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Your Ref: 25.25

Collette Stevenson MSP
Convener
Social Justice and Social Security Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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Dear Collete,

Financial considerations when leaving an abusive relationship

Firstly, I would like to apologise for the delay in replying to your letter dated 8 April 2025. As Head of Major Crime, Public Protection and Local Crime, this falls under my remit to answer the questions you raise.

- To what extent are police officers trained to recognise financial and economic abuse, including coercive control?
- Are police officers trained in trauma-informed working practices?
- The Committee heard from people with experience of surviving domestic abuse that the evidence they provided to police officers to demonstrate that the person was also subjecting them to financial and economic abuse, was not taken as seriously as the investigation of the physical abuse. Could you therefore please confirm the processes that police officers follow when presented with evidence of financial and economic abuse?

Domestic Abuse in Scotland - Context

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Police Scotland utilises the following definition of domestic abuse, as set out in the Joint Protocol between Police Scotland and the Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service.

“Any form of physical, verbal, sexual, psychological or financial abuse which might amount to criminal conduct and which takes place within the context of a relationship. The relationship will be between partners (married, cohabiting, civil partnership or otherwise) or ex-partners. The abuse can be committed in the home or elsewhere including online”

I should point out that given different definitions are used by countries within the United Kingdom (UK). The definitions used in England and Wales, and Northern Ireland include ‘familial relationships’ and ‘family members’ respectively.

In addition, Scotland places no age limit on domestic abuse, unlike the rest of the UK where Domestic Abuse can only occur ‘*between those aged 16 or over*’.

It is acknowledged that domestic abuse as a form of gender-based violence is predominately perpetrated by men against women. This definition also acknowledges and includes abuse of male victims by female perpetrators and includes abuse of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people within relationships.

This definition of domestic abuse encompasses the entire spectrum of behaviour by perpetrators where this amounts to criminal conduct. This includes cases which involve isolated incidents as well as cases involving a course of conduct and includes both violent and non-violent abusive behaviour. Some cases will involve elements and tactics of coercive control, which can involve a range of behaviours designed to control and harm a victim/survivor, including financial harm, while others will involve isolated incidents of conflict provoked by situational factors.

Domestic Abuse Scotland Act 2018

Police Scotland recognised that the domestic abuse legislation (Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018) which came into force on 1st April 2019, represented the most significant legal change to the policing of domestic abuse in decades.

We have worked hard to support effective and consistent implementation of the new legislation. We have provided our staff and officers with training and support so that they fully understand what the changes mean for them and how they can make best use of the powers to protect victims/survivors and bring offenders to justice. We ensured that they understand the dynamics of different types of domestic abuse, particularly coercive control, so that they can recognise it and take effective action to prevent further occurrence.

Domestic Abuse Investigators Training

At an operational level, Police Scotland utilises a ‘3 Tiered Approach’ to the policing of domestic abuse: Local Operational Policing, Divisional Specialist Domestic Abuse Investigation Officers and the National Domestic Abuse Task Force.

Effective delivery of the 3 Tiered Approach is supported by a cadre of bespoke and embedded domestic abuse training to ensure domestic abuse victims across Scotland receive a police response tailored to the particular circumstances of their case. This

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includes but is not limited to Probationer Training, Operational Command Training for newly promoted sergeants and training for Specialist Domestic Abuse Investigators.

A key element of this training is understanding and evidencing coercive controlling behaviour, including financial abuse and control, which by itself may not constitute an offence, but may be evidenced utilising the DASA Act 2018 if relevant evidential criteria is met. There is no hierarchy of offences and coercive abuse and control in any context is to be considered alongside all offending of a physical nature.

Again, a trauma informed and victim/survivor centred approach is weaved throughout this training and embedded in its delivery to colleagues.

Domestic Abuse Matters (DAMS)

Throughout 2024/2025 DACU have been delivering Domestic Abuse Matters (DAMS) supported by external partner SafeLives. DAMS covers the following topics aligned to the wider VAWG strategic aims;

- Domestic Abuse & The Effects of Trauma
- Diverse Experiences of Domestic Abuse – South Asian Communities
- DASA – Understanding and Applying the Legislation,
- Financial abuse and control within the context of DASA offences and how to evidence same
- Multiagency Tools for Keeping People Safe
- The Use of Technology and Social Media in Domestic Abuse
- Domestic Abuse and Children

Throughout this training the principle of a trauma informed approach is reinforced, and the impacts DA can have on victims/survivors and how this potentially influences their interactions with police.

Partnership Working

Police Scotland continue to work and develop relationships with partner agencies both statutory and within the third sector to ensure experience and learning is shared among partner agencies, to better inform our response to supporting victims/survivors of DA. There are local area arrangements in place to engage with partnerships within a given Local Authority area, and a national platform through the Domestic Abuse Forum (DAF). The DAF allows for a national sharing of learning and good practices between partner agencies and police, ensuring police guidance and practice is influenced by survivor feedback and specialist knowledge of services supporting and engaging with survivors/victims of DA. This feedback has helped shape Police Scotland's trauma informed approach to tackling domestic abuse, and a greater understanding of financial abuse and control from the perspective of the victim/survivor.

Domestic Abuse Toolkit/DSDAS guidance

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The Domestic Abuse Toolkit is produced and managed by the Domestic Abuse Coordination Unit (DACU) and is constantly under review and being updated. Feedback from survivors/victims and partner agencies has ensured that a trauma informed approach is embedded into all processes and procedures. How to evidence and record DASA offences with elements of financial control and abuse is also covered, ensuring officers utilising the toolkit continue to think of the wider context and not treat individual incident as standalone, and to always 'think DASA.' This toolkit has been designed in a user-friendly manner, easily accessible with clear signposting to provide guidance and answers to regularly asked questions officers may have on coercive controlling behaviour.

Financial Abuse and Control

It is acknowledged that if sufficient evidence does not exist to libel a charge in relation to an offence under S1 DASA 2018, then a report of financial abuse or control that does not meet the criminal threshold of fraud or theft, may not be recorded as a crime.

An example of this may include a joint bank account which has had monies removed by one of the account holders, with no other reported incidents to consider as part of a wider investigation. As an individual incident this may be considered a civil matter, regardless of the domestic context as a threshold of a crime has not been met.

However, any domestic incident, criminal or not, would be recorded by police with a domestic report (iVPD) created. If subsequent domestic incidents were reported this could potentially be utilised to evidence coercive financial control as part of a S1 DASA offence.

This submission is provided for your information, and I hope you find helpful.

Yours sincerely,

Steve Johnson
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