



Standing Together - response to the VAWG Strategy 2021-2024

Introduction

Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse (ST) fully endorses and supports all aspects of the [VAWG Joint Principles](#), as well as the Designate Domestic Abuse Commissioner's VAWG strategy priorities. As extensively referenced within both consultations, the Coordinated Community Response (CCR) offers a comprehensive, inclusive and holistic approach to address VAWG, by bringing statutory agencies and organisations alongside specialist 'by and for' services to prevent, identify and response to the multiple and intersecting needs of women and girls who are subject to this oppression, while holding the perpetrators to account.

The definitions of VAWG within the Istanbul Convention allows for a standardisation of understandings of VAWG across UK nations, which supports alignment across devolved and non-devolved agencies – which is particularly important for funding, commissioning and multi-agency working. Women's lives are not fragmented, and neither can society's response to the violence they experience. Multi-agency partnership working needs to be prioritised if we are to see the whole picture of a survivors' situation and ensure they receive the most effective safety and support responses from agencies.

Yet, multi-agency responses too often fail to keep women and children safe, to meet their needs, safe and to respond to their experiences of coercion and control. This results in repeat victimisation, rather than early intervention and the prevention of further harm. Multi-agency working is almost non-existent for survivors of sexual violence and abuse.

At Standing Together we have spent the last 20 years working alongside local communities and partners across health, criminal justice, housing, and faith communities, coordinating MARACs, authoring Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs),



and pioneering the transformative Whole Housing, Whole Health and Faith and Community based approaches.

We are founding members of the innovative [Angelou Partnership](#) a group of 10 specialist organisations in West London that have come together to support women and girls experiencing violence or abuse, maintaining specialist VAWG ‘by and for’ services in the boroughs it operates in. Through working together in a coordinated community response (CCR), the partnership aims to improve access to services and outcomes for survivors, holding perpetrators to account.

The Angelou Partnership brings together 10 organisations to:

- Address all forms of violence and abuse including domestic abuse, sexual violence, harmful practices and:
 - Offer specialist support to children and young people, to LBGT+ survivors and to women from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

The Angelou Partnership is supported by three London Boroughs through joint commissioning of this Integrated VAWG Services model, the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham, the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea and the Westminster City Council. To hear more about the Angelou Partnership, watch [here](#).

At the foundation of our successful partnership working is the Coordinated Community Response; a partnership model we have pioneered for coordinating local responses to VAWG which is now recognised as best practice. We wish to complement the Joint VAWG principles and the DA Commissioner’s VAWG strategic priorities with further evidence based on our extensive experience in developing and delivering CCR approaches, which we believe must be incorporated into all aspects of the VAWG strategy.

The Coordinated Community Response (CCR) ¹

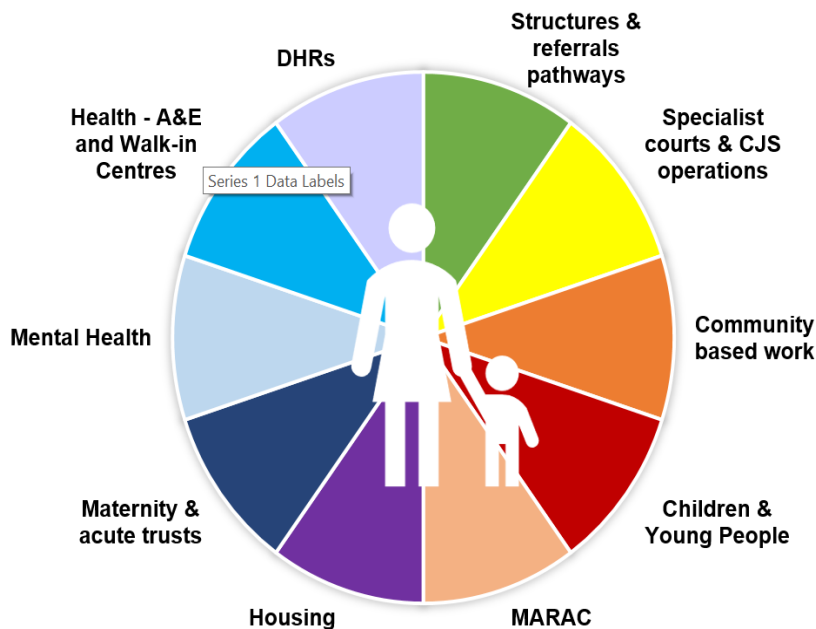
The CCR is based on the principle that violence against women and girls is ‘everyone’s business’, as every statutory agency and organisation has a vital role to play in response to the multiple and intersecting needs of women and girls. A CCR brings together services, including health, housing, social care, education, criminal justice, and local communities, to ensure local systems keep survivors safe, hold

