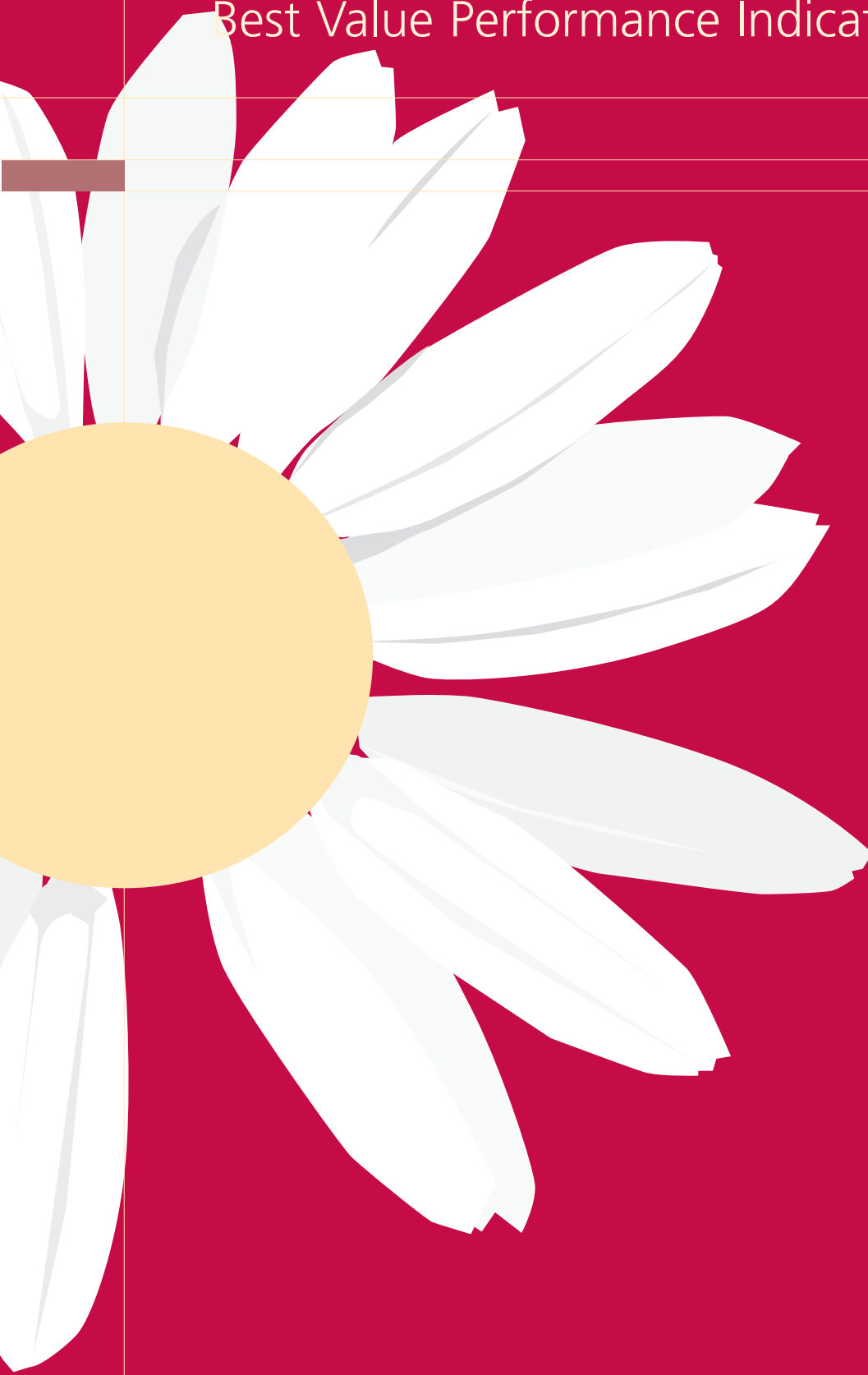




*Local Government Association*

# Implementing the new domestic violence Best Value Performance Indicator





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# introduction

Councils play a vital and central role in tackling domestic violence but too often this role is not sufficiently developed or valued. To highlight the need for sustained local authority action, and demonstrating that domestic violence is not an issue for the criminal justice system alone, the government has published a revised Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) for domestic violence.

So why do local authorities need to tackle domestic violence? Local government has statutory responsibilities to work in partnership with other agencies to reduce crime and disorder, and, with domestic violence making up 16 per cent of all violent crime, the impact is obvious. What is less well documented is the drain that domestic violence makes on local authority services such as housing and social services.

The revised domestic violence indicator (BV 225) came into force on 1 April 2005. Its purpose is to assess the overall provision and effectiveness of local authority services designed to help victims of domestic violence and prevent further domestic violence. It includes 11 questions covering a range of activities. The indicator will be measured as a percentage score of the number of questions to which an authority can answer 'yes'.

The Local Government Association (LGA) is concerned about the number of targets included in the indicator. We also have reservations about its scope (particularly the omission of county councils) and the lack of priority given to support, outreach and advocacy services for adults and children. However, we welcome the broader purpose of the new indicator as a mechanism to encourage good practice in what is a developing area of service provision.

During discussions on the draft indicator councils provided a great deal of excellent information about their experiences of working in this complex area of public policy. This document builds on that material to provide a commentary on the indicator as well as illustrating how authorities have been developing their responses.

The LGA is running a three-year, Home Office funded, domestic violence project aimed at identifying and promoting good practice of councils and partner organisations in addressing domestic violence. This publication forms a part of that project.

# why do local authorities need to tackle domestic violence?

Domestic violence:

- accounts for just under a fifth of all recorded violent crime;
- means that nearly half of all female murder victims are killed by a current or former partner;
- is a primary indicator of child protection needs - children will always be affected by witnessing abuse, even where they do not suffer direct violence themselves.

The total cost of domestic violence to services and the economy is £5.7 billion a year (excluding the human and emotional cost to individuals estimated at over £17 billion a year). These costs include:

- social services: the annual cost is nearly £.25 billion. This is overwhelmingly for children rather than for adults, especially those caught up in the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child abuse;
- housing: the provision of emergency housing (including local housing authority and housing association costs for housing those homeless because of domestic violence), housing benefit for such emergency housing, and refugees. This amounts to £.16 billion a year;
- economic output: lost economic output accounts for £2.7 billion a year. This is the cost of time off work due to injuries<sup>1</sup>.

Many people when asked about domestic violence think primarily about the response of the criminal justice system, but this is only a small part of the picture. Most cases do not go anywhere near the criminal justice system and even for those that do, individuals still need a broad range of support and services which cannot be provided by that system. The LGA believes that councils have a key role, alongside other agencies, in tackling domestic violence by safeguarding survivors, offering services to reduce the impact of the abuse and holding perpetrators to account.

As such, work to tackle domestic violence is part of local authorities' core business - not an optional extra.

It is easiest to understand this role by dividing it into three areas: councils' input onto local partnerships, their corporate response and direct service provision. All this is complimentary to the work undertaken by the voluntary sector, criminal justice professionals and other public service providers.

## As community leaders, councils play a key role in local partnerships

Local authorities have a statutory responsibility to work with other agencies to reduce crime and disorder in their local area. As domestic violence accounts for 16 per cent of all violent crime, it needs to be included within local crime reduction strategies. Most usually local domestic violence partnerships will develop a strategy and action plans, feeding into statutory partnerships. Of course violence is becoming a key concern for central government and domestic violence, if dealt with effectively, can be a key factor in reducing its incidence.

As one of the larger agencies, local authorities have a larger scale of resources to put into making local domestic violence partnerships work. They can also play a part in assisting the smaller, often voluntary sector agencies who are so crucial to the development of new services and approaches. Most often, local councils are the employers of local domestic violence co-ordinators with the attendant responsibilities for support and professional development.

Complex issues such as domestic violence cannot be tackled by agencies working in isolation; a multi-agency approach is essential. But while being a member of a partnership can take up lots of time and effort, on its own it achieves nothing. To be of use, partnerships need to take action both collectively and individually.

<sup>1</sup> The cost of domestic violence: Sylvia Walby (University of Leeds). Women and Equality Unit, DTI, September 2004

## Councils' corporate responsibilities

Councils need to develop their corporate response, for example by:

- agreeing a corporate strategy to tackle domestic violence and meet the needs of the community (including setting budgets);
- leading the domestic violence agenda locally;
- developing domestic violence employment policies for their staff;
- training relevant staff, both front-line and decision makers;
- publicity: to raise awareness and increase access to local services.

The Home Office guidance on multi-agency working published in 2000, recommends that every authority publish a clear policy on domestic violence, which is understood and complied with by its entire staff. They recommend that this policy should:

- cover the detail of good practice expected from council staff;
- promote good practice in individual departments of the authority;
- provide a framework of co-ordinated and measurable responses to domestic violence by all key departments, including social services, education, housing and youth and leisure services;
- include a clear emphasis on effective monitoring and evaluation and ensure that staff receive appropriate training<sup>2</sup>.

