



**HMICS** HM INSPECTORATE OF  
CONSTABULARY FOR SCOTLAND

**Thematic Inspection**  
Domestic Abuse

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## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Having previously conducted a thematic inspection focusing upon the police response to domestic violence over a decade ago (Scottish Office, 1997), Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland (HMICS) has now revisited the issue. In particular we have assessed the progress that has been made over the last decade. In turn, this inspection has focused upon:

- the strategic policing approach to domestic abuse;
- the domestic abuse initiatives with which the police service in Scotland is involved;
- the use of information and communications technology (ICT);
- the role of the domestic abuse officer (DAO)\*; and
- the recording of domestic abuse incidents.

In this report we make the following recommendations:

**Recommendation 1:** That the requirement for a national database of perpetrators and victims be urgently addressed by all forces.

**Recommendation 2:** That the domestic abuse officer role is reviewed in line with the identified good practice in this report.

**Recommendation 3:** That all forces work together (with the Scottish Police Services Authority (SPSA) where appropriate), to develop a common approach to training and support for officers.

**Recommendation 4:** That all forces adopt a model of victim risk assessment and risk management as soon as possible, whilst working towards implementing a single core model across Scotland, and that forces focus on ensuring the quality of the information gathered.

**Recommendation 5:** That forces review and reinforce their quality assurance practices and processes for recording domestic abuse incidents.

While the above recommendations are directed at all forces, we believe that it would be appropriate for the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS) to take the lead in all these matters, through its crime business area.

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\* For the purposes of this report we have used the title of domestic abuse officer (DAO) to encompass the breadth of the specialist role as it exists in the police service in Scotland at this point in time. Variations in the actual titles used by each force reflect differences in the way in which these incidents are managed.

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## Introduction

### The reality of domestic abuse

1. Every year, over 150 people (typically 80% of whom are women) are killed in Britain by a current or former partner. Statistically, one in four women and one in six men will experience domestic violence during their lifetime<sup>1</sup>. The police in Scotland recorded 48,801 incidents of domestic abuse in 2006-07, a seven per cent increase on the previous year. This continues the steady increase in incidents reported since 1999-2000, the first year for which data is available. Again in 2006-07, 57 per cent of cases involved known repeat victimisation<sup>2</sup>.
2. Domestic abuse accounts for 15 per cent of all violent crime recorded nationally, and amounts to 31 per cent of all violence against women and five per cent of all violence against men<sup>3</sup>. Yet, the 2006 Scottish Crime and Victimization Survey<sup>4</sup> found that only one in five victims of physical harm inflicted by a partner had reported the incident to the police. For homicides recorded in Scotland in the last ten years, over half (53 per cent) of the female victims aged between 16 and 69 were killed by their partner. Furthermore, the most common set of circumstances in which females become victims of homicide are in a dwelling, in a rage/fight with a partner<sup>5</sup>.
3. The effects of domestic abuse are far-reaching in terms of the victim's physical and mental well-being, the impact on children of victims, the links to child abuse and other violent crime and the costs to society as a whole both in terms of social cohesion and demand on services. The quality of police intervention is critical to preventing further violence and abuse.

### Previous inspection

4. In 1997, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland carried out a thematic inspection of all eight Scottish forces to examine the way in which they responded to victims, enforced the law, and acted to deter and prevent repeat victimisation in cases of domestic abuse. The resulting report, *Hitting Home – a report on the police response to domestic violence*<sup>5</sup> made 13 recommendations. Since 1997, police forces in Scotland have made progress in implementing these recommendations, evolving good practice and ensuring that domestic abuse remains a priority.
5. The purpose of this thematic inspection was to identify areas of good practice and, where appropriate, make recommendations to the Service on how procedures might be improved, given that over ten years had elapsed. On this occasion we focused on specific aspects of the police response to domestic abuse, taking into account the aims of the joint protocol between ACPOS and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS)<sup>6</sup>, and paying particular attention to how forces identified and handled incidents of repeat victimisation.

1 Government Equalities Office. *Domestic Violence: Key Facts 2008*. ([www.equalities.gov.uk/domestic\\_violence](http://www.equalities.gov.uk/domestic_violence)). London: Government Equalities Office, 2008.

2 Scottish Government. *Domestic Abuse Recorded by the Police in Scotland, 2006-07*. (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/11/22153700/0>). Edinburgh: Scottish Government, 2007.

3 Home Office. *Tackling Domestic Violence Over Christmas And The New Year*. Press Release. (<http://press.homeoffice.gov.uk/press-releases/Tackling-Domestic-Violence>). London: Home Office, 2007.

4 Bolling, K., Brown, M. *Scottish Crime and Victimization Survey 2006*. (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/10/12094216/0>). Edinburgh: Scottish Executive, 2006.

5 HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary for Scotland. *Hitting Home – A Report on the Police Response to Domestic Violence*. (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library/documents4/hithom01.htm>). Edinburgh: The Scottish Office, 1997.

6 Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland, Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. *Joint Protocol – In partnership, challenging Domestic Abuse*. ACPOS/ COPFS, 2005.



6. In conducting the fieldwork for this thematic inspection, we found much evidence of good practice already in place in forces. Details of this good practice are found at Annex A. Forces and police authorities/boards may find it useful to consider the good practice comments alongside our recommendations. This report does not cover every aspect of the police handling of domestic abuse incidents, focusing instead on those issues that we consider will make the greatest difference, at this time, in support of victims of domestic abuse.

