experience different sets of challenges as part and parcel of military life. ”

– MOD victim-survivor

Domestic abuse is pervasive in society and we are not immune to it. Research by Kings College London (KCL), jointly funded by the MOD, found increased prevalence of intimate partner violence and abuse (IPVA) in our Armed Forces community compared to the general population.<sup>6,7</sup> As such, the case for sustained effort to tackle domestic abuse could not be clearer.

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- 4 The term ‘violence against women and girls’ (VAWG) refers to acts of violence or abuse that disproportionately affect women and girls. Crimes and behaviour covered by this term include rape and other sexual offences, domestic abuse, stalking, ‘honour’-based abuse (including female genital mutilation, forced marriage, and ‘honour’ killings), as well as many others, including offences committed online. While the term ‘violence against women and girls’ is used, we refer to all victims regardless of gender.
- 5 Strategic Policing Requirement 2023 at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/strategic-policing-requirement-2023](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strategic-policing-requirement-2023)
- 6 Intimate partner violence and abuse experience and perpetration in UK military personnel compared to a general population cohort: A cross-sectional study at <https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/intimate-partner-violence-and-abuse-experience-and-perpetration-i-2>
- 7 The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines IPVA as incorporating four separate types of abuse: emotional (e.g. belittling, humiliating), psychological (e.g. threatening behaviour, verbal aggression), physical violence, and sexual violence.

In our previous strategy, we highlighted military factors that could increase vulnerability for victims-survivors by creating barriers to seeking support, including:

- economic dependence on the Serving person and concerns regarding potential loss of livelihood
- assignments to new locations, potentially leaving victims-survivors isolated from wider family support, particularly if posted overseas
- concerns the perpetrator's career may be affected and a belief that the Chain of Command will not support the victim-survivor but side with the perpetrator
- non-UK partners of Armed Forces personnel being dependent on their partner for their immigration status
- possible perception that the skills and training associated with service could be misused, resulting in the possibility of increased risk of harm to a victim-survivor
- perceptions around matters of rank when raising concerns to medical and welfare staff

Research by KCL has increased our understanding of military specific factors which can be drivers of IPVA (relationship dissatisfaction, military trauma, mental health, alcohol misuse) or create contexts in which it can be more likely to arise. We also know more from recent research about military specific barriers to the identification and management of IPVA as well as barriers to accessing support.<sup>8</sup> In response to this we will work with policy leads to determine what we are already doing to address these drivers and barriers and where identified make the case for additional resources.

**“ It did not stop there. Post-separation financial abuse and the use of our child as a pawn to cause emotional distress and exercise control. ”**

– MOD victim-survivor

## Policy and legislative landscape

Since launching our previous strategy, there has been a significant amount of policy and legislative activity to address domestic abuse. Most notably, the landmark Domestic Abuse Act 2021 became law and the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan 2022 was published.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 creates the first statutory definition of domestic abuse which includes not only physical violence, but that of emotional, coercive and controlling behaviour and economic abuse. The Act introduces new criminal offences, including the threat to publish intimate images, non-fatal strangulation, and extends the offence of controlling and coercive behaviour to apply post-separation. Under the Act, children receive statutory recognition as ‘victims’ rather than ‘witnesses’ if they see, hear or experience abuse, and statutory duties are placed on local authorities to provide accommodation support for victims-survivors and their children.

The Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan identifies the key problem areas requiring action and details the approach to addressing these issues by prioritising prevention, supporting victims, pursuing perpetrators, and creating a stronger system.

8 Help-seeking for Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse: Experiences of Serving and Ex-serving UK Military Personnel at <https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/help-seeking-for-intimate-partner-violence-and-abuse-experiences->

# Our response

Drawing on the above, our response to tackling domestic abuse is organised into three key areas: **prevention, intervention and partnering.**



## Prevention

Raise awareness of domestic abuse, what it might involve, warning signs and how to find and offer help.

Communicate effectively with victims-survivors, perpetrators, managers and leaders, and service providers.

Identify those at most risk and those least likely to access support services.



## Intervention

Provide access to dedicated support services that are domestic abuse and trauma informed.

Ensure a safe and effective response through appropriate training and awareness.

Ensure policies do not act as barriers to gaining support.



## Partnering

Work together with key stakeholders, including survivor networks, to ensure the Defence response to abuse reflects best practice.

Work with statutory agencies, support organisations, and expert bodies to help them understand Service life and to provide tailored services.

## Co-ordinated Community Response

Survivor voice, intersectionality, shared objective, structure and governance, strategy and leadership, specialist services, representation, resources, co-ordination, training, data, policies and processes

**MOD and Armed Forces Domestic Abuse working groups**

**A whole system response to domestic abuse**

# Prevention

Preventing domestic abuse from happening in the first place is where we all stand to gain. Prevention is critical to reducing prevalence and the many harms associated with domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse is rarely obvious with victims-survivors often unaware they are experiencing abuse. We will therefore continue to communicate what constitutes domestic abuse (including familial abuse), who it impacts, and where/how to get support. This will include pathways to behaviour change for those who have harmed others or are concerned about their own behaviour.

