Progression Model (Early Release of Prisoners Scheme) and the Role of MARAC in Protecting Victims Practice guidance

Introduction:

The early release of high-risk domestic abuse perpetrators presents significant safeguarding challenges. Release can increase the risk of serious harm because perpetrators may seek to re-establish contact, retaliate against victims, intensify coercive control, or undermine victims' recovery and safety planning. Victims are often unaware of release dates, may have relocated, rebuilt their lives, or be engaging with new support services that do not have current intelligence about the perpetrator's movements.

MARAC should therefore be utilised as a proactive risk management and victim protection process before, during and after release. It provides the mechanism through which police, probation, prison services, victim services, housing, social care, health and other relevant agencies can share intelligence, assess emerging risk and implement coordinated safety plans.

The period surrounding release should be treated as a trigger event for MARAC consideration, particularly where:

- The perpetrator has a history of high-risk domestic abuse.
- The victim remains assessed as at high risk.
- There are ongoing stalking, harassment or coercive control concerns.
- The relationship has recently ended
- Child safeguarding issues are present.
- There are multiple victims or serial perpetrator concerns.
- The perpetrator has breached previous orders or licence conditions.
- There are concerns regarding housing, relocation or victim anonymity.

In high-risk cases MARAC can ensure that agencies move beyond simply notifying victims and instead create a coordinated, multi-agency response focused on preventing further harm.

Key Recommendation

High-risk domestic abuse perpetrators being released early should automatically trigger a structured MARAC review process that begins before release, coordinates multi-agency action during transition back into the community, and continues through a period of enhanced monitoring afterwards. MARAC should act not only as an information-sharing forum, but as an active public protection mechanism that ensures victims are informed, supported and safeguarded while agencies collectively manage perpetrator risk.

How MARAC Should Be Utilised: Agency Guidance – Minimum Safe Practice

Automatic MARAC Trigger Prior to Release

The introduction of a policy that:

- All high-risk domestic abuse perpetrators scheduled for early release are automatically reviewed through MARAC
- Where notification is made reviews occur sufficiently in advance of release (e.g. 6-8 weeks before release).
- High-risk domestic abuse perpetrators are identified through relevant multi-agency information and intelligence, not solely by the offence of conviction
- Cases previously discussed at MARAC are re-opened where risks have changed.
- Repeat and serial perpetrators are escalated regardless of current DASH assessment status.

Enhanced Information Sharing Before Release

In high risk cases MARAC partners should receive:

- Confirmed release date.
- Licence conditions.
- MAPPA status (where applicable).
- Current risk assessments.
- Behaviour in prison.
- Completion/non-completion of perpetrator programmes.
- Intelligence relating to victim fixation.
- Known associates and support networks.
- Planned accommodation arrangements.
- Substance misuse concerns.
- Mental health concerns.
- Recent threats or communications made during imprisonment.
- Previous breaches of protective orders or licence conditions.
- Previous MARAC involvement and outstanding actions from earlier safety plans

This enables agencies to identify new and emerging risks before release occurs.

Pre-Release Victim Contact and Safety Planning

Victims should be proactively contacted and offered:

- Updated risk assessment.
- Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) support.
- Personalised safety planning.
- Technology and cyber safety advice.
- Home security assessments.
- Emotional support and advocacy.
- Advice regarding stalking behaviours.
- Information about licence conditions.
- Guidance on reporting breaches immediately.

Victim contact should occur before release, not after the perpetrator has returned to the community.

Multi-Agency Safety Planning Meeting

Prior to release, agencies should jointly develop:

Victim Protection/Safety Plan
Including:

- Safe accommodation arrangements.
- Sanctuary schemes.
- Relocation support where necessary.
- Personal alarms.
- Target hardening measures.
- School safeguarding arrangements.
- Workplace safety plans.
- Child contact safeguards.

Perpetrator Management Plan
Including:

- Monitoring arrangements.
- Licence compliance checks.
- Curfew arrangements.
- Exclusion zones.
- Electronic monitoring where available.
- Substance misuse treatment requirements.
- Behavioural programme engagement.

Immediate Post-Release Monitoring
The first weeks following release often represent heightened risk.

MARAC partners should implement:

- Enhanced police monitoring.
- Probation welfare and compliance visits.
- Intelligence gathering regarding victim contact attempts.
- Monitoring of social media activity where appropriate.
- Checks regarding exclusion zones.
- Rapid response arrangements for reported breaches.

Utilisation of Professional Curiosity
Agencies should actively seek intelligence rather than waiting for incidents to occur.

This could include:

- Housing providers monitoring neighbourhood concerns.
- Children's services reviewing family impacts.
- Health services reporting relevant safeguarding information.
- Police neighbourhood teams gathering community intelligence.
- Probation sharing concerns relating to compliance or attitudes.