## KEY ISSUES

### Information and communication technology

7. Effective record keeping and ease of access to information is key to an effective response to domestic abuse. Because domestic abuse has the highest rate of repeat victimisation of any crime, and because only a proportion of all incidents are reported to the police, every call represents an opportunity to identify a pattern of abuse and to intervene to prevent further or escalating acts of violence in the future. Without readily accessible information about the victim's or perpetrator's previous contact with the police, these kinds of critical intervention are difficult.

8. *Hitting Home* (1997) made a clear recommendation in relation to recording and using relevant information:

*“Recommendation 3: That forces develop information technology which will automatically provide officers attending at the scene of a reported domestic incident, via communications staff, with any relevant information on the address or alleged perpetrator or which is already held on one or more of that force's databases or on any police national database.”*

9. Some progress had been made towards addressing this recommendation in the intervening ten years, e.g. attaching flags or occurrence markers to specific addresses on incident recording and management systems. Front-line officers confirmed that, where this information was available, the controller usually passed it to them. Several shortcomings remained though. For example, the information was stored only by *address* and not by *nominal* (i.e. person).

10. Police information systems have developed in a fragmented fashion over the years, and as a result the process of retrieving information is not always straightforward. In addition to the incident recording system, most forces had in place some form of database to hold information on domestic abuse victims and perpetrators, which tended to be maintained by DAOs. In the majority of forces, however, these databases did not communicate with other force systems. Consequently, retrieving the most comprehensive information necessitated searches of the separate systems. We were particularly concerned to find that in many areas the domestic abuse information was held separately from child protection information.

11. Worryingly, in many areas, front-line officers could not easily access information on the databases, particularly outside office hours when the majority of domestic abuse incidents occur. A number of reasons were given for this, ranging from insufficient time to access the system and lack of familiarity with search facilities, to restricted or even no access having been granted to controllers in





police contact centres and front-line officers. In one force, the officers we interviewed were not even aware that such a database existed. Many front-line officers revealed that they were not routinely given, nor did they have direct access to, the more detailed information held on the databases when en route to calls or compiling reports to the procurator fiscal, even though pertinent information is vital to assist decision-making in this high-risk area. This was confirmed by members of the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, who told us that the reports they received from front-line officers regularly failed to contain the fullest possible contextual information. This too reflects, in part, failings in forces' current information systems.

**12.** Another finding was the absence of a single system for the efficient sharing of domestic abuse data across force boundaries in Scotland. We were particularly concerned that in some instances the inability to share information extended to divisions within the same force. Instead of maintaining one single database, some forces had separate, stand-alone systems serving discrete geographical sectors of the area. Thus, for example, if a domestic abuse victim moved to another area of the force, no-one at the new location would know their domestic abuse history because their details would remain at the original location. Consequently we conclude that these stand-alone databases are not fit for purpose and therefore potentially pose a risk to victims that should be addressed as soon as possible.

**13.** The ACPOS Business Change Programme Board is working towards a longer-term solution to shortcomings in data-sharing generally, through a broader programme of development. However, this is unlikely to come to fruition for a number of years. In the meantime some forces were expending considerable resources in procuring and developing their own systems, whilst others had adopted a wait-and-see approach. Despite our recommendation being made more than ten years ago, this shortcoming is still to be resolved. In our opinion, any further delay is unacceptable.

**14.** The risk to victims that this situation poses is widespread and largely unmitigated. We therefore strongly recommend that a national database, in conjunction with national data standards, be developed and adopted by all forces as a matter of priority.

**15.** Previous HMICS inspections, most notably *Common Knowledge: A Thematic Inspection of Intelligence & Information Sharing*<sup>7</sup>, focused on the need for the police and their partner agencies to share information to facilitate better joint working. HMICS maintains this position. Nevertheless we also point out that there is much that police forces can do to sort out their own internal information management arrangements for the benefit of all.

**Recommendation 1: That the requirement for a national database of perpetrators and victims be urgently addressed by all forces.**

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<sup>7</sup> HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary for Scotland. *Common Knowledge: A Thematic Inspection of Intelligence & Information Sharing*. (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/03/13161000/0>). Edinburgh: Scottish Executive, 2007.

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## Domestic abuse units

**16.** We found some contradictions in organisational approaches to domestic abuse both between forces and, in some cases, across internal force boundaries. The key differences related to the location of specialist DAOs and domestic abuse policy officers, some of whom were located within crime management, others within community safety departments. In our opinion, established links between domestic abuse and child abuse reinforce the need to place specialist DAOs alongside child protection officers in order to facilitate effective information-sharing and case management. Whatever the arrangement, communication between DAOs and those working in specialist areas where there are clear links with domestic abuse, must not be hindered by unnecessary organisational barriers.

**17.** Across Scotland, the role of specialist domestic abuse officers has developed to differing degrees. Their importance was highlighted in our 1997 report, which recommended that all forces consider the need for such designated staff. Approximately ten years on, seven of the eight forces in Scotland had designated specialist officers. The exception was Northern Constabulary, where the role continued to be seen as an ancillary one carried out by uniform officers. We continue to maintain that the deployment of designated specialist officers is good practice.