¹ Standing Together, In Search of Excellence Executive Summary, 2020

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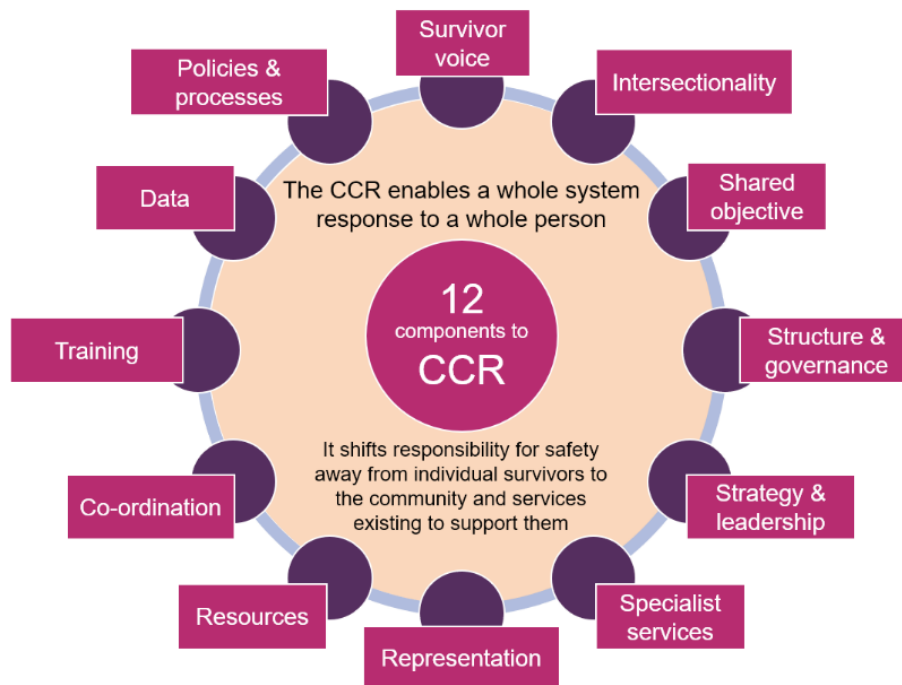
abusers to account, and prevent VAWG. To do this, shared responsibility across agencies, good governance and strong coordination is vital. A trauma based and intersectional approach, that centres the survivor's voice and experience, is paramount and can only be achieved through the full and equal representation of specialist support services in multi-agency responses.



Yet, public services are not designed with domestic abuse (DA) or violence against women and girls (VAWG) in mind, and as a result, they often struggle to protect people. Domestic homicide reviews are a practical illustration and a pertinent reminder of what may happen in the absence of a functioning CCR. Poor communication and gaps between services put women and children at risk. The CCR approach brings services together to ensure local systems truly keep women and children safe, hold abusers to account, and prevent VAWG. Our model of a coordinated local partnership to tackle and ultimately prevent domestic abuse/ VAWG is now widely accepted as best practice.

The CCR offers local areas a sustainable, collaborative and effective approach for integrating and managing partnership multi-agency working through 12 key components as detailed within [In Search of Excellence: A refresher guide to effective domestic abuse partnership working-The Coordinated Community Approach](#). This guidance is the result of learning from our experience in delivering effective partnerships and importantly, the experience of lead practitioners around the country within partnerships providing a VAWG response.

The CCR enables a whole system response to a whole person. It shifts responsibility for safety away from individual survivors to the community and services existing to support them. For the CCR to be effective, responsibility should be shared across agencies, rather than held by a single agency or an individual.



Standing Together's CCR Leaders course has played an important role in supporting VAWG leaders to improve their practice. In our training needs analysis at the beginning of the course, 72% of VAWG leads said training would be helpful to develop a better understanding of the key components of effective VAWG Partnerships. On completion of the course, 100% said it supported their professional development and that they had gained a "*wider knowledge of VAWG, it has supported strategic thinking - next VAWG strategy, and will be improved and given me knowledge regards commissioning*". We are now working with European partners to develop this into a European Qualification. The [CCR Network](#) provides VAWG leaders with a space to learn, share best practice, and network with other leaders and enable a consistent and improved implementation of the CCR

Key recommendations:

- The crucial role of all statutory agencies and organisations must be clearly defined within a VAWG strategy that meets the intersectional needs of women and children.

