

# **Review of Services Relating to Domestic Violence and Abuse in Southwark**

Report of the Housing, Environment, Transport &  
Community Safety Scrutiny Sub-committee

September 2012



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## Introduction

1. Domestic abuse can devastate the lives of its victims. The support that victims receive from a variety of different bodies can be crucial in helping them to move on, ensuring perpetrators are held to account and breaking cycles of violence in the home.
2. In July 2011 Southwark Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Sub-Committee decided to review services relating to domestic abuse. The scrutiny process began in late 2011 and continued until June 2012. The review was particularly timely because Southwark Council was moving to a new integrated approach to dealing with domestic abuse via the commissioning of a new contract with the specialist organisation “Solace – Women’s Aid”.
3. It is important from the outset to understand the broad definition of domestic abuse which the sub-committee considered. Southwark Council uses the same definition as that adopted by the Greater London Authority, which is:

“Domestic abuse is a pattern of behaviour which is characterised by the exercise of control and the misuse of power by one person, usually a man, over another, usually a woman, within the context of an intimate relationship. It can be manifested in a variety of ways, including but not restricted to, physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse, and the imposition of social isolation and is most commonly a combination of them all.”
4. The sub-committee heard evidence that this broad definition adopted by Southwark includes the following:
  - Heterosexual men abused by heterosexual women
  - Same sex relationships
  - Relationships involving a personal/family/otherwise carer
  - Parent/other adult relationships with children
  - Former partners and relationships
  - ‘Honour crimes’
  - Between young people under 18 in the context of ‘dating violence’
5. The scrutiny began at the sub-committee’s January 2011 meeting where we received an introductory presentation from officers in the Domestic Abuse Team and from Jonathan Toy, Head of Community Safety. Further information was collected prior to the meeting in April, where issues were considered in further detail. This meeting included further presentations from Southwark’s Domestic Abuse Team, Housing Officers, representatives of Solace Women’s Aid and Jain Lemon from the Mayor’s Office for Police and Crime. The scrutiny also included further discussion and correspondence with officers with responsibility for domestic abuse and a visit by the chair of the sub-committee to a domestic violence centre run by Solace. The presentation made by domestic violence and community safety officers at the April meeting was based on requests for further information that the sub-committee had made at the January meeting.
6. The sub-committee’s general approach to this issue was to delve into the issues relating to domestic abuse in Southwark and attempt to identify issues which, if addressed, could improve how domestic abuse is dealt with in the borough.

## **Recent developments in Southwark council provision on domestic abuse**

7. Domestic abuse and violence against women and girls is a key priority in the council's Violent Crime Strategy 2010-15, adopted in December 2010 and the Safer Southwark Partnership's (SSP) Rolling Action and Commissioning Plan 2011-12

### **The newly commissioned integrated service**

8. Up until March 2012, Southwark's system for reporting domestic abuse and accessing support has been complex. The council has now commissioned Solace Women's Aid to run a new domestic abuse service which is intended to simplify this process and streamline the passage through the legal system for victims. It ensures a holistic service for victims, perpetrators and children and is accessible on a 24/7 basis.
9. Solace work with other service providers to deliver an integrated service. Angela D'Urso, the Commissioning Service Manager, reported to the sub-committee that performance targets for Solace are linked with the "Every Child Matters" programme.
10. Solace is a London based organisation which specialises in responding to domestic and sexual violence. It has forty years of experience in the field and is "Leading Lights" accredited.
11. The service Solace provides in Southwark is available to both female and male survivors of domestic abuse. The service provides a single point of entry with clear referral pathways. Services are hosted across the borough at different community venues. The new system also includes a risk assessment toolkit to ensure the appropriate support is provided, with low, medium and high risk options.
12. There are four strands to the Southwark Service:
  - An advocacy and support service for male and female survivors
  - A perpetrator programme run by Domestic Violence Intervention Project (DVIP)
  - A Parallel Programme for mothers and their children
  - Capacity building workshops for agencies and professionals within the borough
13. The advocacy and support service for survivors works across all risk levels. Victims have guaranteed access to an advocate of the same gender. The single point of contact is available for victims to use 24 hours a day.
14. The perpetrator programme is run by DVIP and includes a structured group work programme and proactive work with partners of men on the perpetrator programme.
15. The Parallel Programme for mothers and children helps to rebuild relationships between mothers and their children following instances of domestic abuse. It provides a safe and secure environment for children and mothers to express their feelings.
16. The contract with Solace also includes the provision of awareness raising training for external agencies and professionals, targeted community outreach, and facilitating a survivors network.
17. Solace produces monthly output statistics on the number of cases it is coming across.
18. The contract provides for a male member of staff who has a dedicated role in dealing with incidents of domestic violence where the victim is a man.