**18.** Forces had also made considerable, albeit inconsistent, progress in relation to the structure and staffing of domestic abuse units. As public awareness and police understanding of domestic abuse has increased over the last ten years, so the range of duties undertaken by DAOs has developed accordingly. As a result, significantly more domestic abuse incidents are being reported and greater demands are being made on force ICT systems. In addition, there is now greater commitment to multi-agency working, a wider recognition of the links with child protection, and more widespread use of risk assessment. Statistical analysis indicates that more male, as well as more lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT), victims are now willing to report incidents of domestic abuse to the police. This presents further challenges not only for the DAO role but for training and the Service's general approach to domestic abuse (see recommendation 3).

**19.** Despite these changing demands, and the priority given to domestic abuse policy at a force level, resource levels in some specialist units had changed little over the last ten years. In many areas DAOs questioned whether, given the volume of cases they were expected to deal with, they were able to provide an adequate service to victims. Often DAO staffing levels had not been reviewed, nor had attempts been made to match these to demand. In some divisions, DAOs were regularly abstracted to perform uniform duties including, for example, paid attendance at football matches. Given the key role DAOs play in responding to domestic abuse, we consider it vital that the demands placed on these officers are recognised and understood.

**20.** This inspection confirmed that there is no standard model for the DAO role across Scotland. Their spectrum of activities included supporting victims, liaising with external agencies, administering domestic abuse databases, participating in investigations and making sure that force policy is adhered to. In some areas the exact functions and remit of the role were more likely to reflect the drive and personality of the individual DAO than any considered policy document. Our view is that the providing of information and support, as well as referring victims to other agencies, falls within the policing remit; it is important that DAOs do not go beyond this and attempt to engage in counselling or other non-policing activities that are best left to those with the appropriate skills and training.



21. Many DAOs routinely worked on their own, even when visiting victims' homes. Given the potential for violence in these situations, we urge that each visit be risk-assessed and that all DAOs carry their officer safety equipment with them. In addition, many DAOs used their own car to visit victims. We believe that doing so presents a personal risk to officers and should be discontinued.

22. In many forces administration had become their dominant task, inhibiting opportunities both for contact with victims and pro-active efforts to tackle repeat victimisation. One DAO had a three-month backlog of incidents waiting to be placed on the domestic abuse database, leading to inevitable shortcomings in information management, which, in our view is unacceptable. We recognise that organisational and local circumstances mean that DAO roles need not be identical across Scotland, but we do believe that forces should guard against administrative tasks detracting from their core role of providing as excellent a service as possible to the public.

23. More concerning therefore, was the finding that the actual support provided to victims of domestic abuse varied both between and within forces. It was apparent that there was no standard approach either to follow-up contact with victims or to implementing victim safety measures. The service provided was often unpredictable and lacked focus, making it difficult to monitor or co-ordinate activity. We do, however, commend the introduction in some areas (Grampian & East Lothian) of structured processes of victim contact and safety planning linked to risk assessment.

24. We believe the DAO role to be a valuable, though under-exploited, resource. Moreover, regional variations in the actual functions of the role are confusing for victims and other agencies. We identified a number of factors and examples of good practice that, if followed by all forces, would improve their operational effectiveness in this area:

- a strong central role for DAOs in establishing, co-ordinating, monitoring and reviewing consistency of practice;
- opportunities for DAOs to share good practice and be updated with national developments;
- co-locating DAOs and child protection officers;
- clear and active line-management;
- adequate administrative support;
- the application of a risk assessment model to allow a structured, consistent response to victim and perpetrator management (see recommendation 4); and
- the inclusion of domestic abuse in the tasking and co-ordination process to promote divisional ownership and bring domestic abuse into mainstream policing.

**Recommendation 2: That the domestic abuse officer role is reviewed in line with the identified good practice in this report.**

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## Staff development and competence

**25.** The 1997 report *Hitting Home* made specific recommendations in relation to training:

*“Recommendation 4: That forces review procedures and training to ensure that any history of domestic violence is considered by attending officers at the time or immediately after the current incident and that such history is recorded by them in the crime/incident report.”*

*“Recommendation 12: That forces review the content and extent of in-force training on domestic violence, bearing in mind the need for probationer and other constables to receive awareness as well as procedural training, the value of involving Women’s Aid workers in delivery, and new provision to first-line managers by the Scottish Police College.”*

**26.** Since *Hitting Home*, the Scottish Government had published its *National Domestic Abuse Training Strategy*<sup>8</sup>, supported by local multi-agency training consortia in receipt of Government funding to roll out the strategy. Whilst HMICS acknowledges this development and supports police involvement in these fora, it also recognises the need for specific and specialised development and support for police officers.

**27.** During the fieldwork for this inspection, front-line officers in all eight forces said that they had received little or no training in domestic abuse beyond that received in their probationary training period. In some cases, officers with ten or more years’ service had received no training at all. The abstraction of front-line officers for training purposes is a widely reported challenge for forces. Therefore, it would seem sensible for us to point to two specific areas for attention, neither of which necessarily require conventional classroom style training, but instead lend themselves to briefing, coaching and general awareness raising.

