

*Local Government Association*

# learning from domestic violence partnerships

a study of a programme of engagement and support to local domestic violence partnerships

**LGAresearch**



## **Acknowledgements**

This report has been written by Frances Abraham, Senior Researcher/  
Consultant at the Tavistock Institute.

We are grateful to all those who gave their time to be interviewed for this research, and provided such useful information that can be shared with all domestic violence partnerships.

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# summary

## 1. Introduction

This summary report presents the headline findings of research commissioned from the Tavistock Institute by the Local Government Association (LGA), to study their Programme of Engagement and Support to local domestic violence partnerships. This programme, funded by the Home Office, entailed work with ten developing domestic violence partnerships. It aimed to use the skills of a consultant to help establish, guide, advise and support the partnerships. All ten partnerships were at a fairly early stage of development.

The research was undertaken between February and May 2005 in the ten local partnership sites. The aim was to produce a report highlighting implications, lessons and practical issues for other authorities and partnerships to share. Although the partnerships in the programme were generally at an early stage of development, it was hoped that the lessons they learnt from setting up could help others embarking on this stage or reviewing their current arrangements. A further self-assessment checklist for local authorities is also being produced as a companion to this report.

The report examines in turn: the life cycle of domestic violence/domestic abuse partnerships; local partnership structures, especially the position and role of the Domestic Abuse Forum; the domestic violence coordinator role; strategies and resources for domestic abuse partnership work; practice development and service delivery issues; and the role of leadership and champions.

## 2. Partnership lifecycles

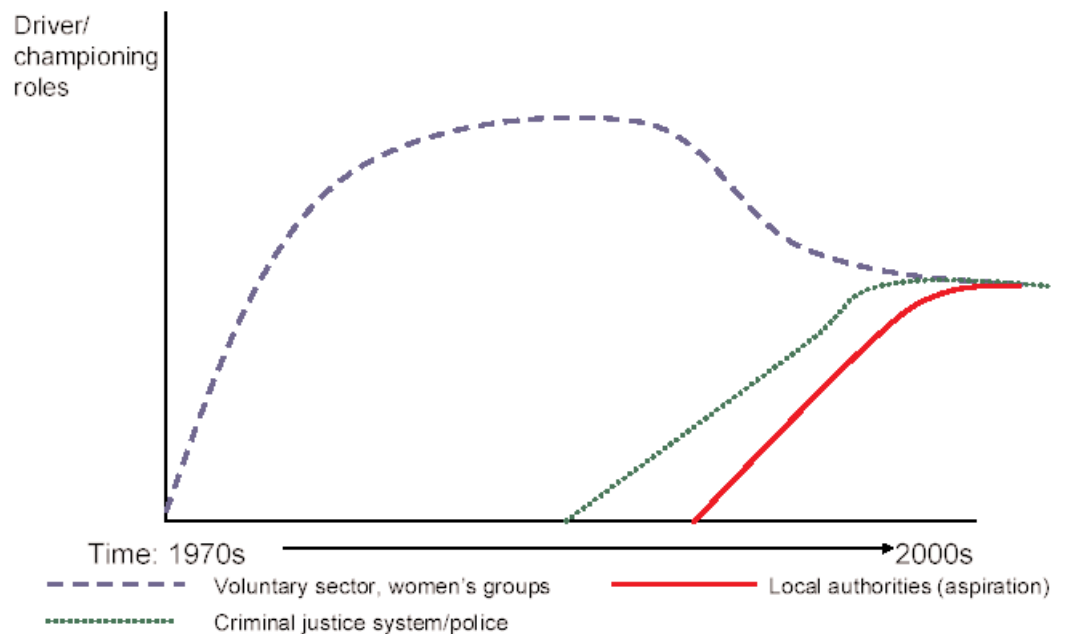
The lifecycle of partnership working is a key to understanding differences between different local partnerships: partnerships in one locality will be at a different point in this lifecycle than another, as seen in the figure below. The implications are that:

- in many areas the local authority may be seen as a relative newcomer who is now bidding to control what goes on in domestic violence/abuse provision;
- funding, which may have come from multiple sources in the past, is increasingly seen as the responsibility of local authorities, either to provide themselves or to broker from other partners;
- relationships between the local partners may therefore be affected by tensions generated from past and present adversarial roles over, for example, levels of resourcing or mobilisation of appropriate responses from housing departments; and
- time and effort in partnership working is needed to overcome what can be costly and time-consuming adversarialism and dispute.

With this in mind, there are some basic principles of partnership working that are key to success:

- continued acknowledgement of the different contribution of sectors, and understanding of the need to maintain their commitment;
- ways of working which reflect different norms and cultures may be required to keep all partners on board;
- being seen to treat all partners as equals; and
- involving all partners in searching for appropriate solutions; and
- ensuring that delivery is achieved, albeit in a limited way initially.

**Figure 1: Lifecycle of domestic violence/abuse partners and partnership**



### 3. Institutional configuration

Three issues arise in relation to the institutional background to domestic violence/abuse partnership work in local authorities:

- roles and responsibilities between local government institutions could helpfully be clarified, particularly the division of responsibility between the county and district councils;
- the rapidly changing landscape of partnership working within Local Strategic Partnerships and, an emergent phenomenon, Local Area Agreements, provides an important opportunity to mobilise new partners, resources and to embed the issue at a high level; and
- the complexity of cross-sectoral institutional relationships, often involving multiple agencies who may be in the process of fundamental internal change, can slow progress.

For a successful domestic violence/abuse partnership, there are a number of issues to be addressed that arise from the needs of different institutional partners:

- work on the costs of domestic violence, possibly at the national level or disseminated nationally, needs to be undertaken to provide institutional partners at the local level with leverage in order for them to prioritise domestic violence/abuse effectively. Although this has been done for criminal justice costs, the wider costs also need reiterating. For example, a business case to provide primary care trusts with details of the costs they incur through not addressing the issue systemically will help to raise the priority of developing more appropriate responses to domestic violence/abuse. There has been some national research on the health costs, but this needs to be used locally as a lever;
- similarly, in relation to work with children, more focused practice development and evaluation

should provide more targeted and useable tools for application by professionals who have a primary task which is not directly related to domestic violence/abuse. As part of this, it is also essential to establish ownership of the issue, and ensure relevant professionals take responsibility and recognise this work as part of their role; and

- partnerships need to adapt to the organisational capacity of members as this changes over time. It is likely that the locus of development will change over time, raising the level of commitment from some institutions while in others the level of intensity of development may slow.

#### **4. Partnership structures**

There are three striking features which emerge from our research in relation to domestic violence/abuse structures.

*First*, the Domestic Abuse Forum is still the main vehicle for partnership working in many areas, although it may carry different names and roles.

