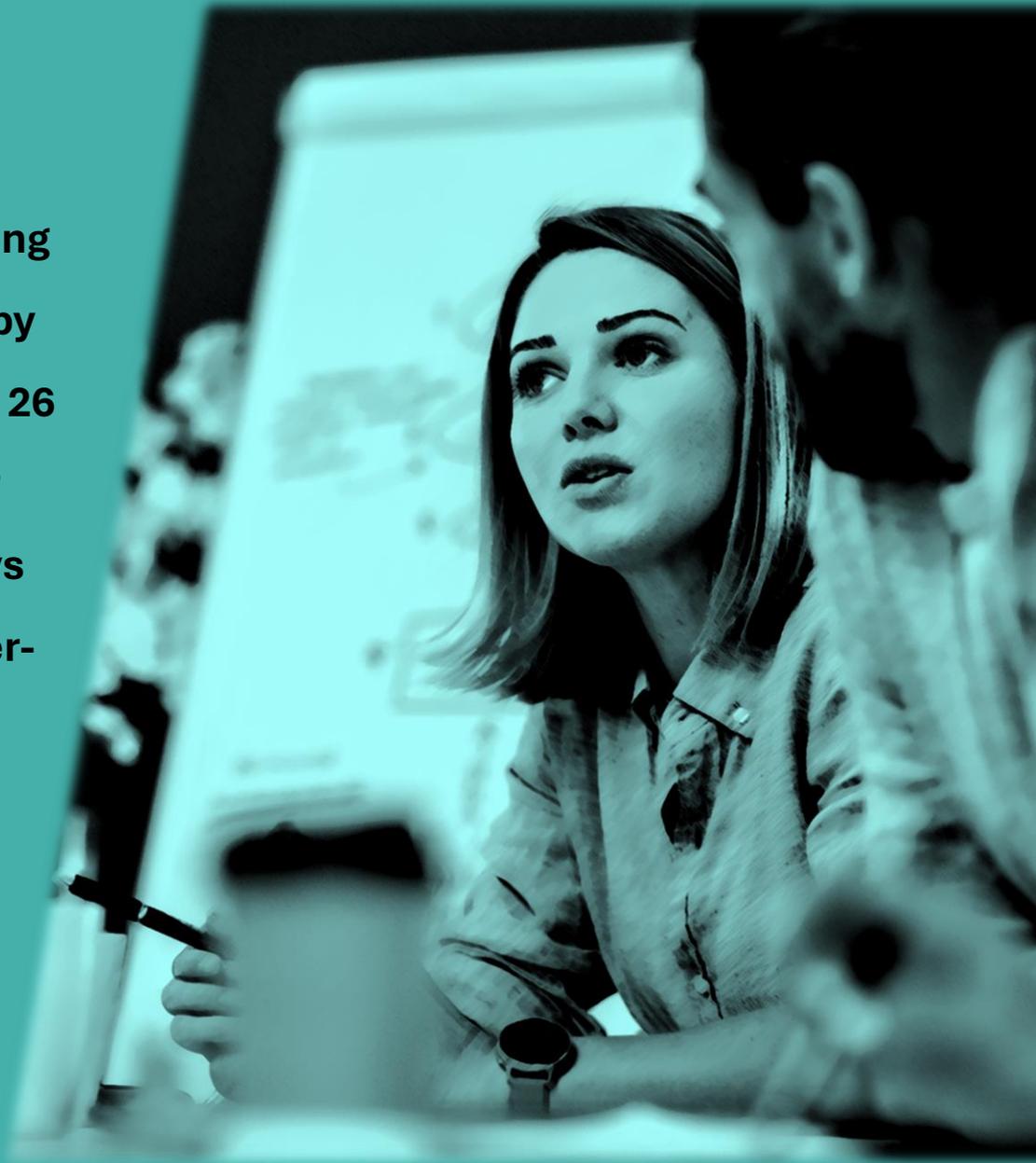


Introduction to the Disclosure Scheme for Domestic Abuse Scotland (DSDAS)

Summary of Learning Session delivered by Police Scotland on 26 November 2025 for Edinburgh's 16 Days of Action on Gender-Based Violence Campaign



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Equally Safe Edinburgh Committee



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Introduction

This resource is a summary of a learning session kindly delivered by Police Scotland to professionals in Edinburgh. The session took place on 27 November 2025 in the context of the 16 Days of Action on Gender Based Violence Campaign.