**28.** Firstly, our fieldwork revealed widespread misunderstanding about the sufficiency of evidence required to prosecute domestic abuse cases. While the evidential standards are clearly laid out in the ACPOS and COPFS joint protocol, officers were not strictly adhering to them, possibly through a lack of understanding. It is obviously vital that officers are clear about the level of evidence required in these cases, and we would therefore support any attempt to make the protocol even more explicit in this regard. Similarly, officers must also be aware of the importance of including background information in standard prosecution reports, and know how to retrieve such information (see recommendation 1).

**29.** Secondly, various risk assessment models were in use across forces. These were widely seen to provide useful support to officers attending domestic abuse incidents and gathering information. We were concerned to note, though, that a number of officers were not fully aware of how to use a risk assessment model to gather and assess information effectively. We believe that this diminishes the value of any risk assessment process and may in turn potentially expose victims to some risk.

<sup>8</sup> Scottish Executive. *Domestic Abuse: A National Training Strategy*. (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/03/18901/33127>)  
Edinburgh: Scottish Executive, 2004.



**30.** In our opinion, sergeants should be key to ensuring that scene attendance; investigations; evidence gathering; report writing and information recording meet the required standard. In practice, DAOs in all areas told us that they are regularly relied upon to act as gate-keepers, to monitor compliance with force policy and spend significant amounts of time making sure that front-line officers submit the appropriate paperwork. Though all sergeants attend the first-line managers course at the Scottish Police College (SPC), which includes an input on domestic abuse, we propose that this be supported by in-force support to grow competence and confidence in this area.

**31.** As far as DAOs were concerned, most claimed to have received little or no training prior to starting in post, with the formal college course typically being undertaken some time after their appointment. At the time of the inspection a number of forces had already recognised the need for an induction package for DAOs. We believe that this need extends to wider support for specialist and front-line officers, given their shared responsibility for managing incidents of domestic abuse.

**32.** Some DAOs suggested that the formal college course conflicted with their force policy in some way. It would seem appropriate, therefore, for existing police training to be reviewed to ensure that it reflects the national perspective and, that it is informed by the Scottish Crime Recording Standard (SCRS) as well as the ACPOS/ COPFS joint protocol. Indeed we would encourage the development of a national support package covering all the relevant areas identified in this report, including risk assessment. This would help to promote a common standard across the Service, raising the quality of service of all forces to the same high level whilst minimising unnecessary geographical variation and areas of duplicate work.

**Recommendation 3: That all forces work together (with the Scottish Police Services Authority (SPSA) where appropriate), to develop a common approach to training and support for officers.**

### **Risk assessment**

**33.** We found it to be broadly accepted that decisions about prioritising cases, allocating resources and the nature and intensity of involvement should be informed by risk assessment. Intelligence can be better used by informing such assessment and ensuring that risk management is used to target cases where the risk of repeat victimisation is most serious. Risk assessment tools offer a structured way for 'first response' officers to gather pertinent information from victims. This information, particularly when shared with other agencies, can help to shape a more responsive service for victims and provides a framework for decision-making that allows police resources to be targeted in a structured and informed manner. The risk assessment process fits in well with the National Intelligence Model (NIM) framework of intelligence, prevention and enforcement and, when applied properly, can serve as an effective *case management* tool.

**34.** As noted already, we found that a number of different victim-focused risk assessment models had been adopted or were being piloted, their exact nature and level of implementation varying across the eight forces. They ranged from risk assessment based on police data only, to the use of multi-agency conferencing for high-risk cases. In some cases, models had been adapted to local circumstances. We believe this to be acceptable, provided that the core elements of risk assessment are used consistently.



**35.** In most areas we encountered a somewhat ad hoc approach to both victim support and perpetrator management; typically DAOs applied their professional judgement to the limited information provided by front-line officers who, in turn, had usually received no training on risk indicators. Similar observations were made by Women's Aid who, while praising and supportive of the DAO role, pointed to inconsistencies in the level of support offered to victims in different areas. Professional judgement, though always important, does not offer the consistency, transparency and accountability of a formalised process. Furthermore, the DAO response tended only to focus on supporting the victim; our findings suggest a Service-wide failure to target the perpetrator effectively for the purpose of preventing the recurrence of incidents.

**36.** Many uniform officers with whom we spoke during our fieldwork were positive about the use of risk indicators. Those that had received it, valued additional training on this aspect of assessment and had a better understanding of the dynamics of domestic abuse as a result. As well as an important means to structure and inform decision-making, DAOs saw the indicators as an effective way of flagging up high-risk cases in the tasking and co-ordinating process and thereby instigating subsequent action.

**37.** However, it must be recognised that the management of risk in domestic abuse is complex and dynamic. We have identified a number of concerns relating to the current use of risk assessment, including:

- a lack of training for officers gathering risk indicators or for those carrying out risk assessments;
- previous risk assessment information not being available to call handlers and first response officers;
- failure to manage the administrative burden of introducing risk assessment by not providing adequate administrative support for DAOs;
- failure to ensure that the most efficient means is employed, not unnecessarily burdensome;
- failure to acknowledge the resources required to monitor and review individual risk assessments or to have a review process in place;
- failure to include risk information in reports to the procurator fiscal and other agencies; and
- the introduction of separate databases to hold risk assessments, which are not linked to existing systems.

**38.** Some of these concerns relate to matters of training and information technology, which we have addressed in recommendations 1 and 3. The national IT solution referred to in recommendation 1 should incorporate the risk assessment and risk management of both victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse.