*Secondly*, structures are in transition within a rapidly evolving partnership landscape, discussed above.

*Thirdly*, there is emerging clarity around the structures and roles that are useful or desirable to deliver domestic violence/abuse work: a strategic group for developing overall strategy; a forum for practitioner, partnership and lobbying issues and for developing practice; and an operational group for operational management and monitoring of services and outcomes. Nevertheless, there is some remaining uneasiness in some partnerships that emerging structures are addressing these different roles unsatisfactorily.

Six issues for domestic violence/abuse partnerships in our study were highlighted as key to partnership effectiveness:

- the current preoccupation with developing strategy should not be used as a rationalisation for policy

developers to abandon the partnership working with providers which can occur through the Domestic Violence/Abuse Forum - hence the recognition that separate structures to deal with these issues separately are useful;

- strategic groups benefit from the inclusion of voluntary sector provider representatives;
- the development of monitoring services and their outcomes needs to involve service delivery providers, who will supply the data and implement monitoring systems, in order to mobilise their knowledge and commitment;
- operational management is required to support delivery of partnership objectives; roles and structures for these appear still somewhat underdeveloped in almost all the partnerships in the study;
- for cross-boundary operational management structures to work they need to be strongly linked to strategic players, in order not to undermine emergent strategies; and
- in underdeveloped areas of practice, light-touch/arms-length structures could support innovation.

#### **5. Domestic violence/abuse coordinator roles**

Within this research we looked at a number of aspects of the domestic violence/abuse coordinator role:

- the terms and funding of the posts;
- the location and management of the post; and
- the actual role which was being taken up by post-holders.

Different costs and benefits are associated with different locations and management:

- location in Community Safety Units that have little relation to domestic violence/abuse work could leave coordinators isolated and professionally unsupported;
- location in partnership structures could be helpful to brokering partnership working but weak in terms of operational links and burdensome in terms of covering the issue on behalf of absent groups; and
- location in the voluntary sector could support greater innovation in practice development, but may result in weak links when trying to mobilise strategic partners and resources.

There was considerable variation between partnerships in the role taken up by the domestic violence coordinator. One dimension of difference relates to practice focus versus a policy focus. The funding, location and management of the coordinator shapes to a considerable degree the kind of role which is taken up.

There are one or two implications of our research in relation to domestic violence coordinators:

- there is probably no one ideal model for location and management of the domestic violence coordinator at this point, given the evolving nature of development of partnerships, but location and management which leaves domestic violence coordinators isolated and frustrated should be avoided; and
- factors which need to be taken into account in the location and management of domestic violence coordinators include: what is the current requirement of the role - strategy, practice development, operational linkages, or partnership development? Partnerships may need to review location and management arrangements and be prepared to modify them to provide more support appropriate to the task as it changes over time.

## **6. Strategy and resources**

In this section we look at the links between strategy and resources across these ten partnerships. Our main findings were:

- the link between strategy and resources was not always explicit in partnerships and is at an early stage of development;
- strategy could be relatively undeveloped and the level of strategy development is not necessarily related to practice development; and
- there seems to be a slowly growing understanding of the costs which good domestic violence/abuse provision and response might cost and of where these costs might reasonably be raised.

On the basis of the research there are a number of points we would like to highlight:

- strategy formation is likely to be an unrealistic paper exercise unless it is founded in available resources;
- resource levels provided by different partners need to be linked to the costs they incur in responding to domestic violence/abuse currently, on which more research would be useful, that goes beyond the criminal justice system and can be used locally;
- strategising is a process which can be useful or dysfunctional; at the current stage of policy formulation it is considered useful in these partnerships but should not continue indefinitely; and
- strategy and resources provided for domestic violence/abuse will need to be revised in the light of service and practice development issues and their implementation needs.

## **7. Practice and service delivery issues**

Practice development and service delivery issues in the partnerships studied included:

- provision of refuge places is the standard basic provision;
- there is often only patchy coverage of outreach services;
- there is growing understanding of the importance of advocacy services;
- children's services are still undeveloped despite awareness of the potential impact of their witnessing domestic abuse;
- perpetrator programmes are seen as best delivered by the Probation Service, which has developed effective models and delivery programmes but has very limited provision, or through other accredited programmes which meet Respect minimum standards (Respect is the United Kingdom association for domestic violence perpetrator programmes and associated support services);
- untargeted, generic information packs are considered of dubious value and awareness-raising training is seen as requiring implementation rather than further innovation;
- services for children, men and black and minority ethnic groups could require pump priming to develop effective models; and
- monitoring of provision and practice requires further development.

In summary, issues highlighted in this research include:

- the effectiveness of current responses to domestic violence/abuse do not seem so far to reflect the energy being directed to strategy and partnership working in this area;
- the profile of the effectiveness of current provision of standard responses could be raised through the development of useful and useable monitoring systems; these would probably be best developed within the voluntary sector, preferably at the national level;
- providing adequate coverage of standardised provision may require commissioner-led initiatives; and
- some pump-priming of new practice development seems to be required, preferably some action research, in relation to neglected areas.

## **8. Conclusions: leadership and champions**

The partnerships involved in the programme were self-selecting, on the basis that they identified a need for change or development. Despite this, a number of positive features were identified, which can provide a basis for, and contribute to, effective improvements:

- an holistic approach to planning which addresses both prevention and provision;
- mainstreaming approaches through operational management, training and developing outcome targets;
- cultivating awareness of the value of the voluntary sector and striving for a balance between partners;
- openness to evaluating the responses of their own organisation as a way of modelling evaluation for others, and involving partners in re-evaluating approaches, which can be powerful;
- the resilience, commitment, adaptability and pragmatism of domestic violence co-ordinators in their role as catalysts, and their ability to work at a variety of levels and often with uncertain funding is marked; and
- sustained commitment from a range of organisations and individuals, as reflected in the size and lifespan of many fora, can provide continuity in the face of changing roles in statutory agencies.



Common problems in partnerships, which have all been indicated to a greater or lesser extent in the previous sections, as reported in these ten partnerships include:

- lack of a clearly articulated common purpose;
- different assumptions and goals;
- clashes of culture;
- inadequate resources;
- lack of support from parent organisations;
- loss of commitment;
- dominance of one partner;
- political division; and
- lack of leadership.

All these areas are ones where local authorities could usefully contribute:

- domestic violence/abuse responses at the local level depend critically, at the point of strategy formulation, on the provision of leadership at the highest levels. Without such leadership, partners can become disillusioned and lose commitment;
- leadership at senior levels can mobilise champions at lower levels of operational management, increasing the likelihood of implementation;
- information about the costs and consequences of domestic violence/abuse as well as the Best Value Performance Indicator (BV 225) can help to reinforce and sustain leadership at the local level; and
- leadership of different kinds is needed in all the different agencies involved in responses to domestic violence/abuse; national associations, federations and institutions supporting different agencies and professionals also need to be involved.