Speakers

Detective Superintendent Adam Brown

Adam is the Detective Superintendent for Domestic Abuse, based in Glasgow, following many years of supporting the Domestic Abuse Investigation Unit (DAIU) in Edinburgh. Adam's team oversees strategic elements and training around domestic abuse for Police Scotland. This also dictates Police Scotland's response to Domestic Abuse.

Detective Sergeant Euan Stobie

Euan Stobie is one of 4 Detective Sergeants in the DAIU in Edinburgh. This department is replicated throughout Scotland. Euan has been in post for 5 years and finds it very fulfilling to support people vulnerable to domestic abuse who need help.

Euan works in the Safeguarding Team within the DAIU. They are responsible for the DSDSAS, carrying out safeguarding visits, and participating in MARAC and MATAAC meetings and case conferences.

There are two other teams in the DAIU: The Significant Inquiry Team who deal with very serious Domestic Abuse crimes as well as a team that works on less serious domestic abuse crimes but that are part of longer and more complex inquiries.

History of the DSDAS

The DSDAS was introduced in October 2015 following successful pilots in Ayrshire and Aberdeen. It provides a mechanism for Police Scotland to disclose to someone that their partner has a history of Domestic Abuse. The legal basis of the constitution of Police Scotland, namely the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012.

The DSDAS came through 'Clare's Law'. Clare Wood was a 36-year-old woman who was murdered in England by George Appleton in 2009.

Clare and George met on Facebook and started a relationship. Claire ended that relationship after 6 months because of his behaviour: he was violent, damaging property and harassing her, trying to assault her after she ended the relationship. She complained to Police England and there was a restraining order. Unfortunately, this culminated in George murdering Clare in 2009.

After the investigation, it turned out George had a history of violence, particularly towards women. Clare's father campaigned that information should be disclosed to women who fear they may be at risk from a new partner, as Clare may not have died had she known George's offending history. Clare's father campaigned for 5 years, until 'Claire's Law' was introduced in England in 2014 under 'Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme'.

Prior to Clare's Law, a person's offending history was confidential. The Police were not allowed to disclose it as it's a data protection issue. The DSDAS scheme gives Police a way to disclose offending history certain circumstances.

This is a legislated process with some limitations. Its aim is not to encourage people to end relationships but to help them make informed decisions about their own safety and the safety of their children. It's never about criticism, questioning choices or telling people what to do. The scheme is about telling people what they need to know so they can make the best decision that's right for them. Police Scotland and partners will support people through this process.

Pathways to accessing the DSDAS Scheme

The Power to Tell

Police Scotland can proactively approach a person who is in a relationship with someone that Police Scotland know has been abusive in the past. This tends to occur, for example, after Police have attended an incident and realised that one member of the couple has a history of abuse. This could be, for example, if a couple are pulled over for dangerous driving or shoplifting, and it transpires that one of them has a history of domestic abuse.

It could also be through finding out about a new relationship through processes like MARAC/MATAC¹ or engagement with partner agencies. In those circumstances, Police Scotland can submit an application, but it means that the person at risk of domestic abuse in the relationship might not know why the Police want to speak to them.

The Power to Tell Pathway is the most common. Most referrals are generated by Police Scotland because part of their role is to review every domestic incident from a safeguarding perspective. This is to see if there is anything more they can do to keep someone safe, and this includes considering suitability for a DSDAS application.

¹ MARAC: Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference: a process for safeguarding victims of domestic abuse that is likely to culminate in homicide.

MATAC: Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination: A police-led process targeting people who abuse their partners in the most prolific and dangerous ways.

When Police Scotland are aware of a new relationship and they have information that one of the people has a domestic abuse history, Police Scotland will submit a Power to Tell application on behalf of the person at risk. That doesn't always have to be from a domestic abuse incident: If there's been an altercation where no crime has been committed but police are called, they would go along, note people's details, and record them on their systems. They would then look at this within their domestic abuse recording system, identify the relationship, submit an application form and request a disclosure to be made.

Other Power to Tell applications can come from professionals in partner organisations such as Social Work, Women's Aid, education, Health and others who become aware of a new relationship through their interactions with the people they work with. For example, if a Justice Worker is working with someone with an offending history, and the person discloses to the worker that they are in a new relationship, the worker might submit an application to Police Scotland. The same can be done if, for example, a Health Visitor visits a new mother who tells them that she is in a new relationship and has concerns about her partner's behaviour– the Health Visitor can then submit an application on the mother's behalf.