**39.** When embedded in multi-agency frameworks, victim risk assessment is an integral part of a co-ordinated community response to domestic abuse. We recognise that the introduction of multi-agency conferencing carries an administrative burden, is resource intensive and depends on the commitment of agencies other than police. Nevertheless, even a single-agency risk assessment is likely to produce a better overall response than an unstructured approach would achieve, and should ultimately pay dividends in terms of reducing chronic and escalating abuse.



40. We acknowledge that the development of a victim risk assessment model is at an early stage in Scotland. We are also aware of ACPOS' interest in the experiences and outcomes of the *Getting it right* approach for children and young people affected by domestic abuse. Nevertheless, we believe that there is significant benefit to be gained now from improving front-line officers' understanding of risk factors and, as a consequence, improving the quality of information gathered during their first contact with victims. We would expect that forces, through the ACPOS crime business area, will review any nationally endorsed approach in the light of findings from the *Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC)* pilots.

**Recommendation 4: That all forces adopt a model of victim risk assessment and risk management as soon as possible, whilst working towards implementing a single core model across Scotland, and that forces focus on ensuring the quality of the information gathered.**

### Incident recording

41. Different incident recording and management systems were in use across the eight forces. Consequently, over time, forces had developed and adapted their own local codes for incidents. As a result, we found no common approach to the way in which domestic abuse incidents were recorded (coded) and subsequently managed.

42. Migration to the STORM MA national incident recording and management system had begun in four of the eight force areas at the time of our inspection. The need to harmonise how incidents are coded and recorded, in tandem with this development, had been recognised and work was underway to prepare a set of common codes. We welcome this move and look forward to its implementation.

43. In all forces, a code to identify that an incident is related to a domestic matter should be, and in most instances was, applied. This can happen in the course of opening, updating or closing an incident record. However, in those areas where incidents were coded on receipt of initial information, it was quicker and easier to identify, prioritise and subsequently manage domestic abuse incidents. We commend this as good practice.

44. In addition, every force had a quality assurance process in place. This allowed them to review all incident records to ensure that force policy and procedure had been applied correctly. The intention was that this should be conducted by a supervisor at or near to the time of dealing with the actual incident. In practice, it was the DAO (or their administrative support staff) in each area who reviewed all incident records to ensure that any not appropriately recorded as domestic incidents were subsequently re-coded and dealt with accordingly. However, a combination of the large volume of incident records captured on one hand and competing demands with limited resources on the other, meant that these reviews were not always carried out. Moreover, we would question whether this type of activity is the best use of a DAO's time and skills.

45. It was clear to us that forces recognised the importance of dealing with an incident correctly and appropriately from the outset. In some areas a significant amount of time and effort had been invested in reinforcing this message amongst front-line operational staff, call handlers and control room staff, as a result of which error rates had fallen. However this is an issue that requires repeated attention.



**46.** All forces were aware that their existing quality assurance systems were not foolproof. In an audit of incident records that we conducted, we found examples where the initial or final coding had not been correctly applied. Some, but not all, of these had subsequently been corrected at different stages of the quality assurance process. While the number of those missed was relatively small, we consider it important that forces have in place robust structures to ensure that incident recording and subsequent management are accurate.

**47.** Conversely, some incident records that had been coded as relating to a domestic matter were subsequently found not to be so. Here too, not all 'false positives' were subsequently corrected on the incident recording and management system, meaning that any analysis of the data would present a misleading picture. Moreover, the potential for confusion, upset or even conflict if officers attending future incidents are given incorrect information of this kind, is obvious.

**48.** Our conclusions here mirror the findings of the recent HMICS thematic inspection *A review of how the Scottish Crime Recording Standard has developed within the police service in Scotland since 2005*<sup>9</sup>. It is apparent from the information recorded on incident recording and management systems that in a number of areas the police response falls short of what might reasonably be expected from force policies and procedures. A more systematic and structured quality assurance regime for incident management is required.

**Recommendation 5: That forces review and reinforce their quality assurance practices and processes for recording domestic abuse incidents.**

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<sup>9</sup> HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary for Scotland. *A Review of how the Scottish Crime Recording Standard has developed within the Police Service in Scotland since 2005*. (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/02/26133627/0>) Edinburgh: HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2008.

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## ANNEX A

### SUMMARY OF GOOD PRACTICE FINDINGS

#### Co-ordination

1. The four largest forces – Grampian, Lothian and Borders, Strathclyde and Tayside – had domestic abuse policy officers based in their force headquarters. Their role was to co-ordinate the force response to strategic matters, deliver internal and external training, and prepare and update protocols. In other forces these responsibilities lay with the head of department, generally the detective chief inspector in the family protection unit or equivalent, though in practice they fell to the detective inspector or detective sergeant within the domestic abuse unit. We believe that clear guidance and leadership in support of a structured and focused approach is an essential basis for any specialised unit, and that every force should have an identified policy lead. We commend the use of policy units or a nominated officer responsible for the domestic abuse portfolio, even if this is not the individual's only role.
2. At the focus groups held during our fieldwork, a number of DAOs and their supervisors told us that this was the first time they had been brought together as a group for a considerable length of time. By contrast, in some forces, including Lothian and Borders Police and Grampian Police, the domestic abuse policy officer regularly brought the force DAOs together for meetings, training and support, using these opportunities to update them on relevant force and national issues. We acknowledge this to be good practice and particularly helpful for those DAOs who are not part of or attached to a larger team or unit. We would also encourage forces to include DAO supervisors in these meetings.
3. In Lothian and Borders Police, the quarterly meeting of its Public Protection Forum enhanced force-wide co-ordination. Here, divisional detective chief inspectors with responsibility for family protection units met with the force co-ordinators for domestic abuse, child protection, sexual offences, vulnerable adults and management of offenders, to share good practice and improve consistency across the force.

