

Domestic abuse and housing in Wales

This factsheet has been written by Julie Nicholas, Policy and Public Affairs Manager at CIH Cymru and Rebecca Jackson. CIH Cymru would like to thank Rebecca for her contribution to this publication, the latest in our series of 'Housing in Wales' factsheets, which was completed as part of her work experience with the Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru in July 2013.

Thanks also to Lynne Schofield at Welsh Government's violence against women and domestic abuse team.

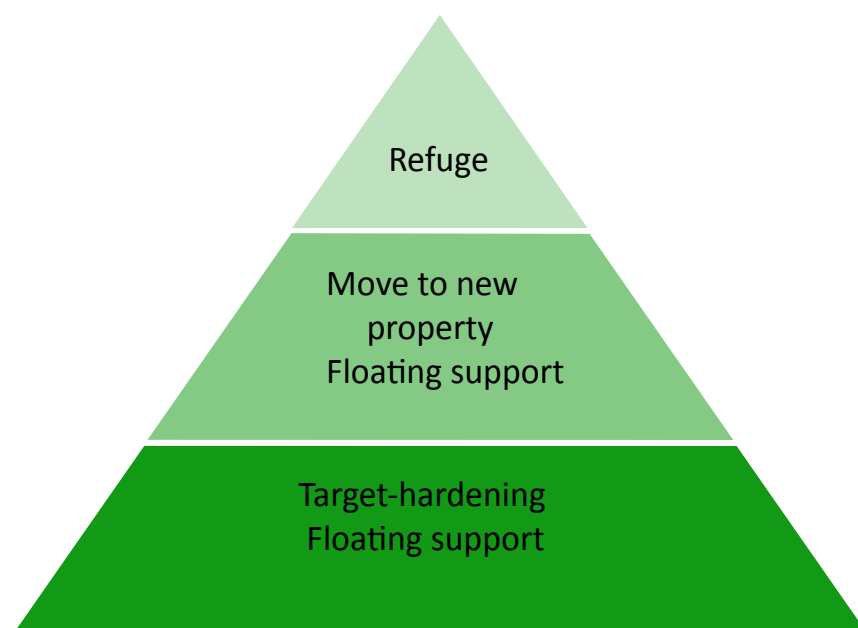
Domestic abuse in Wales

The housing needs of people made vulnerable or homeless by domestic abuse can be complex. A key proposal in the recent Welsh Government white paper on ending violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence is to ensure services are better co-ordinated, more comprehensive, and focus on early intervention.

These proposals will be complemented by the Welsh Government's proposed Housing Bill and proposed Rented Homes Bill to ensure victims of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence can access or remain in safe and appropriate accommodation.

Such a multi-agency approach seeks to enable victims to make active choices about the services that they receive; to select from a 'spectrum of services' which should include the choice to be kept safe in their own homes, where it is safe to do so, as well as the choice to access accommodation-based services where it is not.

It is generally considered good practice to make available a 'spectrum' of services available to victims and their children, including traditional accommodation-based services such as women's refuge (which should be used sparingly for individuals and families when, based on a risk assessment, other accommodation options are not safe) and floating support, provided to victims in their own home and 'target-hardening' services that improve the safety and security of the property.



What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is defined by the Home Office as:

“...any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. This includes issues of concern to Black and Minority ethnic communities such as so called ‘honour’ based violence, female genital mutilation and forced marriage, and it is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group” (UK Government, 2013).

‘Violence against women’ has been defined by the United Nations¹ as:

“...any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. The term violence against women is used to describe violence perpetrated against a woman because she is a woman, being recognised internationally as a violation of human rights and we will use this definition to inform the development of this policy”.

Domestic abuse can cause psychological, physical and social damage; it can also result in post traumatic stress disorder.

The impact upon victims can include:

- **Anxiety**
- **Depression**
- **Low self-confidence**
- **Poor health**
- **Serious injury**

Control and coercion are key factors and victims will often have their movements, actions and social lives restricted and monitored by the perpetrator.