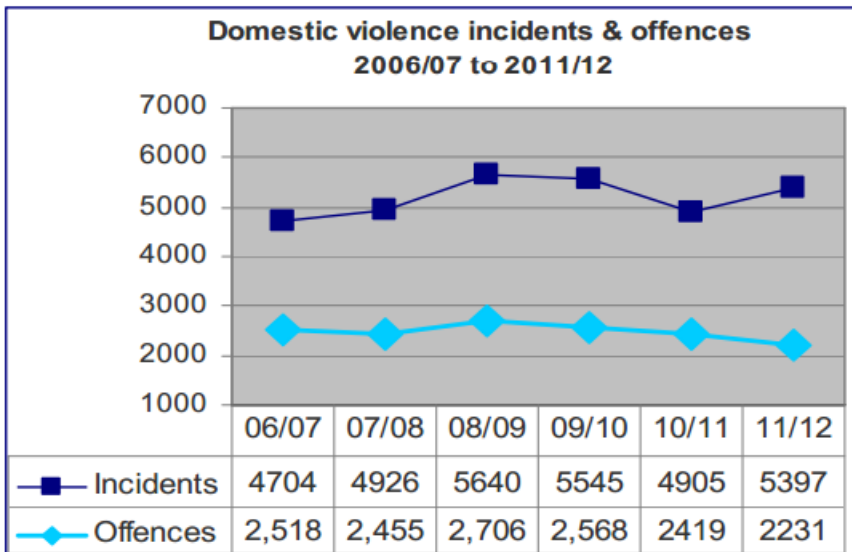
## Other measures

19. The SSP has successfully bid for European funding and is delivering two large projects in schools - SHER and HEDGEHOG. The projects support young people in preventing domestic/dating abuse and sexual exploitation.
20. The SSP is currently working on:
  - Implementing and embedding the new service provided by Solace
  - Further European funding bids in partnership with Solace
  - Progressing the lead commissioner arrangement
  - Exploring future possibilities in relation to perpetrators for example tenancy conditions, contact centres

## Statistical overview of domestic abuse in Southwark

21. The sub-committee brought together statistical information on domestic abuse in Southwark in an attempt to identify trends and gain a more detailed overview of the issue.
22. The sub-committee was provided with the following information about the amount of domestic abuse taking place in the borough over time. Officers stated that between 2006/07 and 2011/12 the number of domestic violence incidents increased by 15% (693 incidents). During this time period, incidents were at their highest in 2008/09 and 2009/10. There were 2231 offences with a domestic violence flag recorded in 2011/12; this is a decrease of 287 offences (-11%) from 2006/07.

**Graph 1**



**Table 1: Victims by gender, age and ethnicity**

The total number of victims in 2011 was 2,228. The tables below give a full breakdown of gender, age and ethnicity.

Gender	Percentage	Number
Female	76.2%	1697
Male	22.1%	492
Not known	1.8%	39

Age	Percentage	Number
9 or under	0.9%	21
10 – 17	1.2%	26
18 – 24	24.0%	534
25 – 30	20.3%	453
31 -39	24.9%	554
40 – 65	25.0%	557
66 or over	2.1%	46
Not known	1.7%	37

Ethnicity	Percentage	Number
White	45.0%	987
Mediterranean	6.2%	135
African/Caribbean	42.1%	923
Pakistani, Indian, Nepalese, Maldivian, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi, or any other (South) Asian	3.6%	78
Chinese, Japanese, or South-East Asian	1.5%	32
Arabic, Egyptian, Tunisian, Algerian or Maghreb	1.1%	25
Unknown	0.5%	48

**Table 2: Those accused of domestic abuse by gender age and ethnicity**

The total number of accused in 2011 was 784. The tables below give a full breakdown of gender, age and ethnicity.