#### Marketing

4. At the time of our fieldwork the family protection policy unit of Strathclyde Police was about to begin an internal awareness-raising campaign featuring posters to remind officers to use the correct closure codes and submit the correct paperwork. At the same time, an interview with the force's strategic lead for this portfolio was placed on the force's intranet and made available through electronic briefings. Such an approach readily shows officers where strategic responsibility and ownership lie, and we particularly commend the appointment of a member of the senior management team as *champion*.
  5. We were also impressed to find that Central Scotland Police was linking the launch of its *Getting it right* pilot with the start of the national *16 days of action to end violence against women*. A public statement of commitment was visible on entering the force headquarters building, where banners and posters on the subject of domestic abuse were also displayed. We encourage all forces to consider using publicity materials in their domestic abuse media strategies.
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## Monitoring

6. Several forces had reviewed their handling of domestic abuse incidents in its entirety. Thus they had covered not just the role of the DAO but also the interface between the different components of police response, i.e. call centre, front-line officer, first-line manager and DAO. In some areas these reviews had included activity analysis and compliance studies.

7. We identified good practice in Q and U Divisions of Strathclyde Police, both of which had set up a domestic abuse forum that monitored performance across all divisional departments. Elsewhere, Grampian Police produced a bi-annual domestic abuse report. Its purpose was to detect any emerging pattern of domestic abuse and inform readers about domestic abuse interventions and measures.

## Role of the domestic abuse officer (DAO)

### Job description

8. In some forces, the role requirement had been comprehensively reviewed. Good practice dictates that the role be reviewed and the job description updated on a regular basis.

### Case management

9. Central Scotland Police's effective approach to case management involved all incidents being discussed and actions allocated in a departmental meeting. Domestic abuse was a standing item at the daily tasking and co-ordinating meetings. DAOs shared responsibility for domestic abuse with community, response or intelligence officers who were responsible for crime prevention advice, preparing intelligence briefings and ensuring a robust co-ordinated response to any future recurrences.

10. As a part of their intelligence-led approach to domestic abuse, we were also impressed by forces that used analysts to interpret the scale of the problem and produce profiles of high-risk offenders.

### Support for victims

11. The Barnardo's project in Tayside and the domestic abuse unit in Central Scotland are both based on models whereby specialist advocates work alongside the police to provide longer-term support to victims. Evidence suggests that such an approach has a positive impact on rates of arrest, prosecution and conviction, and can influence court outcomes (Whetstone 2001<sup>10</sup>). Specialist advocate post-holders also offer a level of continuity that police personnel cannot.

### Investigative role

12. Typically the primary role of the DAO did not include investigating domestic abuse incidents, although in one force the DAO did investigate high-risk and repeat incidents. In two forces, the DAO was a detective officer and had received detective training at the SPC. The Home Office Police and Crime Standards Directorate has determined that dedicated domestic violence units in England and Wales with an investigative capacity result in a higher percentage of offenders being brought to

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<sup>10</sup> Whetstone, T. Measuring the impact of domestic violence co-ordinated response team. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies and Management*, 24(3), 2001, 371 - 398.



justice than if the investigation is carried out by non-specialist officers. We do believe that greater use could be made of trained detectives in investigations of serious domestic abuse incidents and, in particular, for high-risk repeat cases even where the level of one-off or most recent violence would not normally merit this.

### Perpetrator management

**13.** At the time of our inspection, DAOs typically instigated a limited number of actions to target perpetrators, including the use of intelligence/briefing packs and flagging on incident recording and management systems to highlight bail conditions. We found good practice in areas where the NIM process was used to monitor local trends in domestic abuse offending and to manage prolific offenders, and where analysts assisted the DAO in researching perpetrators and identifying risk.

**14.** In Strathclyde Police's K Division, DAOs initiated and, with the assistance of uniform colleagues regularly carried out, pro-active bail checks on identified high-risk offenders to check that they were complying with bail conditions. The Home Office's Domestic Violence Enforcement campaigns have highlighted the success of such initiatives in managing prolific offenders. We consider this to be good practice and would encourage all forces to work proactively to ensure that bail conditions are monitored.

**15.** In some areas, including Aberdeen, DAOs routinely carried out cell visits to people accused of domestic abuse, providing them with information on court proceedings and handing out domestic abuse leaflets prior to any court proceedings. We also found examples of good practice in East Lothian and the Scottish Borders, to name just two areas, where violent domestic abuse offenders were referred to local multi-agency risk panels. In Edinburgh, DAOs worked closely with the court-mandated perpetrator programme, known as the Domestic Violence Probation Project (DVPP), attending risk management case conferences and notifying the DVPP when perpetrators came to the attention of police.