## Service provision

Councils also have a major role as the providers of essential services for people affected by domestic violence, especially housing, social care and education. These services need to be responsive to the needs and circumstances of the individual prioritising the safety of survivors. For example, local authorities have a duty to ensure local co-operation to improve well-being and to make arrangements to safeguard children in their local area. This should include identifying and responding to the needs of children living in households where there is domestic violence.

Obviously, much service provision for people affected by domestic violence is delivered outside of the statutory agencies. Yet councils are central to commissioning and supporting those local voluntary services which often struggle year-on-year to provide support for survivors and their children.

<sup>2</sup> Domestic violence: break the chain multi-agency guidance for addressing domestic violence: Home Office, May 2002

# Best Value Performance Indicators and the CPA process – what does it all mean?

The Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) was first proposed in 2001, and introduced in 2002, with the aim of helping local councils in England to focus on improving the services they provide. The Audit Commission now regularly assesses the performance of every council in England, through the CPA process. It brings together evidence from a range of sources to assess the quality of each council's core services, how it uses its resources and its capacity to improve. These assessments are combined into an overall result placing each council in one of five categories: excellent, good, fair, weak or poor.

The evidence used in the CPA process includes inspection and audit reports, a corporate governance assessment and a self-assessment by the local authority. In addition to this, the Audit Commission examines local authority performance using its score on a range of Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs).

BVPIs are measures of performance in key service delivery areas set by central government. They were introduced because of the duty of best value, which requires local authorities (and other best value authorities) to strive for continuous improvement by having regard to the efficiency, effectiveness and economy of their service delivery. BVPIs help the public and local and central government to monitor, analyse and compare achievements of local authorities to see if they are achieving best value. BVPI targets are based on previous performance levels of councils, and are intended to drive up the delivery standards of local services: they may be set nationally or locally (by the local authority themselves).

Each local authority is required to have their BVPIs checked and validated by the local auditor, and then published. Authorities must also report their progress against key BVPIs and targets in their Best Value Performance Plans, which are published for the general public. Finally, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) publish the performance information of all local authorities to allow their performance to be compared.

BVPIs are set in line with the financial year (1 April to 31 March). So far there have been modifications to existing indicators, deletions, or additions of new indicators every year. Last year a comprehensive review took place, and it is the ODPM's intention to leave the current BVPI suite unchanged for the next three years.

## BV 225: “Actions Against Domestic Violence”

BV 225: “The purpose of this BVPI is to assess the overall provision and effectiveness of local authority services designed to help victims of domestic violence and to prevent further domestic violence”

BV 225 (previously 176) has been substantially amended. The original version looked at the number of refuge spaces per head of population. This proved insufficient because it did not reflect the range of activity that local authorities need to undertake if they are to successfully address the problem of domestic violence.

The revised indicator has a much broader scope looking across a range of local authority services. The LGA has welcomed this as an improvement on the narrow focus of the previous indicator. Covering activity across a range of services should help to ensure that domestic violence rises up local authorities’ strategic agenda, increasing the profile of what is a developing area of service provision.

The LGA does have some concerns with the revised indicator:

- its scope in relation to two-tier authorities, particularly the omission of county councils;
- the multiplicity of elements making it difficult to measure and at odds with other indicators;
- the lack of priority given to outreach, support and advocacy services for children and adults;
- some of its elements may not work in the way intended, either because of possible perverse incentives or because they may not effectively measure the desired outcome.

These issues will be covered in more detail in the next section in the report, which looks at the indicator in detail, listing the 11 questions and the definitions provided by the ODPM. Under each of these is an outline of some of the key issues as well as a range of examples from local authorities.

# indicator questions, discussion and case studies

*"1: Has the local authority produced a directory of local services that can help victims of domestic violence?"*

*Definition: The directory must list both statutory and voluntary agencies that can provide emergency housing, advice (welfare, housing and legal), counselling and support, and include any local women's aid contact details and the National Domestic Violence Helpline. It must be widely distributed and updated at least every two years. A directory should be available for each district and not just at a county level, as a minimum it should be available on the local authority's web-site. A directory for services that work with victims of domestic violence can be provided separately from the Directory for Victims of Domestic Violence."*

The wider the publicity about services for victims of domestic violence the easier help can be found. Yet, to be of most assistance, more than just a directory of services is needed. Councils should bear in mind the distinction between information produced for the public and information produced for other professionals. When producing and distributing materials, there needs to be clarity about whom the information is intended for, and, for what purpose, as well as an evaluation of the amount of resource it is appropriate to put into this activity.

Publicity about services should include:

- a range of information sources - leaflets, posters, information on the council's website etc.;
- accessible information - that means information produced in a range of languages and in formats that reflect the needs of the local population;
- information which is effectively distributed and regularly updated – this is likely to be the most challenging aspect.

In some two-tier areas, information about domestic violence services is produced for each district whereas in others, countywide information is produced for adaptation locally. This can save on both time and resources.

## London Borough of Greenwich

*Tackling Domestic Violence: Greenwich Resource and Information Pack* is a comprehensive reference pack first produced in 1998 and now in its sixth edition. The pack draws on material produced elsewhere (giving credit) and new material developed during multi-agency training. It includes sections on the law, housing, health, refuges, welfare rights, immigration, children, work with perpetrators and multi-agency working, as well as discussion materials, a booklist and a wide-ranging section on agency contact details.

Updating the pack is a constant challenge, with local and national agencies being contacted by the domestic violence co-ordinator to check relevant sections. Each year over half the entries in the list of agencies require some changes.

Effective distribution of updates is also difficult: pack recipients register their details, which form a database now numbering over 800. Updates are sent out electronically where possible. All the resource pack sections are on the Greenwich council website; with additional introductory pages to enable key details (such as the National Helpline number) and related information to be accessed quickly.

Some sections are particularly appropriate for copying for individuals (such as the checklist for safety planning). The resource pack is complemented by short leaflets in 12 languages and a leaflet for women with learning difficulties. These are also available by post or to download from the website.

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*“2: Is there within the local authority area a minimum of 1 refuge place per ten thousand population?”*

*Definition: ‘Places’ means the number of rooms providing bedspaces for a woman and her children. Rooms not normally designated as bedrooms should not be counted towards the total. ‘Refuge’ means emergency accommodation for women and children who have been referred for help having experienced threats to their physical safety. It must provide help, advice and advocacy support as well as being part of an integrated local approach involving partnership with other local and statutory bodies. Calculate ‘local authority population’ using the latest ONS mid-year estimates.”*

This indicator is based on the number of domestic violence refuge places per 10,000 population which are provided or supported by the authority. If the authority part funds an establishment then it can claim credit pro-rata for its contribution to the facility’s running costs. Support can be financial or in kind, eg a building or staff.

Because this indicator is tied to local population it helps to demonstrate that domestic violence occurs across the board; that it is a universal issue. But a general figure of this nature cannot relate to local need. What is important to consider locally is not only how many refuge spaces are provided but how ‘available’ those spaces are. Most refuge spaces are provided on an emergency basis. How soon women and their children can move on will often depend on the availability of suitable alternative housing, or their return to an abusive partner. It might also be an indication of how proactive the refuge or local authority is in providing more on accommodation.

Councils and their partners need to take into account provision for women with multiple or special needs, including women with no recourse to public funds. Nationally there is very limited provision for women with mental health issues or

substance misuse problems and concern has been expressed about the level of evictions for such cases. Specialist provision is needed. This is an area where a number of local authorities have developed excellent initiatives teaming up to provide cross-boundary resources to meet the needs of vulnerable women and their children. This may be an area for discussion with the lead person responsible for new supported housing provision, possibly on a sub-regional basis.

Although advocacy and support are included under the definition in this section, these services are not solely refuge functions but need to be available more broadly through outreach in the community. A refuge is just one of a range of options that should be available in a local area.

## Cheshire County Council

All refuges respond to referrals and do their utmost to accommodate victims on an emergency basis. Three of the four refuges in Cheshire have 24-hour helplines (the other has this facility during office hours only). If they are full they use the national network to locate an alternative space in another refuge. This means that emergency accommodation is usually accessible and women are never left without help and support of some kind to respond to immediate need. All the refuges are affiliated to Women’s Aid, the national charity working to end domestic violence. This gives them access to information, advice and training on policy and practice.

The four Cheshire refuges, whose work is funded primarily by Supporting People with contributions from the Children’s Fund, social services department and district councils, are part of the Cheshire Domestic Abuse Partnership. Since the partnership began in 1997 it has been considered vital to put the expertise which such refuge services have at the centre of the agenda. They have dealt with domestic violence for decades; the statutory sector is just beginning to catch up.

This expertise is enhanced through the contributions of Cheshire Domestic Violence Outreach Services, set up in 2000 as part of the Home Office Crime Reduction Programme to bridge the gap which existed then between the number of referrals to refuges and the numbers accommodated. This work, managed by Stonham Housing Association, is not funded by Supporting People, as users are not seen in their own homes, but are helped with advocacy and support to work through prioritised needs eg accompaniment through court proceedings etc. Approximately 1,400 women with over 2,000 children have received a service since 2001. Comments on the empowering support given include: "I found the service pulled me out of a hole that I never thought was possible to get out of".