We will work with external charities, including the Alice Ruggles Trust, to increase awareness of stalking which features in over 20% of domestic abuse cases.<sup>9</sup> We will continue to raise awareness of coercive control in recognition that of those who experience partner abuse, 84% experienced non-physical abuse.<sup>10</sup> As detailed in the statutory guidance issued under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, our campaigns will also raise awareness of technology-facilitated abuse.

For our campaigns to be effective, they must reach those who are least likely to access support services. To combat this we will

work in partnership with initiatives supporting non-UK civilian partners and other identified groups who face additional barriers to seeking and gaining support. We will ensure victims-survivors have access to information about resources, including initiatives such as indefinite leave to remain.<sup>11</sup>

## Practice in action

### Nepali Domestic and Sexual Abuse Support Service

As part of Citizens Advice Rushmoor, the Nepali Domestic and Sexual Abuse outreach project provides free, independent, confidential, and impartial support for serving and veteran families from the Nepali community who are affected by domestic abuse.

Funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund, the service employs a Nepali Independent Domestic Violence Adviser with understanding and insight into the specific cultural issues facing Nepali victims-survivors of abuse. The service provides face-to-face, phone and online support and has translated initiatives including the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme into Nepali. The service can be accessed in the UK and by families when based overseas.

9 Alice Ruggles was murdered in 2016 by her ex-boyfriend who was a serving soldier. The trust exists to raise awareness of stalking (including coercive control), to ensure that relevant legislation is effective and adhered to, and to bring about lasting improvements in the management of perpetrators and the protection of victims.

10 See 'Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview' at [ONS.GOV.UK](https://www.ons.gov.uk)

11 Domestic abuse victims-survivors, and their children, who are subject to UK immigration controls may be eligible for settlement (indefinite leave to remain (ILR)) if they have experienced domestic abuse as the partner of a British citizen, a person settled in the UK, or a member of HM Armed Forces who has served for at least four years.

We will continue to conduct whole force awareness campaigns and build trust in the Defence approach to tackling abuse. The single Services will conduct campaigns based on this action plan and evidence/ data highlighted at their domestic abuse working groups. Campaigns will drive home messaging that all victims-survivors will be supported in Defence.

““ The stigma attached to the thought of coming forward to seek help for what had happened, not just as a man, but as an experienced serviceperson, compounded the stigma and made it more difficult.””

– MOD victim-survivor

We are determined that everyone working in Defence knows what we are doing to tackle domestic abuse. We will devise a Defence keynote presentation to be delivered across Defence setting out key aspects of our policy and approach as detailed in this plan. We will do more to harness the influence and leadership of our Senior Domestic Abuse Awareness Champions by further promoting their roles and agreeing key objectives.

As a large employer we have a duty of care to our workforce and recognise the importance of creating a safe and supportive work environment. This means acknowledging that we have employees who will be affected by domestic abuse and having appropriate guidance and policy.<sup>12</sup> To achieve this, we will continue active membership of the Employers’ Initiative on Domestic Abuse and work with civilian HR and military policy owners to ensure support to employees reflects best practice, as detailed in the Home Office Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance relating to employers.<sup>13,14</sup>

12 This could be as victims-survivors, carers, witnesses to abuse, or as perpetrators.

13 Employers’ Initiative on Domestic Abuse is a business network which empowers employers to take action against domestic abuse and brings together the experience, expertise and best practice of their members and partners to tackle abuse and raise awareness. See [www.eida.org.uk](http://www.eida.org.uk)

14 Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-act-2021/domestic-abuse-statutory-guidance-accessible-version>

## Defence culture

Defence cultural transformation has been driven by the Wigston Review into inappropriate behaviours, leading to the development of unacceptable behaviours policies and mandatory training.<sup>15</sup> Defence has since published zero tolerance policies on sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as a strategy to tackle sex offending. To further bring home Defence intolerance to domestic abuse it is now included in behaviour and complaints policy (Joint Service Publication 763) as being on the spectrum of unacceptable behaviours. Defence will continue to drive out toxic cultures by further embracing the benefits of inclusion, following recommendations in the recent review of UK Armed Forces incentivisation.<sup>16</sup>

Using all the tools at our disposal, we will continue to promote cultures of equality and inclusivity and do more to challenge values and beliefs that can facilitate abuse and create barriers for victims-survivors. We will ensure single Service cultural transformation programmes reinforce how domestic abuse, along with other unacceptable behaviours, is not compatible with service values and standards.

## Training

Preventing domestic abuse requires a common understanding of the dynamics of abuse and the skills and knowledge to respond. Victims-survivors face multiple barriers to seeking support that demands a 'get it right first time' response. To achieve this, we will begin by:

- building on the training needs analysis of the Service Justice System by undertaking a broader review to determine domestic abuse training needs for the rest of Defence
- promoting attendance on the Army Welfare Service Domestic Violence Informed Practice to all specialist welfare staff across the single Services
- building partnerships with local authorities to promote and enable Defence staff to access awareness training in their respective localities
- upskilling our Diversity and Inclusion Advisers and Practitioners (as part of our Sex Offending Strategy) and those instructing phase one and two training courses, to build their understanding of domestic abuse and associated myths
- reviewing general safeguarding training to ensure it covers the nature and impact of domestic abuse, and promoting the revised Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023<sup>17</sup>
- increasing training on domestic abuse for Commanding Officers so they are better equipped to support victims-survivors, following recommendations from a Service Justice System training needs analysis

15 Wigston Review into inappropriate behaviours at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/wigston-review-into-inappropriate-behaviours](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wigston-review-into-inappropriate-behaviours)

16 Agency and Agility: Incentivising people in a new era – a review of UK Armed Forces incentivisation at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/agency-and-agility-incentivising-people-in-a-new-era-a-review-of-uk-armed-forces-incentivisation](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/agency-and-agility-incentivising-people-in-a-new-era-a-review-of-uk-armed-forces-incentivisation)

17 Government guidance on multi-agency working to help, safeguard, protect and promote the welfare of children, due to be published autumn 2023.