### Occupational health and safety

**16.** We found DAOs to suffer from a variety of organisational stresses in addition to that of being exposed to other people's trauma. Not all forces had the recommended services in place for dealing with these circumstances. Given the risk of vicarious as well as organisational stress, it is essential that all forces have in place support and monitoring systems for DAOs. We have previously pointed to the good practice of Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary in developing a mandatory psychological support policy for certain categories of post<sup>11</sup>, and suggest that all forces consider this option for DAOs and other staff.

### Co-location with other agencies

**17.** In those units where police DAOs and Social Services were co-located, e.g. Fife, we found excellent communication between the two functions. Both typically had access to IT systems and information was readily available and shared. However, in some instances this co-location had the

<sup>11</sup> HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary for Scotland. *Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary Primary Inspection 2006*. (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/03/21091224/0>) Edinburgh: Scottish Executive, 2007.





unintended consequence of distancing the DAO from his or her police colleagues. We would encourage DAOs to maintain regular contact with front-line officers and vice versa, for instance through attending briefings. We support joint-agency working in co-located offices. Even so, we suggest that forces make certain that they have full ownership of the data contained within their own systems and that they have read-only access to the IT systems of external agencies, unless there are clear and auditable protocols for greater access.

### Multi-agency working

**18.** Given the multi-faceted nature of domestic abuse, no single agency or intervention can provide a complete solution. The issue is complex and requires a comprehensive service response involving agencies and services beyond the justice system. Apart from the police and the procurator fiscal service, other agencies including Women's Aid, the wider voluntary sector, local authority departments (housing, education, social services) and the health service have a role to play. Partnership working between different organisations is often time-consuming and difficult, but the benefits to be gained from such work should not be underestimated. Investing time and effort is essential and may, in the long term, reduce the immense economic cost of dealing with such crime and its consequences.

**19.** In Scotland each local authority area has a multi-agency domestic abuse or violence against women forum, though their exact nature and productivity varies from area to area. The police service was routinely represented on these fora, though their level of representation varied from assistant chief constable (ACC) to constable. We would emphasise the importance of having police representatives with the authority to make decisions on these fora.

**20.** Across Scotland a number of projects are underway, such as the Domestic Abuse Court in Glasgow and the North Lanarkshire multi-agency risk assessment conferencing (MARAC), which aim to produce a more co-ordinated multi-agency response to domestic abuse. We encourage all forces to engage actively in, and contribute to, developing such initiatives.

### Civilianisation

**21.** It is important that forces consider the extent to which the DAO role requires the exercise of police powers and consequently the potential for civilianising these posts. This relates back in particular to many of the administrative aspects of the role as well as some of the elements of victim support.

**22.** Although the role of the DAO is primarily seen as co-ordinating the follow-up response to domestic incidents, it actually extends further into collating information, conducting police and external agency checks, and ensuring compliance with force procedures. There may be benefit in employing police support staff for these aspects of the role in addition to working alongside the DAO on home visits and providing advice to victims. For example, anecdotally it is understood that female victims tend to prefer longer-term support than short-term crisis intervention. Due to the sizeable volume of incidents that DAOs deal with it is unlikely that they will be able to provide this longer-term support. In one force, Central Scotland Police, the role of the DAO had been inherited by qualified police support staff, working alongside a detective constable and supported by an administrative officer. We were impressed by the effectiveness of this unit.



**23.** Tayside Police, along with Barnardo's Scotland, has been operating the Tayside Domestic Abuse Initiative since 2000. The Scottish Government's Violence Against Women Fund and Tayside Police jointly fund this initiative. Barnardo's workers with the skill and expertise in responding to domestic abuse assist the force's DAOs, providing the victim with a confidante more able than a police officer to provide long-term support. This is a good example of partnership working to support victims.

### External agencies

**24.** In general, all the external agencies contacted for this review spoke positively about the police response to domestic incidents. This is a very marked change in the decade since *Hitting Home*. Women's Aid representatives considered the introduction of the ACPOS/COPFS joint protocol a positive step for the police service, and in instances where officers had implemented it correctly they had achieved excellent results. Nevertheless, the same agency also reported some instances where clients had received poor service from police officers.

**25.** We found examples of good practice in some forces where DAOs, senior managers and the force domestic abuse co-ordinator regularly met with representatives from Women's Aid organisations to discuss matters arising and generally attempt to maintain a good level of communication. Some areas had also established remote reporting with Women's Aid organisations. This is also good practice – many victims of abuse and hate crimes find it hard to make their first disclosure to the police.

**26.** We also interviewed representatives from COPFS. Their general opinion was that the police approach to domestic abuse was good, and they noted the close working relationship at policy level between COPFS and ACPOS. They went on to highlight the following areas for improvement:

- the submission of standard prosecution reports (SPRs) containing insufficient evidence;
- SPRs routinely not being flagged as domestic incidents;
- SPRs routinely not including full background information on previous incidents;
- relevant information from risk assessments not being included in SPRs;
- victims' opinions not always being sought by officers; and
- their inability to access the police reference numbers given in reports, so that previous police incidents could be missed unless details were provided.

**27.** Victim Information and Advice (VIA) is part of the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) and offers a dedicated service to certain victims, witnesses and bereaved nearest relatives. VIA offers these individuals information on the progress of their case, the range of practical and emotional support available, and the criminal justice system in general. In our fieldwork it was apparent that not all DAOs regularly communicated with VIA on cases. Similarly, VIA observed that DAOs did not always use VIA officers to their fullest effect. VIA has a direct line of communication with procurators fiscal and so is in a position to pass on information that has perhaps not been included in SPRs prior to any court appearance. We would urge all forces to ensure that their DAOs regularly communicate with VIA officers and that processes are in place to ensure that any outstanding matters are resolved.