The Right to Ask

The 'Right to Ask' is the mechanism through which anyone can make an application to the scheme. This could be the potential person at risk, friends, family members, colleagues, etc. Police Scotland would process this application, research it and decide whether there is anything to disclose and if disclosing is the right thing to do. The Police would not deliver the information to the applicant, but to the person at risk themselves. Where the person at risk has known vulnerabilities, Police Scotland can make the disclosure to their guardian or to a person who acts as a guardian.

Anyone can submit a DSDAS application on behalf of someone else. However, **Police Scotland will only make a disclosure to the person at risk of domestic abuse in a relationship – not to the person making the application (if different).**

When someone submits an application, Police Scotland will contact them in the first instance to find out more information about their concerns and the context of the relationship. People who are concerned about themselves can also submit an application. There are different scenarios of how people make applications:

If the person is in a relationship where they feel at risk: They may have experienced abusive behaviour from their partner and they might want to know if their partner has done this to someone else.

If the person is in a new relationship after the end of an abusive relationship

They may feel apprehensive about their new relationship, regardless of whether the new partner has been abusive to them.

An acquaintance or family member submits an application on behalf of a person at risk

The person making the application might feel apprehensive or uncomfortable about the partner of the person at risk. They may have an intuition that something's wrong. They may also have been told by the person at risk that the partner has been abusive to them.

A person who has left an abusive relationship learns that their ex-partner is now in a new relationship and inform Police Scotland about the new relationship

One **limitation** of the scheme is if the relationship has ended: Sometimes people submit retrospective applications to get confirmation that they're not alone in the abuse they have experienced. Unfortunately, the scheme is only to help people risk assess and manage the risk to themselves at the present time. Police Scotland will consider these applications too, but it's unusual that they would make a disclosure to an ex-partner. However, the decision is based on the level of risk and ongoing contact. There is no set answer, everything is assessed on a case-by-case basis.

How to make a DSDAS Application

Please note that applications are tied to the address of the person who might be at risk. If they have always lived in Scotland, then Police Scotland will carry out all the investigations. However, if they live in England or Wales, then it will fall to the local Police forces to carry out the investigation and disclosure.

- The most common way is through the Police Scotland Website's [DSDAS online form](#). This is the simplest method, and the form takes about 5 minutes to fill in.
- Applications can be made by phoning Police Scotland's non-emergency number on 101.
- By passing information on to a Police Officer anywhere.

The Stages of the DSDAS Process

The DSDAS Process is legally time-bound. This means that from application to disclosure, there is a maximum advent of 45 days, although in reality, the process usually takes a lot less time. The reason for the 45 day allowance is because in 2015, capacity to carry out research was much more limited, and all decision-making

meetings took place in person. This took longer to organise, whereas now research can be carried out a lot faster and meetings can be held online. It also means that emergency meetings can be organised and ran much more quickly at shorter notice. The DSDAS is now more like 'Business as Usual' for Police Scotland.

The 5 stages of the DSDAS Process

1. Form Submission

Police Scotland will receive the encrypted application form. They will decrypt it, add it to their system and allocate it to an officer. The officer will read the form, assess the level of risk and how urgent it is. They will explore whether there are ongoing crimes and ongoing concerns about the person at risk.

Sometimes people will use this form to report a crime. In such situations, Police Scotland will try to make contact to establish the circumstances, risk assess the situation and respond in the most appropriate way.

2. Initial Contact with the Applicant (within 3 days)

Police Scotland will try to make initial contact with the applicant within 3 days of receiving the application to find out more information about the context of the relationship and the application. This is regardless of whether the applicant is requesting information for themselves or for another person.

3. Research (within 12 days)

Police Scotland will research information held on the person named in the application as the individual causing concern. At this stage, they will explore any risks or concerns. This is primarily focusing on risks and concerns relating to domestic abuse, but not only: each case is assessed on a case-by-case basis and assessed for any risks that could be posed to a person's partner.

If there have been no concerns, then the application would not progress to the next level. However, if there is information that indicates that the person could pose some kind of risk to their partner, then the application would progress to the next stage, to decide the best way to address concerns identified and how to respond.

The length of time it takes to do research might vary, but it will not take longer than 12 days. The remit of Police Scotland is limited to research they can only carry out in Scotland. If there are prior offences or concerns that came to the attention of the Police in England or Wales, then the local Police divisions will need to carry out the research and send information back to Police Scotland.