Robust Management of Licence Conditions
MARAC should ensure all agencies understand:

- What the licence conditions are.
- Who monitors compliance.
- Escalation routes.
- Thresholds for recall.

Conditions might include:

- Non-contact with victim.
- Geographic exclusion zones.
- Restriction zones.
- Curfews.

- Restrictions on technology use.
- Attendance at treatment programmes.
- Restrictions on entering certain localities.

Child Safeguarding Integration

Where children are involved:

- Child protection plans should be reviewed.
- Schools informed where appropriate.
- Family court proceedings considered.
- Contact arrangements reassessed.
- Information shared with MASH and children's social care.

Children are often directly impacted by release arrangements and should be considered within the overall safety strategy.

Stalking and Coercive Control Assessment

Particular attention should be given to:

- Victim fixation.
- Obsessive behaviours.
- Social media monitoring.
- Third-party contact attempts.
- Economic abuse.
- Digital abuse.
- Coercive control indicators.

Many domestic abuse homicides are preceded by escalating stalking and controlling behaviours.

Serial and Repeat Perpetrator Identification

Release should trigger consideration of whether the perpetrator:

- Has multiple known victims.
- Has offended across force areas.
- Has known associates who facilitate abuse
- Meets local serial perpetrator criteria.
- Requires specialist perpetrator panel oversight.
- Should be considered for enhanced management arrangements.

MARAC intelligence can be critical in revealing patterns that may not be visible through a single case lens.

Consideration of Additional Protective Measures

Agencies should review whether further protections are required, including:

- Domestic Abuse Protection Orders (DAPOs).
- Stalking Protection Orders.
- Non-molestation Orders.
- Restraining Orders.
- Child Arrangement Order restrictions.
- Civil injunctions.
- Housing-based protection measures.

Victim Notification Pathways

MARAC should ensure victims:

- Receive timely, accurate release information.

- Understand supervision arrangements.
- Know who to contact if concerned.
- Have access to support services[1].
- Are informed of any breaches that affect their safety.

Communication should be coordinated so victims are not repeatedly required to tell their story to multiple agencies.

Ongoing MARAC Review Following Release

Rather than closing cases immediately after release:

- Schedule follow-up reviews.
- Undertake 30-, 60- and 90-day risk reviews.
- Escalate emerging concerns quickly.
- Reassess risk where breaches occur.
- Maintain oversight until risk demonstrably reduces.

Data and Intelligence Capture

MARAC should collect information about:

- Reoffending.
- Licence breaches.
- Victim outcomes.
- Repeat victimisation.
- Recall to custody.
- Multi-agency interventions.

This can inform local learning and improve future responses.

Legislative and Policy Framework

The early release of high-risk domestic abuse perpetrators should not be viewed solely as a prison or probation issue. It sits within a wider statutory framework that places duties on agencies to assess risk, share information, safeguard victims and manage perpetrators collaboratively.

Key legislation and guidance include:

Domestic Abuse Act 2021

The **Domestic Abuse Act 2021** establishes the statutory definition of domestic abuse, including coercive and controlling behaviour, economic abuse and psychological abuse. It also emphasises the importance of coordinated multi-agency responses and strengthened perpetrator management arrangements. The accompanying statutory guidance specifically identifies **MARACs as a key mechanism for managing high-risk domestic abuse cases** and facilitating information sharing across agencies.

Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance (2022)

The statutory guidance issued under the Domestic Abuse Act highlights that effective multi-agency working is essential for victim safety and specifically references MARAC as an important forum for coordinating responses to high-risk cases. The guidance also emphasises that agencies should actively assess and manage perpetrator behaviour, not solely respond to victim risk.

Controlling or Coercive Behaviour Statutory Guidance (2023)

The statutory guidance issued under the Serious Crime Act underscores the necessity for multi-agency response even where other criminal or civil orders might not apply. It directly addresses developments

[1] https://womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/i-work-with-survivors/prisoner-early-release-guidance/community-services-support-fund/

such as technology-facilitated abuse, economic abuse, post-separation tactics, and specific patterns like abuse perpetrated using immigration or faith arguments.

Criminal Justice Act 2003 and MAPPA

The **Criminal Justice Act 2003** provides the statutory basis for **Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)**. MAPPA exists to manage offenders who pose a risk of serious harm and requires police, probation and prison services to work collaboratively with partner agencies. Domestic abuse perpetrators may fall within MAPPA categories where serious harm risks are identified. MARAC and MAPPA should therefore operate as complementary arrangements rather than separate processes.

MAPPA Guidance (2024)

Current MAPPA guidance includes specific sections concerning domestic abuse and stalking offenders. It emphasises:

- Multi-agency risk assessment.
- Information sharing.
- Victim safeguarding.
- Risk management planning.
- Recall and enforcement processes.

