

**Police and Crime**

**Commissioner for Dyfed-Powys**

**Scrutiny Panel**

**Dip Sampling Exercise**

**Domestic Abuse Attrition**

**Panel Members’ Findings & Feedback**

**March 2024**

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# **1.0 Overview, Background, Purpose and Methodology**

The Quality Assurance handbook, available on the [PCC’s website](http://www.dyfedpowys-pcc.org.uk/media/6081/002qualityassurancepanelhandbookjune18.pdf), states the background and purpose of the Panel along with how the dip sampling is carried out and what the Panel is asked to consider.

On the 20th of March 2024, members from the Quality Assurance Panel (QAP) met at Dyfed Powys Police Headquarters to review a selection of body worn video (BWV) footage that attributed towards police response to domestic abuse (DA) cases. This was following an action that was taken at the DA attrition panel for the :

*“Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner to consider the undertaking of a scrutiny activity by the Police and Crime Commissioner's Quality Assurance Panel in reviewing Body Worn Video footage to scrutinise terminology and language used by initial response officers and their interaction with domestic abuse victims.”*

The Panel reviewed 5 incidents in total which contained a mix of outcome 1 (offender was charged) and outcome 16 (victim withdrew their support) cases.

Detective Inspector (DI) Nelson from the Dyfed Powys Police VulnerabilityHubgave an input to the Panel and provided an overview of DA attrition within Dyfed Powys.

The panel were informed that victim attrition is considered to have occurred when a case concludes with an outcome code 14 or 16. This is when a case is closed on the basis that the victim does not support police action with outcome 14 resulting when a victim declines / is unable to support action and outcome 16 where a victim declines / withdraws support. DI Nelson informed that data from June to December 2023 suggests that 44.4% of DA cases in Dyfed Powys Police concluded with outcome 14/16. DI Nelson acknowledged the high percentage and noted that the scrutiny undertaken by the QAP will help the Force to identify why, help understand the reasons and help provide learning and feedback to officers.

DI Nelson provided further data to the panel:

* A total of 4,929 DA crimes were recorded in 2023.
* Top 5 offence types recorded were Violence Against the Person, Arson and Criminal Damage, Public Order, Theft, Sexual Offences.
* Violence Against the Person attributed to 80.5% of cases in 2023.
* 39% of victims were considered repeat victims.

Information was provided to the panel on the training that is provided to officers. The panel were informed that officers are provided with the *“Safe Lives DA Matters first responders training”* and during officer initial training, they undergo a 2 week Vulnerability Training module. Following their training it is expected that when officers are handling victims of domestic abuse that they consider the following:

* Compassionate
* Lawful
* Proportionate
* Ethical
* Trauma Informed
* Safety
* Explanations
* Positive Action
* Professional

DI Nelson concluded by thanking the QAP on their assistance to identify and understand why victims withdraw from the Criminal Justice Processes.

OPCC Policy Advisor, Hannah Hyde provided a brief introduction and overview to the panel highlighting the action taken at the domestic abuse attrition board and why the QAP have been asked to review body worn video footage of domestic abuse cases.

# **Review of Domestic Abuse Attrition incidents**

Case 1

*Male victim of Violence with injury - Attempted murder.*

**Positives**

* Officers asked open questions and waited for a reply from the victim before asking the next question. Allowing them to take their time.
* Trauma-informed approach demonstrated. This enabled the victim to describe what had happened in their own way.
* Good relationship demonstrated between hospital staff and officers.
* Officers demonstrated that they were listening to the victim.
* Officers acted in a professional manner throughout.
* Officers maintained a calm level of communication which helped put the victim at ease.

**Feedback**

* Officers language could have been better to encourage disclosure of more information.
* Officers did not introduce themselves to the victim.
* Officers were well briefed by the hospital staff but they failed to carry this forward onto their contact with the victim.
* The victim may had been suffering from shock and officers did not address this with the victim. No acknowledgement of how the victim was.
* Questions asked by the officers seemed to be more focused on the alleged offender. Officers asked very little questions to the victim that focused on the relationship with the alleged offender.
* Very little empathy shown by the officers. The officers approach could have been more sympathetic whilst trying to determine what had happened.
* Not enough meaningful interaction with the victim, the officers were continuously entering and leaving the hospital room.
* Officers did not build a relationship with the victim making the interaction distant.
* Victim had difficulty hearing the officers but no attempt was made to get closer to the victim.
* Officers were too focused on using their tablets to input information onto pronto. Which resulted in the lack of eye contact with the victim further distancing themselves.
* No reassurance was given to the victim.