In the lifecycle of domestic violence partnerships it is time for local authorities to play a central and vital role. Local authorities are in a key position to facilitate local partnership structures, which can maximise evolving opportunities to lever commitment, accountability and integration of domestic violence at strategic and practice levels. Information exchange to raise awareness of the true costs of domestic violence locally will be important in demonstrating the benefits to all partners of prioritising domestic violence, as well as the contribution that both voluntary and statutory agencies have to make in developing an appropriate response.

Domestic violence can be combated effectively by local authorities, through improving partnership working with other local agencies.

# 1. introduction

This is the final report of work undertaken by the Tavistock Institute on domestic violence partnerships on behalf of the Local Government Association (LGA). The Tavistock Institute was commissioned by the LGA to study their Programme of Engagement and Support to local domestic violence partnerships between February and May 2005. The aim was to produce a report highlighting implications, lessons and practical issues for other authorities and partnerships to share. Although the partnerships in the programme were generally at an early stage of development, it was hoped that the lessons they learnt from setting up could help others embarking on this stage or reviewing their current arrangements. A checklist for self-assessment for local authorities is also being produced as a companion to this report.

This report presents the headline findings from the research with illustration and examples from the data collected. It examines in turn: the life-cycle of domestic violence/domestic abuse partnerships; local partnership structures, especially the position and role of the Domestic Violence Forum; the domestic violence coordinator role; strategies and resources for domestic abuse partnership work; practice development and service delivery issues; and the role of leadership and champions. These sections follow a description of the research on which these findings are based.

## Scope and focus of the study

The research was commissioned to feed into the LGA's domestic violence project, one of their current priorities.

The aim of the project overall is to identify and promote good practice of councils and partner organisations in addressing domestic violence; and one of the ways in which the LGA is seeking to do this is through the development and support of local domestic violence partnerships, and by identifying and promoting good practice that is already taking place.

The LGA's project has developed a 'Programme of Direct Engagement and Support' with local partnerships, funded by the Home Office. This was led by a project consultant with experience of working in an effective, multi-agency partnership to tackle domestic violence. It was this programme of direct engagement and support, run with ten domestic violence partnerships, which is the subject of this research.

The programme had twin aims of assisting the development of effective partnerships in the chosen areas, and informing the future development of the LGA's project. Partnerships were selected on the basis that:

- they had a lead person focusing on domestic violence;
- they were developing their domestic violence strategy; and
- they had buy-in from their local authority.

This meant that most of the partnerships selected were at a developmental stage, which in turn means that the findings from this research reflect partnerships at a particular stage, and are not representative of domestic violence partnerships overall. There is some very good practice within some local authority areas, which is excluded from this research.

The programme had a one-year duration, during which the skills of the consultant were used to help establish, guide, advise and support the partnerships. The consultant visited all of them in the first phase of the programme, over the summer of 2004, during which he gathered information by which to assess how best he might advise them. The consultant then used this to tailor his guidance, advice and support for the partnerships. The key areas of activity he focused on were in the areas of strategic development (including the role of the voluntary sector), chief officer support/engagement and policing.

The research was designed to meet the LGA's objectives for the study to:

- examine the programme of direct engagement and support with ten domestic violence partnerships;
- identify policy and operational lessons from the work that has been done to develop the partnerships, and any factors that help them to be successful.

The research team undertook case studies with three of these partnerships. Case study selection was designed to provide regional coverage and of different types of authority: a unitary, a county council and a district council. Each case study comprised a documentary review of materials (including any local strategy or planning for strategy), plus a set of interviews with key people involved in the local partnership, including the domestic violence coordinator, and a range of other informants, as follows:

***Case study one: county council***

Domestic Abuse Strategy Implementation Manager;

Domestic Violence Coordinator in Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (soon Community Safety Partnership);

Lead Officer - Domestic Abuse, county council;

Chief Executive, district council, Chair of Domestic Abuse Strategy Group;

Voluntary sector providers group.

***Case study two: district council***

Domestic Violence Coordinator, in Council for Voluntary Service;

Chief Executive, Council for Voluntary Service, Chair of Abuse Strategy Group;

Domestic Violence Perpetrator Officer, Police Force;

Head of Partnerships, Primary Care Trust.

***Case study three: unitary authority***

Domestic Violence Coordinator, Community Safety Unit, unitary authority;

Detective Inspector, Public Protection Unit;

Social Services lead officer;

Voluntary sector provider.

The remaining seven partnerships were researched via a lengthy telephone interview with the domestic violence co-ordinator, using a topic guide to provide structure to the process.

The consultant responsible for delivering the Programme of Engagement and Support to these partnerships on behalf of the LGA also provided substantial information, both face to face and via email. A workshop involving the consultant together with the LGA Senior Project Officer and the LGA Research Officer was helpful in refining and elaborating the study findings.

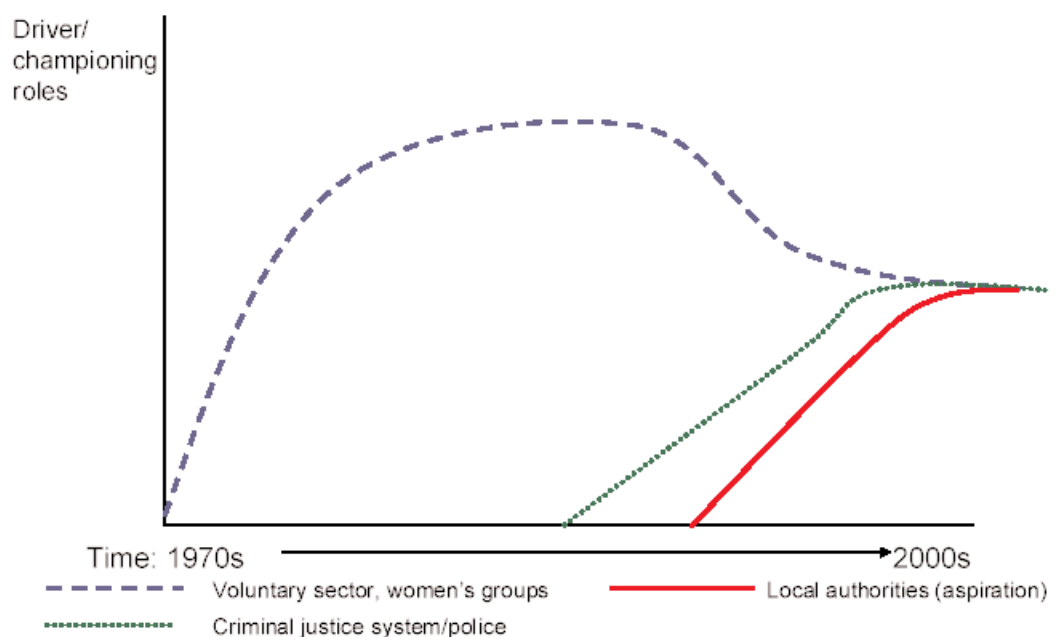
## 2. background: life cycle of domestic violence/abuse partners/partnerships

The context of central government policy is crucial to the development of locally delivered services for victims of domestic violence. Much of the activity in the regions is dependent on the reality and perception of government policy, and how this is interpreted by the government offices for the regions. This can be a confused picture, with domestic violence often being a sub-text to overarching priorities: for example, the crime reduction target which includes an intention to reduce violent offences. Domestic violence amounts to 16 to 25 per cent of those recorded offences, and yet is not a specific target in its own right.

