

**JOINT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY TRANSITION – HOUSING TASK GROUP  
12<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2009**

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**SANCTUARY SCHEME**

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**Purpose of the Report**

**To provide the task group with an opportunity to discuss this scheme which is designed to prevent homelessness for victims of domestic violence.**

**Background**

- 1.1 As a local authority, Wiltshire Council has a statutory duty to work in partnership with other agencies on a variety of issues including crime and disorder. Domestic violence has an impact on local authority services such as housing, homelessness and social services.
- 1.2 There are some victims of domestic violence who choose to relocate to another area and there are some who would prefer to remain in their homes with support and help from other agencies.
- 1.3 The scheme is voluntary and available to men and women living in any tenure
- 1.2 The scheme must operate in conjunction with the police and voluntary sector
- 1.3 A secure 'sanctuary' can be provided by creating a safe room with reinforced doors and bolts
- 1.4 Security arrangements/assessments are tailored to the needs and circumstances of individual households
- 1.5 The service is free of charge to the client

**Key Objective**

- 2.1 To prevent homelessness by providing additional security and support to victims of domestic violence and hate crime to remain in their home if they choose to do so.

**Purpose**

- 3.1 The Sanctuary Scheme is a victim centred initiative which aims to make it possible for victims of domestic violence and hate crime to remain in their homes and feel safe, rather than being forced to

relocate to other areas away from family networks, employment and schooling.

- 3.2 The scheme must provide security measures to allow a person to remain in their home - where he/she chooses to do so - where safety and security can be increased and the violent partner no longer lives within the home. It must be available across tenures where the landlord of the 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 the service is only provided where it is the clear choice of the victim.

- 3.3 The Sanctuary Scheme will be offered to all applicants who present to the Housing Options Team in Wiltshire Council or other referring agencies via the referral procedure. The scheme should only be offered if homelessness would occur without the service.

#### **4. Service Provided Under Sanctuary**

- 4.1 Although there are essentially two levels of Sanctuary, the safety requirements are tailored to accommodate the needs of the individuals involved.

- Level One Sanctuary – this includes a number of security options such as changing door locks, fitting window locks etc. Victims are provided with fire safety equipment, which may include break glass hammers and smoke detectors.
- Level Two Sanctuary – this includes all the above plus provides a 'safe' room where victims can wait until the arrival of the police. The door to the room is replaced with a solid core door, reversed to open outwards with two mortice bolts fitted to the inside of the door along with three large steel hinges, hinge bolts and a 180 degree door viewer. An emergency telephone is installed in every sanctuary room. Additional security features, such as extra 'sanctuary' type doors to the front and rear of the property.

- 4.2 The Wiltshire Bobby Van Trust is not responsible for making good by decoration any cosmetic damage caused by the installation of a safe room and will not return the property to its original state before Sanctuary if the household moves.

#### **5. Procedures**

- 5.1 The service will be activated where a Housing Options Advisor (following an initial application for re-housing on the grounds of

homelessness as a result of domestic violence) recognises the Sanctuary Scheme as a potential and appropriate solution to an applicant's housing problem.

***Agencies involved in the referral process MUST ensure that the Sanctuary Scheme is the most appropriate solution for the victim and that homelessness would have occurred without the service.***

- 5.2 After receiving a referral, directly from a client or from a referral agency, the Housing Options Team at Wiltshire Council will interview the client or contact the referring agency and decide whether the case meets the Sanctuary criteria ie if a Sanctuary wasn't provided the person would be likely to become homeless.
- 5.3 If agreed, the Housing Options Advisor completes Form 991 which must be completed and sent via e-mail to the WBVT on [bobbyvan@wiltshire.police.uk](mailto:bobbyvan@wiltshire.police.uk). The Domestic Abuse Unit (DAU) completes a risk assessment and contacts the Wiltshire Bobby Van Trust (WBVT) to carry out an assessment of the works required. The DAU and WBVT can initiate referrals but all levels of works to be undertaken must be assessed and approved by one of the Housing Options Managers in an area office.
- 5.4 The Housing Options Advisor will identify the tenure type and notify the landlord of possible works under Sanctuary. This will provide an opportunity for a private landlord, in particular, to be at the property (with the client's permission) when WBVT visits to make its recommendations and assessments.
- 5.5 The WBVT contacts the client to make an appointment to view the property. If an agency is working with the client, a joint visit may be beneficial. However, if the client has contacted the local authority direct, the need for a supporting agency ie Splitz to become involved will need to be considered and discussed with the client.
- 5.6 The WBVT will attend the premises and complete a security survey and risk assessment based on any known police knowledge of the perpetrator. The survey should be undertaken in the presence of the victim in order that all security options can be fully explained.
- 5.7 Client decides on whether or not to opt for the Sanctuary Scheme.
- 5.8 If the client confirms acceptance of the Scheme, the WBVT sends its recommendations for work to Wiltshire Council. It is envisaged that the majority of cases will be Level One Sanctuary, which would enable works to be carried out the same day but this can only be achieved if approval from the landlord is given. To avoid unnecessary delays, social landlords must have prior knowledge and commitment to the provision of the Sanctuary Scheme.

5.9 All works will be subject to planning and building regulations approval.

5.10 Sanctuary cannot be seen as an immediate emergency response and, depending on the works required, could take from 5 days plus. A victim may require temporary accommodation during this period, such as staying with family or staying at a women's refuge which offers support and safety. The Housing Options Advisor will work with the victim and other supporting agencies as required to ensure safety is paramount.

## **6. Fire Safety**

6.1 Fire safety is paramount and the fire service is fully involved in planning the Sanctuary Scheme.

## **7. Equalities Statement**

7.1 The policy aims to deliver quality services without prejudice and discrimination to meet the needs of all the community, regardless of age, cultural ethnic background, disability, gender, marital status, religious or political persuasion or sexual orientation.

The policy will adhere to the Equality and Diversity policy developed by Wiltshire Council.

## **8. Monitoring and Reviewing the Scheme**

8.1 The scheme will be reviewed annually, with the next review due in April 2009.