Abuse occurs across all cultures, classes, religions and races; however, the pattern and level of abuse will vary within each relationship. Whilst there is increasing awareness of male victims, research shows that women continue to be disproportionately affected and are more likely to be a victim of domestic abuse.²

Due to the complex nature of domestic abuse many victims and their children will have a wide variety of needs which may involve multiple agencies and sectors. Research has shown that better outcomes are achieved for the victim and children when an integrated approach from all agencies is taken.³

¹ As referenced in: [Welsh Government, Consultation on legislation to end violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence \(Wales\) White Paper](#), 26 November 2012

² 97% of reported incidents of domestic abuse are perpetrated by men against women as reported in Hague, G. & Malos, E. (1998), *Domestic Violence: Action for change* (2nd ed.), New Clarion Press, England

³ Harne, L. & Radford, J. (2008). *Tackling domestic violence theories, policies and practice*. Maidenhead: Open University Press

New legislation

Legislation to end violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (Wales)⁴

In 2012 the Welsh Government introduced a white paper which sets out the Welsh Government's policy and legislation proposals for ending violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. There are three key themes:

- Stronger leadership across public sector services in Wales.
- Better education and awareness from the 'cradle to the grave'.
- Strengthening and integrating services that are consistent, effective and of a quality standard.

Homes for Wales Bill⁵

The Welsh Government's 2012 white paper which sets out the proposals for a new housing bill recognises the links between housing and domestic abuse. It includes a number of proposals to tackle domestic abuse and violence against women.

The paper identifies:

- The vulnerability of those who are experiencing domestic abuse; and acknowledges that this group of people may require more tailored and intensive support.
- That service provision is inconsistent and uneven across Wales, and there is a distinct lack of strategic direction to meet the needs of some of the most vulnerable victims.
- The need to ensure there is effective partnership working between housing providers, health services, police, voluntary sector and all other relevant agencies.

Renting Homes Bill⁶

The Welsh Government's 2013 white paper details ground-breaking proposals to change and improve the social and private rented sector. The paper recognises the issues and challenges that domestic abuse presents to tenant and landlords, specifically in regards to protecting a victim's tenancy rights.

The proposals in the paper include:

- The treatment of each joint tenant as an individual, which enables a joint tenant to leave without ending the tenancy for the other tenant(s).
- The need for all tenancies to include a 'prohibited conduct' term. This would include domestic abuse, which would be deemed a breach of tenancy and could result in eviction or loss of tenancy.
- The ability to terminate a tenancy for a perpetrator without affecting the tenancy of a victim, or to transfer tenancies over, thus providing greater housing security for victims and their children.
- Landlords can also apply for an injunction against the breach of tenancy and social landlords can also apply for an exclusion order, to which a power of arrest can be attached.

⁴ Welsh Government (2012) [Legislation to end violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.](#)

⁵ Welsh Government (2012) [Homes for Wales. A White Paper for Better Lives and Communities.](#)

⁶ Welsh Government (2013) [Renting Homes A better way for Wales.](#)

- Social landlords can also apply for a court order to demote a tenant from a secure contract to a standard contract.

What does it mean for landlords?

The above legislative proposals will have significant implications for the role that landlords play in tackling domestic abuse; acknowledging the importance of housing security and stability for victims. These proposals demonstrate the government's expectation that landlords and support services will respond appropriately and adequately to cases of domestic abuse.

One of the key proposals in the 'Legislation to end violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence' is to place a duty on relevant public service organisations to attend information sharing meetings.

Information sharing by housing providers at meetings, such as Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) and Daily Domestic Abuse Conference Calls (DACCs), is vitally important in ensuring that tenants who are victims of domestic abuse or violence are supported and feel safe in their own homes.

Welsh innovations and practice

Wales is internationally recognised for being innovative in its approach to tackling domestic abuse. Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) were originally established in Cardiff in 2003. It is now estimated that there are 250 MARACs in operation across Wales and England, with 45,000 cases discussed each year.

The aim of the MARAC is to provide a forum for discussion of high risk victims of domestic abuse, sharing information and agreeing safety plans where appropriate. They are held fortnightly and are attended by professionals from a wide variety of organisations.⁷

The MARAC process is a key process which is incorporated into a wider framework of interventions which serve to offer protection and support to victims of domestic abuse. Another key element of this framework is Specialist Domestic Violence Courts (SDVCs)⁸ and Independent Domestic/Sexual Violence Advisors (IDVAs) and (ISVAs).⁹

Evaluations of the MARAC process have revealed promising results such as improved partnership working, increased victim safety and a reduction in re victimization. There is a significant financial implication from MARACs with research¹⁰ showing that for each £1 spent on MARAC's £6 is saved in direct costs across agencies.