- These agencies can only work collaboratively, sustainably, and cohesively through a CCR model, which must be the foundation of a local ending VAWG strategy.
- Specialist 'by and for' services play an integral role in the CCR and meeting the intersectional and 'whole' needs of women in children, and an effective VAWG strategy must support the prioritisation of funding and commissioning these services.
- The VAWG strategy should include the need for training for all strategic leads at local authority level. We have seen and evidenced the impact this has through our CCR leaders' course,

Best practice models of a CCR

The transformative impact of the CCR on multi-agency and partnership working is not only evident through its successful incorporation into local domestic abuse and VAWG policy and practice, but also through the innovative CCR models that we have pioneered with partners across health, criminal justice, housing, and the faith communities. With each CCR model, Standing Together has effectively worked with national and local partners to create systemic change and improve agencies' understanding and responses to adult & child survivors and perpetrators. Below are examples of these models, and we recommend that an effective VAWG strategy must incorporate these specific models of partnership and multiagency working, each of which are survivor led, trauma informed and based on a solid understanding and response to multiple disadvantage and intersectionality.

A Whole Health Approach

The need for a coordinated whole health response to VAWG has been well evidenced by national research and has been a consistent theme within domestic homicide reviews.

Every year nearly half a million survivors seek assistance from medical professionals. Given that just one in five survivors call the police, it is vital that survivors can access a non-criminal or justice-based route to effective support.² Seeing a health professional can often be the only time that a survivor is able to disclose abuse without the perpetrator present. Analysis of domestic homicide

² SafeLives (2016) A Cry for Health
https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/SAFJ4993_Themis_report_WEBcorrect.pdf



reviews and academic research³ has also shown that often health professionals are the only statutory service to come into contact with both the victim and perpetrator. They hold critical information around the safety of the family and can make a significant difference in intervening earlier and ultimately preventing a homicide from happening. Evidence shows however that most often than not these opportunities are missed, and health professionals are not appropriately equipped to respond to VAWG.⁴

The [Pathfinder](#) project was a 3-year national pilot, working across eight sites in England to transform Health's response to domestic abuse, with a specific focus on the roles of Acute, General Practice and Mental Health. The project was led by Standing Together alongside expert partners AVA, Imkaan, IRISi and SafeLives. It brought together the expertise of specialist domestic abuse organisations through its consortium of experts and the experience and good practice of professionals working at the local sites.

Pathfinder was unique in its whole-system approach to health and domestic abuse. For the first time, it brought together good practice from across the health economy into a single model response. The key components of the whole health model response are outlined as part of the Pathfinder Toolkit and are closely linked to the 12 components of a CCR.

Key recommendation:

- A comprehensive VAWG strategy that is based on prevention, multi-agency working and partnership, must incorporate the vital role of the healthcare system in preventing and responding to VAWG effectively.
- The VAWG strategy needs to include a whole health model drawing on existing best practice like the [Pathfinder toolkit](#) which provides the tools to implement this at a local level. As well as providing effective interventions, this model requires a strategic commitment within the healthcare system to embed this work and create a shift in culture at all levels of the system.

³ [Violence against women and mental health.](#)

Oram S, Khalifeh H, Howard LM. *Lancet Psychiatry*. 2017 Feb;4(2):159-170. doi: 10.1016/S2215-0366(16)30261-9. Epub 2016 Nov 15.

⁴ Standing Together (2016) Domestic Homicide Review Analysis
http://www.standingtogether.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/STADV_DHR_Report_Final.pdf