One of the first factors the researchers encountered in getting to know local partnerships was that each one is at a particular point within a lifecycle of domestic violence partnership working.

This is illustrated in Figure 1, which shows the development of work to tackle domestic violence since it was first taken up, often by women's groups in the voluntary sector, from around the 1970s onwards. These groups provided refuge places, as well as a range of other support services for women and children (such as outreach and group work), lobbied for resources in support of new provision and campaigned to have the issue addressed more systemically by the criminal justice system and by local government. These groups also had a focus on public awareness campaigns. Leadership for provision is often still mainly provided by this group/sector.

**Figure 1: Lifecycle of domestic violence/abuse partners and partnership**



Over recent years the issue of domestic abuse has been taken up more vigorously by the criminal justice system, with the crown prosecution service, the probation service and, particularly, the police. This has provided new leadership for the issue, or an increasing contribution to it, at the local level. Domestic violence has come to be seen as domestic abuse (and the term abuse is by no means widespread), which warrants focussed police attention and resources. This has provided more statutory effort directed at higher risk target populations.

Local government involvement in the domestic abuse agenda is comparatively recent in most areas. As the scale of domestic violence and its impact has become better understood, statutory delivery responses and resourcing issues have had to be addressed in a more focussed way by local authorities. Another important driver was the recognition of local authorities' role and responsibilities in this area (and not just the role of the Criminal Justice System), as part of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Over recent years the profile of local government's role in domestic violence has been heightened by central government policy and focus, for example, Home Office funding of domestic violence co-ordinator posts, the introduction and development of a statutory performance indicator for domestic violence, and the establishment of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment process which has a community safety element (although not a specific domestic violence element). The revised Best Value Performance Indicator (BV225, introduced in April 2005) has highlighted the role of local government, and its particular contribution in funding provision and coordinating local partners, including both local authority departments such as housing and education as well as social services, but also partners from other sectors, especially Primary Care Trusts.

The varied structures and relationships around tackling domestic abuse, which can be seen in different local authorities, reflect the point in the

lifecycle of partnership arrangements. In some areas police-initiated projects dominate the partnership, having sometimes been drawn into a vacuum where voluntary provision or local authority leadership have been slow to develop or not been resourced. In many areas, for example, the local authority is seen as a relative newcomer who is now bidding to control what goes on in domestic violence/domestic abuse provision. Funding, which may have come from multiple sources in the past, is increasingly seen as the responsibility of local authorities, either to provide themselves or to broker from other partners. Often the health sector, though nominally involved, have yet to really commit to the partnership in terms of funding and practice.

Relationships between the local partners may therefore be riven by tensions generated by past and present adversarial roles over, for example, levels of resourcing and mobilisation of appropriate responses from housing providers. Voluntary sector, and especially women's groups, are likely to have a different culture of discussion and decision-making than local authorities. Police services may have encountered similar exasperation with voluntary groups' and local authorities' decision-making cycles (and vice versa). The alternative to investing in time and effort to create common ground and understanding is continued adversarialism and dispute over funding levels, which is time-consuming and costly to support. Only partnership working is capable of yielding results in such a multi-dimensional phenomenon as domestic abuse and the continued commitment of partners is essential to carrying the work forward. The implications for local authorities, as for other agencies, working in this area have to do with good practice in partnership working and an acknowledgement of the requirement for specific funding.

Having come to the party late, some local authorities may need to temper their new enthusiasm with recognition that the issue can be a difficult one for many of their staff, as well as for

the general public and, perhaps, councillors. In particular, some partner agencies and individuals may have difficulty in stepping back from the leadership role, even though they welcome the local authority taking a more proactive role in principle. A further difficulty may be that established levels of resourcing for domestic abuse may not be sufficient, given the developing understanding of the impacts and their costs on both adult victims and particularly on children.

A few basic principles need to be borne in mind in partnership working that are key to success:

- continued acknowledgement of the different contribution of sectors and understanding of the need to maintain their commitment;
- ways of working which reflect different norms and cultures may be required to keep all partners on board;
- being seen to treat all partners as equals;
- involving all partners in searching for appropriate solutions; and
- ensuring that delivery is achieved, albeit in a limited way initially.

### 3. background: institutional configuration

Three issues arise in relation to the institutional background to domestic violence/abuse partnership work in local authorities:

- roles and responsibilities between local government institutions could helpfully be clarified, particularly the division of responsibility between the county and district councils;
- the rapidly changing landscape of partnership working within Local Strategic Partnerships and, an emergent phenomenon, Local Area Agreements, provides an important opportunity to mobilise new partners and resources, and to embed the issue at a high level and mainstream it; and
- the complexity of cross-sectoral institutional relationships, often involving multiple agencies which may be in the process of fundamental internal change, such as restructuring of police divisions, can slow progress.

The role of local government in two-tier county council/district council areas calls for clarification of responsibilities. In some counties it is found more appropriate to use the county rather than the district as the focus for partnership, with top-slicing of district budgets. In others the districts retain a more autonomous leading role and there may be political tensions between districts and county levels which undermine partnership working. Within our case studies we found examples of each of these. While planning at the county level was more complex in terms of the numbers of commissioning partners to be involved, it tended to make better sense and provide for less duplication of effort in relation to county-wide provision, for example, of refuge and outreach services. However, it does increase the numbers of institutional partners that need to be involved, in some instances requiring a more layered approach to partnership working.

The landscape of changing partnership working - Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships or Community Safety Partnerships, Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Area Agreements - affects

domestic violence partnership work to varying extents across the cases we researched. In three or four of the partnerships we researched these arrangements provide an actual or emerging architecture for strategic and operational issues to be addressed, which is described more fully in the next section.