**Queries Raised**

* Would the approach from the officer had been more empathetic had the victim been a woman?
* Query whether both officers needed to input the information onto pronto at the same time?

Case 10

*Female victim. Violence With Injury - Sec 47. Assault occasioning actual bodily harm.*

**Positives**

* The male officer was more empathetic towards the victim showing reassurance and advice.
* Officer provided the victim with contact details for mental health support and domestic abuse support.
* Officers were professional throughout.

**Feedback**

* When completing the Domestic Abuse Stalking and Harassment risk assessment (DASH) the officers showed a lack of empathy.
* DASH was very ‘robotic’. Too many generic questions.
* No reassurance was given when the victim stated that she didn’t want to waste police’s time.
* The female officer stated *“You need to think like a grown up”* which was considered to be a condescending remark.
* Officers only used the victim’s name once to address her.
* Too many DASH questions
* The victim was visibly upset. Acknowledged that officers have to handle difficult circumstances; however, the officers that attended didn’t seem to appreciate the impact on the victim.
* The female officer worked through the DASH questions very quickly. Some questions were also being answered by the officer’s assumptions with leading questions.
* During the DASH the victim disclosed that she had suffered a miscarriage this answer was ignored by the officers and they proceeded to ask questions relating to pregnancy and children which could had been triggering for the victim.
* Both officers were occupied in inputting the answers on their devices resulting in a lack of eye contact and poor communication.
* No time given for the victim to recover. At no stage did the officer allow the victim to have some time to think.
* As a result of this video, some of the Panel suggested that the female officer may require further training in conducting DASH assessments and DA input.
* Officers left abruptly and did not state what would happen next.
* Panel members found that the written signposting information, which was given to the victim, looked comprehensive but may be overwhelming. Members suggested that it may be helpful to tailor information / contacts prioritising which organisations or information might be most relevant to each victims circumstances . This might be considered in a follow-up email which could also include basic information on the types of domestic abuse.

**Queries Raised**

* DASH questions were overwhelming. There was no support by officers throughout the questioning. It appeared that the officer was trying to get through the questions. The DASH made the officers appear to be disconnected to the situation. Would it have been possible for the officers to advise that victim can take a break from the questioning?
* Are there restrictions on officers on how close they can sit next to a victim?
* Do officers watch BWV footage examples in training?

Case 6

*Female victim. Public Order Offences-Affray.*

**Positives**

* Officers introduced themselves and asked the victim’s name and addressed her by her name throughout.
* Officers demonstrated a sympathetic approach which helped to gain the victim’s trust.
* Officers explained DASH to the victim and asked if she wanted to complete.
* Officers were calm and helped reassure the victim.
* Officers gave the victim multiple opportunities to make a statement without being considered too ‘pushy’.
* Trauma informed approach demonstrated. Victim was given time to answer questions.
* Good evidence of officers listening to the victim.
* Officers appeared to be very caring.
* Although there were two officers present only one was asking the questions. This possibly allowed the other officer to log the answers which allowed the other officer to maintain eye contact with the victim.
* The panel noted that this interaction should be used as good practice to other officers.

**Feedback**

* No safeguarding information was provided.
* Some words could have been explained further to the victim such as the meaning to the terms *‘evidential’* and *‘risk assessment’.*

**Queries Raised**

* Was a DASH completed as it wasn’t clear in the BWV?

Case 2

*Female victim. Violence without injury – Threats to kill.*

**Positives**

* Officers demonstrated a level of concern for the victim and carried out a search of the house to ensure her safety.
* Language used by officers was reassuring and supportive.
* Officers were very calming which helped the victim to calm down.
* Empathetic approach demonstrated by the officers.
* No negative language used by the officers.

**Feedback**

* No attempt was made to ensure the other person in the house was safe.
* No details provided on mental health support even after the victim stated that they were suffering.
* Officers' main focus was on finding the alleged offender.

**Queries Raised**

* The panel asked for clarification whether an officer or call handler‘s opinion should be logged and questioned whether a subject access request (SAR) be made by individuals? If so, would this be reason enough not to enter on STORM or NICHE or are SARs not applicable to Police records.

Case 8

**Positives**

* Appropriate action was taken by the officers. The victim was injured and officers focused on their wellbeing rather than asking questions.
* Officers showed empathy.
* Officers were calm which helped the victim to relax.
* Officers were appropriately engaging throughout. Allowed the ambulance team to intervene when needed to.
* Terminology and interaction all deemed appropriate.