A Whole Housing Approach

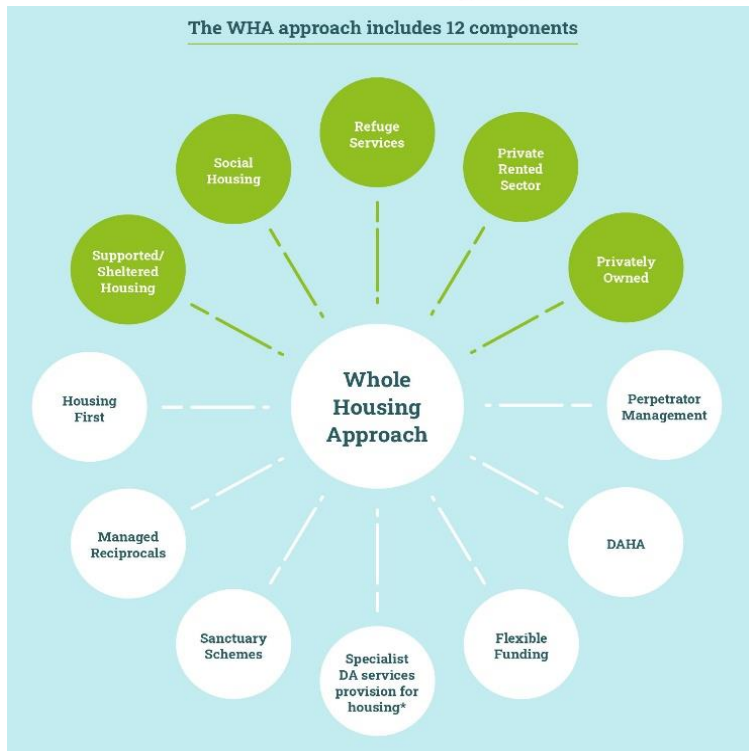
The Whole Housing Approach was first conceptualised the [National Housing and Domestic Abuse Policy and Practice Group, led by Standing Together and the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance \(DAHA\)](#) when the group identified that a whole system approach was needed to effectively address the key issues and barriers experienced by survivors and to transform the housing sector's response to VAWG. With funding from the MHCLG, the Whole Housing Approach (WHA) was piloted from October 2018 to March 2021. The WHA is recognised throughout the housing and VAWG sectors as a best practice housing approach to VAWG.

A Whole Housing Approach (WHA) endeavours to improve the housing options and outcomes for people experiencing domestic abuse and other types of VAWG living in any tenure type (social, private ownership, privately renting), leading to earlier identification of VAWG and decreases the number of people made homeless as a result. The WHA offers a sustainable and collaborative framework for the local domestic abuse and VAWG services and housing sectors to work together to address the immediate and longer-term housing needs of survivors. The model incorporates the experiences of survivors, the expertise of system leaders and established, evidence-based practice, while also exploring new ground like in the privately rented and privately owned sectors to identify how they can be part of an effective response. The online [WHA toolkit](#) provides strategies for partnership working between the housing and perpetrator response partners at a local level to hold perpetrators to account for their behaviour, and where safe and the survivor's choice, to place the burden of relocating on the perpetrator.

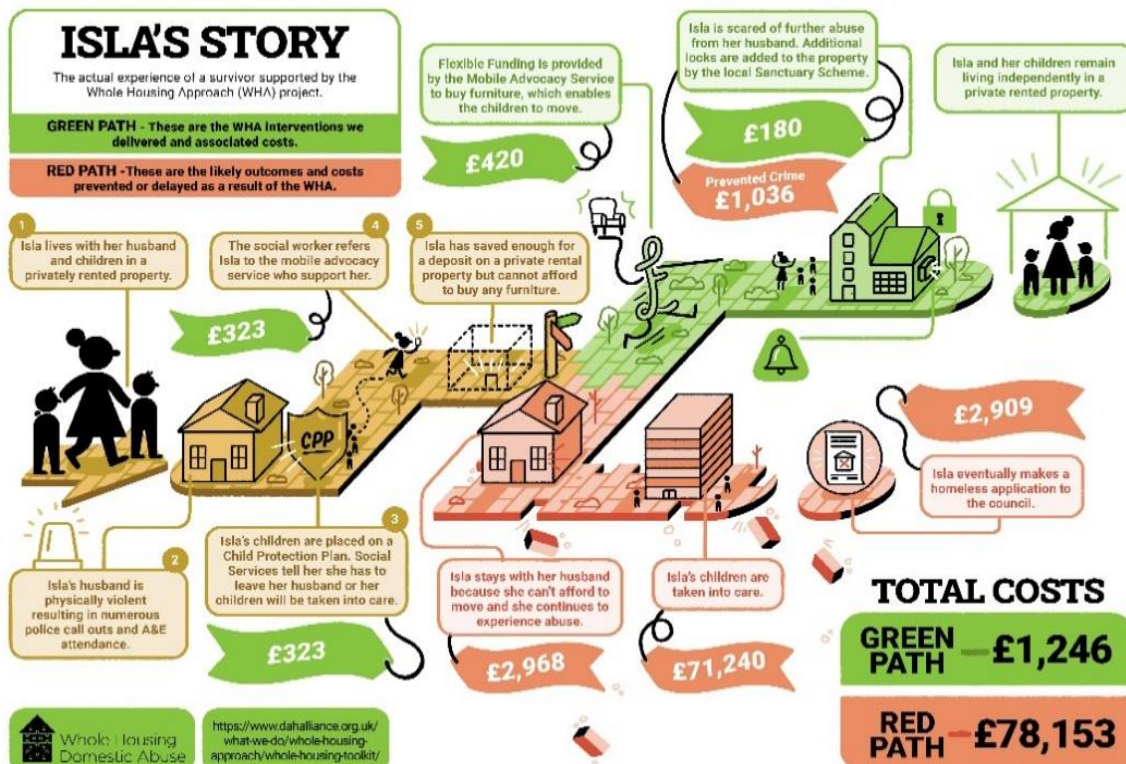
The diagram below illustrates the model and its twelve components. The bright green circles represent different forms of accommodation including the three main tenure types (social, private rented and private ownership) and temporary accommodation settings (refuges, supported accommodation). The white circles are the housing options and specialist services designed to offer the quickest route to safe and stable housing which allow survivors to either remain in their property or relocate to new accommodation.