## Practice in action

### Domestic Violence Informed Practice<sup>18</sup>

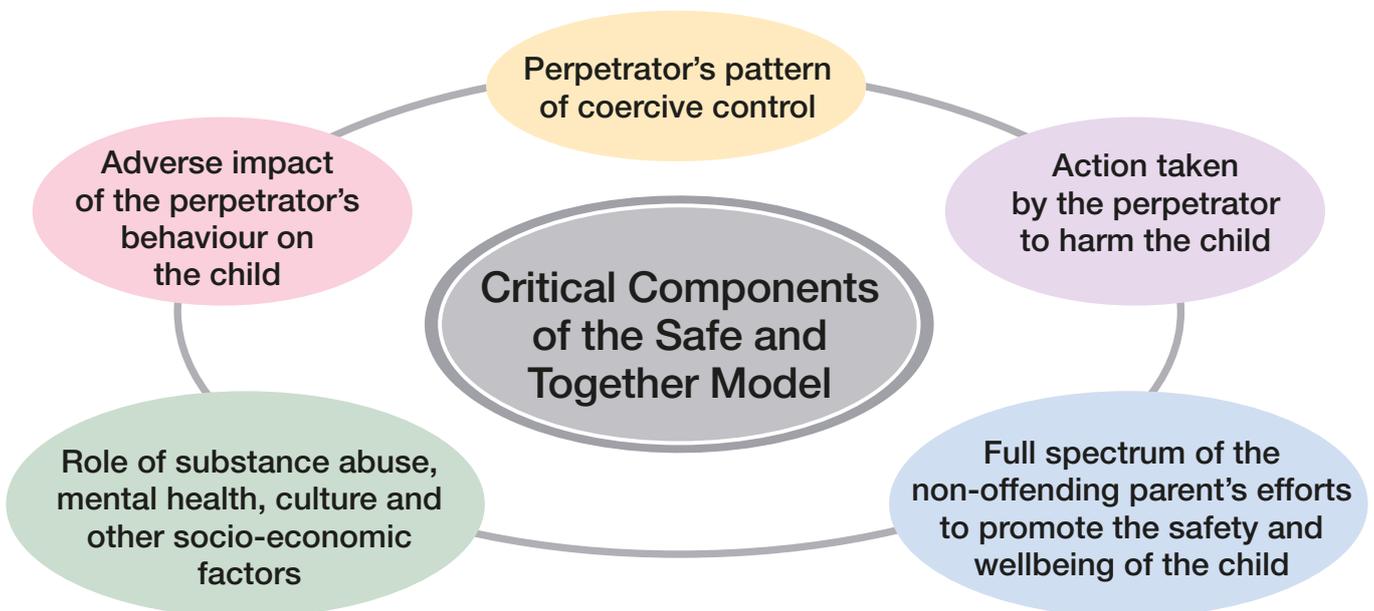
In 2019 several Army Welfare Workers were accredited to deliver training in the internationally recognised Safe and Together Model.

The Army Welfare Service instructors have since trained over 500 staff in this model encompassing health, social work, unit welfare, Service police and chaplains. The approach has been embedded in Army Welfare Service casework and a specialist team has been established to work with the most complex domestic abuse cases.

Titled ‘Domestic Violence Informed Practice’, this course equips those working with abuse to understand several key critical components to increase safety for victims-survivors and to hold perpetrators to account. By focusing on the perpetrator’s pattern of behaviour, a

more detailed understanding of risk is gained which informs understanding of the multiple impacts upon the victim-survivor or family. The model encourages cultural and systematic change and stresses the importance of language. The model shifts from a ‘blame’ or ‘failure to protect narrative’ that victims-survivors can experience and instead advocates strength-based assessment, partnering and intervention.

Use of the model has led to better recognition of domestic abuse and more accurate risk assessments. Additionally, the Army Welfare Service has been able to better identify destructive areas of practice, and policy and champion for systematic change to ensure increased proficiency in responding to domestic abuse.



18 Domestic Violence Informed Practice can be defined as a perpetrator-pattern, child-centred, survivor-strengths based approach to working with domestic abuse. It holds perpetrators to account while recognising the strengths of the non-offending partner to protect the safety and wellbeing of children. It aims to keep children and non-offending partners together and ultimately improve outcomes for adult and child survivors of domestic abuse. See [www.safeandtogetherinstitute.com/the-sti-model/model-overview/](http://www.safeandtogetherinstitute.com/the-sti-model/model-overview/)

# Intervention

## Supporting victims-survivors and holding to account those that harm others

“ I lost all my confidence, avoided going out with my friends as the arguments became overbearing and wasn't worth it. ”

– MOD victim-survivor

Intervening to prevent domestic abuse is often a complex and dynamic process involving assessment of risk, information sharing and safety planning. It demands a multi-agency response, skilled staff, and services that are organised and do the basic things well.