Since 2003 the refuges have been funded through Supporting People to provide support for those moving on from refuge accommodation in the community and also some outreach work to maintain those experiencing domestic abuse in their own homes when the abuser has moved out. In addition the Children's Fund, in partnership with various agencies through the Cheshire Domestic Abuse Partnership, has secured the vital role of child support worker to enable children to recover from their experience of domestic abuse and make the most of their life chances.

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### **Brighton and Hove City Council**

Brighton and Hove has a population of 250,000, meaning that the current provision of 40 bed spaces (including for children) meets the recommended ratio. To put this into context, on average, the police report 2,500 - 2,700 domestic violence incidents in the area every year.

The Women's Refuge Project has been providing services for women and children affected by domestic violence in Brighton and Hove for over 10 years. These include a refuge, helpline and outreach services.

In March 2004, a new purpose-made refuge was built. This refuge has self-contained units, one of which is specifically designed for disability needs (wheelchair access, counter weight, equipped bathroom, etc.) The existing refuge was then refurbished to provide accommodation and facilities for women who have 'low to medium' mental health needs such as severe depression, agoraphobia, self-harming and paranoid schizophrenia (provided it is being adequately managed by support and medication). This refuge has been specially designed to provide the intensive support that is not available in the more independent living structure of the main refuge.

Local women residents seeking refuge provision are carefully assessed as to whether it would be appropriate to house them in the city. This means that women living in Brighton can access the refuge provided: the immediate area she has been living in is at some distance from the refuge in another part of the city, there are not children in any of the local schools that could place her at risk, and, the perpetrator is not identified as having stalking behaviours and therefore likely to go to lengths to track her down. Other residents come from around the UK, either through Women's Aid, other local authority social services and housing departments and self-referrals coming through the police.

This project has been undertaken in partnership with Chichester Diocese Housing Association (CDHA), who designed and built the new refuge, and Brighton and Hove City Council, where the Supporting People Programme funds the Women's Refuge Project in the region of £120K.

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*“3: Does the local authority employ directly or fund a voluntary sector-based domestic violence co-ordinator? (For District Councils of fewer than 35,000 households, the responsibility for co-ordinating domestic violence can be designated within the job description of an existing senior officer. For District Councils that contribute to a county-wide co-ordinator, see definition).*

*Definition: The co-ordinator should be employed at a local authority level (see exemption below) and have responsibility for strategically co-ordinating domestic violence issues throughout the local authority area. Where funding has been provided to the voluntary sector or local partnership to employ a co-ordinator this will meet the definition as long as their role remains to co-ordinate work in both the statutory and voluntary sectors across the area covered by the local authority. Exemption – in cases where District Councils fund a county-wide co-ordinator the District Council will meet the requirements of this BVPI if the responsibility for ensuring that any county-wide work is implemented at a district level is included in the job description of an existing senior officer for that district.”*

Employing a domestic violence co-ordinator has for several years been regarded as the key to developing an effective multi-agency response to domestic violence. According to Home Office research carried out in 2004: “59 per cent of partnerships had access to a domestic violence co-ordinator, with 70 per cent of these working exclusively on domestic violence. Although no details were provided about the competencies or the role of the domestic violence co-ordinator, those partnerships which had one in place were more likely to have met most or all of their targets over a 12-month period and to consider themselves as a model of good practice.”<sup>3</sup>

The role of a domestic violence co-ordinator is necessarily a complex one: pulling together all the agencies, partnerships and organisations involved in a local area to agree a coherent strategy and

action plan. Excellent administrative skills combined with a clear focus on achievable actions is essential for this role. Domestic violence co-ordinators must manage the difficulties inherent in multi-agency working to ensure that partnerships are effective in delivering improvements rather than becoming a mere talking shop (a criticism that has been leveled at some domestic violence forums).

To be effective it is important that domestic violence co-ordinators are adequately supported. This is an important role for the local authority. However, the LGA's programme of work with selected local partnerships during 2004/5 has shown that co-ordinators are often isolated within the community safety system and can, on occasions, be unable to develop their performance without effective managerial support. Ideally, not only should co-ordinators be supported from within their own teams, but officers from relevant directorates (such as social services and housing) should be identified to link in to the co-ordinator posts.

Most co-ordinators are employed by boroughs, unitaries or county councils. In some areas, districts employ local co-ordinators linked to a strategic group. Other areas believe that having a number of local co-ordinators is not the best use of resources and instead contribute to funding a county team which operates at a strategic level. A number of county councils have developed very successful domestic violence teams and have stressed that county-wide provision can provide economies of scale and sharing of best practice. The LGA welcomes the flexibility now built into the indicator to allow local authorities to determine the most appropriate structure in their local areas.

3 Domestic violence and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships - findings from a self-completion questionnaire: Home Office online report 56/04, 2004

## Sandwell Metropolitan District Council

Julie Sullivan, the strategic co-ordinator in Sandwell was appointed to implement the local partnership's Domestic Violence Strategy.

Priority activities for the partnership include:

- producing a strategic action plan and targets for service delivery;
- reviewing the borough's contribution to domestic violence work through an elected member scrutiny panel;
- developing procedures, processes and protocols through a domestic violence courts multi-agency steering group;
- producing complementary processes to those in place for child protection;
- assisting voluntary sector provision for out-of-hours services for victims;
- providing multi-agency training;
- setting up a central, co-located, domestic violence team and a multi-agency network of service providers.

Julie works to ensure that these priorities are progressed, above all working to pull together existing service provision and to identify how any significant gaps can be addressed.

Having previously worked at a county level, Julie believes the main difference is that a county works with a number of CDRPs who have held the funding for crime and disorder work. Although she believes that a strategic view of service delivery needs to be taken at a county level, actual service provision is best met locally to provide an accessible and consistent service fully involving all the key agencies.

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***“4: Has the local authority produced and adopted a multi-agency strategy to tackle domestic violence developed in partnership with other agencies?”***

*Definition: The strategy should have been developed in partnership with all relevant statutory and voluntary partners. It should be supportive of, and aligned with, the authority’s Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy (CDRP). The strategy should cover a three-year period with an action plan reviewed annually. The action plan should contain at least 50 per cent outcomes that are SMART and include a section on how the needs of BME communities will be addressed. A Chief Officer and an Executive member in the authority should have been allocated responsibility for its implementation.”*

In the consultations on the various drafts of the revised BVPI, this section stood out as the prerequisite for implementing all the rest. A multi-agency strategy is essential to encourage a consistent and prioritised approach. The reference to chief officer and executive member responsibility was welcomed as a useful mechanism for ensuring that this happens. Lack of corporate support at chief officer level has proved to be a major stumbling block for many partnerships often meaning that there is a lack of investment in work to tackle domestic violence.

Having a strategy is not enough - it needs to be good - and that means focusing on a limited number of achievable and central objectives which are signed up to by all the relevant partners. A difficulty with an issue as cross-cutting as domestic violence is the temptation to produce a long wish list of activities. Such an approach, while it may acknowledge the scope of the problem, is unrealistic. Effective strategies need to be tied to clearly owned activities that require quantifiable results which lead to safer outcomes for victims and their families. Under the umbrella of the strategy the commissioning of services and projects should be based on identified need with standards for provision identified and monitored.

In addition, the domestic violence strategy needs to feed into other strategic frameworks, such as linking to children’s service plans and homelessness strategies. In this way authorities can ensure that domestic violence is a priority across the board not just within crime and disorder. Again, different approaches have been adopted in different areas. Some county councils have adopted a pan-county strategy linked to the local CDRPs and related local domestic violence action plans. In other areas strategies are developed and implemented at a local level.

The LGA believes that the equalities issues raised within the definition in this section should be broadened so that, for example, the needs of individuals with disabilities or substance misuse problems are also taken into account. In practice, equalities issues need to cut across implementation of all the indicator areas.

A number of excellent strategies have already been developed. The domestic violence pages on the LGA website have links to a number of local authorities who have developed well thought out strategies: [www.lga.gov.uk](http://www.lga.gov.uk); and last year the Home Office produced a guide for CDRPs on developing their domestic violence strategies<sup>4</sup>.

## **Leeds City Council**

The Leeds’ domestic violence strategy aims to reduce the level and impact of domestic violence across the city. Delivering the strategy is led by the Leeds’ Inter-Agency Project (LIAP). Its effectiveness is measured by the local multi-agency partnership.

The strategy provides a framework for domestic violence work and has five objectives:

- 1 raising public awareness;
- 2 improving agency responses;
- 3 developing community support;
- 4 ensuring appropriate civil and criminal justice responses;
- 5 developing preventative and educational work.

<sup>4</sup> Developing domestic violence strategies – a guide for partnerships: Home Office Violent Crime Unit, December 2004

Around 60 Leeds organisations have signed up to the strategy, agreeing to develop action points that feed into a three year city-wide strategy action plan.

Key performance indicators have been established as a way of measuring effectiveness and a performance management framework has been put in place. Partner agencies take the lead in meeting targets for the key performance indicators and the LIAP monitors agency progress. Future work in Leeds will focus on developing a minimum standards quality mark as a tool to promote consistently high-quality services to women and children.

