



west midlands  
police and crime  
commissioner

West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner (WMPCC)

WMPCC Pathfinder Independent Domestic  
Violence Advocate (IDVA) 2024-2025:  
Service Specification

Introduction.....	2
Background information for the service .....	4
Aims and objectives of the Pathfinder Court.....	5
Expected Outcomes.....	5
Process of the Pathfinder Pilot and Role of Family Court IDVA.....	6
Expected numbers and demand .....	7
Outputs .....	7
Performance review and monitoring requirements .....	7
Safeguarding.....	8
Staff recruitment, qualifications, support and standards .....	8
Living wage .....	9
Timescales for the project implementation .....	9



**West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner  
Pathfinder Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA)  
2024-2025  
Service Specification**

Project Name:	Pathfinder (Integrated Domestic Abuse Courts)
Grant value:	£200,667
Funding period:	28 <sup>th</sup> May 2024 – 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2025
Service start date:	28 <sup>th</sup> May 2024

## Introduction

The West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner is seeking a delivery partner to support the provision of Domestic Abuse (DA) support services within the Birmingham Family Court in relation to private law proceedings. Both Individual and consortium bids will be considered.

Combatting violence against women and girls (VAWG) and domestic abuse remains a top priority for the Police and Crime Commissioner, Simon Foster. This is reflected in his manifesto pledge and Police and Crime Plan which highlights the disproportionately of VAWG crimes affecting women and girls, such as domestic abuse, stalking, rape, and sexual assault, Honour-based Abuse and Forced Marriage.

It is imperative to ensure comprehensive support for all victims, regardless of their gender, sexuality, or any other protected characteristics. This can be accomplished through collaborative efforts with partner agencies. However, it's vital to recognise that support must be tailored to meet the diverse needs of individuals and respond appropriately to their specific protected characteristics, ensuring inclusivity and effectiveness in addressing their circumstances. Specific measures committed to that are being delivered by the PCC include; improving police training, increasing support for victims through advocates, imposing bail conditions on alleged perpetrators, and advocating for legislative changes. The goal is to increase accountability for offenders and ensure holistic support for survivors.

Advocates play a crucial role in supporting victims Domestic Abuse. Specifically, Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs), they provide essential support and guidance to victims navigating the criminal justice system and accessing necessary services. IDVAs offer emotional support, safety planning, assistance with legal proceedings, and access to other support services, tailored to the individual needs of victims.

In addition to supporting victims, advocates also work to raise awareness about the dynamics of VAWG and domestic abuse, advocate for policy changes to better protect victims, and collaborate with other agencies to ensure a coordinated response to cases. Therefore, expanding the offer of advocacy to Family Courts is a welcome development and one which has seen minimal investment nationally. The Pathfinder Pilot will therefore increase the availability and accessibility of advocates, authorities can better meet the diverse needs of victims and survivors, ultimately contributing to more effective prevention and response efforts.

The issue of reform in the Family Court system is highlighted due to the significant challenges faced by survivors of domestic abuse. Despite efforts to address these issues, there remains a lack of understanding and support for victims within the legal system. The report by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner underscores the urgent need for cultural change within the Family Court system to better support victims of domestic abuse and their children<sup>1</sup>. It emphasises the pervasive nature of domestic abuse within family court cases, with evidence suggesting that a substantial portion, around 60%, of cases involve domestic abuse. Previous reports, such as the Ministry of Justice's Harm Panel report<sup>2</sup>, have also highlighted systematic failures within the family court system that put victims and children at risk. These include a culture of disbelief towards survivors, the persistence of narratives like parental alienation and parental conflict which conflate the existence of domestic abuse in addition to creating a pro-contact bias that can lead to unsafe contact arrangements.

Despite some progress, such as the prohibition of cross-examination by defendants and the introduction of support schemes like the Qualified Legal Representative (QLR) scheme, survivors continue to face significant barriers in seeking justice and protection from their abusers within the family court system. Some personal experience shared by victims illustrate the challenges faced by survivors, including inadequate support, victim-blaming attitudes, and a lack of legal representation. There is need for comprehensive reforms, including improved training for judges and magistrates, greater transparency in judicial decision-making, and increased access to non-means-tested legal aid for survivors.