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The below case study provides an example of the impact of a WHA on the life of a survivor and how it can effectively increase safety and prevent homelessness.





The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA)

ST are one of the co-founders of [DAHA](#) who's aim is to transform the housing sector response to domestic abuse. DAHA have been involved in creating a framework for housing providers (housing associations and local authorities) to transform their organisational response.

The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) launched in 2014 and have pioneered an accreditation process for housing providers nationally which is based on 8 priority areas:

- Policies and Procedures
- Case management
- Risk management
- Partnership working
- Inclusivity and Accessibility
- Training
- Perpetrator management
- Publicity & Awareness

The idea is that we work with housing providers to assess themselves against this framework in terms of changing their whole organisational response to domestic abuse. They can access free workshops (currently short term grant funded by Comic Relief and London Councils) which cover each priority area, an [online self-assessment tool](#) which they can bench mark themselves against and provides best practice examples and then finally an accreditation visit where we audit their work and decide whether they have met the requirements. If they pass they are awarded a charter mark which they keep for three years before applying for re-accreditation.

This DAHA accreditation visit consists of reviewing policies and procedures, meeting with leadership team and the DA steering group, auditing cases and staff interviews across the organisation.

We now have over 160+ providers engaged with us and our [interim evaluation](#) was launched last month which evidences the positive impact DAHA has had to improve outcomes for survivors of domestic abuse. DAHA also lead on and facilitate nine Regional Groups with membership from social housing providers, local authorities & domestic abuse services. The purpose of these groups is to improve connectivity between the sectors regionally working collaboratively to raise issues that impact on local/regional policy & practice, linking directly with the [National Housing Group](#) and



the Office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner to have a collective voice that can influence strategy and policy.

We have also working in the Private Rented Sector (PRS), homelessness and contractor sector to create a similar accreditation process that meets the needs of these sectors.

Housing First as a core element of the Whole Housing Approach

The WHA, has also addresses the significant gap in service provision for women experiencing VAWG and multiple disadvantage, who currently cannot access emergency refuge accommodation. Research⁵ into women's experiences of rough sleeping found that experience of domestic violence and abuse is near-universal among women who become homeless. In addition to domestic abuse, homeless women affected by multiple disadvantage experience a continuum of gendered violence and abuse. Housing First is an evidence based and effective programme that offers longer-term housing solutions for chronically/long term homeless women survivors experiencing multiple disadvantage and VAWG.

Yet, the majority of Housing First services across England are mixed gender, which is reflective of homelessness provision more widely. Recent research has highlighted the methodological limitations in how data on homelessness is gathered, and that women are likely to be among the uncounted 'hidden' homeless population⁶. This is problematic as it means that most homelessness provision does not recognise women's gender specific needs and results in them going largely unsupported.

Supported housing also provides an option for survivors who have care and support needs in addition to their experiences of VAWG, and who may be unable to live safely and independently in housing of other tenure types. Women-only supported housing is a valuable option for women with care and support needs who have experienced VAWG from male perpetrators, and who face the risk of being further victimised or re-traumatised in mixed services.