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## Devon County Council

Devon Against Domestic Violence and Abuse Partnership (ADVA) is on the verge of publishing its next three year strategy. This follows on from three years' partnership work which has led to the establishment of the following services:

- outreach support for women victims/survivors in each of the eight districts;
- outreach support for men victims/survivors across the county (DevonMALE);
- children and young people's specialist worker;
- domestic violence court hearings on one afternoon (Exeter magistrates court);
- monthly multi-agency risk assessment conferencing (MARAC) in Exeter, to write safety plans for the identified very high-risk victims;
- a training and awareness-raising programme, which has reached 2,000 practitioners;
- a community perpetrator programme (REPAIR);
- development and delivery of a school curriculum programme (Home Ground);
- pattern-changing courses for women survivors;
- employer policy development.

The partnership has achieved this level of funded service delivery thanks to the high-level commitment from some statutory agency senior managers and annual joint funding from most statutory agencies and all of Devon's eight CDRPs.

The business plan developed to support the strategy identified clear targets which were reviewed quarterly through task-focussed partnership groups.

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*“5: Does the local authority support and facilitate a local multi-agency domestic violence forum that meets at least four times a year?”*

*Definition: The forum should have a mix of statutory and voluntary sector representatives at a senior enough level to aid the implementation of decisions and the strategy action plan. The forum should be formalised as part of the Crime and Disorder Partnership.”*

Domestic violence forums can harness a wealth of local experience, expertise and knowledge. The Home Office recommends that CDRPs make formal links with their local domestic violence forums. However, the nature of this relationship, and the structure and role of domestic violence forums varies greatly. In the majority of areas (55 per cent according to Home Office research in 2004<sup>5</sup>) forums are consulted during the three-yearly crime reduction audit and strategy process. They may play a consultative role, serving as a repository of information and acting as a sounding board for ideas. Some areas have a larger forum for discussion of issues and a smaller strategic group. In others the forum has become a formal sub-group of the CDRP and is responsible for setting local strategy, monitoring implementation and employing the domestic violence co-ordinator. The LGA project has identified that some forums struggle to develop concerted activity in response to domestic violence. This makes the linkages with the CDRPs or the use of a smaller strategic group an effective and worthwhile consideration.

Where the domestic violence forum fits into this picture is a matter for local discretion. What is important is development of an integrated partnership structure able to deliver quantifiable results that lead to safer outcomes for victims and their families. For this to happen all the key agencies need to be represented at the strategic partnership and there needs to be meaningful voluntary sector involvement.

## East Cambridgeshire District Council

In Cambridgeshire all of the five districts have a domestic violence forum. East Cambridgeshire is no exception. Its forum was established in 1999 as an independent body working closely with all the key local agencies and the CDRP.

The new BVPI provides a welcome opportunity for the council to work even closer with the forum. The list of questions will be used to formulate a new action plan. Some of the initiatives in the indicator are already underway locally but many are not. This will mean that the district and its partners will need to work together on areas such as producing a strategy, agreeing an information sharing protocol and producing a directory of services. Some of this work will be carried out by the Countywide Domestic Violence Steering Group where all the forums are represented. This approach will minimise duplication and enable some of the rural authorities to work together to deliver local multi-agency training for front-line staff.

One barrier is the lack of funding to deliver new services for victims. All districts will need to consider increasing their funding. Many of the activities listed in the BVPI can be delivered using minimal resources and taking a multi-agency response. An example is the local directory of services to help victims of domestic violence. Many of the services cover the whole county so it is likely that a countywide template can be drawn up which can then be adapted for the districts to use.

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5 Domestic violence and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships - findings from a self-completion questionnaire: Home Office online report 56/04

## South Gloucestershire Council

South Gloucestershire's domestic violence forum works within the framework of the CDRP. As such, it receives the majority of its funding via the CDRP with its individual strategy feeding into 2005/08 CDRP strategy. However, it retains a degree of independence with a chair elected from the voluntary sector.

The local domestic violence co-ordinator works very closely with the forum, agreeing an annual work programme with them. The forum meets quarterly and has over 40 members, including strategists and practitioners who represent a mix of statutory and voluntary sector agencies.

The forum's key objectives are to:

- reduce the incidence of domestic violence in South Gloucestershire;
- ensure high quality service provision and a sensitive and consistent response to all those reporting domestic violence and their families;
- ensure all agencies work together to provide a co-ordinated approach to domestic violence service provision.

The forum's work programme includes: co-ordinating support for women and children, awareness raising and training.

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***“6: Has the local authority developed an information-sharing protocol and had it agreed between key statutory partners?”***

*Definition: The information-sharing protocol must facilitate the exchange of information to enable domestic violence to be effectively tackled across all statutory agencies. Key statutory agencies are defined as the police, health, housing, social services and education. The protocol will also provide an opportunity to implement Homicide Reviews where appropriate. It must ensure that confidentiality and victims safety is protected.”*

Information sharing has two important functions:

- to enable the effective monitoring of domestic violence incidents to inform service responses and the allocation of resources;
- the effective resolution of some domestic violence cases where a multi-agency response is urgently required.

Failing to share information or doing so inappropriately can put domestic violence survivors and their children at serious risk. A consistent approach to sharing personal information by all agencies can vastly improve the quality of provision for domestic violence survivors in terms of preventing the unnecessary repetition of distressing case history to different professionals and the saving of considerable time. Above all, the safety of survivors must be built in as a guiding principal.

On a practical level, the difference between the sharing of anonymous as opposed to personal information needs to be emphasised with safe procedures for both agreed. This should include clarity about processes for sharing information ‘with’ and ‘without consent’. Currently, many agencies are not monitoring or recording domestic violence cases, so they have little or no reliable data to share. Once an agreement has been put in place it will need to be regularly monitored. Again, there are opportunities to pool resources so that, for example, in two-tier areas county councils can take a lead in negotiating one protocol. Finally,

consideration will need to be given to how this protocol will relate to the information sharing arrangements about to be put into place for children’s services.

In 2004, the Home Office launched a guide to information sharing in the context of domestic violence<sup>6</sup>. This guide provides advice about how best to share information lawfully and responsibly to protect victims and/or enable perpetrators to be brought to justice. It provides a brief overview of why responsible information sharing is vital in the context of domestic violence, an outline of the key legal provisions, examples of good practice and details of sources of further information and advice. It is aimed at all practitioners who are likely to come into contact with domestic violence survivors or who are involved in the assessment of risk and is backed by an interactive tool for practitioners available at: [www.crimereduction.gov.uk/isp01.htm](http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/isp01.htm)

Some excellent examples of information sharing protocols developed by other specialist domestic violence projects are available on the website of the Co-ordinated Response and Advocacy Resource Group (CRARG) website: [www.crarg.org.uk](http://www.crarg.org.uk)

## **London Borough of Newham**

Newham published its domestic violence information sharing protocol in 2002, with all of the agencies represented on the borough’s domestic violence forum signing up. The protocol, which provides guidance on information sharing, is intended to improve inter-agency working and thereby improve victims’ access to services.

The borough has also established a common system for recording domestic violence incidents. Their common referral form helps them to ascertain the true extent of reported domestic violence (by reported domestic violence, they mean domestic violence reported to all the agencies signed up to the protocol and not just the police). The common referral form has now been updated on a number

<sup>6</sup> Safety and justice: sharing personal information in the context of domestic violence – an overview: Home Office, May 2004

of occasions to ensure that it is of maximum use for participating agencies. For example, it now covers the heightened risk factors introduced by the Metropolitan Police, and, at the request of the housing department, also includes information about the type of accommodation the victim is living in.

Newham is hoping to improve their capacity to analyse the information which they have collected on a regular basis so that they can provide a sound, quantifiable evidence base for the work they are carrying out. Last year, data from the common reporting form was collated over a six month period to provide detailed information about the ethnicity, age and gender of survivors. Details of hotspots and about the services provided in the borough were also provided. This information, combined with findings from focus groups and interviews, was used to compile a more accurate profile of the uptake of services in the borough detailing which services were approached, what survivors wanted and what was provided.

Newham believes that the form is working well and has brought about significant improvements in inter-agency working. An example is the acceptance of the common referral form by the Homeless Persons Unit. Now, instead of referrals needing to be signed off by the Borough Superintendent, the common referral form is accepted by all housing officers. Adopted as standard, it is now used by all agencies as a risk assessment tool and as evidence of a need for emergency housing or other emergency services.

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*"7: Has the local authority developed, launched and promoted a 'sanctuary' type scheme to enable victims and their children to remain in their own home, where they choose to do so and where safety can be guaranteed? (For smaller district authorities, of fewer than 35,000 households this can be arranged in partnership with neighbouring authorities).*

*Definition: A sanctuary type scheme must provide security measures to allow the woman to remain in her home where she chooses to do so, where safety can be guaranteed and the violent partner no longer lives within the home. It must be available across tenures where the landlord of a property has given permission for the work to be carried out. It must consist of additional security to any main entrance doors to the accommodation and locks to any vulnerable windows. Wherever possible it must provide a safe room in the home secured with a solid core door and additional locks. It is essential that this service is only provided where it is the clear choice of the victim. The scheme should be implemented through a partnership with the police and/or the voluntary sector that could provide supplementary support. It may be provided directly by the local authority, or through a third party, funded as part of the local authority's homelessness prevention work, through grants that may be available for crime reduction initiatives."*

Sanctuary projects are designed to enable victims to stay in their own homes where this is possible and desired, rather than being forced to move and disrupting education, employment and family networks. These problems can be exacerbated by victims of domestic violence frequently being forced to move on numerous occasions. It should also be noted that, apart from the social benefits, the cost of keeping a victim and their family in their home can be considerably less expensive than the provision of emergency accommodation.

