All Party Parliamentary Group on Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse

22 January 2025 Meeting: Minutes

Date and time: 10:00 – 11:00, Wednesday 22 January 2025

Location: Room O, Portcullis House, 1 Victoria Embankment, London, SW1A 2JR (hybrid online)

Attendees:

Jess Asato MP (Labour)

Emily Darlington MP (Labour)

Office of Chloe Eccles MP (Labour)

Office of Maya Ellis MP (Labour)

Daniel Simpson, Office of Jess Asato MP

Jo Todd CBE, Respect

Caroline Bernard, Respect

Tom Hunter, Foundations

Professor Nicole Westmarland, Durham University

Sue Burke, MK-ACT

Kate Bulman, MK-ACT

Kuljit Sandhu, Rise Mutual

Ailsa Malcolm, The Drive Partnership

Kate Iwi, Positive Change Service

Welcome and introduction – Jess Asato MP, Chair

Jess Asato MP welcomed attendees and outlined the focus and purpose of the meeting. The meeting and agenda focused on the title question: 'Can domestic abuse perpetrators really change their behaviour? Understanding perpetrator programmes and their outcomes.'

The research landscape, understanding the impact and what works: Professor Nicole Westmarland, Director of Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse and Professor of Criminology at Durham University

Professor Nicole Westmarland shared an overview of the research landscape regarding responses to perpetrators:

- Outlined summary of Project Mirabal - an award-winning research project which took place between 2009-2015 to investigate the question 'Do domestic violence perpetrator programmes (DVPPs) actually work in reducing men's violence and abuse and increasing the freedom of women and children?'. The final report was titled 'Steps Towards Change', in line with the research findings, that showed that all involved had made steps towards change, and many of the participants lives were improved, however it was hard to fully measure success.
- At present, there is a scaling up of research and innovation in this field, with a move towards quantitative research rather than purely qualitative research. There is also a willingness to move beyond sector norms in terms of research and evaluation, with new approaches to assessment introduced, such as 'risks, needs, responsivity'. While the sector as a whole

continues to expand and scale up, it's important to not lose focus on what we already know is safe and effective practice. Perpetrator responses in the UK are very victim-survivor centred, thanks to Respect Standards and Home Office Standards, and these are important grounding frameworks to ensure that the UK keeps working well.

- Looking ahead, it's important to ensure that, while keeping standards at the core of all work, these standards are continuously reviewed and updated – Respect Standards are now on the Fourth Edition, and this is important to ensure they remain up-to-date and responsive to new developments. Essentially, it is important to hold on to what works, while also continuing to innovate.

Professor Nicole Westmarland closed agenda item by encouraging everyone to approach new research and developments critically – particularly research that suggests broad, generalised conclusions; lives are complicated and messy, and they don't all fit neatly into research papers. It's essential to always seek and be guided by victim-survivor voice, and what victim-survivors want beyond a basic right of freedom from violence.

Delivering perpetrator responses alongside support for victims, what works: Sue Burke, CEO, and Kate Bulman, Fresh Start Manager, MK-ACT

Sue Burke shared an overview of MK-ACT's work – a charity in Milton Keynes which works with over 100 families every day to help them move on from fear and abuse. MK-ACT offers a range of services including crisis-intervention, support to access essential services, emergency refuge accommodation, specialist support for children and young people in refuge, support programmes inside the refuge and in the community, and the Fresh Start programme.

Kate Bulman shared an overview of MK-ACT's Fresh Start Programme - a specialist domestic abuse prevention programme**,** which works to address the cause of the problem by working with individuals who have issues in relation to violent, abusive, intimidating or controlling behaviours in their intimate or family relationships. The service aims to increase the safety of both partners and children and prevent further incidents of abuse. Kate highlighted that the programme works as an integrated support service in daily communication which keeps the victim-survivor work separate but parallel to ensure victim-survivor safety throughout. The programme is guided by Respect standards, and always works with the victim-survivor first before the perpetrator – within the support, the victim-survivor can decide the level of contact they want to have with the service.

Working with high harm high risk perpetrators: Kuljit Sandhu, CEO, RISE Mutual

Kuljit Sandhu shared an overview of Rise Mutual's work with high-risk, high-harm perpetrators through delivery of the Drive Project and Rise Mutual's Culturally Integrated Family Approach programme.

- The Drive Project, developed by the Drive Partnership, is a perpetrator intervention for high-risk, high-harm perpetrators that takes an intensive case management approach to challenge service users to change, prevent abusive behaviour, and protect victim-survivors. Alongside being assessed as posing a high-risk, high-harm level of domestic abuse to the people that

they are in intimate or family relationships with, service users also often have multiple needs and are resistant to change. The Drive Project takes a multi-agency approach and is centred on adult and child victim-survivor safety with a combined but separate approach taken to victim-survivors and perpetrators in line with the Respect standards. Rise Mutual delivers the Drive Project as a pan-London service. Kuljit Sandhu closed the section by sharing feedback from service users on positive behaviour change.

