Paloma

A PRACTICAL GUIDE

MARAC beyond paper and spreadsheets

For PCC offices and police forces. Ten minutes to read, with a self-check you can use whatever system you run today.

Why this guide

MARAC only works as well as the information behind it: accurate, current, shared securely and easy to act on. On paper or in a spreadsheet, that is hard to guarantee as caseloads, agencies and scrutiny grow.

This guide is for PCC offices, who commission and oversee domestic abuse services, and for police forces, whose MARAC coordinators run the process week to week. It is deliberately practical and product-neutral.

Where paper and spreadsheets break down

Most problems are not about effort. They come from tools that were never designed to hold sensitive, fast-moving, multi-agency information. Six pressure points come up again and again.

Version control

Several copies of the list circulate, and agencies prepare from an out-of-date one.

Actions and risk decisions are based on the wrong picture.

Access and security

Case lists are sent as email attachments or kept on broadly shared drives.

It is hard to limit who sees what, or to prove who has seen it.

Spotting repeats

Repeat victims are found by memory or by searching names by hand.

Spelling variants and changed addresses cause missed repeats.

Tracking actions

Actions sit in minutes and are chased by email.

Overdue actions are only found at the next meeting.

Reporting

Counts for referral source, repeat rate and agency

Audit trail

Records of what was shared, with whom and why are

attendance are compiled manually.

Answers to PCC and partnership questions are slow, and gaps in who is referred go unseen.

scattered.

It is difficult to evidence information-sharing decisions, retention and deletion.

A 10-point self-check

Tick what you can honestly say is true today. Anything left unticked is a place to start.

- [ ] Every case has one agreed record, with a named owner, that all attendees work from.
- [ ] We can say within five minutes how many cases are open and how many are repeats within 12 months.
- [ ] Each referral is logged with date received, referring agency and the reason it met the referral criteria.
- [ ] Papers reach attendees by a secure route, not routine email attachments, and old copies are removed.
- [ ] Access is limited to people who need it, and we can show who opened what and when.
- [ ] Every action has an owner, a due date and a status that someone reviews between meetings.
- [ ] We can show how many actions were closed on time and how many are overdue.
- [ ] Referral source and protected characteristics are recorded consistently, so we can see who is not being reached.
- [ ] Retention and deletion rules for MARAC records are written down and followed.
- [ ] Another coordinator could run next month's meeting from the records alone if the lead were away.

Quick wins this month, with no new software

Six changes cost nothing and fix most of the pressure points above.

1 **One master, one editor**

Keep a single master list with one named editor. Share it view-only through your secure platform, never as an emailed copy.

2 **Fixed columns**

Agree one set of columns: name format, date of birth, referrer, date received, repeat flag, action owner, due date and status.

3 **A repeat check before every meeting**

Search each new referral against the previous 12 months, including name variants and previous addresses, and flag matches.

4 **A 10-minute action chase**

Filter for overdue actions halfway between meetings and chase owners then, not at the next meeting.

5 **A five-number summary each month**

Report cases heard, repeats, referrals by source, overdue actions and agencies absent. Share it with your partnership board or PCC lead.

6 **One page of access and retention rules**

Write down who may see the records, where they are held and when they are deleted. Review the access list every quarter.

When to move to a MARAC system

SIGNS IT IS TIME

A spreadsheet stops being enough when compiling the information takes more effort than discussing it.

- Several coordinators work on the same list.
- More than a handful of agencies send updates.
- The PCC or partnership board asks questions you cannot answer without a manual count.
- There has been a near miss over who saw a record.

WHAT TO ASK ANY SUPPLIER

- **One secure record** with role-based access and a log of who opened or changed each case.
- **Repeat detection** that copes with name variants, changed addresses and date-of-birth errors.
- **Actions with owners, due dates and reminders,** plus a clear view of what is overdue.
- **Direct agency input,** so referrals and updates arrive without re-typing.
- **Built-in reporting** for repeats, referral source, attendance and equalities.
- **UK data hosting and recognised security standards,** such as ISO 27001 and Cyber Essentials.
- **Data you can take with you,** so you are never locked in.

Next steps and where to get help

Start with the self-check, then pick two of the quick wins to put in place before your next meeting. Repeat the self-check in three months to see what has changed.

Paloma builds software for the domestic abuse sector, including Reach. If it would help, we can talk through your self-check results, or how a MARAC system could fit your force or PCC area, with no obligation.

Contact us