## ANNEX B: PILOTS

### Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC)

1. This is the Scottish Government's approach to helping children and young people in Scotland. It sets out guidelines to help families and professionals to work better together with children and young people and to give children and families more say in the help that they get. It recognises the importance of everyone working together towards a shared set of goals.
2. Pathfinder pilot projects are currently running in four areas: Edinburgh, Falkirk, West Dunbartonshire, and Dumfries and Galloway. The key objectives of the pilots are to:
  - ensure that all agencies place the child's needs and interests at the centre of their activity;
  - achieve better joint working amongst all relevant agencies, in all the interests of the child;
  - test and refine the framework and tools for a multi-agency response which can then be used throughout the country as part of the Scottish Government's *Getting it right for every child* approach;
  - adopt a unified, timely, appropriate approach to situations where children are affected by domestic abuse; and
  - provide specialist advice on the single assessment, record and plan to be used by agencies.

### Domestic abuse court

3. The National Group to Address Domestic Abuse in Scotland, which became the National Group to Address Violence Against Women, set up a number of working groups to consider how domestic abuse and subsequently the wider violence against women (VAW) agenda should be tackled in Scotland.
4. In recognition of the prevalence and seriousness of domestic abuse, and of the possibilities that a specialist court could offer, the Sheriff Principal of Glasgow and Strathkelvin and other members of the judiciary in Glasgow established a steering group, comprising the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, Strathclyde Police and others, such as Social Work Services and the Women's Support Project. Their aim was to pilot a specialist domestic abuse court in Glasgow.
5. Evidence from similar courts elsewhere in the UK has indicated that such courts have helped to develop best practice in multi-agency, integrated working that places the victim at the centre of the process.
6. As a result of the activities of these working groups, a pilot specialist domestic abuse court in Glasgow has been established to deal with the majority of domestic abuse incidents reported in Strathclyde Police's G Division.

### Assist service

7. The Assist service is linked to the domestic abuse court. Its staff provide information, advocacy and support to adults, both male and female, young people and children, who are survivors of domestic abuse and are involved with the specialist domestic abuse court.
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### Multi-agency risk assessment conferencing

**8.** A new framework to help victims of domestic abuse and their families has been introduced across North Lanarkshire. Multi-agency risk assessment conferencing (MARAC), which was developed in South Wales, has been introduced to identify victims of domestic abuse who are most at risk of experiencing violence in the future. The key element of MARAC is the risk assessment, which will be carried out by police officers attending incidents of domestic abuse. The risk assessment has three main objectives:

- to gather detailed and relevant information from victims that can be shared with other agencies;
- to identify those who will need more intensive support; and
- to make agencies aware of the most dangerous offenders.

**9.** Information gathered during these risk assessments will be shared among relevant agencies to promote the safety of abused women and their children. Evaluation has shown that, for women going through the MARAC process, repeat victimisation has fallen to 17%. This, compared to the domestic abuse repeat incident rate of 40% in the rest of the Strathclyde Police area, demonstrates significant improvement.

**10.** At present MARAC is operational in half of the local authority area and plans for continued implementation are on-going. The objective over the course of the next three years will be to ensure that MARAC is fully embedded within agency responses to violence against women.





## ANNEX C

### METHODOLOGY AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. In conducting this thematic inspection, we focused on specific aspects of the police response to domestic abuse, paying particular attention to the identification and handling of incidents of repeat victimisation. The inspection also took into account the aims of the joint protocol between ACPOS and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service: 'In Partnership, Challenging Domestic Abuse' and focused on the following areas:

- the strategic approach to domestic abuse;
- the domestic abuse initiatives in which the police service in Scotland is involved;
- the use of information and communications technology (ICT);
- the role of the domestic abuse officer (DAO); and
- the recording of domestic abuse incidents.

2. The fieldwork was conducted from November 2007 to January 2008, informed by a desktop review of information provided by all eight forces and covering:

- existing policy and procedure documents relating to domestic abuse;
- recent reviews of domestic abuse that have been conducted in-force;
- business cases that apply to pilot projects operating in each force area; and
- the domestic abuse liaison officer job description.

3. Following this review, the inspection team visited each force and conducted personal interviews with four separate groups of internal stakeholders: front-line officers; DAOs; DAOs' first-line managers and force strategic leads for domestic abuse. Each group was asked open questions about its own force's response to domestic abuse. We found that the officers and staff who attended these meetings were open and honest in their responses and many aspects of good practice were recognised.

4. We also consulted with external stakeholders, including the following: Women's Aid; Violence Against Women Partnerships; The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) including Victim Information and Advice Service (VIA); and the Scottish Police College (SPC).

5. The lead officer for this inspection was Mrs Susan Mitchell, Principal Inspecting Officer with HMICS, assisted by Sergeant Lisa Gregg and Sergeant Claire Walker on secondment from Lothian and Borders Police and Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary respectively. The inspection was directed by Assistant Inspector of Constabulary Malcolm R Dickson QPM.

6. We are grateful to everyone with whom we consulted during this inspection, and particularly to Lothian and Borders Police and Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary for lending Sergeants Gregg and Walker.