Even if there is no prior domestic abuse offences or incidents, depending on what the research reveals, Police Scotland might still want to visit the person at risk and discuss

safeguarding, or ask them whether there is anything they would like to disclose. At this stage a decision will be made as to whether the application will proceed to the next stage or not. Approximately 55% of all applications make it to Stage 5 of the DSDAS process, and this proportion remains steady despite the dramatic increase in the number of applications over the years.

4. Decision-Making Forum (DMF) (within 20 days)

The DMF is a joint meeting between Police Scotland and partners. If the research has identified that there may be an offending history that needs to be considered for disclosure, then the application will be discussed at the DMF. Police Scotland will present the circumstances of the application, the history, propose a plan of how and when things need to happen. The discussion will decide whether the disclosure will go ahead or not.

The DMF is expected to place within 20 days of the application being submitted. This timescale was based on the initial model from 2015. In reality, DMF meetings take place in Edinburgh every week at the moment so applications are processed much faster. However, there may be unexpected issues and delays. Police Scotland document everything they do and make lots of efforts to pass on the disclosure.

The Structure and content of the DMF

The DMF is Chaired by Police Scotland and attended by a minimum of 2 partners. In Edinburgh, partners include Social Work, Health, Edinburgh Women's Aid, and Criminal Justice Social Work. The benefit of including partners is that they can bring additional information and context to the meeting to help assess risk, better understand vulnerabilities and make a more informed decision about whether to make a disclosure.

During the meeting:

- 1) Police Scotland will present the case and their research findings. This includes:
 - a) Information about the person at risk
 - b) Information about the person who might pose a risk
 - c) How the application came about
 - d) The offending history of the person who might pose a risk.

The presentation will stick to risks associated with domestic abuse offences. Sometimes other, non-domestic abuse related issues might be discussed if they relate to risks in the context of a relationship. However, if the final decision is to make a disclosure, additional non- Domestic Abuse information will not be included. It is included in the meeting only to provide partners with a more rounded view about the person who may pose a risk and what kind of risk(s) that might be.

Coming to a decision:

The DMF discussion will focus on the merits of the application on the basis of three principles. Would a disclosure be:

- a. Lawful
- b. Necessary
- c. Proportional

The DMF members will come to a decision on whether to proceed with a disclosure or not. If there is no consensus on whether to proceed with a disclosure, the Chair (Police Scotland) has the final say, and the Chair will speak after all partners have had a chance to provide their input. Disagreements are very unusual, however, even if the Chair disagreed with all members' views, there would be additional discussion before coming to a decision.

Complexities of the DMF:

There are occasions where the application might apply to both members of a relationship. This can be situations where both people pose a risk to each other as they both have a history of domestic abuse incidents or offences. The DMF will consider such circumstances jointly.

There are also occasions where someone's domestic abuse history has been in the context of 'violent resistance' – this means that they have primarily been the victim previously, but they have lashed out against the abusive partner. This can be identified with support from partners. On such occasions, a disclosure would not proceed as it would not be considered proportional. The discussion will explore the balance of power and the level of risk. If the risk goes the other way to what was initially suspected, then a disclosure would not go ahead.

Deciding on whether to make a disclosure:

The DMF helps Police Scotland make an informed decision as to whether it is lawful, necessary and proportional to the information available. Sometimes, there may be a strong feeling as to what the outcome of a DMF meeting will be, but sometimes this turns out not to be the case. The inclusion of partners in this process really helps to support discussions around proportionality and justification of delivering a disclosure and determining if it's the right thing to do. At the end of each case discussion, all partners decide whether they will or won't make a disclosure.

If the decision is to make a disclosure

If the decision is to make a disclosure, then Police Scotland will propose appropriate wording for the disclosure during the DMF and request the approval of the group. They will read it out and ask partners about what they think should be included and whether there is a risk or significant risk. Partners will input into this process.

The proposed wording will contain information about the level of risk Police Scotland believe the victim/potential victim to be in, any prior convictions by the person who has been abusive in the past and they may also include information about investigations that may not have resulted in reports to the Procurator Fiscal.

The example disclosure below is fictional and not based on a specific case. It is intended to serve as an example disclosure that Police Scotland might make to someone they believe to be at risk from domestic abuse.

Example Disclosure

Police Scotland holds information that [Name of Person] has been the perpetrator of domestic abuse towards two partners.

Police Scotland would normally tell the potential victim how many previous partners the abuse has targeted. They would also include the date range to show accurately if this is a prolonged pattern of behaviour, and if it's recent or historical.

[Name of Person] has been reported for a number of violent offences including assaulting a partner by punching, kicking and grabbing them to the throat.