## Practice in action

### Whole system approach: North-East Hampshire Military Domestic Abuse Working Group

This meeting is chaired by a domestic abuse specialist external to Defence. Attendance includes police from all three Services, civilian police, specialist welfare organisations, external specialist support services (Independent Domestic Violence Advisors), local authority services, Defence domestic abuse policy lead, Defence community mental health team, education, and representation from the MOD survivors' network.

Bringing expertise together helps to articulate military-specific issues faced by victims-survivors and identify what is working well and where there are gaps in provision. The knowledge exchange from this way of working is mutually beneficial, ensuring continued review and refinement of our policies, practice and overall response to tackling domestic abuse.

For our interventions to be effective, they need to be conducted with the objective of doing no further harm and with services that are both domestic abuse and trauma informed. We will promote the government’s working definition of trauma-informed practice and accompanying principles throughout our health and support services, and Service Justice System, and articulate why this matters in the context of domestic abuse.<sup>19</sup>

To gain a deeper understanding of the Defence response to domestic abuse we will conduct health checks of key support services including unit and specialist welfare, health, and the Service Justice System including the Service police. Benchmarked against best practice, these evaluations will seek to determine the quality of our response, highlighting both our strengths and areas for action. These will take place across Defence (UK and overseas) commencing in 2024.

## Health

“ I turned to alcohol as a coping mechanism to deal with how I felt. I withdrew from my family and friends and avoided talking to anyone, I’d lost all sense of myself. ”

– MOD victim-survivor

Domestic abuse is a widely recognised public health issue with healthcare professionals often being the first point of contact for victims-survivors.<sup>20</sup>

To ensure our medical and healthcare professionals are appropriately equipped to respond to those experiencing abuse, we will:

- promote the Defence Primary Healthcare standard operating procedures for responding to domestic abuse and ensure this is built into staff inductions
- ensure health safeguarding leads are domestic abuse informed and able to guide other staff on best practice including referral pathways
- ensure routine and targeted screening for domestic abuse is embedded in day-to-day practice
- ensure staff can safely manage disclosures and signpost both victims-survivors and perpetrators to specialist support services

Given the nature and prevalence of domestic abuse, we will review the Defence People, Health and Wellbeing Strategy and consider the inclusion of those affected by domestic abuse as a health priority group.

Furthermore, there is a growing recognition of domestic abuse being a common risk factor in suicide. As part of this plan and the Defence Suicide Prevention Strategy and Action Plan we will raise awareness of the link and update relevant training content to inform those working in health and welfare support.

19 Trauma-informed practice is an approach to health and care interventions which is grounded in the understanding that trauma exposure can impact an individual’s neurological, biological, psychological and social development. Trauma-informed practice aims to increase practitioners’ awareness of how trauma can negatively impact on individuals and communities, and their ability to feel safe or develop trusting relationships with health and care services and their staff. See [www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-definition-of-trauma-informed-practice/working-definition-of-trauma-informed-practice](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-definition-of-trauma-informed-practice/working-definition-of-trauma-informed-practice)

20 HM Government, Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategy 2016- 2020 at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strategy-to-end-violence-against-women-and-girls-2016-to-2020/ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-strategy-2016-to-2020-accessible-version>

## Policing domestic abuse

The Defence role in tackling domestic abuse must include a robust, informed, and organised police response that understands the dynamics of abuse and the needs of victims-survivors. To achieve this, DSCC is leading the implementation of the Domestic Abuse Matters Change Programme to all Service police (UK and overseas), including integration into current and forward training courses.

### Domestic Abuse Matters

Domestic Abuse Matters is a cultural, attitudinal and practice transformation programme which builds on and enhances the policing response to those experiencing domestic abuse and those responsible for domestic abuse. The change programme will establish Domestic Abuse Matters Champions and engage strategic leads to ensure gains from the programme are sustained. Completion of the Domestic Abuse Matters programme will see our service police trained to the same level as civilian police forces in recognising and responding to coercive and controlling behaviour, leading to consistency in responses to Defence victims-survivors and in action taken to hold perpetrators to account.

Responding to domestic abuse and supporting investigations is a key task for Service police. To ensure they have full capability to safeguard victims-survivors we will retain an ambition to amend legislation that will give Service police the same powers to make protective orders available to civilian police. We will continue work to ensure that Service police and Commanding Officers understand the use of lawful orders in domestic abuse situations.

Information sharing with civilian police forces is essential to safeguarding victims-survivors and pursuing perpetrators. As well as overhauling our police information management system, we will continue to work with the National Police Chiefs Council to update information sharing agreements.

We will action the recommendations made by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services concerning domestic abuse investigations by the Service police, and in line with the Strategic Policing Requirement, the DSCC, and all three Service police forces will ensure domestic abuse and VAWG is included in future strategic assessments.