Overall, there is a pressing need for systemic change within the family court system to ensure that victims of domestic abuse receive the support and protection they desperately need.

---

<sup>1</sup> **The Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales** - The Family Court and domestic abuse: achieving cultural change. Available at <https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/domestic-abuse-commissioner-calls-for-wide-reaching-reforms-to-ensure-safety-of-children-in-the-family-courts-and-accelerate-government-plans/>

<sup>2</sup> **Ministry of Justice** - Assessing Risk of Harm to Children and Parents in Private Law Children Cases. Available at <https://consult.justice.gov.uk/digital-communications/assessing-harm-private-family-law-proceedings/>

## Background information for the service

Pathfinder/IDAC (Integrated Domestic Abuse Courts), are an innovative approach to private law proceedings in family courts which brings in domestic abuse (DA) agencies to work alongside HMCTS and Cafcass/Cafcass Cymru to provide crucial support to children and families at an earlier point in proceedings.

Expanding Pathfinder supports the Ministry of Justice's strategic outcome to strengthen the justice system and deliver swift access to justice. The programme provides better support to children and families undergoing private law proceedings with a less adversarial approach and with enhanced support to victims and survivors of domestic abuse. The programme also delivers swifter resolution which will help to drive down the caseload in the court system.

As a minimum, Pathfinder requires that domestic abuse support providers undertake Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence (DASH) assessment, give advice to the court on an individual family's circumstances and provide in-court Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) support to those who need them.

The Pathfinder model incorporates a range of delivery partners, including HMCTS, Cafcass/Cafcass Cymru, the judiciary and domestic abuse support agencies. Though the budget for the overall pilot is much higher, £3.4m, this grant represents a subsection of it, covering payments to the domestic abuse support agencies only. This subsection is split across four sites according to their individual requirements. These sites are courts in District Family Judge (DFJ) areas in Dorset and North Wales, which have been piloting Pathfinder since February 2022, and Birmingham and South-East Wales, which are new expansion sites and present an opportunity to test the model in more demographically diverse, urban settings.

Monitoring and evaluation of the pilots is underway, with a formal evaluation due to be published in 2024. Key stakeholders have provided positive feedback, highlighting the enhanced engagement between courts and local partners such as local authorities and domestic abuse support services.

The grant is directly awarded to the PCC who is responsible for operating a competed grant process, the legal legislation empowering this grant is section 56 (1) of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004. The grant available to provider/s that will deliver support in Birmingham is £200,667 for 24/25, bidders are expected to illustrate through their application how the service will be shaped, this includes the structure of the team and a requirement of IDVA roles within the service. Local discretion can be used if any bidders wish to provide additional services, such as, but not limited to, travel and childcare vouchers, toiletries, and food vouchers.

Bidders are expected to demonstrate how their service will ensure support is available pre, during and post court as part of their delivery model.

## Aims and objectives of the Pathfinder Court

- Enhance outcomes for users of the family court, within private law cases, encompassing parent-victims of domestic abuse and their children, while ensuring effective representation of the child's perspective.
- Minimise the trauma experienced by victims of domestic abuse, including children, throughout legal proceedings, while advocating for non-adversarial, problem-solving approaches both before and during court proceedings for all families whenever feasible.
- Improve coordination and integration of responses to domestic abuse and all reform objectives within private law, fostering enhanced information sharing across criminal and family jurisdictions.
- Enhance court efficiency and resource allocation effectiveness to reduce order breakdown rates and revisits to court across all proceedings, with a specific focus on criminal and family cases related to domestic abuse.