Important components of the model include:

- the scheme is voluntary and available to people living in any tenure;
- it provides additional security, enabling victims of domestic violence to remain in their own homes where they wish, and it is appropriate, for them to do so;
- it should operate in conjunction with the police and the voluntary sector;
- as well as installing new or extra locks and lighting, a 'secure sanctuary' is created by creating a safe room with reinforced doors and bolts;
- arrangements are tailored to the needs and circumstances of the individuals involved.

50 schemes were established in 2003/04, using funding from the ODPM's Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate's grant programme. Other forms of housing outreach and target hardening initiatives have also proved successful in assisting victims of domestic violence.

A key factor for authorities to consider is the level of support for women leaving refuges as well as services for victims who wish to remain in their own homes. Physical security arrangements are not enough on their own, but need to be promoted alongside a range of other options such as outreach and advocacy services. Sanctuary schemes will not be appropriate, or safe, in all instances.

For more information on how possibly to set up a sanctuary scheme, the following documents are available on the domestic violence pages (under 'sharing good practice') on the LGA website: [www.lga.gov.uk](http://www.lga.gov.uk)

- a guide describing setting up a sanctuary scheme in Harrow;
- a sanctuary leaflet from Harrow with pictures of what it looks like.

## London Borough of Croydon

Croydon Council's Sanctuary Project provides practical help for those who have escaped from an abusive relationship by installing new security measures, such as reinforced doors, new locks and camera door-entry systems.

The project was set up in partnership with the police and domestic violence support agencies, helping those who have taken legal action against an aggressive partner. Because victims of domestic violence often need specialist advice and support as well as physical security, it is only available to those who are already in contact with local support agencies. Tenants with sanctuary works are listed with the police for an urgent response, so any incidents at these known properties will be met with an immediate response.

The project is fast becoming a key part of Croydon's homelessness strategy, with local statistics showing that the number of people forced to leave their homes because of domestic violence was growing. In the year up to April 2004, more than 150 people contacted the council after fleeing domestic violence and since April a further 66 have become homeless because of abuse. As well as helping victims feel more secure in their own homes, the sanctuary project reduces the chance that these people will be made homeless through no fault of their own.

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## East Staffordshire Borough Council

East Staffordshire's sanctuary scheme was set up in October 2004 and is a partnership between the council, Stoneham Housing Association (Kiaura Project) and South Derbyshire Council for Voluntary Service (CVS). The rationale behind the project is to allow those who have suffered domestic violence to stay in their own homes, rather than going through the stress and stigma of becoming homeless and having to move away from the area they currently live in. The scheme secures the victim's property so that they can return in the knowledge that the perpetrator has been removed and cannot get access.

The scheme was introduced because over the previous two years there had been a significant increase in victims coming from social housing tenancies. Domestic violence was the main reason for homelessness in the borough.

Although the scheme has assisted 27 victims to date, it has come across a significant problem in that it has been unable to achieve one of its key aims: changing locks. The reason for this is that all the victims who have come forward are owner-occupier households where there is joint ownership of the property. There has also been a dramatic downturn in victims from social housing. This has prompted the council to re-evaluate how the project can now be used, in particular how it can work with the police and CPS to help owner-occupiers.

A positive outcome is that the media attention from the launch of the project has highlighted the work of the Kiaura Project. Subsequently it has increased the number of victims it helps three-fold.

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*“8: Has there been a reduction in the percentage of cases accepted as homeless due to domestic violence that had previously been re-housed in the last two years by that local authority as a result of domestic violence?”*

*Definition: The indicator is met if there is a percentage reduction in homelessness acceptances due to domestic violence. Acceptances who were previously homeless in another local authority area should not be included. Reductions achieved in preventing repeat homelessness should be clearly linked to positive measures adopted to provide genuine alternatives for women to either remain in their own home or be placed in alternative accommodation, removing the need to become homeless. Alternative accommodation may be secured by arranging a reciprocal property with another social landlord, or a safe management transfer. Any options or measures to prevent repeat homelessness must only be taken with the full consent of the victim of domestic violence.”*

Repeat homelessness is caused by a complex range of factors that cannot be effectively evaluated through a quantitative indicator. A worry is that the indicator could have a possible perverse incentive: authorities could score well by turning people away. Conversely if councils are effective in raising awareness of service provision for domestic violence survivors, this will encourage people to come forward and therefore numbers may increase.

The LGA therefore welcomes the link that the definition makes to the reduction in repeat homelessness with measures to provide genuine alternative options for survivors. This is the only way to ensure that the indicator is recording an improvement in practice. Authorities will need to monitor what happens to these individuals and how satisfied they are with the options they have been offered.

There are other practical difficulties that will need to be overcome, including problems with recording, where often the domestic violence aspect of a case is missed. Some people are re-housed on a temporary basis and then return to their own property once they get an occupation order. Homelessness and housing allocation officers have an important role in giving individuals escaping domestic violence access to alternative accommodation or support to stay in their own homes. To fulfil this role they will need training to develop a good understanding of the issues involved. The ODPM is looking to publish a good practice note on tackling homelessness and domestic violence later in the year.

## East Riding of Yorkshire Council

Safe accommodation and support services are a key priority for victims of domestic violence. In East Riding they are provided by the Domestic Violence Accommodation Project (D-VAP), which is part of the CDRP.

D-VAP has developed a unique partnership with East Riding council's housing services, working together to put victims at the heart of the process. A range of housing options are provided including: security measures for victims who wish to remain safely in their own homes; individual refuge properties located across the county; re-housing by the council, housing association or private landlord; or a move to refuge provision beyond East Riding.

The project accepts self as well as agency referrals and, importantly, a range of support services are offered in tandem with the various housing options. This includes practical help, emotional support, legal information, safety advice and equipment, and assistance with welfare benefits and child-related services.

D-VAP promotes a positive image of services, and victims are encouraged to come forward in the knowledge that they will be treated in a sympathetic and non-judgemental way. Over the past three years, while referrals to the project have risen, the number of homeless households accepted as vulnerable due to domestic violence has fallen. The partnership between D-VAP and housing services did result in an initial increase in homeless acceptances sustained in the second year, only now beginning to show a reduction in the third year.

East Riding believes that housing services alone cannot affect any reduction in repeat presentations unless there is partnership working to provide a comprehensive support service which is available for any victim of domestic violence or abuse.

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## **Wolverhampton City Council**

In Wolverhampton a Tenancy Sustainment Officer has been in post for two years. Their primary role is to support victims of domestic violence within their own homes where this is the victim's preferred option. Otherwise advice is given about a safe house or alternative accommodation. The service is always client led. Options of an emergency alarm linked to the police can be arranged. Referrals are made from Victim Support, local housing and social services teams, local family centres, the Police Domestic Violence Unit and other agencies.

In addition, the Haven organisation seconds a post to the Homeless Services Unit to support women in the council's temporary accommodation who were made homeless due to domestic violence. The Haven is a women's refuge established for more than 30 years, which provides safe temporary accommodation for women and children. Their floating support service has a range of specialisations in relation to women's needs including mental health expertise,

Asian women's support and women who have experienced childhood sex abuse.

A firm and robust approach is taken to anyone causing harm/harassment to tenants with the Anti-Social Behaviour Unit assisting with enforcement.

An anticipated initiative is to target resources to those people who, it is felt, can safely stay in their own homes with additional services and security measures. A small amount of money has been identified initially to pilot a sanctuary project, which will be discussed with partner agencies.

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## Oxford City Council

In Oxford the Housing Services Department have reviewed their domestic violence policy and procedures and have identified the level of service response which local agencies and the public can expect.

Current service provision includes:

- Oxford domestic alarms scheme;
- domestic violence and housing steering group;
- domestic violence housing support post (currently under review);
- legal advice.

In March 2005, they held an event 'housing provision for domestic violence survivors' for local agencies publicised through the International Women's Festival Programme. The aim was to provide information about the range of housing options available to domestic violence survivors and to gain a common understanding of how different housing providers respond. Each agency was asked to consider the relevant issues for their agency and how they can work together.

As well as examining agency responses for survivors in all housing tenures, the event paid particular attention to meeting the housing needs of black and other minority ethnic domestic violence survivors, and supporting children affected by domestic violence.

The event highlighted several key issues for the steering group to address:

- the need for domestic violence support workers;
- problems caused by cuts to Supporting People funding;
- lack of provision for refugees, asylum seekers and women with no recourse to public funds;
- the need for the district councils to work more closely with registered social landlords to develop consistent policy and practices;
- the need for increased resources to be allocated to target hardening initiatives – although it was recognised that there will always be some cases

where the perpetrators are so dangerous that the survivor has to move.