All Service police will be aware the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme, also known as Clare's Law, and encourage its use.<sup>21</sup> As part of Op Encompass, Service police will ensure schools are notified of domestic abuse incidents where Service children are affected.<sup>22</sup>

21 The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme enables the police to disclose information to a victim or potential victim of domestic abuse about their partner's or ex-partner's previous abusive or violent offending. See [www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-bill-2020-factsheets/domestic-violence-disclosure-scheme-factsheet](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-bill-2020-factsheets/domestic-violence-disclosure-scheme-factsheet)

22 OP Encompass involves information sharing between the police and schools to provide emotional and practical support to children affected by domestic abuse. The scheme was rolled out nationally by the Home Office in 2019 and is now active in all 43 police forces across England and Wales.

The Service Justice System will implement revisions to the prosecutors’ protocol and take account of the considerations that are particularly relevant in cases involving allegations of domestic abuse.<sup>23</sup>

### Practice in action

#### Defence Serious Crime Unit

The DSCU was established in 2022 to ensure the reporting of serious crime, including domestic abuse, is investigated impartially. The unit was established following a series of reviews aimed at strengthening the Service Justice System and is independent of the single Services and Chain of Command.

The Victim Witness Care Unit was launched on 16 March 2023. The Victim Witness Care Unit adopts a victim-centred approach and focuses on multi-agency engagement to support victims at every stage of their journey through the Service Justice System.

A team of specially trained Victim Liaison Officers are responsible for providing support to victims-survivors of domestic abuse, as well as other serious crimes including sexual offences, by engaging and assessing the individual’s needs, facilitating access to specialist support, and acting as a conduit between the victim-survivor and various agencies/ support networks.

## Perpetrators

“ Things began to spiral about 3 months post separation. I was getting threatening text messages, phone calls in the middle of the night begging for another chance, being followed outside of work and shouted at in public. ”

– MOD victim-survivor

Holding those who abuse to account is a key strand of intervention and one that is vital to preventing further harm to victims-survivors.

Defence currently holds perpetrators to account through the Service Justice System, Civilian Justice System, interventions from specialist support services, and by supporting attendance on behaviour change programmes. To ensure our response to perpetrators is effective, we will work with discipline policy leads to review our approach and adapt this accordingly. In doing so we will consider the experiences of serving victims-survivors who may find themselves assigned to a location with an abusive ex-partner and seek to establish safeguards to prevent this from happening.

As part of our approach to perpetrators, we will continue to encourage behaviour change programmes and address barriers to attendance. We will use learning from the Forces Intervention Programme detailed below to further inform the Defence response and to develop a perpetrator strategy for our Armed Forces.

23 See draft revised protocol regarding the exercise of criminal jurisdiction in England and Wales at [www.cps.gov.uk/publication/draft-revised-protocol-regarding-exercise-criminal-jurisdiction-england-and-wales](http://www.cps.gov.uk/publication/draft-revised-protocol-regarding-exercise-criminal-jurisdiction-england-and-wales)

## Practice in action

### Forces Intervention Programme

The Forces Intervention Programme is a three-year project delivered by the Charity FearFree and funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund. It provides support to Armed Forces personnel (regular, reserve and veterans) who live or work in Wiltshire and wish to change abusive behaviour. The programme is delivered through group and one-to-one sessions that take place away from military establishments. The programme uses a whole family approach and gives family members and affected others the opportunity to access bespoke support.

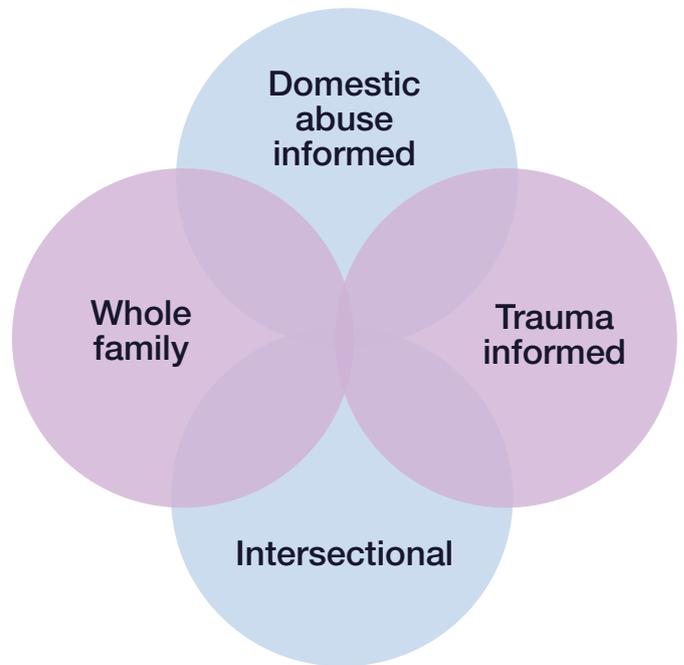
Defence forms parts of the Forces Intervention Programme Advisory Panel. Findings from the project will be evaluated and used to inform domestic abuse support to the Armed Forces community.

