

Wirral Domestic Abuse JSNA (June 2025)

Governance structure for domestic abuse in Merseyside

The governance structure for domestic abuse in Merseyside is a multi-agency, strategic framework led by the **Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC)** and supported by **Merseyside Police**, local authorities, health services, and community organizations. Here is how it is structured:

◆ 1. Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC)

- **Emily Spurrell**, the current PCC, leads the strategic direction through the **Police and Crime Plan 2025–2029**.
 - The PCC's priorities include:
 - **Supporting Victims** – especially those affected by domestic abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).
 - **Preventing Harm** – through early intervention and education.
 - **Fighting Crime and ASB** – with a focus on serious violence and safeguarding
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◆ 2. Merseyside Police

- Operates under a **Protecting Vulnerable People (PVP)** command structure.
 - Domestic abuse cases are managed by:
 - **Frontline response teams** for immediate incidents.
 - **Specialist safeguarding units** for risk assessment and victim support.
 - **Partnership officers** who liaise with external agencies
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◆ 3. Multi-Agency Partnerships

- The **Merseyside Strategic Policing and Partnerships Board (MSPPB)** oversees the delivery of the VAWG strategy.
- Includes representatives from:
 - Local councils
 - NHS and mental health services
 - Probation and youth justice
 - Voluntary and community sector organizations

◆ 4. Community and Victim Engagement

- Initiatives like **Walk and Talk**, **Safe Spaces**, and **Domestic Abuse Workplace Champions** ensure community voices shape services.
 - Victim feedback is used to evaluate and improve services.
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◆ 5. Operational Tools and Policies

- Use of **Clare's Law** (Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme) to inform potential victims.
- Enforcement of **Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs)**.
- Trauma-informed training for officers and staff

Merseyside's strategy for tackling domestic abuse

Merseyside's strategy for tackling domestic abuse is embedded within a broader, multi-agency approach to ending **Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)**.

This strategy is led by the **Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC)** and **Merseyside Police**, and is structured around prevention, protection, pursuit of offenders, and partnership.

◆ 1. Strategic Framework: VAWG Delivery Plan

Launched in **November 2022**, the **VAWG Delivery Plan** outlines 57 specific actions aimed at:

- **Protecting women and girls**
- **Preventing violence**
- **Pursuing perpetrators**
- **Prioritising VAWG as a policing and societal issue**

This plan was co-developed with over 50 partners, including community groups and survivors, and is overseen by the **Merseyside Strategic Policing and Partnerships Board (MSPPB)**

◆ 2. Key Initiatives and Achievements

- **Trauma-informed training** for over 1,700 officers and staff.
- **Education in schools**: 131 schools trained on misogyny, harassment, and abuse.

- **Domestic Abuse Workplace Champions:** Over 51,000 employees now have access to trained support.
 - **£800,000 invested** in early intervention programmes for domestic abuse.
 - **£3.2 million committed** to support survivors of sexual violence
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◆ 3. Operational Measures by Merseyside Police

- **Operation Nightsafe:** Focused on preventing violence in the night-time economy.
 - **Walk and Talk:** Officers Walk with women in areas they feel unsafe to hear concerns directly.
 - **Perpetrator Programmes:** Targeted interventions to manage and reform domestic abuse offenders.
 - **Regular scrutiny meetings:** To review and improve the police response to domestic abuse.
 - **Trauma-informed officer training:** Based on lived experiences of survivors
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◆ 4. Community Engagement and Campaigns

- **#TakingAction Campaign:** A public-facing initiative to raise awareness, encourage reporting, and ensure women's voices shape policy and policing.
- **Safe Spaces and Guardian Projects:** Initiatives in public transport and nightlife areas to support vulnerable individuals

Merseyside Police's Approach to Domestic Abuse

Merseyside Police treats domestic abuse as a high priority and has implemented a structured approach to support victims and manage offenders. Key elements of their strategy include:

- **Initial Response:** First response officers often attend incidents with Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs) to ensure victims receive immediate support
- **Risk Assessment:** The force uses the Merseyside Risk Identification Tool (MeRIT) to assess risk levels. However, frontline officers do not conduct full risk assessments at the scene; instead, they collect information which is later reviewed by specialist teams

- **Specialist Teams:** These teams are responsible for formal risk assessments and safety planning, but they do not operate during evenings or weekends, which can delay protective measures
- **Safeguarding:** While officers are trained to arrest perpetrators, there is limited awareness of broader safeguarding options. This has been identified as an area needing improvement
- **Victim Identification:** Control room staff are generally well-trained, but limitations in database access can hinder the identification of vulnerable victims or repeat incidents

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) PEEL Assessment (2023–2025)

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) conducted a PEEL (Police Effectiveness, Efficiency, and Legitimacy) inspection of Merseyside Police, published in October 2023.

The findings relevant to domestic abuse include:

- **Protecting Vulnerable People:** This area, which includes domestic abuse, was graded as **"Requires Improvement"**. The report highlighted delays in responding to Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (Clare's Law) requests and the need for faster 999 call responses
- **Overall Performance:** Merseyside Police received a mix of grades:
 - **Good:** Treating the public fairly, preventing crime, workforce support.
 - **Adequate:** Responding to the public, investigating crime, leadership.
 - **Requires Improvement:** Managing offenders and protecting vulnerable people

The Police and Crime Commissioner has acknowledged these findings and stated that work is underway to address the concerns, including through the Community First Operational Review, which aims to enhance local resources and victim support

The HMICFRS has made several specific recommendations to improve Merseyside Police's—and other forces'—response to domestic abuse. These are drawn from thematic inspections and progress reports.

Here are the key recommendations relevant to Merseyside Police:

◆ **1. Improve Risk Identification and Assessment**

- **At first contact,** officers and staff must consistently identify victims of domestic abuse, especially repeat victims
- **Risk assessments** should be thorough and timely. Delays in assessing risk can leave victims vulnerable

◆ 2. Enhance Initial Response and Safeguarding

- **Speed of response** is critical. HMICFRS found that delays in attending domestic abuse incidents were common and could expose victims to further harm
- Officers must be trained to **recognize coercive and controlling behaviour**, which is often misunderstood or overlooked

◆ 3. Strengthen Investigations

- Improve the **quality of evidence gathering**, including victim and witness statements, and ensure that officers take comprehensive notes on injuries and demeanour
- Promote **evidence-led prosecutions** where victims are unwilling or unable to support a case

◆ 4. Expand and Support Multi-Agency Working

- Strengthen **Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASHs)** by involving a broader range of partners, such as housing and mental health services
- Ensure **information sharing** between agencies is timely and effective to protect victims.

◆ 5. Invest in Training and Leadership

- Continue to roll out **specialist training** for officers, particularly around coercive control and trauma-informed approaches
- Leadership must ensure that domestic abuse remains a **strategic priority**, with clear accountability for outcomes

◆ 6. Monitor and Evaluate Progress

- Forces should **track the impact** of their domestic abuse strategies and adjust based on victim feedback and performance data
- HMICFRS encourages forces to use **Force Management Statements** to assess demand and capacity in domestic abuse response

Examples of work being undertaken by Merseyside Police

- **Operation Blackbird** is a domestic abuse safeguarding initiative operating in **Liverpool and Wirral**, developed by Merseyside Police in partnership with local agencies.
 - The operation places an **Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA)** alongside police officers to provide **immediate, on-the-ground support** to victims of domestic abuse.
 - This joint approach ensures that victims receive both **protective policing measures** and **specialist emotional and practical support** at the earliest opportunity—often during or shortly after a police response to an incident.
- **Trauma-informed training** for over 1,700 officers and staff. Training continues with a view to upskill all frontline staff. (note it is repeated in Operational measures)
- Merseyside Police is championing **Child-Centred Policing**. An approach that places the needs, rights, and experiences of children and young people at the heart of policing practice. It recognises that children—whether they are victims, witnesses, or suspects require a different, more tailored response than adults.