

## **Briefing: Domestic Abuse Support Services and the removal of ring fencing from Supporting People.**

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Supporting People funding in the last four years has been the only funding stream for the provision of a range of specialist domestic abuse housing support services in Scotland. As well as providing support in refuge accommodation for women who are homeless as a result of domestic abuse, this funding stream has funded support services to resettle women in their move into a new home and to support them while they remain in their community. Removing the ring -fencing from this funding means that there is no longer any form of secure funding framework for these services.

Supporting People provided a policy and funding framework to support vulnerable people in different types of accommodation in ways that are responsive to their needs. It required local authorities to strategically plan housing support services and make links with other strategies such as homelessness and domestic abuse. This clearly linked national strategy with local provision of services and provided a designated source of funding.

### **Supporting People Funding**

As can be seen in the table below in the three year period 2003 – 2006 Supporting People funding of over £22 million pounds was allocated to services for women experiencing domestic abuse. As some local authorities did not identify this as a specific client group within their returns the actual expenditure is likely to be higher.

### **Cost Benefit Analysis**

Research to be published shortly by the Scottish Government confirms that investment in Supporting People services more than pays for itself in the savings it generates elsewhere in the system. In relation to domestic violence the research estimates a cost saving of £42 million per year. These are based on cost savings in relation to health care and crime.

<b>Supporting People expenditure and benefits for women at risk of domestic violence</b>		
<b>Year</b>	<b>Expenditure<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Monetary Benefit<sup>2</sup></b>
2003/04	£7.9 million	£42 million
2004/05	£6.8 million	£42million
2005/06	£7.3million	£42 million
Total	£22 million	£126 million

As can be seen from the table above in cost benefit terms the provision of Supporting People funding for domestic abuse services provides very significant benefits to public spending.

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<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government: Supporting People Grant Annual Expenditure Returns

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government: Supporting People: Cost and Benefits Research, Tribal Consulting

## **Consistent Provision of Services**

Recent research on the provision of violence against women support services in the UK, Map of Gaps, graphically illustrates the geographic disparity in service provision. The report points out that Scotland has the most equitable distribution of services, 'The reason is simple; the Scottish Government is developing a strategic approach to addressing violence against women and has allocated ring-fenced funding for services'<sup>3</sup>.

The report continues 'The maps demonstrate that where government steers provision, a more consistent geographical spread is possible, when decisions are left to localised decision-making, the postcode lottery is enforced.'

It further comments that Local Authority Guidance in England which states that; 'work to tackle domestic violence is part of local authorities' core business – not an optional extra' has not been consistently heeded and some local authorities have failed to commission frontline services.

Since 2003 specialist support services for women experiencing domestic abuse have been funded by Supporting People. Currently services are working on Letters of Agreement which end in March 2008. Many of these services have no commitment to funding after that date and in areas where there are competing budgetary pressures these services are particularly at risk.

The Single Outcome Agreement contains no national outcome or indicator that reflects tackling violence against women, children and young people as a priority. This means that not only is there no secure funding for domestic abuse services but there is also no requirement on local authorities to demonstrate how they are addressing this issue locally.

## **Securing future provision**

Ring fencing cannot be removed from domestic abuse services until the following measures are put in place:

- Local authorities enter into 3 year full contracts with service providers for the provision of domestic abuse services.
- The development of a National Outcome and relevant National Indicators in relation to tackling Violence against Women.

Without these safeguards the achievements made in Scotland to ensure services are available to women and children where and when they need them are at great risk.

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<sup>3</sup> Map of Gaps: The Postcode Lottery of Violence Against Women Support Services published by End Violence Against Women in partnership with Equality and Human Rights Commission 2007.