

Coordinating the partnership response to domestic violence

Domestic Abuse Courts

Standing Together Against Domestic Violence (STADV) coordinates a specialist session for domestic violence cases at **Hammersmith Magistrates Court** and **Westminster Magistrates Court**

STADV co-ordinates domestic violence hearings every Thursday at **Hammersmith Magistrates Court** (average 11 to 15 cases heard per Thursday) and DV cases through the court process (average 4 trials per week). This Court serves LBHF and RBKC.

Partner agencies on the SDVC Management Group include: Witness Service and ADVANCE IDVA service alongside the Magistrates, Court staff, Police; Crown Prosecution Service, Probation, the Witness Care Unit and the Youth Offending Service.

STADV co-ordinates a dedicated session for domestic violence hearings and trials at **Westminster Magistrates Court** (average 12 cases heard every Wednesday) and tracks all DV cases (average 5 trials per week).

This Partnership involves 10 agencies on a Domestic Violence Court Management Group.

The DA Court Coordinators attend court every week to observe proceedings and assist to ensure that information is provided to the Court to enable safe decisions to be made. They provide a vital support to the CPS by ensuring that all relevant and appropriate information is available from all agencies. The role of the Coordinator is to maintain records of information from the various agencies in order to track cases accurately and ensure that gaps in information are filled.

The Coordinators deliver an observation report on each case heard in Court to each practitioner present in Court and their managers. They note whether the agreed safety and best practice indicators have been met. These reports identify problems, successes and trends for the Court Management Group.

Immediately following the SDVC day, the Coordinators give specific case information quickly to Victim Support, Witness Care Units; Community Safety Unit Police Officers, IDVA's e.g. regarding restraining orders and bail conditions which are essential to the safety of victims. This ensures timely communication at a point where this is often lost.

The Court Coordinators are collocated within police stations as a point of contact and subject matter expert.

Other roles of the DA Court Coordinators include:

- Facilitating enquiries and risk assessment when application are made to the court to vary or remove restraining orders;
- Conducting Annual Reviews of the DA Courts, with data reports, for all partner agencies; agencies confirm that the role of STADV helps them to do their job better;
- Providing a single point of contact for all the agencies working within the DA Court before, during and after the court days.

Why we need Domestic Violence Courts

This is no ordinary crime and the criminal justice system has traditionally failed to take account of its specific nature and patterns.

The particular nature of risk and vulnerability needs to be actively assessed at every stage if we are to provide a safe and effective service to victims.

These are difficult cases to prosecute in which attrition and withdrawal rates are high but can be reduced by well-focused action.

The presence in the one court room of well-trained staff, specialised in relation to domestic violence cases, together with victim/witness support agencies can be shown to assist the justice process and helps ensure that victim safety is prioritised as an outcome.

Within an SDV Court, this information can be shared and expertise about domestic violence applied in a systematic, well regulated and timely way.

Effective operational partnerships are the only way to get the best results from the criminal justice process.

Statistics

- Police respond to an increasing number of incidents each year
- No. of defendants arriving at the SDVC is increasing
- The number of conviction rates are increasing
- The mean number of hearings per completed case is decreasing

Please see over the page for more information about the role of the DA Court Coordinator

Role of SDVC Coordinator in facilitating information flow