However, in some authorities the need to calibrate to the needs of particular institutional partners could slow things considerably. While changes in police structures could support partnership working, there was still a felt tension between the enforcement model and the ethos of voluntary sector and social service responses. Voluntary sector informants felt that this could undermine their outreach services by inhibiting requests for support. Education and health services were often preoccupied by a wide range of targets which could slow their commitment and participation in developing domestic violence/abuse responses.

What was often clear was that there is currently an opportunity at a corporate level within local authorities to develop domestic violence/abuse strategies in ways which could provide support to the development of practice in new areas. This has been prompted by the increased focus of central government, as seen in the revised Best Value Performance Indicator (BV225) and Home Office research.

For a successful domestic violence/abuse partnership, there are a number of issues to be addressed that arise from the needs of different institutional partners:

- work on the costs of domestic violence, possibly at the national level or at least disseminated nationally, needs to be undertaken to provide institutional partners at the local level with leverage in order for them to prioritise domestic violence/abuse effectively. Although this has been done for criminal justice costs, the wider costs also need reiterating. For example, a business case to provide primary care trusts with details of the costs

they incur through not addressing the issue systemically will help to raise the priority of developing more appropriate responses to domestic violence/abuse. There has been some national research on the health costs, but this needs to be used locally as a lever;

- similarly, in relation to work with children, more focused practice development and evaluation should provide more targeted and useable tools for application by professionals who have a primary task which is not directly related to domestic violence/abuse. As part of this, it is also essential that partnerships establish ownership of the issue with agencies, and ensure relevant professionals take responsibility and recognise this work as part of their role; and
- partnerships need to adapt to the organisational capacity of members as this changes over time. It is likely that the locus of development will change over time, raising the level of commitment from some institutions while in others the level of intensity of development may slow.



## 4. structures for domestic violence/domestic abuse

There are three striking features which emerge from our research in relation to domestic violence/abuse structures.

*First*, the Domestic Abuse Forum is still the main vehicle for partnership working in many areas, although it may carry different names and roles

*Secondly*, structures are in transition within a rapidly evolving partnership landscape, discussed above

*Thirdly*, and most importantly, there is emerging clarity around the structures and roles that are useful or desirable to deliver domestic violence/abuse work: a strategic group for developing overall strategy; a forum for practitioner, partnership and lobbying issues and for developing practice; and an operational group for operational management and monitoring of services and outcomes. Nevertheless, there is some remaining uneasiness in some partnerships that emerging structures are addressing these different roles unsatisfactorily.

Domestic Abuse Fora are typically and traditionally formed around practitioner and lobbying issues, although it appears that in many cases they are simply not able to deliver the all the actions necessary to achieve outcomes. There is a tension almost universally experienced in the partnerships in this study between maintaining an adequate forum for partnership issues on the one hand and,

on the other, creating capacity for strategic positioning. Having clear linking mechanisms into partnerships with statutory powers and responsibilities, such as Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, is highly valued but may involve losses to individual partners of previous leadership roles and broader deliberation around practice issues, unless it is secured in some other setting.

The response to these challenges is varied but usually includes developing a more strategic subgroup of the Forum or a separate group of commissioners/funders to lead on strategy, as seen in the examples below taken from the partnerships involved in the research (see Figure 2 for Models A, B, C, and D, though note that Models A and C reflect intentions which had not been fully implemented at the time of our fieldwork).

The different structures reflected the different local contexts (historical, organisational, financial etc.), and the evolving focus on domestic violence by different sectors. Many of these structures were either being developed (some with help from the LGA consultant) or were recent developments, so that their impact is something that will become clearer over time. It is not yet possible to identify an 'optimum' structure. However consideration of the issues emerging from these partnerships will be useful for others to take into account when choosing the right structure for their area.

**Figure 2: Example partnership structures from cases in the research**

### Model A: Aspiration



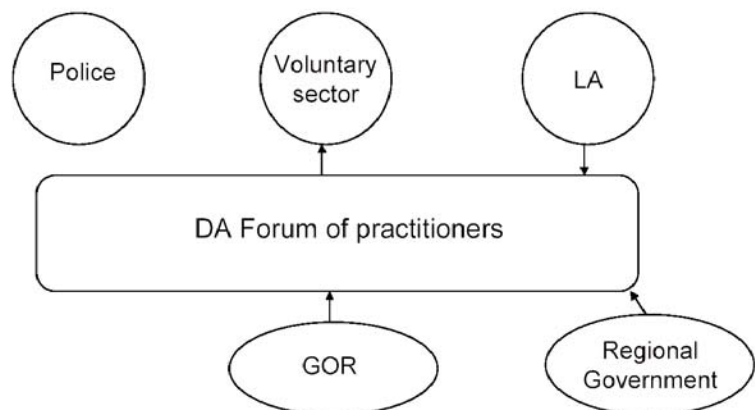
## Model B: Embedded



## Model C: Clarified Roles



## Model D: Disconnected



Different partnership structures were being developed in partnerships we visited partly from a desire to "separate out the policy making from the practical work" (Detective Inspector, Public Protection Unit) and partly to give "clarity around decision making" (domestic violence coordinator). In Model C, the stated intention was to provide a set of structures for shared decision making in allocating sustainable resource levels which would "balance the needs of elder abuse, child abuse and domestic abuse".

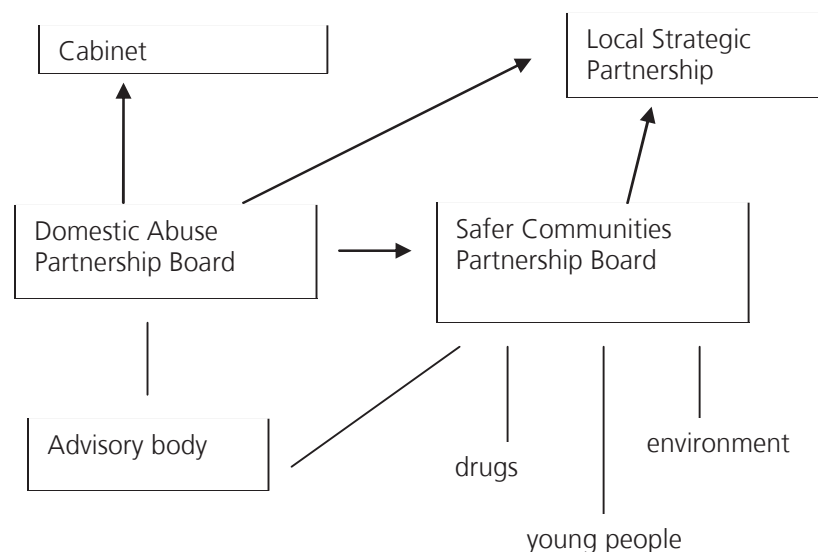
However, the removal of voluntary sector input into strategic decision-making was not generally regarded as optimal. Informants often highlighted the relatively recent commitment from the statutory sector, particularly the local authority, which in some cases seemed still to be reluctant partners. Statutory neglect occasionally provides good conditions for trying out new approaches. While the freestanding Domestic Violence Forum of one authority (see Model D) can be seen as lacking in strategic value, imaginative approaches devised by its coordinator and members are

consistent with other findings that light touch/arms length management supports innovation or trying things out better than close management.