**Feedback**

* Victim stated that this had happened on eight previous occasions before. No advice given to the victim on domestic abuse support services.
* Officer was taking photos of the victim’s injuries but was not explaining why or asking for consent.

# **General Comments and Observations**

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| **Observations** | **Force Response** |
| Case 1 - The Panel questioned whether the officer’s approach had been more empathetic had the victim been a woman. The Panel felt that the officers were more focused on finding the alleged offender rather than supporting the victim. | *It is expected that all police officers will demonstrate empathy to all victims of crime, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity etc. Police officers’ first priority is to preserve life. In case 1, the victim was safe and officers were speaking to him in hospital. Due to the gravity of the alleged offence, identifying and locating the suspect will also be of importance. Information gleaned by attending officers will be fed back to the Force incident Manager / Senior Investigating Officer who can then direct enquiries to locate and arrest the suspect.* |
| A consistent theme throughout all the cases reviewed by the panel was in relation to the use of the tablets to input information onto Pronto. The Panel questioned whether two officers needed to input the information as it can have an impact on the communication and overall interaction with the victim. The Panel identified good practice within case 6 where one officer asked all the questions whilst the other made the notes. | *All officers are required to utilise their Mobile Data Tablets to input data. However whether all officers have cause to utilise their tablets at the same time will be based on a case by case basis. Officers should be mindful of any barriers to communication / rapport building the tablet causes, and in many cases, simply explaining what they are doing and what they are using the tablet for may suffice to reduce the impact. Many of the forms on PRONTO have a “multiple officer” function, which enable multiple officers to feed into the same form.* |
| The Panel found that the questions asked during the DASH were overwhelming and made the officers appear to be disconnected to the situation. Would it have been possible for the officers to advise that victim can take a break from the questioning? | *The DASH should be completed in a conversational format – not a question-and-answer session. The ability to weave the DASH into conversation improves with experience and level of service. Officers should be mindful of how their interactions effect the victim and should afford the victim breaks if required. Officers can advise victims that a break is possible.* |
| Are there restrictions on officers on how close they can sit next to a victim? The Panel noted that in both case 1 and 10 that the officers were a considerable distance away from the victims. Within case 1 the victim was having difficulties hearing the officers, but no attempt was made to get closer to the victim. In case 10, the victim was clearly very upset, and the Panel thought that an officer could have been a bit closer to provide some comfort. | *There are no restrictions on how close an officer can sit to a victim. However, where an officer sits may depend on room layout, furniture, mindfulness of personal space, maintaining professionalism and professional boundaries. If a victim appears to be struggling to hear an officer, it would be expected that the officer either talks louder and clearer, gets closer (within reason) or explores whether there are any hearing difficulties / communication difficulties that can be addressed and support put in place.* |
| A Panel member queried whether examples of BWV footage are used for officer’s training? For example, case 6 was considered to be identified as good practice to be highlighted for the purposes of officer’s training. | *BWV is used within the training environment. Case 6 will be provided to Learning and Development for their review and consideration for inclusion in future training.* |
| In relation to case 6, the Panel were unclear as to whether a DASH was eventually carried out? | *A DASH was completed, however it was completed as a “Refused” DASH. The BWV reviewed by the panel was not the completion of a DASH, albeit the officer spoke of a DASH and asked the victim whether she’d be willing to complete the risk assessment. The DASH was completed by another colleague who conversed with the victim.* |
| In one case, a female officer appeared to show a lack of empathy to the upset tone of the victim whilst conducting a DASH assessment, which asked a number of sensitive and invasive questions. Would this indicate that this officer would need re-training, or is this not a consideration when training officers regarding DASH assessments? The Panel felt that this approach was very robotic and would impact the victim's trust/confidence in the police. | *All officers are expected to demonstrate empathy to victims. Naturally, some people have a better ability to demonstrate empathy. When the DASH is completed as a question and answer session, this can lead to a robotic delivery. Officers should weave the DASH into conversation. If conducted as a question and answer, officers should listen to the responses, record what is said and show that they are indeed listening to what has been said. Feedback will be provided to the officer in Case 10 to highlight the concerns raised by the panel.* |
| The Panel identified that in two cases that the officers were more concerned with finding the alleged offender rather than discussing the incident with the victim. The Panel noted that this may need to be addressed during the training but acknowledged the difficult balance faced by the officers. | *Dependent on the circumstances and risk posed by the suspect, locating the suspect may indeed need to be prioritised to maximise the safety of the victim and public. There are occasions where the attending officers with the victim will be required to gather information regarding the suspect to enable other officers (not with the victim) to locate and affect an arrest.* |