

Commissioning within the CCR

The co-ordinated community response (CCR), pioneered in the UK by Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse (STADA) is widely acknowledged as best practice when supporting victims and survivors of domestic abuse and holding perpetrators to account.. This holistic approach brings statutory agencies together, an approach which has clear implications for commissioners when designing and procuring services. Commissioners have a responsibility to assess need and respond by designing services appropriately, allowing services to work together and avoid ‘one-size-fits-all’ provision.

In this briefing we outline our position on the essential elements of a commissioning approach which would provide more effective public services to communities via the CCR. This involves ensuring agreements are flexible, fully-funded and clear; that they are founded on collaboration, and that co-ordination of services is properly resourced; and that specialist by-and-for services are not excluded from commissioning by overly complex application or reporting structures. We seek a commissioning environment which meets the diversity of need in communities and creates a strong ecosystem of tailored domestic abuse partners, working together within a thriving CCR.

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1. Consultation and assessment of need

Local authorities are often commissioning an incredibly wide range of public services. This means they may not possess the expert knowledge of particular issues, such as domestic abuse/violence against women and girls, and how these issues are playing out in their area. Commissioning a service which genuinely meets local need requires a solid understanding of the local area; the communities living there and accessing services; and the current state of provision to ensure any gaps have been identified.

In response commissioners must allow for appropriate lead in time before putting out a tender for services, during which they should conduct market research to understand how they can meet varying local need within a single contract. This might mean provision for a range of services, including VAWG, education, outreach and DA response. It should also include understanding the specific demographics of an area and breaking down the contract into the services which are required, rather than providing a ‘one-size-fits-all’ service. At a basic level, all commissioners should understand the following elements before starting to design a service tender:

- Identifying what a generic service would look like and comparing this with current provision. This should include an assessment of what is working well and where services have failed to support victims of domestic abuse in the past to help identify gaps. If a structure is already in place, assessing whether the need has changed is vital before making decisions to change that arrangement
- The demographics of the local area, in particular any areas where by-and-for services should be explicitly provided for within funding arrangements
- Taking an intersectional approach which recognises that the majority of domestic abuse is perpetrated by men against women, and understanding what additional and intersectional needs there are in the community to ensure minority groups who do not fit into this pattern are also catered to
- Consultation with survivor and perpetrator services; local experts by experience; national service standards and national priority areas for domestic abuse organisations to understand the service landscape
- Marking out pots of funding to meet this need, to ensure the profiles of all victim survivors are supported

Mapping and consultation phases are vital to ensure that from the very earliest stages of designing a contract, it is tailored to the unique specific features of that community. The service landscape can change frequently so regular mapping exercises should be conducted on an ongoing basis. The detail of how a contract delivers this will look different in each area, but ensuring this phase is not rushed will ultimately ensure public services can work better for everyone and prevent victims and survivors from falling through the gaps.

2. Co-ordination and information sharing

The CCR is a model rooted in the co-ordination of public services to allow them to collaborate and share information effectively. Policymakers at local and national levels highlight the importance of collaboration; the Domestic Abuse Best Practice Framework (DABPF) already highlights the need for collaboration between services, and the soon to be introduced Victim's Bill brings in a 'duty to collaborate' at commissioning stage. These measures compel commissioners to work with other agencies and understand how need should be met.

Secondly, while we absolutely welcome the commitment to collaboration when commissioners are designing services, we also know from our work that no single service can keep a victim safe. Domestic abuse is no normal crime and requires a fully connected response. As such, a collaborative approach must be placed at the centre of service agreements. We want to see a culture in which commissioners recognize the different added value and specific expertise of different organisations, understanding where they cannot meet specific need and working with other expert providers to do so. This approach is informed by the principles of collaboration set out by NCVO and ACEVO in their report [Rebalancing the Relationship](#) (2021). Collaboration must not be seen as an 'add-on' or 'nice to have', but as essential to ensure victims and survivors are kept safe.

On a practical level, a contract with collaboration at its heart should include the following key elements:

- The flexibility to meet the intersectional needs of survivors and their children and to hold perpetrators to account
- Robust and clear information sharing agreements within all contracts. This will ensure all agencies can share information with a clear understanding of their data and privacy responsibilities;
- Agreed frameworks of accountability, responsibility and expectations, including mechanisms for how problems will be resolved and how service standards will be reviewed on a regular basis to identify opportunities for improvement and sharing of good practice
- Funding provision for co-ordinator roles to bring services together safely and effectively. Co-ordination takes time, relationship building and management, and a wide knowledge of different sectors and how they work. It is a skill and role in and of itself and where it is not properly resourced, co-ordination is not effective. If commissioners do not recognise this, service providers will not have the resource to work together and victims will not be adequately supported;
- Ensuring subcontracting arrangements are properly scoped and designed so that organisations can bid for services together. This means commissioners taking responsibility for fully funding the resource required to oversee, manage and distribute a pot of money, and ensuring this does not dilute the funding available for frontline services.