Where a perpetrator is managed through MAPPA, clear information-sharing pathways between MAPPA and MARAC should be established to ensure victim-focused safety planning.

Victims' Code and Victim Contact Scheme

Under the **Victims' Code** and the **Victim Contact Scheme (VCS)**, eligible victims have rights to receive information regarding offender release, licence conditions and opportunities to request victim-focused licence conditions. Victims should therefore receive coordinated communication via Victim Liaison Officers, with MARAC providing the forum to ensure this information is integrated into broader safety planning.

Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004

This legislation underpins several victim rights, including the statutory basis for the Victims' Code and broader responsibilities across criminal justice agencies to support and inform victims.

Information Sharing Requirements

The lawful basis for information sharing between agencies involved in MARAC and MAPPA is established through safeguarding responsibilities, public protection duties and data protection legislation. The statutory guidance accompanying the Domestic Abuse Act explicitly supports proportionate information sharing where necessary to prevent serious harm.

Enhanced Recommendations: How MARAC Should Be Used to Protect Victims Following Early Release

In addition to the operational recommendations already outlined, consideration could be given to adopting the following nationally consistent practices:

Strategic Recommendations

Make Early Release an Automatic MARAC Referral Trigger

Any domestic abuse perpetrator meeting one or more of the following criteria should automatically be considered for MARAC:

- Early release from custody.
- MAPPA Level 2 or 3 management.
- Previous MARAC involvement.
- History of strangulation, stalking or coercive control.
- Repeat high-risk perpetrator status.
- Multiple victims or serial offending history.

- Domestic Abuse Protection Order (DAPO) eligibility.
- Child safeguarding concerns.

Establish Mandatory Pre-Release MARAC Reviews

A multi-agency review should take place 8-12 weeks before release to:

- Assess current victim safety.
- Review changes in victim circumstances.
- Agree information-sharing approaches.
- Identify any further protection measures required.
- Confirm agency responsibilities.

Formalise MARAC-MAPPA Escalation Pathways

Every area should have a documented protocol covering:

- Referrals from MARAC into MAPPA.
- Referrals from MAPPA into MARAC.
- Joint risk reviews.
- Joint information-sharing arrangements.
- Escalation procedures where risk rapidly increases.

This reflects emerging good practice nationally and prevents high-risk perpetrators falling between systems.

Introduce Perpetrator-Centred Action Planning

MARAC action plans should contain specific actions aimed at disrupting perpetrator behaviour, such as:

- Active probation monitoring.
- Domestic abuse offender management.
- Stalking assessments.
- Intelligence-led police disruption activity.
- Digital monitoring where lawful.
- Referral into accredited perpetrator interventions.
- Enforcement of licence conditions.
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This aligns with recent SafeLives guidance encouraging MARACs to maintain a stronger focus on perpetrators alongside victim safety. Whilst we recognise public services such as probation are under significant strain the focus needs to be on ensuring they have the resources to ensure victim safety.

Require a Post-Release Risk Review

Mandatory review points could be established at:

- 14 days.
- 30 days.
- 90 days.
- Six months.
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These reviews should assess:

- Victim safety.
- Compliance with licence conditions.
- Known breaches.
- Escalation in stalking or coercive control.
- Emerging victims.

Treat Stalking Behaviour as a Critical Risk Indicator

Research consistently demonstrates the relationship between stalking behaviours and serious domestic abuse harm. MARAC reviews should specifically consider:

- Victim fixation.
- Monitoring behaviours.
- Third-party contact.
- Digital surveillance.
- Location tracking.
- Harassment through family members.

Child Safeguarding Reviews as Standard Practice

Where children are involved, MARAC should ensure

- MASH notification.
- Child safeguarding plan review.
- School notification where appropriate.
- Family court implications considered.
- Child contact arrangements reassessed.

Victim-Centred Notification Framework

MARAC should ensure victims are:

- Informed before release.
- Supported to understand licence conditions.
- Offered IDVA support.
- Enabled to influence additional victim-focused licence conditions via the Victim Contact Scheme.
- Given a clear escalation route if concerns arise.

Consider Additional Protective Measures Before Release

MARAC should routinely review whether agencies should pursue:

- Domestic Abuse Protection Orders (DAPOs).
- Stalking Protection Orders.
- Restraining Orders.
- Non-Molestation Orders.
- Occupation Orders.
- Child Arrangement Order restrictions.

Strengthen Performance Monitoring

MARACs should collect data on:

- Repeat victimisation after release.
- Licence breaches.
- Recall rates.
- Re-referrals to MARAC.
- Stalking incidents.
- Serious further offences.
- Victim outcomes.

This would create an evidence base for assessing whether current early release arrangements are effectively protecting victims.