⁵ St. Mungo's (2018) Women and Rough Sleeping: A Critical Review of Current Research and Methodology. Retrieved from <https://www.mungos.org/publication/women-and-rough-sleeping-a-critical-review/>

⁶ St. Mungo's (2018) Women and Rough Sleeping: A Critical Review of Current Research and Methodology. Retrieved from <https://www.mungos.org/publication/women-and-rough-sleeping-a-critical-review/>

Key recommendations:

- A robust VAWG strategy must be responsive to the whole housing needs of women and children through the strategic prioritisation of a WHA, which must include funding and commissioning specialist services that are integral to a WHA, including: [Housing First](#) , [Specialist Refuges](#), [Mobile Advocacy](#), and a [Perpetrator Response](#) .
- A VAWG strategy that is responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable women and children must prioritise the planning, commissioning, and delivery of Housing First services which is underpinned with the recognition that women experiencing long term homelessness have had different experiences to their male counterparts and require a different approach.
- An effective VAWG strategy must support the funding and commissioning of specialist supported housing services to ensure survivors with additional needs can lead healthy and fulfilling lives.
- The VAWG strategy must highlight the important role played by all housing providers (social and private landlords), in response to the safety and housing needs of all survivors, particularly with regards to home security, management transfers and reciprocals. This must include the requirement that all local authority and housing providers to attain [Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance \(DAHA\) accreditation](#) which offers housing providers resources to implement the 8 priority areas that make up a coordinated, sustainable and collaborative model for housing's essential response to VAWG.
- An effective VAWG strategy must incorporate a perpetrator strategy that is inclusive of a perpetrator housing strand as a vital means to empowering women to stay safe within their own homes. Standing Together supports the sector wide Call to Action for a perpetrator strategy and sees it as key part of ensuring safety for survivors.

Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)

The MARAC is a multi-agency process that works to reduce the risk to those victims/survivors of domestic abuse who are assessed to be at high risk of serious harm or homicide. MARAC is a partnership arrangement whereby partner agencies work together to share information about the victim/survivor and perpetrator with the purpose of assessing risk so that effective and safe interventions can be planned and put in place to reduce the risks identified.

Crucial to an effective MARAC process is the voice of the victim/survivor and all efforts need to be made to involve them in the MARAC process. One of the key functions of MARAC is holding each other to account, and professionally challenging



each other to reach the best and most creative outcomes for victim/survivors. As part of this process, agencies hold regular MARAC meetings to share information, expertise, and updates so that joint action plans can be created.

Standing Together played a pioneering role in the development and implementation of MARACs and coordinate five MARACs across London: Hammersmith & Fulham (September 2007), Kensington & Chelsea (January 2008), Haringey (March 2013), Ealing (June 2013) and Westminster (September 2013). In 2019-2020, our MARACs consistently delivered across all key areas making our MARAC team among the best performing in the London region aligning with SafeLives best practice guidance and the principles of an effective MARAC. Furthermore, ST coordinates and administrates the London MARAC Coordinators Forum bringing together Coordinators to share best practice, discuss challenges and explore innovation in the MARAC field further embedding the CCR into practices across London.

Underpinning our MARAC work is all elements wider CCR model incorporated within each local area. This provides us with expertise in developing partnerships and multi-agency working. To reduce the barriers to support experienced by marginalised individuals and communities, our work includes close liaison with specialist agencies; bringing their expertise to MARAC meetings, helping inform practitioners, and ensuring equality of access and inclusive action planning that recognises diversity. Our work ensures that agencies continue to communicate effectively, share information, and working collaboratively and creatively to support the survivor and manage the behaviour of the perpetrator.

Key Recommendations:

- The VAWG strategy must ensure funding and commissioning for MARAC coordinators who play a crucial role in the MARAC process.
- Effective and collaborative multi-agency working cannot occur just through a singular forum in isolation and must operate within a wider CCR approach. A robust and effective VAWG must ensure that any multi-agency process in response to VAWG is supported by a CCR.

Specialist Domestic Abuse Courts (SDACs)

The government has specifically requested evidence to support a criminal justice response to VAWG. Standing Together worked with partners to establish and coordinate one of the first Specialist Domestic Abuse Courts (SDACs) at the Hammersmith Magistrates Court in 2002 and after establishing a second court at Westminster in 2012, continues to lead the development and delivery of SDACs,



which situates the Court and the Criminal Justice System as a part of the CCR as a whole system.

Working together, specialist courts help to ensure the safety of the victim by identifying, tracking and risk-assessing domestic abuse, supporting victims, and sharing information effectively. The approach has been shown to increase safe outcomes for survivors, help increase convictions and reduce attrition and withdrawal rates for these cases. Underpinning the SDAC are protocols reflecting the agreed aims of the local strategic partnership and commitment of each agency in achieving the aims.