Gender	Percentage	Number
Female	18.4%	148
Male	81.6%	656

Age	Percentage	Number
10 – 17	1.8%	14
18 – 24	27.0%	212
25 – 30	18.5%	145
31 -39	24.6%	193
40 – 65	27.7%	217
66 or over	0.4%	3

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Number</b>
White	44.1%	346
Mediterranean	6.0%	46
African/Caribbean	42.7%	335
Pakistani, Indian, Nepalese, Maldivian, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi, or any other (South) Asian	4.3%	34
Chinese, Japanese, or South-East Asian	1.5%	12
Arabic, Egyptian, Tunisian, Algerian or Maghreb	1.1%	9
Unknown	0.3%	2

In 2011, this is the number of domestic abuse offences which took place in the following wards:

**Table 3**

<b>Ward</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Numbers</b>
Peckham	6.9%	143
Camberwell Green	6.8%	141
Grange	6.5%	135
Newington	6.4%	132
Livesey	6.2%	128
The Lane	5.9%	122
East Walworth	5.8%	121
Nunhead	5.7%	119
Rotherhithe	5.3%	109
South Bermondsey	5.2%	108
Faraday	5.1%	106
Riverside	5.0%	104
Chaucer	4.6%	95
Cathedrals	4.4%	91
Brunswick Park	3.5%	72
Surrey Docks	3.3%	68
South Camberwell	3.2%	67
College	3.1%	64
East Dulwich	2.3%	48
Peckham Rye	2.2%	46
Village	1.8%	38

**Solace Advocacy & Support Service – Southwark Monitoring Report: April 2 – May 2, 2012**

**Table 4: How do victims get referred to support services? Numbers and sources of referrals**

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Number (#)</b>
Victim Support	50
Children's Services	17
Southwark Psychological Therapies Service	2
Self	16
CAB	7
LB of Southwark	4
Police	24

WiseGem	1
CAHMS	1
Kappa Project	1
One Housing Group	2
Housing Options	2
Schools	1
GALOP	1
Refuge	14
Bede House	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>149</b>

**Table 5: Numbers and types of abuse**

Type of VAWG	Number (#)
Emotional/psychological	62
Financial	25
HBV	0
Physical	129
Rape	0
Sexual	18
Sexual Assault	0
Verbal	29
Controlling behaviour	34
Stalking & Harassment	28
Unknown	0
<b>Total*</b>	<b>325</b>

\*Multiple Experiences

**Table 6: Domestic Violence sanctioned detection rate, comparative data for the London boroughs in Southwark's MSG (most similar group) of community safety partnerships.**

Borough	DV SD rate 2011/12
Kensington & Chelsea	50%
Camden	48%
Greenwich	47%
Hackney	47%
Islington	44%
Tower Hamlets	44%
Lambeth	40%
Haringey	39%
Brent	37%
Southwark	36%



## **Analysis**

23. Officers advised the sub-committee that we need to be careful about jumping to conclusions about domestic abuse statistics. Domestic violence is a notoriously “hidden” crime which it is difficult to quantify. A rise in “incidents” may be the result of greater awareness of support. Also, local area statistics can be skewed by individual repeat offenders.
24. Currently there are around 20 – 25 victims per month who are classified ‘at high risk.’
25. One in every five recorded crimes in Southwark is classified as violence against the person (10,553 reports in 2010/11). One in every four of these violent crimes is linked to domestic abuse (2,419 in 2010/11).
26. In Southwark, 40% of Merlin<sup>1</sup> referrals are domestic abuse related; 30% of these trigger initial assessments. In 2011, 225 cases were heard at the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), involving 254 children and young people.
27. Domestic Abuse incidents mainly occur in the 16 – 30 age range. Issues of relationship violence amongst young people rarely gets recorded. Young women with abusive experiences often find that the tolerance for abuse remains with them into adulthood.
28. In BME groups, there is a larger portion of women being effected and more work needs to be done to redesign more appropriate services around those communities. (See recommendations)
29. 83% of reported cases are from women, however there is a slight increase in reported cases where men are the victim and where parents and/or carers are also experiencing violence from children and young people.
30. It can take an average of 36 incidences of domestic abuse before a victim will call the police.
31. Clearly, the most striking statistic of those collected by the sub-committee is that showing Southwark’s low detection rate (36%) for Domestic Violence incidents when compared to similar inner London Boroughs. The reasons for this and possible solutions are pursued in the “Issues for further attention” section and the recommendations.