## Expected Outcomes

Bidders will be expected to outline in their application how their activity will contribute to the following outcomes framework;

- Improved Family Court experience for non-abusive parent victims of domestic abuse and their children. It is expected that through their initial assessment the IDVA be able to identify primary DA victims which will be offered appropriate support.
- Improved children's experience of and (appropriate) participation in the court process, the DA support service would be expected to ensure a distinction of roles and responsibilities among them and agencies such as Cafcass to avoid duplication.
- Delivering a more efficient court process which reduces delays whilst ensuring that all orders are safe and appropriate to the case.
- Reduced re-traumatisation of domestic abuse victims, including children, that may be experienced during proceedings.
- Safeguarding the victim and children with the aim of limiting the opportunity for the abusive adult to commit coercive and controlling behaviour during proceedings. Risk assessments should be able to identify coercive and controlling behaviour posed by the abusive parent.

- The DA support service would be expected to identify stalking patterns/ behaviours and ensure the service is able to either, deliver specialist stalking assessments e.g. SASH and SAI or refer the survivor onto the Regional Stalking support service and work alongside their allocated ISAC.
- The DA support service would be expected to meet the diverse needs of victims with cultural competency<sup>3</sup> taking into consideration the demographic make-up of the Birmingham area. Bidders will be expected to demonstrate how they will meet these diverse needs with particular consideration given to language.
- Reduce the number of returning cases through a more sustainable court order.
- Demonstrate experience of multiagency working to meet the holistic needs of those you support e.g. mental health or substance use etc.
- Bidders are expected to show how they will deal with complex issues such as parental visitation/access rights, demonstrating how and with whom collaboration is required i.e. Cafcass, to ensure that victims are represented in the most appropriate way.
- Adopt a multi-agency approach to improve coordination between the Family Court and agencies, such as Cafcass, local authorities and the police, and the way allegations of domestic abuse and other risks of harm are dealt with.

## Process of the Pathfinder Pilot and Role of Family Court IDVA

Upon identification or allegation of domestic abuse subsequent to an application to the court for child arrangements, Cafcass will refer the case to the DA Support Service. The DA Service will conduct a DASH risk assessment and, if necessary, provide specialised support post-assessment. The objective of the DASH risk assessment is as follows:

- ✓ To inform safety planning for the individual
- ✓ Assess the immediacy of risk
- ✓ Share findings with Cafcass to incorporate into the Child Impact Report, alongside other sources of information.

When it is apparent from the outset, through an application or supporting documents, that the child or either party is receiving support from a domestic abuse service, inquiries should be initiated promptly. This proactive approach will enable Cafcass to establish an accurate understanding of the domestic abuse dynamics within the family and any safeguarding concerns.

**Please note** - Referrals to DA Support Services are not contingent on gender. The PCC expects that all primary victims navigating the family court system receive appropriate support. It is the

---

<sup>3</sup>[Competencies, Training and Development Framework for Tackling Exploitation and Abuse.](#)

responsibility of the bidder to provide assurance on how they will deliver support in alignment with The Respect Standards Toolkit. The initial risk assessment conducted by the IDVA should be capable of identifying the primary victim. There is no expectation for the DA Support Service to assist the adult/parent identified as the secondary victim of domestic abuse or the one making counter-allegations, as this could pose a conflict of interest if the IDVA support is provided by the same organisation. However, the DA Support Service should facilitate an onward referral to an appropriate service if necessary.

## Expected numbers and demand

The Family Court at Birmingham Civil and Family Justice Centre receives on average, 35 cases per week and 80% of these are DA-related, a total of 1820 cases go through the court per year suggesting that an estimated 1456 cases would be flagged to be DA. The figures provided do not however, give contextual information on the numbers of those alleging DA that take up the offer or would want to take up the offer for advocacy i.e. IDVA, as this role is not currently commissioned in the region. Based on the figures provided, bidders will be expected to demonstrate how will they will manage demand in line with the budget provided. The referral figures will help inform future commissioning so requirements on reporting or service delivery may alter to accommodate changing needs.