⁷ Robinson, A. (2004). Domestic violence MARAC's (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences) for very high risk victims in Cardiff, Wales: A process and outcome evaluation. Cardiff: Cardiff University. PDF

⁸ Cook, D; Burton, M; Robinson, A & Vallely, C. (2004). Evaluation of specialist DV Courts/ Fast track System- Evaluation of the effectiveness of 5 specialist domestic violence courts in Cardiff, Derby, Leeds, West London and Wolverhampton. CAADA <http://www.caada.org.uk/policy/CPS1.pdf>

⁹ Howarth, E., Stimpson, L., Barran, D., & Robinson, A. (2009). Safety in numbers: A multi- site evaluation of Independent Domestic Violence Advisor Services. CAADA http://www.caada.org.uk/policy/Safety_in_Numbers_full_report.pdf

¹⁰ CAADA, Saving Lives, Saving Money: MARAC's and high-risk domestic abuse (2010) www.caada.org.uk

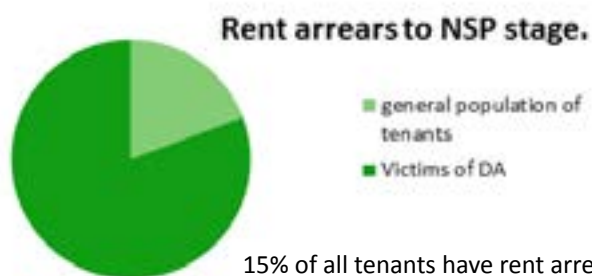
All of these roles and initiatives aim to deal with domestic abuse cases in a cohesive, consistent and holistic manner. They include combined responses between the police, CPS, housing, health and other specialist agencies that provide support to victims of domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse and housing management

Provision of safe housing

Rent arrears

Recent research in Wales¹¹ found that there was a link between domestic abuse and rent arrears; with tenants who are victims being four times more likely to have arrears related Notice to Seek Possession (NSP) than that of the general population of tenants. There are multiple reasons as to why victims of domestic abuse are more likely to be in arrears, including financial abuse whereby a perpetrator will control all finances as a means to control victims.



15% of all tenants have rent arrears to NSP stage.

63% of tenants who are victims of domestic abuse have arrears to NSP stage.

Anti-social behaviour

Welsh research¹² also shows a link between Anti-social behaviour (ASB) complaints and domestic abuse, tenants who are known to be victims were four times more likely to have been complained about by neighbours. The majority of complaints were relating to noise and nuisance. Research also suggests that despite guidance and advice which encourages landlords to address the underlying issue and cause of ASB, many still adopt a punitive approach which can compound the isolation and vulnerability of the victim.¹³



9% of all tenants have had ASB complaints made against them.

40% of tenants who are victims of domestic abuse have had ASB complaints made against.

¹¹ Jackson, Rebecca (2013) The Role of Registered Social Landlords in tackling domestic abuse in Gwent and the wider implications.

¹² Jackson, Rebecca (2013) *The Role of Registered Social Landlords in tackling domestic abuse in Gwent and the wider implications.*

¹³ Hunter, C and Dixon, J. (2001). Social Landlords Response to Neighbour Nuisance and Anti Social Behaviour: From the Negligible to the Holistic? *Local Government Studies* 27 (4). Pp 89- 104. PDF

Tenancy sustainability

The links between domestic abuse, rent arrears and ASB suggests that victims are four times more likely to lose their tenancies and possibly become homeless. It is vital that housing providers are aware of the impact that domestic abuse can have on tenants and develop an understanding of it in a wider context; viewing and responding to other housing management issues more sensitively and appropriately where domestic abuse is a factor.

Work place policies

The Welsh Government recognises that domestic abuse and violence can affect public service employees as well as housing tenants. The Minister for Housing and Regeneration has asked all registered social landlords to implement or update workplace policies on domestic abuse, violence against women and sexual violence. This is a key step that landlords can take to provide staff with a safe working environment and support them during difficult periods in their lives. Many devolved public service organisations already have robust workplace policies in place as a result of work led by the Minister for Local Government and Government Business, Lesley Griffiths AM. These workplace policies have been developed in accordance with best practice guidelines published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission Wales.

Gwent Police Force: Daily Domestic Abuse Conference Call (DACC)¹⁴

In 2010 Gwent Police Force established the DACC. The procedure involves a daily call attended by multiple agencies including local authority housing options teams and registered social landlords. The call discusses all domestic abuse logs from the previous 24 hours, information is shared and safety plans agreed.

The aims and objectives of the DACC are:

- Individuals discussed at DACC obtain a fast response and early intervention.
- Individuals discussed are at a reduced amount of risk of domestic abuse.
- Perpetrators discussed at the conference call are identified and held accountable.

Evaluations of the DACC have found that it is extremely beneficial for all agencies involved, particularly in regards to the information they receive and the interventions that are given, as a result 60% of agencies disclosed that their responses and reactions to victims were much quicker, more appropriate and coherent. The DACC has also been reported as enabling professionals to identify, map and deal with serial victims and perpetrators in a more holistic manner.¹⁵

¹⁴ <http://www.policingdomesticabuseingwent.org.uk/how-our-daily-domestic-abuse-conference-calls-work/>

¹⁵ Thomas, G & Allen, R. (2012). Domestic Abuse Conference Call Evaluation Report.