### **Early performance indicators on SOLACE contract**

32. Significantly, Solace’s monthly output statistics produced on the number of cases it is coming across are not matching the official statistics either according to quantity or trend. The sub-committee feels that the statistics produced by Solace are more likely to be reflective of the real extent of domestic violence in the borough.

### **Interview with Jain Lemom (Mayor’s Office for Police and Crime)**

33. Jain Lemom, from the Mayor’s Office for Police and Crime (MOPC), told the sub-committee that she had been working on the Mayor’s integrated strategy on all forms of violence against women and girls which included incidents of rape, sexual assault, honour based violence and female genital mutilation. The Mayor’s office strategy on domestic abuse covered a range of issues including refuge provision, the police and encouraging witnesses and victims to go through the court system, to help bring the perpetrators of domestic abuse to justice.

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<sup>1</sup> Merlin is a report produced by the Metropolitan Police notifying local authorities and agencies of violent incidents in the home where children may be affected.

34. Jain Lemom went on to inform Members of some of the problems she had encountered during her work on the issues of domestic abuse. She said that the London Council budgets had been reduced to help tackle this problem and that the Home Office (HO) was streamlining its service by encouraging women who might be experiencing domestic violence to go to a website to find information and support. She went on to say that this service might not be able to offer much to women who did not speak English or did not have access to the internet. This possibly was not the best approach to encourage vulnerable women to come forward.
35. Jain Lemom went on to say that there needed to be better training for the police when dealing with call outs and that more needed to be done to look after witnesses and victims going through the court system to help support them through a stressful time. Work also needed to be enhanced with all partner agencies and all boroughs to help raise awareness and improve the working of the systems overall.
36. Jain Lemom responded to Members' and officers' concerns by saying that the London crime reduction board, the police and the Mayor were all looking at what could be done about the perpetrator attrition rate. She was happy to work with Southwark in the future and offered to supply examples of good practice from other boroughs to the scrutiny sub-committee. The Chair thanked her for attending the meeting.

### **Visit to Domestic Abuse Advocacy and Support Centre**

37. On 22 June 2012 the chair of the sub-committee visited Southwark's Advocacy and Support Centre operated by Solace. The visit included an in-depth interview with the Service Coordinator, a tour of the centre and a group discussion with staff providing services. Unfortunately, on the day of the visit, it was not possible to speak to any victims of domestic abuse.
38. On behalf of the sub-committee, the chair would like to put on record his thanks to the staff for taking the time out to contribute to the scrutiny process. The visit was extremely valuable in providing useful information regarding the provision of domestic abuse services.
39. Issues which came out of the visit are included in the "Issues for further attention" section below and also in the report's recommendations.

### **Issues to be addressed**

40. **Conviction rate** - Southwark's conviction rate for domestic abuse incidents is far too low. It is 14% below Kensington and Chelsea, 12% below Camden and 11% below Greenwich and Hackney. During the scrutiny process two key reasons for this became apparent.
41. **Dedicated domestic violence court** - Firstly, the slowness of the criminal justice process. Victims are often afraid of reprisals from the perpetrator and/or can be financially dependent on their abuser. Currently, perpetrators are aware that if they pleaded not guilty to a crime, the likelihood that the victim would go through with court action resulting in a trial, was not high. Perpetrators understood that the further ordeal of a court case was not something that victims wished to face and that they often dropped out of any prosecution. Members and officers felt that it was very important that something was done about this. If the court process is too slow, there is a much higher chance that the crime will go unpunished and that the perpetrator will be free to abuse again. One way of addressing this issue is to introduce a dedicated domestic violence court. This is pursued further in the recommendations.