- The 'Culturally Integrated Family Approach' (CIFA) programme delivered by Rise Mutual CIC is designed to respond safely and effectively to those causing harm across racialised communities. The culturally responsive approach challenges those causing harm to change their behaviour and considers and responds to different relationship dynamics within abuse, such as wider networks of familial abuse.

Kuljit Sandhu closed the agenda item by outlining how instability across the sector is leading to the loss of highly skilled works, and outlined the importance of long-term, sustainable funding for not only workforce preservation but also development – the sector needs sustainable funding to have long term impact.

Questions/discussion

- ***Emily Darlington MP*** asked what age should we be looking at for interventions? There was a pilot in Milton Keynes with schools and every school as identifying domestic abuse. It was an 8-week programme that revealed so much.
- ***Kate Bulman*** responded that engagement should be as early as secondary school – have experience with lots of adult males who say that they wish they had learned more at school. There are also children as young as 9 who are abusive towards parents.
- ***Sue Burke*** said that primary school level is also important.
- ***Jo Todd*** added that we are seeing indication of harmful behaviour as early as primary school. Really important for a legal definition of Children Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse (CAPVA) to help work in this area – Respect is pushing for a legal definition on this from young age.
- ***Emily Darlington MP*** added that the most likely age for rape is 14 – there are extremely high levels of harm at a young age and need to respond to this.
- ***Warren Betts*** (online) added that they are working with children as young as 6 who are displaying levels of CAPVA.
- ***Jess Asato MP*** asked about the definition/labels for young children causing harm – important to remember they are children, which is why we don't used the label of perpetrator but need the appropriate language and definitions to engage effectively. Jess Asato asked if the Government is working on a legal definition.
- ***Jo Todd*** confirmed that the previous government was consulting on it but believes it has been put on pause.
- ***Warren Betts (online)*** also noted that the use of the word perpetrator is avoided when working with those who harm.

- ***Jo Todd*** noted that the use of language is tricky but important – the word perpetrator can impact engagement in behaviour change, but also know that many victim-survivors want this label and that it is important to have it clearly defined.
- ***Paul Watherstone*** (online) asked how we can improve sharing best practice between systems – for instance, thinking of interventions in police and probation.
- ***Jo Todd*** highlighted police and probation's work to improve system and noted that HMPPS sits as a member on the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Strategic Reference Group, which helps brings systems together, and can bring learning from this to All Party Parliamentary Group too.

Jess Asato MP and ***Emily Darlington MP*** thanked all speakers and attendees, and gave apologies for remainder of meeting due to parliamentary diary clash.

Domestic abuse perpetrator work: Setting the scene - Plans for Respect's SR2 submission: Jo Todd CBE, CEO Respect

Jo Todd shared an overview of domestic abuse perpetrator work, including an update on the current landscape, alongside the key focuses of Respect's spending review submission:

- Perpetrators come in all shapes and sizes across all communities. We all know perpetrators, even if we aren't aware of it, and many of us know and love people who have caused harm in their families or intimate partner relationships. It's a deep societal issue that affects all of us, so the responses that we need in place are very varied.
- The range of responses needed is a particular challenge for commissioners with small budgets, but we do need a full range of responses. We need prevention, early intervention, and behaviour change for those where harmful behaviour is already a pattern who are willing and able to change, alongside disruption techniques and punitive approaches for those who are not. All perpetrators must be stopped and held to account.
- Accountability and visibility have been outlined by victim-survivors as essential in this work – ensuring that there are risk-managed opportunities to change, whilst also ensuring full accountability for the harm caused. Victim-survivors must always be the centre and focus of work with perpetrators – their voice, safety and wellbeing; nothing should take place in isolation or without that focus.
- The voluntary sector has driven the progress in responses to perpetrators – while it is positive that many sectors and systems are now also realising the role that they have to play, it is important that within this the standards of best practice in working with perpetrators are carried across to any new and developing work.
- On systems change, also want to outline Respect's submission to the Comprehensive Spending Review. Taking into account the Government's mission to halve VAWG within a decade, and the importance of effective responses to perpetrators within this, Respect's submission proposes a fully funded comprehensive approach that will embed perpetrator work in state systems, expand specialist service provision, establish specialist pathways, ensure

practice is safe and effective, and enhance data and evaluation. Jo also highlighted the importance of workforce development and associated funding and training.

Questions/discussion

- ***Kate Iwi*** raised issue experienced while working on a project in children's social care in that social workers can't take out a DVPO to protect a child, so social workers are having to encourage victim-survivors to do it themselves. Is there any way that we can support greater powers across social workers to protect victim-survivors?
- ***Jo Todd*** responded that she would be keen to discuss this further – understanding is that anyone can apply in theory, but it may be that the funding and training hasn't been there to support its development in practice.

Jo Todd closed the meeting and thanked all attendees – in-person and online.