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*“9: Does the council’s tenancy agreement have a specific clause stating that perpetration of domestic violence by a tenant can be considered grounds for eviction? (For local authorities that have transferred their housing stock, the clause should be contained in the LSVT organisations’ tenancy agreement.)*

*Definition: Any clause should make clear that evidence of domestic violence for eviction purposes does not need to rely on a criminal charge. Evidence may be based on a possession action using civil evidence.”*

*‘The tenant must not use or threaten violence against any other person lawfully entitled to reside in the property, so that they are forced to leave by reason of the tenant’s violence or fear of such violence.’*

Clause 8.4, Greenwich council’s tenancy agreement:

This indicator should be relatively easy to implement but will be more difficult to use. Many local authorities already have clauses in their tenancy agreements but they are very rarely applied. Usually there is a joint tenancy which is terminated by the victim leaving, surrendering the tenancy and being re-housed. When that happens the council does not need to use tenancy conditions to evict because the perpetrator is now an unauthorised occupant. So the council will evict, but not using this clause. The only circumstances where the clause would be used are if the perpetrator was the sole tenant.

In some areas the victim is required to give up their tenancy if they need emergency housing. They then go onto the housing list, possibly with a lengthy wait before being permanently re-housed. Making it easier to evict the perpetrator could ease this situation.

Although the guidance states that ‘evidence for a conviction does not need to rely on a criminal charge’ there is still confusion about the level of proof that is needed to secure an eviction. To what extent should the victim be required to provide evidence and to what extent would information from the police or a third party, such as Women’s Aid, suffice? There is a clear message here that no matter how difficult this area of tenancy law is; councils or housing associations should be proactive in taking action against tenants who perpetrate domestic violence.

Councils’ experience is that usually victims do not want any involvement in evicting ex-partners, especially once they themselves have been re-housed. Apart from all the issues about providing evidence, there is also the problem that a homeless perpetrator is much more of a continuing threat – because they will be seeking to reconcile with or to blame the victim now that they have nowhere to live.

The Housing Act 1996 introduced a new ground for possession for secure tenancies into schedule 2 of the Housing Act 1985 (a similar provision for assured tenancies was introduced by section 149 of the Housing Act 1996). These grounds were designed to address the problem of partners (normally women and their children) who left accommodation because of violence or threats of violence from their partner. They enable local authorities to recover possession in such circumstances whether the tenant remaining in the property has a joint or a sole tenancy and without having to rely upon co-operation from the abused partner who has left. In making a claim for an order for possession a landlord must show that violence is the dominant cause of the abused partner leaving and not simply a cause<sup>7</sup>. This appears to be an area where further guidance would help to clarify the position for agencies and others providing advice to those experiencing domestic violence.

7 See *Camden v Mallett* (2001) 33 H.L.R. 204

## **Magna West Somerset Housing Association**

Social landlords are required to register with the Housing Corporation under Section 3 of the Housing Act 1996 and are subject to the regulatory code which sets out terms and conditions. Included in the Housing Association's tenancy agreement is a clause on racial and other harassment, violence and nuisance. This includes domestic violence.

However, there is a problem with enforcing this clause in domestic violence cases because of the lack of clarity about when exactly a perpetrator can be evicted. Historically, there has been uncertainty about whether a conviction is needed or where the victim has taken some form of civil action such as seeking an injunction or an occupancy order. This is the reason that few, if any, such evictions have taken place.

The housing association would like to protect victims using this clause. They recognise that allowing the victim and their children to remain in the home is important, as too often they are required to move into temporary accommodation while the abuser is able to remain in the family home. Waiting for the outcome of court proceedings can take a long time during which the victim is left in temporary accommodation. They believe that clear guidance is needed to ensure that social landlords do not feel vulnerable if they activate possession proceedings.

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*“10: Has the local authority funded and developed a domestic violence education pack in consultation with the wider domestic violence forum?”*

*Definition: The domestic violence education pack must have been specifically designed for use in schools and with youth groups. It must aim to challenge attitudes of tolerance to violence and help young people to achieve positive relationships based on mutuality and respect. Schools and youth groups cannot be forced to run a programme on domestic violence but the pack must be easily available and actively promoted. Schools should be encouraged to use the material as part of their PSHE or citizenship curriculum.”*

Research into the attitudes of over 1,300 children aged 8 to 16 has revealed that:

- over 75 per cent of 11-12 year old boys thought that women get hit if they make men angry, and more boys than girls, of all ages, believed that some women deserve to be hit;
- boys of all ages, particularly teenagers, have less understanding than girls of who is at fault, and are more likely to excuse the perpetrator<sup>8</sup>;
- the vast majority of children at secondary school want to learn what to do about domestic violence and how to stop it.

Domestic violence prevention and education programmes for children and young people are aimed at addressing these attitudes. For councils who have not already undertaken work of this sort, there is no need to start afresh. There are already some excellent packs in existence, meaning that ‘developing’ a pack may not be necessary. We would strongly suggest that councils make use of the existing resources.

In 2003, Womankind Worldwide commissioned research into the implementation of education interventions on violence against women and girls<sup>9</sup>. The research found that:

- programmes were, or had recently been, delivered in 73 local authorities;

- programmes were financed from a number of different sources, almost all short-term. This made the programmes insecure and potentially unsustainable;
- in schools, programmes were almost exclusively delivered as part of the Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education (PSHCE) curriculum. While some programmes did promote a whole school approach and made clear links to other education initiatives such as social inclusion and bullying, how and to what extent individual schools embedded the work was unclear;
- programmes varied markedly in their length, the most common pattern was for six one-hour sessions.

Womankind have also developed an education programme which is available for use in schools: [www.womankind.org.uk](http://www.womankind.org.uk). The Westminster Domestic Violence Forum has developed domestic violence materials for use in primary and secondary schools. The second series of the *Watch over me* video for secondary schools produced by Miss Dorothy.com addresses the issues of domestic violence within the classroom. The video follows a soap opera format with credible characters who young people can relate to. In addition, the National Union of Teachers has published a pamphlet on domestic violence with information about why there needs to be a focus on preventative work in schools, how domestic violence can be tackled through the curriculum and what schools can do to challenge gender stereotypes, as well as making the links to child protection and safeguarding children<sup>10</sup>.

For programmes to be effective it is important that a whole school, cross-curricular approach is adopted with training and support for school staff and connections made to work on school attendance, attainment and behaviour. Key messages need to be built-upon and reinforced.

Domestic violence education in schools and youth groups will inevitably result in disclosures being made. It is important that support services can be made available to children and young people.

8 *Children’s needs, coping strategies and understanding of woman abuse*: Economic and Social Research Council, 2000

9 *Preventing violence against women and girls – a study of educational programmes for children and young people*: Jane Ellis, University of Warwick, Womankind Worldwide, November 2004

10 *Silence is not always golden – tackling domestic violence*. NUT, 2005. [www.teachers.org.uk](http://www.teachers.org.uk)

When discussing drafts of the indicator several councils, although supportive of the idea of running prevention programmes, felt that adopting it as a BVPI was the wrong approach. This was largely for reasons of practicality. The description under the indicator acknowledges that schools cannot be forced to use packs. In addition, education is clearly a county not a district function, yet county councils are not covered by the scope of the indicator. Finally, providing access to an education resource is only a small part of the picture for children affected by domestic violence.

### London Borough of Tower Hamlets

In Tower Hamlets the Education for Respect Project was established to raise school's capacity to respond appropriately to the needs of children and young people experiencing domestic violence and to pilot preventative approaches as part of the curriculum.

Initially, a multi-agency steering group was established and needs assessment carried out to look at how schools currently deal with domestic violence and identify the support they need to address the issue more effectively.

It was found that primary schools were more likely to receive disclosures from pupils and parents, and tended to address domestic violence as a child protection issue, but did not explicitly address the issue within the curriculum. Schools welcomed the possibility of training and support. In addition, a questionnaire distributed to pupils in years 7-12 at one secondary school showed that 35 per cent knew someone who had experienced domestic violence. Pupils overwhelmingly said that domestic violence was a subject they would like to learn more about at school.

Three schools participated in a pilot programme taking a 'whole school' approach. This involved training for teaching and support staff, whole school and year assemblies, English, drama and PSHE lessons, and a poster and poetry competition.

A variety of teaching methods and materials were used, including the Westminster Domestic Violence Forum schools pack, Womankind Worldwide materials and the Zero Tolerance Trust Respect pack.

Guidelines were produced giving schools detailed information on responding to pupils affected by domestic violence and incorporating domestic violence into the curriculum. The School Library Service also compiled a selection of teaching resources for use in schools. Finally, the Education Social Work Service was trained in domestic violence issues to enable them to support school staff in responding to concerns about pupils.

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### Stoke-on-Trent City Council

The *relationships without fear* programme provides young people with the opportunity to explore attitudes and beliefs which may contribute to abusive relationships. It encourages young people to look at rules and boundaries, examine early warning signs as well as providing information on where to go for help and support. The programme looks at different forms of abuse and stereotyping. In doing so it aims to empower young people to be confident and to avoid, or address, abusive relationships. It equips educators to raise issues surrounding domestic violence.