The Criminal Justice System has traditionally failed to provide a safe and effective service to domestic violence victims (Home Office, 2005). Firstly, there is no regular assessment of the victim's vulnerability and the nature of the risk. This is necessary to protect the victim due to the intimacy of their relationship with the perpetrator, and the extent of the latter's coercive control over them. Secondly, in the victims' eyes, the system's inefficiency is exacerbated by frequent changes to personnel in both the court and the CJS as they do not have a consistent primary point of contact.

In contrast, SDACs prioritise the victim's safety and assist the criminal justice process to prosecute perpetrators efficiently and systematically through operational partnerships. According to a 2013 review of SDACs by the Centre of Justice Innovation, the number of convictions and percentage of successful prosecutions in domestic abuse cases have increased, despite pressure on public services.

Additionally, over half of the perpetrators convicted in Hammersmith SDAC made an early guilty plea due to the system's efficient and enhanced evidence gathering. Such pleas encourage perpetrators to be accountable, whilst relying on minimal involvement from a victim.

Furthermore, SDACs deter the perpetrator from committing further abuse. In a report on sentencing outcomes by a Standing Together Court Coordinator, cases sentenced in the SDAC are more likely to result in a Rehabilitation Activity Requirement or Suspended Sentence. In contrast, those that are tried in a normal court often result in conditional discharge, curfew, a financial penalty, imprisonment or unpaid work. The report showed a correlation between a sentence that involved a financial penalty and a perpetrator committing and being prosecuted for further domestic offences.

[The Domestic Abuse Best Practice Framework](#) launched by CPS, HMCTS and Police in 2018 identified key elements of an SDAC as essential to improve the response to domestic abuse and suggested that courts 'should consider clustering their DA cases' as part of this initiative to make those improvements. The clustering of cases in a SDAC would further enable the third sector to provide support to DA



victims in the CJS following the onset of the Covid19 pandemic and the consequent effects on victims.

Standing Together have recently been awarded funds from the Tampon Tax to create Mentor Courts and the national roll out of Specialist Domestic Abuse Courts (SDACs). This project seeks to reinvigorate the SDAC model nationally to improve the criminal justice response. This project aims to accelerate progress by:

- 1) Developing the existing SDACs at Westminster Magistrates Court into 2 Mentor Courts so that stakeholders can observe the court in session and also have an opportunity for a learning session so that they can take the SDAC model back to their local area. The national mapping work (2) will assist with disseminating best practice nationally.
- 2) National mapping work to build a picture of existing SDACs in England & Wales, and where none exist an audit of services and partnerships. We know there is an inconsistent approach to DA in the CJS. In contrast, SDACs prioritise the victim's safety and assist the CJ process to prosecute perpetrators efficiently and systematically.

This project will be evaluated by Centre of Justice Innovation and we will also be partnering with [Advance](#) our sister charity of 20 years.

The below case study gives an example of how the SDAC multi-agency partnership works together to increase the safety of victims and reduce risk in the CJ System.

Case study

Standing Together's Criminal Justice Team developed a briefing on Adult Family Violence (AFV) based on findings from our Domestic Homicide Reviews and informed by PhD research. The briefing was shared with the SDAC Partnership to disseminate among practitioners and judiciary to raise awareness of the dynamics and risk factors of AFV.

Informed by the briefing, the SDAC Probation Officer raised concerns regarding a case coming into court on a non-DA day. The Domestic Abuse Coordinator had been alerted to the case by the Police and in turn shared key information with both the Probation Officer and Prosecutor. Due to the trusted working relationship among agencies in the SDAC partnership, the Probation Officer's concerns were quickly responded to. The Prosecutor in court was alerted to specific risks and the importance of a strong opposition to bail.

The defendant was remanded in custody and the Probation Officer was able to expedite enquiries with the Prison and Community Mental Health Teams to ensure

that the concerns regarding the defendant's mental health were flagged. The victim was referred early to the CJ Idva and received support from the point of charge.

Without the partnership coordinated by Standing Together, agencies would not have had access to a briefing which identified and analysed the risks of AFV, which then enabled the SDAC partnership to be fully informed and able to react quickly to make safe decisions and reduce risk. This is a clear example of a CCR where agencies have a trusted and committed aim to work together to achieve a whole system approach to VAWG.

Key recommendations:

- The Criminal Justice System is a core component of a CCR to VAWG and their crucial role must be highlighted within the VAWG strategy.
- The SDAC and mentor courts offers an evidence-based model of best practice, which should be referenced and incorporated into the VAWG strategy.