“ One of his children would visit on weekends and sometimes witnessed the abuse from him to me. The last thing I wanted was for him to fear his father, which in the end he did. ”

– MOD victim-survivor

## Safeguarding children

Domestic abuse causes significant harm to children who are now recognised as victims of abuse perpetrated against their parent or carer (Domestic Abuse Act 2021). To ensure this is embedded in our response, we will promote the Department for Education principles that should underpin practice approaches when working with children, their parents, wider families and networks in relation to domestic abuse.<sup>24</sup> We will also ensure Defence schools and early year settings adopt Operation Encompass and have trained staff in place.



24 Multi-agency safeguarding and domestic abuse at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/multi-agency-safeguarding-and-domestic-abuse-paper>

# Partnering

Responding to the harms caused by domestic abuse requires coordinated partnership working at multiple levels with a range of professionals, services, working groups, networks, initiatives, and expert organisations.

A key area where partnership working is essential is at Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences run and organised by local authorities. These conferences consider the most high-risk cases and set out actions required to support victims-survivors. To ensure Defence is consistently represented at these meetings we will work with local partners and establish guidance setting out who in Defence should attend and their roles and responsibilities.

Our work in helping to establish the newly formed Defence Domestic Abuse Survivor Community and Awareness Network is a recent example of partnering in action.

## **Defence Domestic Abuse Survivor Community and Awareness Network (DDASCAN)**

The network launched in February 2023 and the majority of its committee have lived experience of domestic abuse. The network is independent of any Chain of Command and is actively supported by the four Senior Defence Domestic Abuse Awareness Champions. The network is whole force with membership open to anyone in Defence (military and civilian), and functions both as a space to bring survivors together and a platform for allies to learn about how they can support as a friend, colleague, or manager.

The network has a mission to support, educate, and empower and welcomes new members, whether they have lived experience, are passionate about doing their bit to support and raise awareness, or simply wish to educate themselves on an important issue. Acting as critical friend to Defence, the network is represented at the MOD Domestic Abuse Working Group (DAWG) and other relevant working groups to inform and shape our response to domestic abuse.

The Defence environment is complex and unique. Victims-survivors and perpetrators straddle Service and civilian systems and at times will engage with and move between both. Coupled with the complex and dynamic nature of domestic abuse, this reiterates the importance of multi-agency working and information sharing.

### Practice in action

#### Armed Forces Advocacy Service provided by Aurora New Dawn

The Armed Forces Advocacy Service established by Aurora New Dawn is a further example of Defence partnering with external specialist services to improve the response to victims-survivors.

Funded through Army Central Fund and directly by the Royal Navy, it provides independent support to Armed Forces personnel and their families affected by domestic abuse, sexual violence and stalking. As well as direct support to individuals, the service provides case guidance, consultancy, and the delivery of bespoke training. In recognition of the additional barriers and challenges that non-UK personnel and their families can experience, the service has a practitioner specialising in this area.

To increase partnership with external agencies we will establish a Military Domestic Abuse Practice Network that will serve as an information exchange between Defence and civilian services. We will engage local authorities, community safety partnerships and specialist providers, and use the network to breakdown any perceived or existing barriers when it comes to tackling domestic abuse in Defence.

### Practice in action

#### Acorn Survivors' Recovery Programme: ManKind Initiative

Defence supports the work being done to support male victims-survivors of domestic abuse and actively promotes the ManKind Initiative charity including the Covenant-funded, military specific ACORN Recovery Programme.

The programme is designed for serving and ex-servicemen who have previously experienced domestic abuse and who want to make sense of their experiences, understand the impact on their children, and move on to healthy and respectful relationships in the future. As part of the programme, ManKind raises awareness at health and wellbeing events across the Armed Forces.

### Research and Data

We will continue to work in partnership with academia and use research insights to inform our response to domestic abuse. To ensure this takes place we will form a dedicated working group to consider research recommendations and learning from relevant reviews. We will begin with the research recommendations from King's College London.

Data is critical to understanding the nature and impact of domestic abuse and in determining our response to it. We will work closer with all our partners to ensure data collection and analysis becomes business as usual and establish a data working group to drive this forward. Building a better picture of prevalence and support seeking will be a priority for this group.

# Implementing our plan

For our three areas of action to be impactful they demand a coordinated, whole system approach as advocated by the charity Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse who have developed the Coordinated Community Response Model.

The Coordinated Community Response Model is used across the UK and internationally to keep survivors and their families safe, hold abusers to account, and end domestic abuse by transforming the way organisations and individuals think about, prevent, and respond to it.

The model is made up of 12 components and a set of core values and principles that need to be shared for it to be effective, including:

- collaboration
- connected with gender inequality
- individual, intersectional experiences
- whole system / whole person
- responsibility for safety rests with systems and community
- perpetrators held accountable
- support to existing organisational responses (not replacing them)
- shared understanding, shared leadership

We will implement the model to cohere our response to domestic abuse and begin trialling it at the MOD DAWG with a view to adopting its use at single Service and overseas working groups.

