

Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales

Annual Report 2024-2025

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Presented to Parliament pursuant to Section 14 (2) of the Domestic Abuse Act
2021

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Foreword

This has been a significant year for my office. As I reflect on the work we have undertaken, I am struck both by how much we have achieved and by how much we still need to do to ensure every survivor of domestic abuse receives the protection, support and justice they deserve.

At the heart of everything we do are the people this office exists to serve. This year, we heard directly from nearly 700 survivors about their experience of the criminal justice system, engaged with over 100 children and young people with lived experience of domestic abuse, and provided guidance to nearly 400 people who wrote to my office seeking help and support. These are not statistics - they are people whose courage and determination continues to shape everything I do.

A particular highlight of this year was our first Survivor Summit, which brought together 25 survivors to speak directly to ministers and senior officials about the changes they want to see. That 89% of attendees felt heard by government tells me that this kind of engagement matters enormously. It must continue - and it must translate into action.

The publication of *Shifting the Scales* in January 2025 marked an important milestone in my work to improve the criminal justice system's response to domestic abuse.

Examining the system from end to end, the report exposed serious failings - including the deeply troubling finding that only 4% of alleged domestic abuse perpetrators are dismissed from the police force. I made 12 recommendations to government, and I am encouraged that six have already seen meaningful progress. I will continue to press for action on the remaining six with determination.

This year also required my office to respond rapidly to emerging pressures. When the UK government announced emergency measures to ease the prison capacity crisis, my office acted swiftly to call for the exclusion of domestic abuse perpetrators - and I am pleased that pressure secured an important protection. Vigilance of this kind is critical if we are to ensure government delivers for victims, and I will not hesitate to use my voice when survivors' safety is at risk.

We have seen progress on safeguarding migrant survivors, recognising children as victims, and strengthening the family justice response. But lasting change requires sustained political commitment, adequate resources and strong cross departmental collaboration.

The government's ambition to halve violence against women and girls within a decade is bold and right. My office stands ready to support that mission by holding ministers to account, amplifying survivor voices and driving the systemic changes they so urgently need to see. The work continues.

Dame Nicole Jacobs
Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales

Impact report

This report outlines the work undertaken by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's office during the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 and highlights its impact for victims and survivors of domestic abuse.

The Domestic Abuse Commissioner's priorities

1. Standing with victims and survivors

Standing alongside people subject to domestic abuse and amplifying their voices sits at the heart of the Commissioner's work. Hearing directly from victims and survivors ensures that every recommendation for change is grounded in their lived reality. Over the past year, this commitment has translated into impactful research, targeted policy engagement and collaboration with specialist domestic abuse services to drive change.

Building a community

Enabling and supporting survivors to share their experiences is essential to driving forward what is needed to prevent and tackle domestic abuse.

This year, the Office continued to grow *Voices at the DAC* - the Commissioner's survivor hub - which connect people with external opportunities to share their experience. Through surveys, roundtables and other engagement activities, the platform has created a direct link between people with lived experience and decision-makers across government, academia and the sector. The community has grown steadily, now approaching 1,000 members, with more than twenty-five engagement opportunities shared.

Participation

This year, the Commissioner's office played a key role in influencing the government's forthcoming violence against women and girls strategy by hosting the office's first survivor summit. Set over two days, the Commissioner brought together twenty-five survivors who had the opportunity to speak directly to ministers and senior officials about the changes they wanted to see across a range of topics including the criminal justice system, family court, policing, health and education.

The impact was clear. Eighty-nine per cent of survivor attendees said they felt heard by ministers and civil servants. One hundred per cent said they felt the same about the Commissioner's team.

Following the Summit, the themes deriving from the roundtables have continued to inform ministerial briefings, policy consultations and official letters, ensuring survivor voices directly shape and inform national and local policy development.

The office also engaged extensively with survivors to help inform the Commissioner's work to improve the criminal justice's response to domestic abuse, drive up service provision for child victims and establish a better reporting mechanism within the Family Court to better protect survivors and their children.

This year, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's office heard from:

- **Nearly 700 survivors were surveyed on their experiences of the criminal justice system** – with **a further 40 people engaged via roundtables** to deep dive into the challenges they face and develop recommendations for change. These findings and insights were captured in the Commissioner's report *Shifting the Scales* published in January 2025, which set out how to improve the criminal justice response to domestic abuse.
- **Over 100 children and young people with experience of domestic abuse**, as part of the fieldwork for a forthcoming report exploring the changes needed to improve the domestic abuse response for children.
- The office provided **support and guidance to nearly 400 survivors** who wrote to the Commissioner about their experience.