## Outputs

DA support services are required to collate the following outputs;

- Number of cases referred
- Number of successful contacts
- Number of consents to DASH assessment and a report created
- Average DASH score
- Number of cases supported through family court
- Instances of in-court IDVA support conducted for Pathfinder cases

## Performance review and monitoring requirements

Reporting will be required on a quarterly basis and will include a qualitative narrative report, a quantitative report and a financial report submitted to the project lead. The recipient will engage in regular reviews with the project lead (dates and times to be provided by Project Lead). The recipient will join the OPCC provider network (dates and times to be provided by Project Lead). The recipient must be open to engage with evaluation partners, and provide quantitative and qualitative service data to inform the developing evidence base and support performance monitoring. Recipients will also be required to demonstrate satisfaction with the service using



both qualitative and quantitative methodology. During the mobilisation period, there is an expectation for a partnership discussion to take place weekly, times and dates are to be confirmed by the Project Lead.

## Safeguarding

- The Recipient must carry out the project in accordance with all applicable laws, regulations and best practice to safeguard vulnerable people and children (including conducting disclosure and barring service checks and restrictions or vetting where applicable and regular review of policies and procedures).
- The recipient must have a Safeguarding Children / Child Protection Policy in place that has been reviewed in the past 12 months.
- The recipient must attach a copy of their Safeguarding Policy Statement / Child Protection Policy with the application.
- The bidder should ensure employees and volunteers working directly with children and young people on this project have a current enhanced DBS clearance.

The recipient will attend training as directed by the WMPCC/ Family Courts prior to the launch of the pilot including a requirement to attend relevant local safeguarding partnership (adults and children) where applicable.

## Staff recruitment, qualifications, support and standards

IDVAs would be required to hold a Safe Lives IDVA qualification or equivalent and be able to demonstrate knowledge and expertise in the following areas;

- Significant proven experience of providing emotional and practical support to survivors of domestic abuse
- Experience of identifying and responding to the risks and needs of survivors of domestic abuse
- Knowledge of domestic abuse legislation and best practice
- Proven track record of managing a caseload, including support planning, risk assessing and multi-agency working.
- Knowledge and or experience of the family court processes
- Experience of attending court in a professional capacity would be desirable
- Experience of crisis management, risk minimisation and of making decisions in difficult situations
- Experience of providing, non-judgemental, non-directive and confidential support to individuals.
- Knowledge and experience of Safeguarding Practices and Procedures.

## Living wage

The Recipient and / or its sub-contractors should pay as a minimum the real living wage to all its or their as applicable employees, staff or contract workers. The rates of pay required under this clause are as stipulated by the Living Wage Foundation from time to time and are available on their website: [https://www.livingwage.org.uk/what-real-living-wage?qclid=EAAlQobChMIxLKvrtjX4qIVFeDtCh0FDwEYEAAYASAAEgKXQ\\_D\\_BwE](https://www.livingwage.org.uk/what-real-living-wage?qclid=EAAlQobChMIxLKvrtjX4qIVFeDtCh0FDwEYEAAYASAAEgKXQ_D_BwE)

## Timescales for the project implementation

The timeline for this grant agreement is as follows. This is an approximate estimate and subject to change.

<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Milestone</b>
23 <sup>rd</sup> Feb 2024	Competitive tender opens on find a grant
8 <sup>th</sup> March 2024	Deadline for any clarification questions
15 <sup>th</sup> March 2024	Publish answers to clarification questions
25 <sup>th</sup> March 2024	Competitive tender closes 9am
3 <sup>rd</sup> April 2024	Evaluation moderation session
8 <sup>th</sup> April 2024	Award Notification
24 <sup>th</sup> April 2024	Unified training –for DA support provider, Cafcass and the Family Court Judiciary
28 <sup>th</sup> May 2024	Pathfinder Court to Commence

**All bids must be submitted to Chelsea Lloyd on [chelsea.lloyd@westmidlands.police.uk](mailto:chelsea.lloyd@westmidlands.police.uk) by 9am on the 25<sup>th</sup> March 2025. Late applications will not be accepted.**