The position of the Domestic Abuse Forum within the structural arrangements therefore highlights the question: what is the Forum for? In some authorities it is still the main vehicle for any kind of partnership working while in others it operates as a kind of residual body, a place where voluntary sector providers can be safely located out of the way. If it has a real role in developing new professional practice, then this may also need clarification and the addition of new members.

The current arrangements are in many cases already seen as having only a temporary life as new partnership developments are foreseen in the strategic landscape, as in the example shown in Figure 3, which represents the desired projected arrangements which are the current aim in one of our case study authorities.

**Figure 3: Example of planned structural arrangements for the future in one research case study**



Membership of fora varies considerably between the partnerships studied and impacts on the tasks that can be accomplished. In four partnerships membership included everyone with a role in domestic violence/abuse and was consequently cumbersome and dysfunctional for strategising and decision-making, but useful as a networking and information sharing exchange. In three others it involved mainly senior members with strategic roles and authority to allocate resources, but in one of these cases was described as "not very motivated". Others felt the absence of more senior people weakened the role of the Forum, including one of two where membership was at middle management level. A more operational group was seen as undermining strategy development.

Perhaps a more important question or criterion than what the Forum is for could be stated as: what structures are essential, useful or potentially desirable in supporting domestic violence/abuse work? In general, the currently emerging structures seem designed to support the current preoccupation in the lifecycle of partnerships, which is its focus on developing strategy.

Although partnerships place most importance on the provision of good services to victims, both at high risk and lower risk levels, two other emergent preoccupations were raised by the research with these ten partnerships: the need to develop new practice, especially with regard to relatively undeveloped areas such as work with children, men, black and minority ethnic groups (although recognising that the largest group of victims - that is, female victims - should also be getting a good service); and the growing importance of operational management and monitoring of services and outcomes. Structures in around half the partnerships provided mechanisms for linking with child protection partnerships.

Given the qualifications noted above, six issues for domestic violence/abuse partnerships in our study were highlighted as key to effectiveness:

- the current preoccupation with developing strategy should not be used as a rationalisation for policy developers to abandon the partnership working with providers which can occur through the Domestic Violence Forum - hence the recognition that separate structures to deal with these issues are useful;
- strategic groups benefit from the inclusion of voluntary sector representatives;
- the move towards the increased monitoring of services and their outcomes needs to involve service delivery providers, who will supply the data and implement monitoring systems, in order to mobilise their knowledge and commitment;
- operational management is required to support delivery of partnership objectives; roles and structures for these appear still somewhat underdeveloped in almost all the partnerships in the study;
- for cross-boundary operational management structures to work they need to be strongly linked to strategic players, in order not to undermine emergent strategies; and
- in underdeveloped areas of practice, light-touch/arms-length structures can support innovation.

## 5. the domestic violence/abuse coordinator role

Within this research we looked at a number of aspects of the domestic violence/abuse coordinator role:

- the terms and funding of the posts;
- the location and management of the post; and
- the actual role which was being taken up by post-holders.

In a few cases (four out of ten) the post was a full-time permanent post which was mainstreamed within the local authority. The Community Safety Unit was the location of two of these postholders, and provided management for domestic violence coordinators in seven of the set. A third was located in the housing department with management from the Housing Services Manager.

Three posts located in partnership structures did not feel they could regard their posts as permanent unless the local authority had specifically indicated it in their contracts. The new partnership structures were often emergent and perceived as possibly transient as a result. Depending on the location of their manager, they could feel somewhat isolated in a difficult role, carrying a difficult issue on behalf of half-hearted partners.

Three were based in the voluntary sector, one of whom worked from home, another from the Council for Voluntary Service, and a third (a former police officer) in a Housing Association. This reflects the stage in development of strategic management of the issue in these partnerships and perhaps a lack of commitment on the part of statutory partners to develop more appropriate arrangements. However, it was experienced as providing a sound base for a range of activities from awareness-raising and developing practitioner responses. In the last authority there was currently no domestic violence coordinator in post, the role reverting part-time to the Community Safety Officer, which provided a point of contact for partners.

Even where located in a local authority with mainstreamed funding this location is likely to have costs and benefits. For example, domestic violence coordinators based in the local authority Community Safety Unit which does not deal with serious crime can leave the coordinator feeling professionally unsupported. Three posts were located in partnership structures, which was felt to make sense in terms of brokering partnership arrangements that could be important where the partnership lifecycle required focused intervention and support. However, these roles and locations were perceived as weak in terms of linking into operational management issues. They could also be burdensome in terms of carrying the issue on behalf of absent groups, sometimes being the target for discontent with lack of leadership at a more senior level, problems of resourcing, introducing monitoring of services and mobilising operational responses from particular local authority departments such as housing. While these domestic violence 'management models' are increasing in popularity, being planned in two other authorities, location in partnerships could mean domestic violence coordinators are perceived as distant from domestic violence/abuse and the day to day operational issues it raises.

There was considerable variation between partnerships in the role taken up by the domestic violence coordinator. One dimension of difference relates to practice focus versus a policy focus. Those located in the voluntary sector tended to have a stronger practice focus and could form the node of local practice networks. The roles of trainer and fundraiser were common to those with a less strategic role, which could result in imaginative uses of resources and approaches to mobilising others (described in more detail in Section 7 on 'Practice Issues' below). Others described their role as "not hands on", seeing themselves as more of a broker of relationships and resources. Those located in partnerships benefited from perceived authority, either through seniority or links to senior figures (such as local

authority Cabinet or Chief Executive offices), or through perceived expertise which gave their role credibility with partners. In this case they could take up brokerage roles between different partners or partnership levels.

The funding, location and management of the domestic violence coordinator shapes to a considerable degree the kind of role which is taken up. A further factor relates to what is required by the partnership at a given time: domestic violence coordinators in a few cases seemed to be drawn into a vacuum at the strategic level. The independence from partners could be a strength or a weakness depending on what was currently required: partnership support or operational management.

On the other hand, our findings are consistent with the idea that domestic violence coordinators who are isolated or frustrated by their institutional location can be drawn too far from a strategic role of catalysing and brokering the activities of others, into a practitioner and fundraising role which does not make full use of the skills and capacities of others.