2. Improving support for the most marginalised victims and survivors who face the greatest barriers

Information-sharing firewall

Accessing advice and support to leave an abusive situation should not be based on who you are or where you are from. The beginning of this financial year saw the Commissioner, in partnership with the Step-Up Migrant Women Campaign, continue to push for their long-standing call for an information-sharing firewall between police and immigration enforcement to better protect migrant survivors of domestic abuse.

This work took the form of amendments in both the Commons and the Lords, working with and building support amongst MPs and Peers. It culminated in a landmark vote in the House of Lords in April 2024 in which Peers voted in favour of the firewall amendment tabled by crossbench Peer Baroness Meacher.

While the amendment did not return to the Commons for reconsideration due to the calling of the 2024 General Election, and therefore did not pass into law, the vote provided a clear signal to Government of the support amongst Peers for enshrining protections for migrant survivors into law. Given the specific

support for the amendment from Labour Peers, this provided a strong starting point for conversations with the new Government on this issue, including the Commissioner's calls for including a firewall in the Government's forthcoming violence against women and girls strategy.

Proposals for a specialist 'by and for' funding pot

The Commissioner's 2022 mapping report of domestic abuse services across England and Wales (Patchwork of Provision) found significant gaps in the provision of specialist 'by and for' services which support minoritised communities. The Commissioner has continued to reiterate the report's recommendation for increased, dedicated funding for these services, to better meet the needs of all victims and survivors of domestic abuse in briefings, consultations and policy papers shared with ministers and officials.

In October 2024, the Commissioner developed this work further, producing a detailed policy proposal paper on a 'by and for' funding pot for specialist domestic abuse services. This set out the clear rationale and need for the pot and a proposed design of what the pot could look like, including definitions, eligibility, principles and management. It also developed a methodology to cost the amount of investment required to meet need, which for the first time enabled the Commissioner to provide estimations for these figures across 3 years for BME, LGBT+ and d/Deaf and disabled specialist services respectively.

This work enabled the Commissioner to make a clear and specific call on Government to fund these vital services via her submissions to HM Treasury for both its Autumn 2024 and Spring 2025 Spending Reviews.

3. Improving consistency in the statutory response to domestic abuse and provision of specialist services

The calling of the General Election in May 2024 presented an opportunity for the Commissioner to highlight the systematic changes needed to improve the response for victims and survivors and outline the solutions a new government must take to better prevent and tackle domestic abuse. A key element of this included emphasising how any approach must be genuinely cross-departmental and driven from the heart of government.

The Commissioner set out her priorities for the new Government via a briefing paper, which enabled her to communicate clearly to all political parties her expectations and the change she wanted to see from them. She was also able to reflect on these through an opinion piece in a major daily national newspaper, raising the profile of the issue of domestic abuse, and way Government should respond to it, amongst the public more widely.

This provided a strong foundation upon which the Commissioner could begin her engagement with key Ministers across the new Government following the

General Election, as they embarked upon their stated manifesto mission to halve violence against women and girls in a decade.

The office has also continued to scrutinise the level of investment specialist services receive and push central government for a ring-fenced funding stream through various consultation and briefings.

Improving the criminal justice system

This year, the Commissioner has driven forward vital work on the criminal justice system's response to domestic abuse. Through in-depth analysis of criminal justice data, exploring victims and survivors' experiences and studying police misconduct procedures, the office published a major report *Shifting the Scales* which examined the justice system from end to end. This was published within months of the election of a new government to inform its approach to structural change across the criminal justice system from the outset.

The report exposed critical failings in police misconduct procedures, whereby only 4% of alleged domestic abuse perpetrators are dismissed from the police. It also highlighted examples of good practice where perpetrators are held to account and survivors are properly supported. The findings received widespread media coverage including in the Daily Telegraph, Sky News and the Independent.

The Commissioner made 12 recommendations to government, and the office has used these findings to campaign for improvements across the criminal justice system, by engaging with ministers and officials across the Home Office and Ministry of Justice and providing evidence to system-wide inquiries and reviews such as the Angiolini Inquiry, Sentencing Review, and Independent Review of the Criminal Courts.

At the time of writing, six of the 12 recommendations have seen meaningful progress. This includes the government having committed to a presumption of dismissal being applied to officers found guilty of gross misconduct, and vetting standards will be placed on a statutory footing.

Prison capacity crisis and early release

This year, the Commissioner and her team also mobilised in response to the emergency measures announced by the government to release offenders from prison early to ease the capacity crisis.

The Commissioner was incredibly concerned about the impact these changes would have on victims' safety and called for all domestic abuse perpetrators to be excluded from any early release measures in a letter to the Home Secretary, as well as in numerous media appearances.

