



10th July 2009

Dear Chair,

Specialist Domestic Violence Court Programme

The purpose of this letter is to inform you of the transfer of governance and performance management responsibilities to Local Criminal Justice Boards for the Specialist Domestic Violence Courts (SDVCs) programme, from April 2010. It is important for SDVCs to be fully embedded within local initiatives and, therefore, we encourage you to engage collaboratively with LCJB partners to ensure that the SDVCs in your areas are as effective as possible.

As you are undoubtedly aware, SDVCs are part of a co-ordinated community response to domestic violence. They represent a partnership and problem solving approach taken by the police, prosecutors, magistrates, court staff, the probation service and specialist support services for victims which provides a specialised way of dealing with domestic violence cases in magistrates' courts. A review of the first 23 SDVC systems published in March 2008¹ clearly demonstrated that SDVCs have contributed to improvements in both justice and safety for domestic violence victims. There are currently 122 SDVC systems across England and Wales. A list is attached to this letter.

The Co-ordinated Community Response Model (CCRM) to tackling domestic violence combines criminal justice, statutory and voluntary sector services and interventions into a holistic multi agency response providing both support and safety for victims. The CCRM provides the broader setting that includes early intervention and prevention. As such, it has always been expected that a SDVC be supported by both the Crime and Disorder Partnership or Community Safety Partnership and the Local Criminal Justice Board.

SDVCs contribute to the delivery of NI 32 and NI 34. They also contribute to the delivery of PSA 23 (making communities safer) and 24 (delivering a more effective, transparent and responsive CJS for victims and the public). In particular, they can contribute to an increase in public confidence in both the criminal justice system (PSA 24) and local services (NI 140).

¹ <http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/dv/dv018.htm>

Following a Consultation exercise with LCJBs in September 2008, in which 90% of those who responded expressed agreement with the proposed changes, there is to be a reassignment of responsibility for governance and performance management of SDVCs from central government to LCJBs. This is to be effective from April 2010, the current year being one of transition.

In practice this requires all LCJBs to have established clear governance and performance monitoring procedures for SDVCs in their area. This includes reporting routes from the local SDVC operational and strategic steering groups up to LCJBs, either directly or via a sub-group, in accordance with the national SDVC model² and established arrangements for performance data to link into overall LCJB Performance Management arrangements.

This transfer of responsibility will also necessitate there being a strategy in place to ensure effective and meaningful engagement and working arrangements with CDRPs/CSPs and the associated partner agencies. This is particularly relevant in order to ensure effective delivery of those components of the SDVC that are outside the direct remit of CJS agencies, i.e. Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs), robust and effective links to children's services, health services and specialist support services.

We acknowledge that a number of areas already operate effective collaborative working arrangements. We would encourage their continued development. In those areas where such arrangements have yet to be made we would urge your full co-operation with LCJBs in their immediate development. DV leads within Government Offices are a key partner in facilitating these developments, in particular in strengthening links between CDRPs and LCJBs.

We trust we can rely on your support and co-operation in ensuring the continued success and development of the SDVC programme, which forms a vital element of an effective response to tackling domestic violence.

If you have any queries or concerns about this please do not hesitate to contact a member of the National Steering Group, listed below. Further details about the SDVC programme and a Review of the first 23 systems can be found at

<http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/domesticviolence/domesticviolence59.htm> - National SDVC Resource Manual and data templates;

<http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/dv/dv018a.pdf> - *Justice with Safety* – review of the first 23 SDVC systems.

² <http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/domesticviolence/domesticviolence059a.pdf>

Yours faithfully,

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