3. Engagement of by-and-for services

A collaborative approach is also essential to enable smaller, specialist by-and-for services to engage with the commissioning environment. Evidence demonstrates that victims and survivors from marginalized communities need their support services to take a tailored and culturally sensitive approach, but that these services can be inconsistently funded and hard to access. Research conducted by the Centre for Justice Innovation, [*“A safe place and a safe time’ Providing effective advocacy to Black and Minoritised victim-survivors of domestic abuse and harmful practices in contact with the criminal justice system”*](#) demonstrates the value of culturally appropriate advocacy to these communities; recent [mapping research](#) from the Domestic Abuse Commissioner found that ‘Most victims and survivors from minoritised communities want to receive support delivered ‘by and for’ their own community.’¹ STADA works with numerous by-and-for organisations who provide this informed support, and their invaluable specialisms are an essential ingredient in commissioning structures to ensure commissioners can meet the specific needs of any one local area.

However, the current commissioning environment is not set up to enable smaller, specialist organisations to bid, and they are therefore often excluded from this kind of funding. Time-intensive bidding and reporting processes and a lack of more flexible funding frameworks such as grants leave smaller organisations, often running with one or two team members, unable to bid. Additionally, there are often arbitrary income limits placed on contracts, excluding these types of organisations from applying.

¹ Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales, ‘A Patchwork of Provision: How to meet the needs of victims and survivors across England and Wales, *Summary report*’, *Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales*, < https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/DAC_Mapping-Abuse-Survivors_Summary-Report_Feb-2023_Digital.pdf>, p. 5

Without by-and-for organisations, local authorities will not be able to understand or adapt services to respond to the specific dynamics of how domestic abuse manifests and plays out in certain communities. Commissioning models should have flexibility built into their structures in the domestic abuse space to ensure that generalist providers (who have a role to play, but cannot meet every need) do not take over contracts and leave particular communities lacking support. Such measures could include, but are not limited to:

- Increasing the use of grants, whether as the mechanism of payment for full contracts, or as an enabled and permissible method of subcontracting organisations who lack the capacity to engage with a full contract;
- Recognizing by and for services as equal partners, what they may lack in resource and capacity is balanced by their knowledge and experience of working with specific communities.
- Reducing reporting pressures for smaller organisations;
- Increasing lead-in times for bids to ensure smaller organisations can build trusted relationships with a lead partner, and commissioners to provide guidance and support in bringing organisations together;
- When mapping need and provision prior to releasing a tender, commissioners should specifically identify local by-and-for organisations and consult with them to understand the scale of local need for the communities they work with. This knowledge can then inform the design of the contract;
- Provision within contracts of funding to engage specialist support from by-and-for services as necessary, to meet language and cultural sensitivity needs.

4. Contract types and full cost recovery

Many domestic abuse organisations are charities, delivering public benefit in line with their charitable aims to support victims and survivors of domestic abuse. They are often best-placed to deliver public services due to their unique, longstanding relationships with communities authorities have historically found hard to reach and years of experience tackling and continuing to respond to enduring social problems.

However, the value of commissioned contracts is often not large enough to meet the actual full cost of the service commissioners outline as being needed. This creates significant problems for charities, especially smaller, local or specialist organisations, who are unable to absorb additional costs or bounce back from overspend. Charities often subsidise the full cost of services with income from other sources such as donations and grant funders, but this is becoming increasingly difficult. Larger, private entities can often absorb overspend but they also often lack close relationships with and understanding of service users. This creates a highly problematic market in which charities struggle to compete.

Moreover, commissioners often design service contracts as lasting for one year. While this allows them flexibility to respond to changes in public spending trends, this has a serious and detrimental impact on the quality of service delivered. Developing services which meet emerging need requires built-in time for evaluation. Without proper resourcing for this process, gaps between services widen and there is not sufficient resource to ensure provision is properly joined-up.

Given firm commitments from national and local government concerning the need to join up services and support victims and survivors of domestic abuse, there are real opportunities for small changes to be made to commissioning practice which will allow existing provision to improve. As a minimum, commissioners should ensure:

- That all contracts embed full-cost recovery for organisations, ensuring subsidies are not necessary, and that decisions about the value of contracts are taken based on consultation for domestic abuse organisations to understand the true costs of frontline delivery;
- That these costings also embed co-ordination costs, rather than asking organisations to absorb the costs of subcontracting smaller, expert organisations and managing pots of money without sufficient resource to do so;
- That domestic abuse contracts last for a minimum of three years, allowing for services to be appropriately tailored.