This pressure successfully secured an exclusion that prevented some domestic abuse perpetrators from being automatically released from prison

after serving 40% of their sentence rather than 50%. The Commissioner continues to press government to communicate the changes clearly to all affected victims and survivors and ensure they will not be put at further risk by the introduction of additional measures.

Family Justice

This year, the Commissioner made good progress in strengthening the family justice system's response to domestic abuse. Building on the ten recommendations laid before Parliament in July 2023, the Commissioner responded to multiple consultations, directly shaping policy and legislative developments on long-standing issues impacting victims and survivors of domestic abuse within the Family Court.

The wider office has actively supported and informed several workstreams at the Ministry of Justice, including sharing position documents with Ministers, and played a role in cross-departmental discussions on legal aid. The Commissioner's office also participated in working groups overseeing the potential national rollout of Pathfinder courts - a development that could significantly transform how domestic abuse cases are handled across the family justice system.

Relationships with key partners have also been strengthened throughout the year. Ties with Local Family Justice Boards have been established, the working relationship with Cafcass has deepened, and an international human rights law workstream has been introduced to the Office, broadening the evidence base underpinning the Commissioner's work.

The Commissioner also maintained engagement with senior judiciary, government ministers, family law practitioners, academics and the wider domestic abuse sector - reinforcing specialist expertise, supporting sector-led efforts and ensuring that the voices of victims and survivors continue to shape a safer family justice system.

4. Bring together local partners and government departments to provide a holistic response to domestic abuse

Learning from local practice

Tackling domestic abuse requires a joined-up approach. This year, the Commissioner has strengthened the office's connections with the specialist domestic abuse sector, 'by and for' organisations and statutory agencies throughout England and Wales through a rolling programme of visits.

These visits have enabled the office to see firsthand how local areas are responding to domestic abuse and gather evidence and insights which the office has used to directly shape national policy responses.

This included providing practice-focused responses to consultations on the statutory guidance for Domestic Abuse Protection Orders (DAPOs) and

Notices (DAPNs), the role of Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs), and the Relationships, Health and Sex Education curriculum. The visits have also informed the Commissioner's position on the rollout of Family Hubs and the Children's Social Care Pathfinder pilot.

The Commissioner also visited areas involved in the upcoming Duty to Collaborate outlined in the Victims and Prisoners Act. By bringing together local partners, these visits identified what practitioners need from government guidance and the challenges they may face during implementation, enabling the Commissioner to advocate for strengthened guidance with senior officials.

To support the Commissioner's work on domestic homicide reviews, the office also established the 'Domestic Abuse Related Deaths Review Forum' in partnership with the Local Government Association and Association of Police and Crime Commissioner. This growing forum brings together statutory services leading on DHRs in their area across CSPs, PCCs and in some cases health partners with a focus on sharing learning and improving practice in tackling domestic abuse related deaths.

5. Accountability and transparency – using data and research to improve the response to domestic abuse

Police recorded crimes

Accurate data is fundamental to understanding the scale of domestic abuse and holding agencies to account. This year, the Commissioner's office reacted to a developing priority and played a significant role in securing change when adjustments were made to how police record crimes.

Following the Home Office introducing new counting rules for police-recorded crime, which included reintroducing the 'principal crime rule', which officers are required to record only the most serious offences reported to them, rather than all when multiple crimes are disclosed. The Commissioner's office raised concerns that these changes could artificially deflate recorded crime rates, discourage attention on lower-level offences that often form patterns of coercive control, and impact the information gathered and recorded for the purpose of risk assessments.

Through sustained engagement with senior officials in the Home Office, police leads and the Office for National Statistics, the Commissioner's office secured clear caveats in the quarterly releases of Crime in England and Wales publications. This ensured the data can be interpreted accurately and better inform our understanding of the scale of domestic abuse.

Children as victims of domestic abuse

As part of the Commissioner's work to establish how children subject to domestic abuse should be supported, the office has requested information from over 150 organisations that commission nearly 700 domestic abuse services specifically for children and young people. Alongside this request the

office has also surveyed over 250 specialist support services about the services they provide between them.

The office also conducted over 12 roundtables with professionals and practitioners working in domestic abuse to discuss how Section 3 of the Domestic Abuse Act, which recognised children as victims of domestic abuse for the first time, is working in practice. Practitioners were asked to explain the challenges and barriers they face in supporting children effectively, and to outline what they felt could be some of the solutions to these problems. These invaluable insights informed the Commissioner's position about what needs to happen at a national and local level, specifically the need for funding, training and guidance about what this recognition means for practitioners and decision-makers.

To ensure children and young people were involved in shaping the Commissioner's understanding of the support they receive, the office has also developed and conducted a participatory research approach with 100 children with lived experience of domestic abuse.