42. **Placing a domestic abuse caseworker with police** - Secondly, victims of domestic abuse do not always feel empowered to engage with the criminal justice system. Rightly or wrongly, they often feel that the process is skewed against them and that they will not be supported. As a result, they will report incidents, but not pursue justice. In other boroughs (such as Kensington and Chelsea) certain pilot schemes have been very successful in empowering the victims to pursue justice more regularly. In particular, having a domestic abuse support worker on-site in the police station to speak to the victim about the support that is available to them at the point that they are reporting the crime. This helps the victim to understand the process and become aware that they are not on their own.
43. **Women of indeterminate immigration status** - There are big challenges to provide services for women with indeterminate immigration status, who have no recourse to public funds. Often there are no community connections which makes vulnerable women 'hard to reach.' Solace will be expected to do a substantial amount of outreach work. Officers within the Housing department discussed the difficulties of acting on cases of reported incidents, as this often required cooperation with private landlords, other boroughs, legal services and had to be in accordance with legislation. Currently measures included in legislation impacted badly on women with indeterminate immigration status. They had no recourse to public funds to aid them, and officers and Members acknowledged that this situation needed urgent change.
44. **Training on how to deal with domestic abuse reports** - Another key issue is training for staff across a wide range of agencies (including police) on how to deal with a report of domestic abuse. There are varying levels of training across the council and other agencies and these need to be addressed. The new Solace contract does provide for a training scheme to address this issue, but there has been some delay in getting the domestic abuse training courses into the work programme of different departments and agencies. This needs to be sorted out as a matter of urgency.
45. **Risk Assessment Criteria** - A connected issue relates to the risk assessment criteria for domestic abuse being applied by staff working for agencies across the borough. Concern was raised by staff working at the Southwark/Solace Advocacy Support Service that staff in different council departments and other agencies were often using outdated or inadequate risk assessment criteria. This posed a danger because it meant there was higher risk of the wrong assessment being made, and it made the process more bureaucratic because it meant dedicated domestic violence caseworkers were then having to re-assess a high number of cases. The risk assessment which should be used is the Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA) risk identification checklist. This is a widely accepted risk assessment used across other boroughs and agencies.
46. **Slowness of response from Housing Department** - Officers told the sub-committee that often it was the victim who was removed from his/her home, the abusive situation, to be re-housed in less than adequate accommodation. A small proportion of those victims even found themselves on the streets eventually as a result of delays in the process of re-allocating housing. Once the victim has been removed from immediate danger, the process tends to slow down and take less of a priority.
47. **Ensuring perpetrators attend behaviour change programme** - Officers and Solace report that one recurring issue is that perpetrators of domestic violence are often extremely reluctant to attend the "behaviour change programme". In the case of council housing tenants, Southwark council needs to give these perpetrators greater encouragement to attend these courses. One option would be to make attendance on the programme a condition of continued tenancy.
48. **Staffing levels in support service** - On the visit to the Southwark/Solace Advocacy Support Service another issue which arose was staffing levels. Staff understood that, as a

result of severe cuts in funding from central government, resources were tight. However, there was concern that the number of cases per caseworker was very high and that this was making the provision of support to the victims of domestic abuse more difficult than it would otherwise be. The waiting list for Counsellor focussed on domestic violence is very long. Staff expressed concern that victims (particularly of psychological abuse) were having to wait long periods of time to access these services. This issue is pursued in the final recommendations.

49. **Ensuring staff take responsibility for domestic abuse** - All staff who work with someone who discloses domestic abuse should ensure that the appropriate referrals are made and that they take any necessary action to ensure the safety of the victim and any children. Staff should ensure they have the knowledge and skills to do this. Domestic abuse is a serious issue and we should ensure the best standards of service provision.
50. **Peckham** area is a hot-spot for domestic violence incidents. The Solace “hub and spoke” structure in the borough needs to make sure that sufficient facilities for support meetings are available in this part of the borough. There has been some delay in securing these facilities and this needs to be addressed urgently.