There are one or two implications of our research in relation to domestic violence coordinators:

- there is probably no one ideal model for location and management of the domestic violence coordinator at this point, given the evolving development of partnerships, but location and management which leaves domestic violence coordinators isolated and frustrated must be avoided;
- factors which need to be taken into account in the location and management of domestic violence coordinators include the current requirement of the role - is it strategy, practice development, operational linkages, or partnership development? Partnerships may need to review location and management arrangements, and be prepared to modify them, to provide more support appropriate to the task as the requirement of the role changes over time.

## 6. strategy and resources

In this section we look at the links between strategy and resources across these ten partnerships. In doing so it has to be said that this was not always a link which was being made within the partnerships. Indeed there seems to be an only slowly growing understanding of the costs of good domestic violence/abuse provision and response, and where these costs might reasonably be raised. However, nearly half of the partnerships in the study had begun to identify some of the parameters involved, whether of the costs of domestic violence/abuse to the full set of strategic partners (rather than to individuals and communities) or of the sums which could reasonably hoped to be raised from individual institutional partners.

### **Example estimates of cost and parameters to estimate costs**

Costs and budgets for domestic violence/abuse were quoted in one authority as sums they felt could reasonably be expected as contributions:

£3000 per PCT;

£9000 per Police Division.

Another partnership quoted the sum of £1,322 per adult victim for legal services, housing, counselling and social services (research from a neighbouring local authority).

The unitary case study authority quoted recorded incidents running at 3,300 per annum. A county council quoted figures of 5,687 recorded incidents in the last calendar year.

These costs can be seen in the context of the national picture where annual costs are estimated at £5.7 billion (excluding human and emotional costs estimated at a further £17 billion a year), of which:

- £0.25 billion incurred for social services;
- £0.16 billion incurred in relation to housing;
- £2.7 billion lost economic accounts due to injuries.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sylvia Walby (2004), *The cost of domestic violence*, Women and Equality Unit, DTI quoted in LGA (2005) *Implementing the new domestic violence Best Value Performance Indicator*, LGA

The evolution of strategic thinking about domestic violence/abuse responses seems in most of these partnerships to have occurred in the absence of a sense of the real sums which might be involved. The need to be doing something and the location of leadership in the voluntary sector seems in some authorities to have led to nurturing fantasies about the levels of resourcing which might be forthcoming. The result, especially in areas where Domestic Violence Fora are large groups with diverse membership, can be 'long wishlists' rather than strategies. On the other hand these fifty-odd page 'strategies' could be important transitional objects for partnerships which are trying to develop ownership across multiple partners; moving directly to a streamlined strategy, with targets and budgets attached, can leave the job of 'selling' the document to the less-involved as an outstanding issue.

While there was a view expressed by some informants that more realism in relation to budgets for domestic violence/abuse was needed, there seemed to be an absence of understanding among them of the full costs of domestic violence/abuse, particularly in relation to health and to children. It could be that the full costs of responding to domestic violence dwarf the sums currently envisaged for provision.

A further point in relation to strategy is that it should not be confused with implementation. The focus on developing a strategy to which all partners are signed up is seen by some informants to slow progress towards implementation. For one voluntary sector informant in a case study:

"..getting this formalised and approved is taking too long (the draft was available about November and in April it still hasn't been approved. The momentum is already being lost. I've seen all this before - the local authority is happy to sign up to words but less interested in actually operationalising them and taking on responsibility for change."

It has to be said that this view of local authorities is quite common across multiple actors and institutions. In terms of the policy cycle, the emphasis on strategy is obviously timely: if it remains the focus of activity for a further twelve months it might come to be seen as a displacement activity, likely to result in stalemate and loss of credibility.

On the basis of the research there are a number of points we would like to highlight:

- strategy formation is likely to be an unrealistic paper exercise unless it is founded in available resources;
- resource levels provided by different partners needs to be linked to the costs they incur in responding to domestic violence/abuse currently, on which more research would be useful that goes beyond the criminal justice system and can be used locally (this is a problematic area but essential, as often the relationship between spending and saving is complex and cuts across different agencies - for example, most available evidence is based on costs to criminal justice agencies, which is an argument unlikely to win over local authority or primary care trust chief executives);
- strategising is a process which can be useful or dysfunctional; at the current stage of policy formulation it is considered useful in these partnerships, but should not continue indefinitely; and
- strategy and resources provided for domestic violence/abuse will need to be revised in the light of service and practice development issues and their implementation needs.



## 7. practice and service delivery issues

This section considers practice and service delivery issues which emerged in our study, together with the implications for partnerships in terms of practice development and operational management.

A range of issues was drawn to our attention in the partnerships we researched, which may not be a comprehensive set but appears consistent with our own literature reviews. This highlighted the need for practice development and improved service delivery in a number of areas (some of which are supported by the latest best value indicator, BV225, as discussed in a recent LGA paper <sup>2</sup>), notably housing. In relation to these it is noteworthy that:

- none of the partnerships we researched report a "sanctuary-type scheme" and, although the importance of keeping domestic violence/abuse victims in their own homes is universally acknowledged, it is not thought to have been implemented fully in most of the partnership areas;
- untargeted, generic information packs are considered of dubious value and awareness-raising training is seen as requiring implementation rather than further innovation;
- awareness-raising activities for previously neglected professional groups, such as providing cameras to accident and emergency hospital staff to record repeat incidences, are seen as helpful in mobilising new actors;
- police introduction of a risk assessment scheme for domestic violence/abuse is seen as an important new contribution in one area;
- perpetrator programmes are seen as best delivered by the Probation Service, which has developed effective models and delivery programmes but has very limited provision, or through other accredited programmes which meet Respect minimum standards (Respect is the United Kingdom association for domestic violence perpetrator programmes and associated support services);

- advocacy services are increasingly seen as a development which could strengthen provision of services to adult victims, through providing targeted support to high risk victims including risk assessment and safety planning, with appropriate handover to outreach services once crises have passed.

The relative absence of service development reported by these partnerships for children (only three raised this area of work and only two partnerships reported substantial work in the area) seems of particular concern given the increased understanding of the impact. Services for men and for black and minority ethnic groups continue to lag, reflecting partly voluntary sector participation as well as interests. Some pump-priming of initiatives could be useful in these areas. However, focus on providing a good service for the largest group of victims (female ones) is clearly of key importance.

While there was reasonable coverage of refuge provision across most of the partnerships, outreach provision was often more patchy and provider- rather than commissioner-led, leading to assertions of "postcode lottery" patterns consistent across the ten partnerships. This partly reflected commissioners' desire to support good practice where it is available, and partly the lack of proactive commissioning of services in some partnerships.