SAFE Communities and the Faith and VAWG Coalition

As stated within the Joint VAWG Principles, we cannot eradicate VAWG without preventing it from happening in the first place by tackling the structures, institutions and attitudes which continue to perpetuate and enable VAWG. Without due attention to sex inequality, discrimination, harmful gender norms and attitudes - and the cultures they promote - the root causes and harmful consequences of VAWG cannot be properly addressed.

The specialist 'by and for' VAWG sector must be central to prevention and early intervention. Some of the most effective solutions are community-based specialist women's organisations, which are already embedded in local spaces building awareness and delivering innovative preventative work.

Recognition, signposting to, resourcing and capacity building of 'by and for' Black, minoritised and marginalised women's organisations is vital.

Again, Standing Together has produced coordinated community-based approaches for putting these principles into action at a local level. SAFE Communities, was a three-year project run by Standing Together, seeking to tackle domestic abuse and violence against women and girls by working with and learning from grassroots BME and faith communities. By building the capacity of these institutions, communities



and women, meant that these groups could become better equipped and more effective in tackling domestic violence and abuse (DVA) early. [Creating space for faith and race: a coordinated community response to domestic abuse](#), provides a full explanation of the project's aims, objectives, and impact.

One of the most impactful outcomes of the SAFE Communities project was the establishment of the [Faith and VAWG Coalition](#) led by Standing Together. The Faith and VAWG Coalition is a partnership of organisations which seeks to build bridges between members of faith communities or faith-centric organisations and DVA specialists and organisations within the VAWG-sector. Although the work to end VAWG at a grassroots level is already rich and diverse, this coalition enables a more strategic, regular, and structural approach to addressing these issues. The coalition works collaboratively to share good practice, to raise awareness and to campaign for wider policy change.

Key recommendations:

- A VAWG strategy that is based on prevention and early intervention, particularly for the most marginalised women and girls, must include the roles of BME grassroots and faith-based community organisations within the CCR.
- A VAWG strategy that meets the needs of marginalised women and girls must require the sustainable funding and commissioning of the specialist 'by and for' services that make up these grassroots organisations who work within and amongst the institutions and structures that can be used to empower and support women and girls at risk of VAWG.

Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs)

A consistent theme identified in DHRs and research is the fatal consequences of a fragmented agency responses that fail to identify and meet the 'whole' needs of victims while holding perpetrators to account. These themes highlight not only the need for a robust CCR, but also the vital role that DHRs play in the CCR. As such, DHRs must be recognised as a vital component to the CCR to VAWG in, order to identify gaps in the response to VAWG and establish best practice.

Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) were established under Section 9(3), Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 and conducted in accordance with the December 2016 [Multi-Agency Statutory Guidance for the Conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews](#). In addition to analysing agency involvement, DHRs examine the



past to identify any relevant background or trail of abuse before the homicide/death, whether support was accessed within the community, and whether there were any barriers to accessing support. By taking a holistic and intersectional approach, DHRs seek to identify appropriate solutions to make the future safer.

Standing Together has been involved in DHRs since their inception, chairing and authoring over 80 DHRs, as well as contributing to DHR research in [2016](#) and [2020](#). The rich learning coming from DHRs needs to be more accessible and better engrained in wider VAWG work. Standing Together's 2020 [London DHR Analysis](#) show us that the same types of recommendations appear throughout many DHRs. Our approach to protecting those at risk and response to perpetrators is still failing in several areas, despite all the work and effort invested in this. New work is needed to explore ways we can look at the huge gaps in coordination at a local and national level. We need to make all agencies feel part of the coordinated systems approach and feel accountable for their part in keeping victims safer and holding perpetrators accountable. We know the CCR works. Done in its entirety, and not in bits being adopted, it is the best system available in the UK to provide cross agency accountability for keeping victims safer and perpetrators accountable. A whole system approach to DHRs is needed across all statutory agencies.

Key recommendations:

- We call for a VAWG strategy that incorporates an independent evaluation of the DHR system and, reflecting this, amended statutory guidance.
- We also call for better support and infrastructure so DHR findings can be better implemented both locally and nationally. This should include:
 - establishing a database of DHRs.
 - a qualification or code of practice for chairs to ensure quality.
 - better inclusion of intersectionality and 'by and for' service representation within the DHR process.
 - funding for local authorities to carry out DHRs.
 - The introduction of further DHR guidance on complex DHRs.
 - Ensuring action plans and recommendations are monitored for progress.