

**WEST WILTSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**SANCTUARY SCHEME**

**PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS BY PROVIDING ADDITIONAL  
SECURITY AND SUPPORT**

**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.**

## Background/Introduction

As a local authority, West Wiltshire District 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. Government targets are clear and, as a local authority, we are expected to achieve one of the following objectives:

- Reduced levels of repeat homelessness
- Reduced levels of homelessness against its main causes, and or:
- Reduced inappropriate use of temporary accommodation

We have recently put in place a housing and homelessness strategy to prevent homelessness and achieve the above targets. One of our objectives was to introduce a Sanctuary Scheme to help prevent homelessness caused by relationship breakdown. Domestic violence makes up 25% of all recorded violent crime and, as a result, the government published a revised Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI 225) for domestic violence. We recognise that some victims of domestic violence choose to relocate to another area; however, there are some who would prefer to remain in their homes with support and help from other agencies.

A key part of BVPI 225 is the requirement of local authorities to develop a Sanctuary Scheme. A service specification will need to be established to determine how the outcomes of the project are to be best determined and recorded.

## Purpose of the Sanctuary Scheme

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.

*Sanctuary requirement in BVPI 225:*

***“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?”***

**Although the BVPI states “where safety can be guaranteed”, it is pertinent to state that safety cannot be *guaranteed* if a victim decides to relocate or chooses Sanctuary. Sanctuary offers increased security and enables victims to stay in their own homes where this is possible and desired, rather than being forced to move and disrupting education. It is, however, recognised that the physical security arrangements that Sanctuary offers are not enough and the level of support, for women**

**leaving refuges as well as services for victims who wish to remain in their own homes, must be considered.**

*The main objective*

- 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.

*Factors to consider:*

- The scheme is voluntary and available to women and men\* living in any tenure.
- It should operate in conjunction with the police and the voluntary sector
- A secure 'sanctuary' can be created by creating a safe room with reinforced doors and bolts.
- Security arrangements/assessments are tailored to the needs and circumstances of individual households.
- The service is free of charge

\* Although men can also be victims of domestic violence, it is acknowledged that the majority of households will be single women or women with children.

**Who will use the service?**

- Applicants who present to the Housing Needs Section of West Wiltshire District Council or other referring agencies via the referral procedure.

**Who can make referrals under the Sanctuary Scheme?**

There are many agencies involved with victims of domestic violence such as:

- Social services
- Splitz
- The Domestic Violence Unit
- Registered Social Landlords
- Victim Support

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.

***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.***

## **What services will be provided under Sanctuary?**

Although there are essentially 2 levels of Sanctuary, the safety requirements are tailored to accommodate the needs of the individuals involved.

**Sanctuary One** – 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.

**Sanctuary Two** – 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 also provided under the scheme – 999 only – and will be wall mounted in the 'safe' room.

## **What support is provided throughout the process?**

The Sanctuary Scheme offers physical security but does not offer the support provided by specialist agencies. Like many local authorities, West Wiltshire District Council does not have the resources and relies on other agencies to provide the specialist support. Within the Sanctuary working group there are agencies who can offer support throughout the process and after the work has been completed. It is important that support can be provided for anyone who needs it.

## **Fire Safety**

Fire safety is paramount and the fire service has a representative on the working group who offers advice in the planning of the Sanctuary Scheme.

## **Who is eligible to use the service?**

The Sanctuary Scheme is not limited to housing association tenants and includes any person within West Wiltshire, who is threatened with homelessness due to domestic violence or hate crime.

## **Who pays for the work to be carried out?**

The Housing Needs Team at West Wiltshire District Council has secured ODPM funding under the homelessness prevention fund for 2006/2007. Works will be carried out by the Wiltshire Bobby Van Trust and agreed by the Housing Options Team Leader at West Wiltshire District Council.

## **When will the service commence?**

A pilot scheme has been running since November 2005 and West Wiltshire District Council has been working closely with the Wiltshire Bobby Van Trust and the Domestic Violence Unit in Melksham during this time.

The official commencement date for the Sanctuary Scheme in West Wiltshire is 1 April 2006 and a Service Agreement between West Wiltshire District Council and the Wiltshire Bobby Van Trust has been agreed for a 12 month period.

West Wiltshire District Council will provide information about the scheme in the form of leaflets/booklets and will 'advertise' the scheme on West Wiltshire District Council's website. All local agencies; social landlords; doctors' surgeries; libraries etc will be provided with information about the scheme.

## **Monitoring and Reviewing the Scheme**

A working group has been formed to include:

- West Wiltshire District Council (Housing)
- West Wiltshire District Council – (Community Safety Officer)
- The Wiltshire Bobby Van Trust
- Wiltshire County Council – Domestic Violence Co-ordinator
- The Domestic Violence Unit
- West Wiltshire Refuge
- Splitz
- The fire service
- Social Services
- West Wiltshire Housing Society

The scheme will be reviewed and monitored throughout the year, with the group meeting on a quarterly basis once the scheme has become established.