The effectiveness of current provision is a sensitive issue within partnerships, given the consensus that the voluntary sector is the most appropriate locus of provision, providing accessibility and approachability to service users. Voluntary sector providers, possibly acting at the national level, could usefully take a leadership role in relation to this issue by supporting the development of acceptable monitoring tools and standards (see the current Home Office national plan). Indeed, Women's Aid has been commissioned by the government to develop national domestic violence service standards for provision of refuge, outreach,

<sup>2</sup> LGA (2005), *Implementing the new domestic violence Best Value Performance Indicator*

advocacy and support to women and children who experience domestic violence. This issue needs addressing in the short-term if partnerships are to survive the current challenges of resource and strategy appraisal. The relationship between public sector organisations and the not-for-profit sector are often difficult and would benefit from a greater degree of mutual accountability.

The issue of monitoring service implementation applies perhaps even more to local authority services, especially in relation to housing at this point. In the future, this could be an issue with relevance to education, social care and health services. The absence of these services from most partnerships highlights gaps in terms of training for specific outcomes rather than for awareness-raising more generally.

In summary, practice issues highlighted in this research include:

- the effectiveness of current responses to domestic violence/abuse do not seem so far to reflect the energy being directed to strategy and partnership working in this area;
- the profile of the effectiveness of current provision could be raised through the development of useful and useable monitoring systems; these would probably be best developed within the voluntary sector, preferably at the national level;
- providing 'minimum' or 'adequate' standards of service may require commissioner-led initiatives, as provider-led ones may lead to a postcode lottery of provision across an area; the commissioning of Women's Aid to develop national domestic violence standards is a good example of this occurring; and

- some pump-priming of new practice development seems to be required, preferably some action research, in relation to neglected areas. This may need to include researching joint funding by both Supporting People budgets and children's services at the local level, to make good gaps between funding for adult victims of domestic violence and funding for children affected by domestic violence.

## 8. conclusions: leadership and champions

The partnerships involved in the programme were self-selecting, on the basis that they identified a need for change or development. Despite this, a number of positive features were identified, which can provide a basis for, and contribute to, effective improvements:

- an holistic approach to planning which addresses both prevention and provision;
- mainstreaming approaches through operational management, training and developing outcome targets;
- cultivating awareness of the value of the voluntary sector and striving for a balance between partners;
- openness to evaluating the responses of their own organisation as a way of modelling evaluation for others, and involving partners in re-evaluating approaches, which can be powerful;
- the resilience, commitment, adaptability and pragmatism of domestic violence co-ordinators in their role as catalysts, and their ability to work at a variety of levels and often with uncertain funding is marked; and
- sustained commitment from a range of organisations and individuals, as reflected in the size and lifespan of many fora, can provide continuity in the face of changing roles in statutory agencies.

Common problems in partnerships which have all been indicated to a greater or lesser extent in the previous sections as reported in these ten partnerships include:

- lack of a clearly articulated common purpose;
- different assumptions and goals;
- clashes of culture;
- inadequate resources;
- lack of support from parent organisations
- loss of commitment;

- dominance of one partner;
- political division; and
- lack of leadership.

The sections above highlight a range of issues where new and ongoing leadership is required. It is almost a prerequisite of the local authority sector currently to talk of leadership and to see it as the answer to a range of issues. In this study it was raised most frequently by partnerships in relation to the absence of leadership and champions at senior levels. Getting the attention of senior figures with authority to mobilise partners and authorise adequate resources was seen as requiring considerable strategising on the part of partners. However, it must be acknowledged that local authorities, like all partners, have finite resources that are limited by current and previously agreed expenditure. Good leadership in this case can mean making the financial argument that persuades institutional partners at the local level to prioritise domestic violence/abuse effectively. The contribution of senior managers in local authorities, not to mention elected members (referred to in only two of our study sites), varied enormously across these partnerships, although there was evidence of strong leadership at a senior level in at least two. In a third there was successful mobilisation of leadership and accompanying resources through the LGA's Programme of Engagement and Support. The presence of leadership at senior levels is especially critical at the stage of strategy development reported in our ten partnership sites and their progress will depend on it.

Sustaining the attention of senior managers - especially, within local authorities, chief executives and elected members - was seen as a more problematic issue which requires structural underpinning. There is a possible opportunity to use the evolving arrangements for Local Area Agreements. Best Value Indicators clearly provide a critical lever and are generally seen as "going in

the right direction" (senior manager, county council case study), despite struggling to keep abreast with a rapidly moving issue.

However, a consistent theme in our informants' views was the need for leadership at the operational level, to ensure implementation of strategies and policies in all the agencies involved in this issue. The 'difficult issue' of domestic violence was seen by informants as something which prompts staff and managers at all levels to avoid it. The distribution of costs associated with domestic violence across different agencies and sectors supports the continued invisibility of domestic violence to each of the organisations concerned with it.

Provision of information can be most powerful in leveraging domestic violence/abuse onto the agendas of senior managers, especially information on costs of such violence and appropriate responses. The LGA's provision of information was seen as having credibility for senior managers. At another level, the LGA domestic violence project was reported as extremely helpful in this regard, especially in bringing domestic violence coordinators together on a regular basis (for those able to access the project advisers meetings, that is, not too far from London). National institutions with similar authority and credibility for their members and associates need to be involved in leveraging similar commitment in local authority partners.

There are a number of areas to which local authorities could usefully contribute:

- domestic violence responses at the local level depend critically, at the point of strategy formulation, on the provision of leadership at the highest levels. Without such leadership, partners can become disillusioned and lose commitment;

- leadership at senior levels can mobilise champions at lower levels of operational management, increasing the likelihood of implementation;
- information about the costs and consequences of domestic violence/abuse as well as the Best Value Performance Indicator (BV225) can help to reinforce and sustain leadership at the local level; and
- leadership of different kinds is needed in all the different agencies involved in responses to domestic violence/abuse; national associations, federations and institutions supporting different agencies and professionals also need to be involved.

In the lifecycle of domestic violence partnerships it is time for local authorities to play a central and vital role. Local authorities are in a key position to facilitate local partnership structures, which can maximise evolving opportunities to lever commitment, accountability and integration of domestic violence at strategic and practice levels. Information exchange to raise awareness of the true costs of domestic violence locally will be important in demonstrating the benefits to all partners of prioritising domestic violence, as well as the contribution that both voluntary and statutory agencies have to make in developing an appropriate response.

Domestic violence can be combated effectively by local authorities, through improving partnership working with other local agencies.

For further information, please contact  
the Local Government Association at:  
Local Government House  
Smith Square, London SW1P 3HZ

**or telephone LGconnect,  
for all your LGA queries, on 020 7664 3131**

Fax 020 7664 3030

Email [info@lga.gov.uk](mailto:info@lga.gov.uk)

Website [www.lga.gov.uk](http://www.lga.gov.uk)

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