*Relationships without fear* is designed so that it can be adapted to meet the individual requirements of schools or other settings. It follows a progressive reinforcement from year groups 4-11 building as the children move through the school. It is also mapped to aspects of the PSHCE and other curriculum subjects. Delivery is carefully monitored.

This approach has proved extremely successful both in affecting a positive attitudinal change to domestic violence by young people as well as impacting on

health and education outcomes. Because of this, it became the first project to be put forward for mainstream funding through the Joint Commissioning Unit in April 2004.

To build sustainability and cost effectiveness, the programme has evolved from being purely a direct delivery project to adopting a whole school approach. Basic awareness and information training is offered to all staff, while key staff are identified and trained to implement the programme. Experienced domestic abuse professionals offer on-going support to school staff and monitor delivery as well as providing individual support for pupils through a dedicated children and young persons support worker. Additional support is in place through multi-agency links. Later this year a new manual for secondary year groups will be launched, followed by the primary programme. This approach is recommended in the Home Office research study: *Tackling domestic violence: effective interventional and approaches*, February 2005<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Tackling domestic violence - effective interventions and approaches: Research Study 290, Home Office, February 2005

*“11: Has the local authority carried out a programme of multi-agency training in the last twelve months covering front line and managerial staff in at least two of the following groups: housing staff, social services staff providing services in the local authority area; education staff; health staff; and front line police officers.*

*Definition: The training programme must cover domestic violence awareness training, the legal framework, information sharing, and who provides what services to victims of domestic violence with referral and contact points. The programme should be developed in consultation with the Domestic Violence Forum and reviewed by the forum annually.”*

Awareness training for all the agencies likely to come into contact with victims or perpetrators of domestic violence is vital. Effective training will increase understanding of the impact of domestic violence and how best to respond and offer help and support. It should also encourage earlier identification. Most courses are interactive allowing participants to challenge any assumptions or stereotypes as well as sharing information.

Research from the domestic violence projects funded through the Crime Reduction Programme<sup>12</sup> recommends that: “Appropriate training should increase awareness about domestic violence, as well as how to ask about it. It should last more than one day, enable exploration of fears and concerns, and provide knowledge and resources including use of safety planning and referral to local advocacy and support services.”

Providing training in a multi-agency context has some distinct advantages. It enables participants to gain an understanding of how other agencies respond as well as developing an awareness of the role their own agency has to play. Using the training to explore how agencies can work together can lead the way in developing a consistent multi-agency response. But, in addition to a rolling programme of multi-agency training, councils should consider

the need for a variety of customised, single agency and issue-based training courses. Bearing in mind the importance of corporate leadership in the domestic violence field some councils are considering training their senior management teams. This will undoubtedly raise the profile of the issue.

As with all the other elements in the indicator, what is important is that it is delivered to a high standard. The definition makes it clear that the programme should be reviewed annually by the local domestic violence forum. Training programmes should be based on a training needs assessment and clearly linked (and evaluated against) the over-arching domestic violence strategy.

A number of local authorities and voluntary organisations have been formalising the evaluation of their training courses with some developing accreditation and professional standards. For example, CRARG have been developing accreditation for their advocacy training programme. In 2002 the Central Police Training and Development Authority (Centrex) and the Association of Chief Police Officers published a new six part training pack on domestic violence. Each of its modules covers a different aspect of police work, including a section on working with the local community and other agencies to prevent violence and hold offenders to account.

## Coventry City Council

The Coventry Domestic Violence Partnership (CDVP) was initially set up in 1990, with the local authority funding a domestic violence co-ordinator from 1998. In 2001, CDVP commissioned research into current provision and future requirements for domestic violence training in both statutory and voluntary organisations. The results showed a need for domestic violence awareness training and, as a result, a multi agency training project was established.

The CDVP training project is managed by the domestic violence co-ordinator, and employs a full-time training officer and part-time clerk. The

12 Tackling domestic violence – effective interventions and approaches: Research Study 290, Home Office, February 2005

project has been funded by the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, although this ceased in 2005. The CDVP has developed a business plan to sustain the project in the long term.

The project has provided free training for hundreds of front line staff across statutory and voluntary agencies, having developed two core modules: raising awareness and developing skills. It has also developed hot topics, including cultural awareness, drugs and alcohol and mental health. To support delivery of its training modules the project has produced a DVD/video: *Scars of a quiet denial*. This training resource is now available for purchase nationally.

Speaking about what they have learnt from the training project, Coventry believes that to develop a successful project, partnerships need to:

- gain commitment from key stakeholders at a senior level as early as possible, through raising awareness of the impact of domestic violence on their individual agency;
- identify the level of local demand for training at an operational level within a wide range of agencies, and consider how to balance the recognised benefits of multi-agency training with the need to respond to agencies specific training needs;
- ensure that evaluation processes have been built into the training project from the start;
- consider the implications of non-attendance at training events, often due to conflicting demands on front-line staff;
- undertake long-term planning. To ensure sustainability, partnerships need to consider the resource planning cycles of the various potential funding stakeholders.

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## **Bath and North East Somerset Council**

Using funding from the BCU budget, Bath and North East Somerset Partnership Against Domestic Violence provides multi-agency training on domestic violence and abuse awareness. It has also offered training to the local child protection committee, to extend awareness of the impact and needs of children and young people affected by domestic violence. The partnerships also organises lunchtime seminars every 2/3 months, given by researchers in various specialist fields. This programme will continue with an update on the new legislation, the role of schools in supporting children and guidelines for working with survivors who misuse drugs or alcohol and/or have severe mental health problems.

The partnership sees training as an important plank in its strategy to improve effective multi-agency working, increase protection and improve support. They have identified the following as key components of effective training delivery:

- partnerships should devise and implement a training strategy to ensure that all relevant staff receive training (rather than leaving it up to individual interest);
- relevant staff includes both front-line staff and managers, and organisations should monitor the take-up of training;
- in terms of training content, basic training should focus on awareness raising, with further training in more specialist areas only offered once basic awareness training has been undertaken;
- training should be delivered by two experienced practitioners and should, where possible, include input from local support agencies;
- knowledge and skills development should be evaluated both during the course and at appropriate intervals after the training event.

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## concerns – who is it for and how will it be measured?

The scope of BVPI 225 is: metropolitan authorities, London boroughs, unitary authorities, district councils, council of the Isles of Scilly and the Common Council of the City of London. County councils have not been included.

We understand that counties were left out largely because of the complexity of the indicator and the difficulty (and possible confusion) that their inclusion would cause. Counties make a significant contribution to tackling domestic violence, but for their work to have the greatest impact, systems for local implementation and action need to be set up. It is on this that the BVPI focuses.

However, the indicator does not provide an incentive for county councils to carry on their good work. While it is acknowledged that the role of counties is essential, leaving them out of the indicator means that they do not have access to a useful tool which could help them to lever domestic violence up the agenda and ensure that it is given the attention and resources it requires. Some counties are concerned that being left out will positively hamper their work in this area, for example: undermining negotiations for setting domestic violence stretch targets in the second round of local public service agreements.

Because the indicator cuts across a range of local authority functions, the full range of local authority structures needs to reflect the set up of these services. For example, the question on providing an education resource sits more comfortably with the county council in two-tier areas, a fact which is reflected by current provision.

As the previous section has shown, local authorities have adopted a range of different arrangements for developing strategies and protocols, employing a coordinator and providing training. These activities should be based on local needs, building on what is already in place. Not having county councils as part of the picture hampers this. While the LGA has welcomed the exemption in the section on co-ordinator posts, we would have liked to have seen room for greater flexibility built in throughout the indicator. What is important is the outcome - local arrangements and structures should be a matter for local determination.

In terms of how the indicator will be measured and its usability, the LGA believes that the multiplicity of elements makes it difficult to measure and may be off-putting. This could mean that some of the most important elements, such as the production of a meaningful strategy and the provision of training, will get lost.

## what's missing?

Although the indicator looks like a check list, it's not exhaustive. When commenting on the breadth of the BVPI, local authorities suggested that a greater emphasis on diversity, partnership working and on work with perpetrators should have been given. Another notable omission is the absence of any reference to workplace policies. The DTI's *Cost of domestic violence research* estimates that lost economic output due to domestic violence accounts for around £2.7 billion a year. A number of local authorities have adopted domestic violence employment policies. These policies are useful as not only do they assist individual employees, they also convey an important public message.

More fundamentally, two issues were raised time and again as the most important areas of service delivery in work to tackle domestic violence.

### **Outreach, support and advocacy services**

The indicator pays a great deal of attention to setting strategy, providing training and sharing information. What it says less about is the nature of the services to which individuals should be referred on to. In terms of achieving a positive outcome for survivors and their families it is the provision of outreach, support and advocacy services that will make the greatest difference.

The references in the indicator on access to help and advice are very much linked to measures for emergency accommodation and safe housing. There is little for people who need support but not necessarily linked to accommodation - including those who are still living with the perpetrator.

While most domestic violence support services are provided outside the statutory sector, local authorities have a central role in terms of commissioning, supporting and funding of these services - as well as ensuring that the range of provision meets identified needs and that this is monitored and reviewed.