Bron Afon Community Housing: trespass notice and perpetrator accountability

“Because of the links between domestic abuse and housing management issues, such as rent arrears and ASB, we feel that it is vital to actively tackle domestic abuse. By providing additional services to victims we have managed to help them maintain their tenancies, live in a safe and secure home and remain close to support networks”

Many landlords struggle to manage and navigate the legal system when dealing with cases of domestic abuse. The process of obtaining an injunction is often time, cost and resource intensive. However, it is often necessary for landlords to take measures to exclude the perpetrator from the property in order to protect the victim. Bron Afon Community Housing has developed a new approach to dealing with this issue that requires significantly less time, resources and finance. In incidents of domestic abuse where a perpetrator is apprehended by the police, a member of the community safety team will attend the police station and serve the perpetrator a trespass notice in the presence of an officer.

The cost of this process is minimal and requires only one member of staff to attend the station for a short period of time. This approach has been extremely successful with perpetrators staying away from the property and area, reducing risk to victims and housing staff.

Target-hardening in Cardiff

For many victims it is important to access a place of safety away from the perpetrator, such as refuge. However, for others ‘target-hardening’ their home can be a safe alternative to moving to refuge or another accommodation-based service. Target-hardening can be an effective way for victims and their children, who are able to remain in their homes, to stay safe and continue to receive support from their local network of family and friends. Children can continue to access local schools and health services, as well as reducing the stress associated with moving home.

The Cardiff target-hardening model has seen all local combined to a centralised city-wide service available across all tenures. The service provides window locks, door locks, alarms and cameras; all of which serve to increase the victim’s safety. Cameras can help to deter perpetrators from attending the property and support evidence collection when a restraining or exclusion order has been breached.¹⁶

North Wales homelessness officer training

Training is a key tool to increasing awareness and understanding of domestic abuse and supports professionals to react and respond to cases of domestic abuse appropriately and adequately.

Domestic abuse awareness sessions were delivered to homelessness officers in Flint, Wrexham and Caernarfon. The training was delivered by domestic abuse co-ordinators from the relevant local authorities and other professionals.

“Hearing directly from a survivor really brought home how important it is to show compassion to victims of domestic abuse when you are working with them”

The three sessions included a module developed and delivered by a service user group. Feedback received from attendees after the training sessions was very positive and the involvement of service users was considered particularly successful and powerful.

¹⁶ Welsh Domestic Abuse Modernisation Project: Final Report (2012) From the Steering Board on the Cardiff, Dyfed, Gwent and North Wales Pilots.

Further information and reading

Policy and practice Information

- **Welsh Government:**
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/safety/domesticabuse/?lang=en>
- **Domestic Abuse Daily Conference Call (DACC):**
<http://www.policingdomesticabuseingwent.org.uk/welcome-from-chief-constable-carmel-napier/agenda/>
- **Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) information available from Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA):**
<http://www.caada.org.uk/aboutus/aboutus.html>
- **Welsh Local Government Association:**
<http://www.wlga.gov.uk/domestic-abuse>
- **Supporting People in Wales (funds housing-related support services):**
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/housing/supportingpeople/?lang=en>

Strategies, consultations and legislation

- **The Right to be Safe** (2010) Welsh Government strategy:
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/safety/domesticabuse/publications/besafe/?lang=en>
- **Together We Can End Violence Against Women and Girls** (2009) UK Government Strategy:
<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100419081706/http://homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/vawg-strategy-2009/index.html>
- **Consultation on legislation to end violence against women and domestic abuse** (Wales) White Paper:
<http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/housingcommunity/vawwhitepaper>
- **Homes for Wales. A White Paper for Better Lives and Communities** (2012):
<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/desh/consultation/120521whitepaperen.pdf>
- **Renting Homes: A better way for Wales** (2013):
<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/desh/consultation/130520rentinghomesbillen.pdf>

Information, services & support organisations

- **BAWSO** (providing specialist services for BME communities)
www.bawso.org.uk (BAWSO helpline: 0800-731 8147)
- **Dyn Project** (services for male victims)
www.Dynwales.org (Dyn Wales helpline: 0808 801 0321)
- **Hafan Cymru:** www.hafancymru.co.uk
- **Llamau Women's Services:** www.llamau.org.uk/womens-services
- **Welsh Women's Aid:** www.welshwomensaid.org.uk

All Wales Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence Helpline

Available free, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Phone **0808 80 10 800**