## Recommendations

1. **Accurate statistics** - Significantly, Solace's monthly output statistics produced on the number of cases they are coming across are not matching the local police statistics (based on reported crime) either according to quantity or trend. The sub-committee feels that the statistics produced by Solace are more likely to be reflective of the real extent of domestic violence in the borough. In future, these are the statistics which should be used to inform the council and Solace's action to tackle domestic abuse.
2. **Dedicated domestic violence court** - Time between incident and court hearing needs to be drastically reduced. Domestic violence courts have been very effective in other London Boroughs in reducing this time and consequently increasing conviction rates. Southwark council on its own cannot deliver this much needed reform. The sub-committee will write to all three Southwark MPs to see what influence they can bring to bear on Ministers and the courts service to deliver this change. The sub-committee would also ask that the Cabinet Member for Community Safety initiates work with Executive Councillors in Lambeth to see what further work can be done to deliver a dedicated domestic violence court. Southwark cannot continue to have such a low conviction rate, which exacerbates the problem of domestic violence in our borough.
3. **Training** – The training programme for relevant Southwark Council staff and other external agencies needs to be rolled out as a matter of urgency. There should be no further delay. Priority groups for training are: community leaders (TRA leaders, voluntary and community sector and councillors) and professionals (social workers, Area Housing Staff, council staff who have regular contact with residents). This is important as Domestic Abuse needs to be 'owned' by all that come into contact with it. Officers can make routine enquiries about domestic abuse in assessments etc and all should know what the next steps should be.
4. **Domestic Abuse Champions** - In addition, managers in Southwark Council should identify Domestic Abuse Champions. These would be members of staff across council departments who would be given additional specialist training. They would then be a resource which their colleagues could consult if they were concerned about a possible incident of domestic violence. This has been successfully done in other London Boroughs.
5. **Linking tenancy and leaseholder status to attendance on behaviour change programme:** Officers and Solace report that one recurring issue is that perpetrators of domestic violence are often extremely reluctant to attend the "behaviour change programme". Where the perpetrator is a council tenant, the council should make attendance on the programme a condition of continued tenancy. Officers from Solace and Housing should work closely together to use tenancy as leverage to force perpetrators to attend the programme. The same approach could be taken with leaseholders, where the council is the freeholder.
6. **Victims of indeterminate Immigration status, no recourse to public funds.** The council does respond to those high risk victims with no recourse through the MARAC process, however options remain extremely limited. Southwark officers should await the outcome and recommendations of Children's Services research into cases where the victim has no recourse to public funds. On receipt of this research a further action plan on how to deal with this difficult issue should be drawn up by the council. The sub-committee will ask local MPs to write to Ministers to highlight the issue and the need for further resources.
7. **Placing a domestic abuse caseworker with police** – The sub-committee recommends (as per the Solace contract) that the police prioritise the co-location of a domestic abuse support worker at key days and times. This helps the police to understand the process and needs of victims as well as ensures victims have access to support services in the shortest possible time frame.

8. **Risk Assessment Criteria** - Concern was raised by staff working at the Southwark/Solace Advocacy Support Service that staff in different council departments and other agencies were often using different risk assessments. This may, in part, be due to statutory frameworks requiring different focus, but should not be an excuse for making the system more complex and onerous for victims. Officers and Solace should train/ work with agencies and council departments to ensure that the correct risk assessment criteria are used.
9. **Changing the response from the Housing Department** - Officers told the sub-committee that often it was the victim who was removed from his/her home, the abusive situation, to be re-housed in less than adequate accommodation. Senior managers in the housing department need to work with officers in community safety to ensure that measures are put in place to enable bespoke action plans to better meet the needs of victims.
10. **Staffing levels in support service** - On the visit to the Southwark/Solace Advocacy Support Service another issue which arose was staffing levels, particularly in relation to caseworkers and counsellors. The Cabinet Member for Community Safety should consider prioritising funding for two additional posts (one caseworker and one counsellor) as and when it is possible to identify funding for these posts
11. **Ensuring all staff in the Housing Options Unit take responsibility for reports of domestic abuse** – All staff should take responsibility for dealing with those presenting as victims of domestic abuse. This is particularly important in high risk areas such as the housing options unit. Managers should ensure staff are trained and able to do this. Timely and high standard bespoke action planning should be undertaken and necessary referrals made.
12. **Peckham** area is a hot-spot for domestic violence incidents. The Solace “hub and spoke” structure in the borough needs to make sure that sufficient facilities for support meetings are available in this part of the borough. There has been some delay in securing these facilities and this needs to be addressed urgently.
13. **Additional security scheme** – Given that continued accommodation is such a crucial issue for the victims of domestic violence, consideration should be given to setting up a scheme which supports victims to remain in their homes where this is appropriate. The scheme should assist with security measures for the homes of victims of domestic violence.