### **Children's services and child protection**

The other significant area that local authorities should address is the provision of services to children and young people who have experienced/witnessed domestic violence, including linking this work with child protection systems.

The LGA believes that the needs of children and young people experiencing domestic violence must be explicitly addressed within the new structures for children's services and thus embedded within the preventative agenda for all vulnerable children. Many local authorities are taking up the challenge and developing joined-up approaches to working with children and adults, for example:

- funding children's support workers in refuges;
- providing outreach support;
- developing therapeutic work with children and young people – both individual and group work;
- making the links with health and midwifery services;
- joining up processes between domestic violence and social services, for example aligning child protection and domestic violence policies and procedures.

While we would not argue for any extension to the BVPI, local authorities need to consider both these areas of service delivery if they really do want to make a difference to the lives of domestic violence survivors and prevent repeat offences. We would suggest that the provision of support, outreach and advocacy services for adults and children should form the focus of an effective strategy to tackle domestic violence.

## conclusions

Domestic violence is a big problem. For too long its impact has been underestimated and this has meant that public resources have not been adequately channelled into dealing with this issue. Historically, given the lack of a national vision and the confusion about the roles of the various agencies, the involvement of local authorities has been patchy. Now that there is a growing consensus on the types of intervention that are most effective, it is important that this knowledge is shared.

The LGA has welcomed the broader purpose of the new BVPI looking as it does across the spectrum of local authority activity. We agree that a holistic approach is needed to address this problem, but that within this, priorities have to be picked out. The indicator should help to ensure that this happens.

The LGA does have concerns about BV 225's usability as an indicator, but hope that these will not detract from what we see as a much needed boost to local authority work in this area. BV 225 should provide a useful tool for domestic violence co-ordinators allowing them to hook the work they are doing more coherently to the local authority's strategic agenda. To use it effectively they will need to build upon it, looking at what services are needed locally and drawing on the best practice that has already been developed.

Performance indicators can give a useful steer, but they should not be the rationale for change. Providing an appropriate response focused on early identification and intervention will not only help individuals and limit the negative impact of domestic violence, it also sends out a message of non-tolerance that will help change attitudes in the future. When looking at implementing this indicator, councils must ensure that their efforts are clear, committed and effective so that they achieve more than just a good score: they make their community safer and prevent further damage to people's lives.

# what next?

## LGA project and role

The LGA is running a three year Home Office-funded domestic violence project. The project aims to identify and promote good practice of councils and partner organisations in addressing domestic violence by:

- developing and supporting local partnerships;
- sharing good practice;
- raising awareness of domestic violence and council's role in tackling this problem;
- influencing national developments for a more co-ordinated response;
- identifying broader lessons for community safety.

In July 2004, the LGA produced a publication sharing council's experiences of setting domestic violence stretch targets in the first round of Local Public Service Agreements (LPSA). This report outlines the key benefits and difficulties that councils faced, and set out the considerations which local authorities will need to take into account when deciding whether to set domestic violence stretch targets for second generation LPSA's. Copies of the report can be downloaded from the LGA's website [www.lga.gov.uk](http://www.lga.gov.uk)

The LGA developed a programme of engagement and support with local domestic violence partnerships which ran through the financial year 2004/5. Independent research on the programme will be published in the summer of 2005 with a second, year-long programme of consultancy starting in the autumn. The domestic violence pages on the LGA website contain additional information about the project, including briefings, publications and links. They can be accessed at: [www.lga.gov.uk/ProjectHome.asp?lsection=59&ccat=943](http://www.lga.gov.uk/ProjectHome.asp?lsection=59&ccat=943)

If you would like any further information about the issues raised in this paper, or on the LGA's domestic violence project more generally, please contact LGconnect on 020 7664 3131 or email [info@lga.gov.uk](mailto:info@lga.gov.uk)

In addition, if you would be interested in receiving bi-monthly e-mailings from the LGA's domestic violence project contact LGconnect.

## Useful publications

*Tackling domestic violence - effective interventions and approaches: Research Study 290*, Home Office, February 2005

*Developing domestic violence strategies – a guide for partnerships*: Home Office Violent Crime Unit, December 2004

*Preventing violence against women and girls – a study of education programmes for children and young people*: Jane Ellis, University of Warwick, Womankind Worldwide, November 2004

*The cost of domestic violence*: Sylvia Walby, University of Leeds, Women and Equality Unit, DTI, September 2004

*Targeting abuse – setting domestic violence stretch targets*: LGA, 2004

*Safety and justice: sharing personal information in the context of domestic violence – an overview*: Home Office, May 2004

*Unlocking the secret: women open the door on domestic violence – findings from consultations with survivors*: Women's National Commission, 2003.

*Supporting people handy guide – addressing domestic violence in the Supporting People programme*: ODPM, 2002

*Domestic violence and child abuse – policy and practice issues for local authorities and other agencies – briefing paper from the task group on domestic violence and child abuse*: LGA, 1998.

Below is an outline of the main statutory provisions relating to domestic violence which apply to local authorities. The list provides an overview, demonstrating that local authorities have clear obligations – it is not, however, exhaustive.

For information about the various legal options and sanctions available to victims please refer to the Department of Constitutional Affairs' (DCA) *Domestic Violence - a guide to civil remedies and criminal sanctions*. This guide aims to assist professionals and service providers to advise victims on their options for effective protection for them and their families - especially their children. It can be downloaded at [www.dca.gov.uk/family/dvguide03.pdf](http://www.dca.gov.uk/family/dvguide03.pdf)

#### **Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004**

The Act made a number of changes to the criminal justice system aimed at increasing the protection offered to victims. These include: making common assault an arrestable offence, extending the availability of restraining orders and making it an arrestable, criminal offence to breach a non-molestation order. The Act also made provision for an independent commissioner and a code of practice for crime victims, and put into place a system to review domestic homicides, drawing in the key agencies (including local authorities) to find out what can be done to put the system right and prevent future deaths.

#### **Children Act 2004**

This Act imposes new duties on councils to ensure local co-operation to improve well-being, to make arrangements to safeguard children and promote welfare, as well as proposals for information sharing and Local Safeguarding Boards. The Act also established a new joint inspection framework for children's services and a Children's Commissioner for England.

#### **Homelessness Act 2002**

Under Section 177 of the Housing Act, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, a local authority has a responsibility to assess whether it is reasonable for an individual to continue to occupy

accommodation. The Act states that it is not reasonable for a person to continue to occupy accommodation if it is probable that this will lead to domestic or other violence against them. The Act also imposes duties on authorities to provide advice to homeless people or those threatened with homelessness; temporary accommodation to homeless people as defined under housing legislation. Generally social landlords have a duty to keep their housing stock in good repair and have obligations to protect the welfare of their tenants. The Code of Guidance lists six additional priority needs categories including: "A person who is vulnerable as a result of ceasing to occupy accommodation because of violence from another person or threats of violence from another person which are likely to be carried out."

#### **Adoption and Children Act 2002**

Section 120 of the Adoption and Children Act expands the definition of harm in the Children Act 1989 so that it now includes "the impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another". This provision, which came into force in January 2005, makes it clear that children can suffer harm as a result of witnessing violence and abuse and that such harm should be taken into account when decisions are made about a child's future.

#### **Local Government Act 2000**

This Act requires local authorities to prepare a community strategy to improve the economic, social and environmental well being of their area, putting them at the heart of the governance of their localities.

#### **Race Relations (Amendment Act) 2000**

The Race Relations Amendment Act creates a general duty on public authorities to promote racial equality, requiring strategies and services designed to meet specific needs of people from black and minority ethnic communities. Under the Act, local authorities have duties to deliver all services within a framework which adheres to equal opportunities legislation.

### **Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

Under this Act local government (and other key agencies) have duties to plan, implement and deliver three year Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategies; to exercise all their functions with regard to the effect on and the need to prevent crime and disorder; and, to form local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships. The Home Office has made it clear that it expects these partnerships to address domestic violence. The Act also allows for the use of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBO) that aim to protect the public from behaviour that causes or is likely to cause harassment alarm or distress. The legislation specifically excludes the use of an ASBO where the abuser is of the same household as the victim. They can, however, be applied for where the victim and abuser do not live in the same household and/or the violence is such that a public nuisance is being caused as well as specific harassment of the victim.

### **Human Rights Act 1998**

This Act incorporates into UK domestic law certain provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights. It includes a number of 'articles' which set out human rights. Article 3 refers to the prohibition of torture and states that "no one shall be subject to torture or inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment".

### **The NHS and Community Care Act 1990**

This gives local authorities a duty to assess the care needs of any person who appears to need community care services and decide whether services should be provided. Social services will assess a vulnerable person who is experiencing domestic violence, under the adult protection procedures, but will also carry out a separate community care assessment if they appear to need community care services.

### **Children Act 1989**

This Act relates to the welfare of children and places a duty on local authorities to promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need, which will include children living with domestic violence.

### **Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (and regulations thereunder)**

This Act imposes a duty on employers to ensure, as far as is reasonably practical, the health and safety at work of their employees. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1992) requires employers to assess the risks of violence to employees and make arrangements for their health and safety by effective planning, organisation and control.

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