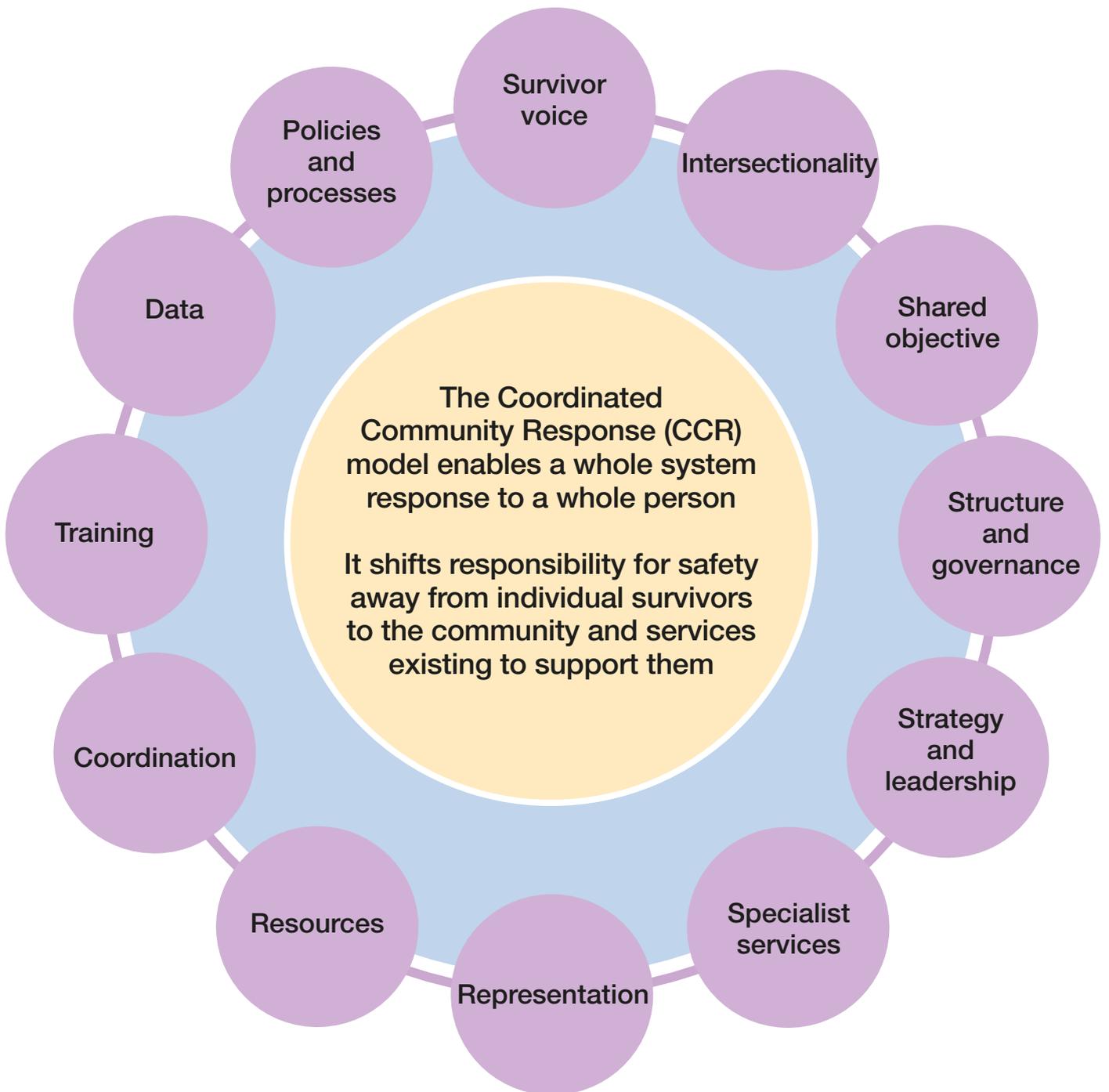
## Governance

The implementation of this plan will be overseen by the MOD DAWG with support from the single Service Domestic Abuse Working Groups and relevant working groups in the Service Justice System. An annual report on the progress of the plan and associated work will be submitted to the Minister for Defence People and Families, and regular updates will be reported to the MOD Safeguarding Partnership Board.

The MOD DAWG exists to ensure domestic abuse policy and practice is fit for purpose and acts to safeguard all Defence personnel and their families. Membership is broad with key representation from single Service policy leads, Service Justice System, Families Federations, HiVE information services, Defence Medical Services, specialist welfare, and external specialist domestic abuse organisations. The MOD DAWG forms part of the wider MOD safeguarding arrangements and reports to the MOD Safeguarding Partnership Board.

“I cannot say it has been easy but leaving my domestic abuser was the best thing that I could have done for my child and myself.”

– MOD victim-survivor



# Action plan

This action plan will be reviewed at the MOD DAWG and new actions will be formulated as the response to domestic abuse demands.

The following table summarises the key actions we will begin work on in 2024. These actions, alongside all the actions detailed in this plan, will form the basis of the main overarching action plan that will be managed by the MOD DAWG.