The full research framework, findings and recommendations from this work will be published in the 24-25 financial year.

Family Court monitoring mechanism

The Family Court continues to be one of the most prominent reasons victims and survivors contact the Domestic Abuse Commissioner. This year, the Office continued work on the Family Court Review and Reporting Mechanism (FCRRM), a research pilot designed to provide a systematic account of how the family courts recognise and respond to domestic abuse in child arrangements cases, and the experiences of parties and professionals engaged with proceedings.

Fieldwork for the pilot was undertaken during 2024 with the office gathering and analysing data and evidence from three court sites in England and Wales. The pilot serves a dual purpose: to collect baseline data against which future progress can be measured through the FCRRM, and to establish the effectiveness of the research methodology.

The study includes a review of 300 case files of child arrangements proceedings - half finalised by magistrates and half by family judges – all of which closed between 1 January and 31 December 2023. Researchers also observed hearings in a sample of live child arrangements cases at each court over a two-week period between March and June 2024. They also conducted focus groups with domestic abuse survivors in each court area, alongside interviews with judges, magistrates, and Cafcass/Cafcass Cymru officers.

The fieldwork was conducted by researchers within Domestic Abuse Commissioner's office, under the supervision of two independent academic

experts commissioned to lead the work - Professor Mandy Burton and Professor Rosemary Hunter KC (hon), both members of the Harm Panel.

The full findings and recommendations from this pilot study will be published in the next financial year.

Domestic Homicide reviews

Every life lost to domestic abuse represents a failure of our systems to properly protect and support victims and survivors. To address this, the Commissioner is establishing a Domestic Homicide and Suicides Oversight Mechanism. As part of this work, the Commissioner used her powers to seek information from Community Safety Partners (CSPs) and Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) across 21 pilot areas in England and Wales.

The office requested details of the reviews these pilot areas have conducted and whether recommendations have been effectively implemented. The mechanism aims to ensure that recommendations from domestic homicide reviews (DHRs) are acted upon, while enabling lessons to be shared both locally and nationally.

The full findings and recommendations from this pilot study will be published in the next financial year.

Administrative and governance report

The Domestic Abuse Commissioner receives funding from the Home Office as its core financial settlement on an annual basis. These funds are managed in line with the Framework Agreement and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that the Commissioner holds with the Home Office.

While the Domestic Abuse Commissioner is responsible for day-to-day management of the budget, overall spending, procurement and recruitment rules are set by the wider Home Office, and the overall accountability for the budget sits with the relevant Home Office Director General. The Commissioner may also receive additional funding from other parties to carry out work, as set out in the Domestic Abuse Act (2021).

Financial statements

Statement of net expenditure for year ended 31 March 2025

(Rounded to nearest £1,000)

24/25	BUDGET (£000)	ACTUAL (£000)	SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) (£000)
PAY	1450	1526	(76)
NON-PAY	45	80	(35)
GROSS	1495	1606	(111)

*Pay breakdown includes pension and social security contributions. This financial year departments were able to make an average pay increase up to 5% for all civil service staff.

Office operating costs

(Rounded to nearest £1,000)

24/25 NON-PAY BREAKDOWN	BUDGET (£000)	ACTUAL (£000)	SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) (£000)
IT & TELECOMMUNICATIONS	-	7	(7)
STAFF TRAVEL & OTHER	-	52	(52)
CONFERENCES	-	16	(16)
OFFICE RELATED	-	9	(9)
OTHER EXPENDITURE	45	(5)	50
GROSS	45	80	(35)

Staff report

Staff headcount as of March 31 2025 for salaried staff, including the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, were as follows:

Grade	Permanen t- F	Permanen t - M	Tota l	Temporar y - F	Temporar y - M	Tota l
Public appointe e	-	-	-	1	-	1
Grade 6	1	-	1	-	-	-
Grade 7	4	-	4	1	-	1
SEO	2	-	2	5	-	5
HEO	1	-	1	6	-	6
EO	-	-	-	2	-	2
Total	8	-	8	15	-	15

Advisory Board

The Advisory Board is required by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and membership is at the formal invitation of the Commissioner.

During the 2024 -2025 period, the Advisory Board met four times and was chaired by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner.

Name	Date of appointment
Dr Liz Kelly	February 2023
Farah Nazeer	February 2023
Sara Kirkpatrick	February 2023
Ghadah Alnasseri	February 2023
Mary Clarke	February 2023
Catherine Hinwood	February 2023
David Challen	February 2023
ACC Samantha Millar	January 2024
Ippo Panteloudakis	February 2023
Gwenyth Knowles	February 2023
Louise Gittins	February 2023

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