The wording here might be different. It may include more or less detail, but it will always represent what's happened as accurately as possible. This is to make sure it's fair towards the person who is receiving the disclosure so that they can make an informed decision.

[Name of Person] has also been investigated for behaving in an abusive manner towards a different partner by shouting, swearing and making threats to harm them.

This paragraph includes slightly different terminology. The previous paragraph uses the term 'reported' which can mean that the Person has been investigated, arrested, charged and passed on to the courts for prosecution. The term 'investigated' in this paragraph, means that there has been an investigation but that the person has not necessarily been charged or convicted. Police Scotland can still make the disclosure even if there hasn't been a conviction, as this gives the person a fuller picture to help them make a decision.

It is assessed that [Name of Person] poses a risk to your safety.

The last paragraph might state that the person poses a 'risk' or a 'significant risk' depending on what offences are being disclosed. It is important that the disclosure is fair but impactful if the risk is significant to enable the person at risk to have accurate information to base their future decisions.

How information is disclosed

The above disclosure is an accurate example of a disclosure that a person at risk of domestic abuse might receive. The wording is agreed at the DMF meeting with partners. Partners are integral to this process because they support discussions around proportionality, justification of delivering a disclosure and determining if it's the right thing to do. They discuss safest and most appropriate means to deliver the disclosure.

When Police Scotland make the disclosure, they don't deviate from the agreed script. They may need to expand on the terminology, for example to explain the difference between someone being 'reported' or 'investigated' for a crime but they would not expand to provide additional information or details.

When an application has been made through the Right to Ask route, then organising the meeting to make the disclosure is more straightforward: this is because the person themselves has requested the information.

Making a 'Power to tell' disclosure can be more challenging: not everyone wants to speak to Police Scotland. This can sometimes cause delays and push the disclosure outside the designated timeline.

When organising to meet the person at risk, only Police Scotland can actually disclose information. However, often a representative from a partner organisation might accompany Police officers when meeting the person to make the disclosure as a way of offering a softer approach that promotes aftercare, ongoing advice and support. This partner can be someone from the third sector or someone the person at risk may already know such as a social worker. It is important to make sure that immediate support is available, as well as after the disclosure. The same process is followed in England and Wales.

The outcome of a disclosure can vary. Sometimes people are already aware of previous abusive behaviour because their partner has already told them or because they have been informed by other people. If it's a 'Right to Ask' application and it's a new relationship, people might tell Police Scotland that they will end the relationship at the point of disclosure. This will prompt Police officers to update the relationship status on their system. However, sometimes people might accept the risk level and decide to stay in the relationship. They may wish to take it into consideration and decide what to do in due course.

Police Scotland and partner organisations will offer support regardless of the person's decision. They can continue to offer safeguarding support and advice without recording any crimes. They can also offer safety information, direct numbers to helplines and support services, or make direct referrals to specialist organisations. Having that face to face interaction is really helpful. Research in England identified that aftercare is really

important. When Police deliver the disclosure, this can be a distressing and impactful experience for the person at risk so it's vital that aftercare and support is in place.

It's also very difficult to define success for the DSDAS as Police Scotland can't monitor what happens after a disclosure. People are asked at the disclosure meeting what their thoughts are and what they might do, however, ending the relationship is not the ultimate aim – sharing the information and helping people to make informed decisions is.

Summary and Conclusions

Since its implementation, the scheme has grown significantly. In ten years, we have delivered around 20,000 disclosures following 35,000 applications. In the first 12 months there was a 598% increase in disclosures and 654% increase in applications. This increase is partly due to the rise in social media and TV shows that featured Claire's Law. On average, a decision to disclose is made approximately 55% of the time, and this proportion has remained constant regardless of the number of applications received.

Police Scotland process around 600 applications a month or 20 a day. As of today, we are processing 14% more applications than we were at the same time last year, and application numbers increase every year. The biggest increase we have seen in the last year has been through the 'right to ask' pathway. Raising awareness has been really effective in increasing the number of applications.

However, the success of the DSDAS also brings challenges. This year, the Edinburgh DAU has been looking at how we can streamline the process and remove some of the admin and bureaucracy. We hope that this will allow us quicker disclosures as well as more disclosures that are trauma informed and that include aftercare.

Work is also under way with the Scottish Government to examine the impact, scope and reach of the scheme and how this can improve. Some surveys have indicated that there is still a lack of awareness of how to access the scheme, especially for seldom heard communities.