<b>Action</b>	<b>Action leads / stakeholders</b>	<b>Prevention/ Intervention/ Partnering</b>
Implement the Coordinated Community Response Model at the MOD DAWG and trial in single Service and overseas domestic abuse working groups.	MOD DAWG and single Service working groups	Prevention Intervention Partnering
Develop partnerships with local authorities to enable more access to domestic abuse training.	MOD DAWG and single Service working groups	Prevention Partnering
Establish a Military Domestic Abuse Practice Network to better inform local authorities and third sector organisations of the forces context and to share learning.	MOD domestic abuse policy leads	Prevention Partnering
Establish a MOD DAWG subgroup to review, track and action recommendations from research, reports, reviews, etc.	MOD DAWG	Prevention
Review guidance/policy to cohere the discipline response to perpetrators of domestic abuse.	MOD DAWG and single Service discipline leads	Intervention
Consult relevant Defence networks, including DDASCAN, in the development of future guidance, policy, and provision to ensure it is victim-survivor focussed.	MOD domestic abuse policy leads and single Service working groups	Partnering
Continue to raise awareness of domestic abuse and pathways to support through dedicated awareness campaigns.	MOD DAWG and single Service working groups	Prevention Partnering

<b>Action</b>	<b>Action leads / stakeholders</b>	<b>Prevention/ Intervention/ Partnering</b>
Develop and promote an awareness brief describing key elements of MOD domestic abuse policy, guidance and procedures to be used across Defence.	MOD domestic abuse policy leads	Prevention
In established military communities, ensure there is military/Defence representation at local authority domestic abuse forums, or equivalent.	Single Service specialist welfare	Prevention Partnering
Undertake assurance of the safeguarding elements of domestic abuse policy Joint Service Publication 913 using the Defence Safeguarding Assurance Framework.	MOD Safeguarding Policy Team	Prevention
Promote Department for Education guidance on domestic abuse and safeguarding to specialist welfare and MOD contracted social work providers.	MOD domestic abuse policy leads	Intervention Partnering
Continue to make the case for and seek use of emergency protection orders (Domestic Abuse Protection Orders and Notices, and Stalking Protection Orders) for the Service Justice System.	Service Justice System	Prevention Intervention
Establish guidance setting out who in Defence should attend Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences and their roles and responsibilities.	MOD and single Service domestic abuse policy leads, specialist welfare services and Service police	Partnering
Single Services Unit and specialist welfare to conduct a 'health check' regarding domestic abuse practice and provision in their locations. Parameters/framework to be agreed by the MOD DAWG.	Single Service unit and specialist welfare, MOD DAWG	Prevention Intervention Partnering
Overseas commands to conduct a 'health check' regarding domestic abuse practice and provision in their locations. Parameters/framework to be agreed by the MOD DAWG.	Local Safeguarding Partnerships, specialist welfare and contracted social work services, MOD DAWG	Prevention Intervention Partnering

<b>Action</b>	<b>Action leads / stakeholders</b>	<b>Prevention/ Intervention/ Partnering</b>
Service Justice System to conduct a 'health check' regarding domestic abuse practice and provision. Parameters/framework to be agreed by the MOD DAWG.	Service Justice System and MOD DAWG	Prevention Intervention Partnering
Service police to conduct a 'health check' regarding domestic abuse practice and provision. Parameters/framework to be agreed by the MOD DAWG.	Service police and MOD DAWG	Prevention Intervention Partnering
Civilian HR and military policy owners to review domestic abuse policy against current best practice and seek to align where gaps exist.	Civilian HR military policy owners	Prevention Partnering
MOD to establish a data working group and develop a comprehensive data set regarding the prevalence of domestic abuse across Defence.	MOD DAWG members and external specialist providers	Prevention Intervention
Roll out Domestic Abuse Matters programme and Domestic Abuse Matters training to all Service police (UK and overseas).	Service police	Prevention Intervention Partnering
Promote the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme and ensure all serving police have knowledge of the scheme.	Service police	Prevention
The DSCC and all three Service police forces to ensure domestic abuse and VAWG is included in future strategic assessments.	Service police	Prevention Intervention Partnering
Service police and Commanding Officers to be trained on the use of Lawful Orders and how to apply these in domestic abuse cases for safeguarding purposes.	Service police and single Service Chains of Command	Prevention Intervention
Promote the Defence Primary Healthcare (DPHC) standing operating procedures for responding to domestic abuse and ensure this is built into staff inductions.	DPHC/Defence Medical Services	Prevention Intervention
Ensure health safeguarding leads are domestic abuse informed and able to guide other staff on best practice including referral pathways.	DPHC/Defence Medical Services	Prevention

<b>Action</b>	<b>Action leads / stakeholders</b>	<b>Prevention/ Intervention/ Partnering</b>
Ensure routine and targeted screening (as per the standing operating procedures) for domestic abuse is embedded in day-to-day practice.	DPHC/Defence Medical Services	Prevention Intervention
Ensure staff can safely manage disclosures and signpost both victims-survivors and perpetrators to specialist support services.	DPHC/Defence Medical Services	Prevention Intervention
Promote the government definition of Trauma Informed Practice and the six practice principles.	MOD DAWG/MOD Domestic Abuse policy lead	Intervention
Raise awareness of the link between domestic abuse and suicide.	MOD Domestic Abuse and Suicide Prevention policy leads	Prevention
Develop an MOD perpetrator strategy.	MOD DAWG/MOD Domestic Abuse policy lead, Service police, external stakeholders	Prevention Intervention Partnering





