

Domestic Abuse Courts

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

STADV co-ordinates a Specialist Domestic Abuse Court (SDAC) every Thursday at **Westminster Magistrates Court** (average 11 to 15 cases heard per Thursday) and DA cases through the court process (average 4 trials per week). This Court serves LBHF and RBKC.

STADV also co-ordinates a Dedicate Domestic Abuse Court every Tuesday at **Westminster Magistrates Court** (average 12 cases heard every Tuesday) and tracks all DA cases (average 5 trials per week). This Court serves Westminster borough, City of London and BTP DA cases.

There is a multi-agency DA Court Partnership which includes the following agencies: Police, CPS, HM Courts Service, National Probation Service, Witness Care and ADVANCE IDVA service. Judiciary are represented by DA Link Magistrates and a DA Lead District Judge. STADV coordinate the Partnership and convene the DA Court Management Group which meets on a quarterly basis. The Court also convene a bi-annual meeting to ensure consistency between the two DA Courts.

The DA Court Coordinators (STADV) 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 practitioners represented 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 DA Court Management Group.

Immediately following the DA Court day, the Coordinators give specific case information quickly to CSU Officer and other relevant agencies working with the case (e.g. Children's Services), regarding restraining orders and bail conditions which are essential to the safety of victims and their children. 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 experts. Other roles of the DA Court Coordinators include:

- Facilitating enquiries and risk assessment when applications 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 agencies working within the DA Court before, during and after the court days.

Why we need DA Courts

This is no ordinary crime and the criminal justice system has traditionally failed to take account of its specific nature and patterns of DVA and element of coercive control. DVA related cases are challenging to prosecute in which attrition and withdrawal rates are high but can be reduced by well-focused action. In addition to these challenges, there are constant changes in the CJS and key players at the court which further exacerbates how chaotic and ineffective the CJS can feel to victims of DVA. The specialist court model seeks to ensure that the criminal justice process is focused on the safety of the victims of DVA and that perpetrators of abuse are held to account.

The SDVC model ensures 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.

Outside of the courtroom, CJS partners benefit from data and observation collected by the SDVC Coordinator to address system issues arising in the CSJ which need to be addressed to ensure there is a focus on victim safety and to that the component parts of the CJS are working to best effect. This kind of effective, operational partnership is the only way to get the best results from the criminal justice process.

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

