

**PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS THROUGH
SECURITY MEASURES IN THE HOMES OF
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS
THE SANCTUARY SCHEME**

This section describes how Harrows Sanctuary scheme works. The scheme protects victims of domestic violence from becoming homeless by providing additional security in their home. Questions on how to set up a scheme are considered. Standard procedures and referral forms are included for information.

The Harrow 'Sanctuary Project'

Introduction

This is an area where in Harrow we have had some success. Violent relationship breakdown is the third highest homelessness acceptance category nationally. In Harrow, homelessness acceptances from this group has been reduced by over 50% since 2001/2002. The foundation of this success is the Sanctuary scheme. The scheme provides additional security measures for domestic violence victims and was developed in conjunction with Harrow's Domestic Violence Forum and the Police. Quite often victims of domestic violence lose confidence in remaining in their home because support and security is not provided quickly enough. Police figures in Harrow indicate that up to 50% of domestic violence incidents occur from associated persons who live outside of the home. The Home Office estimate the figure nationally at 40%. It is for this group, that there is significant potential to prevent homelessness.

The 'Sanctuary Project' 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.

The Crime Reduction Unit (CRU) at Harrow Police Station identified that despite all of the good work being done to help victims of domestic violence and hate crime, they were still feeling isolated and often gripped by the fear of repeat incidents. This frequently resulted in them having to move home on numerous occasions, with the associated problems of moving away from family, friends and the added problem of finding new schools for their children.

Home security and personal safety advice was always given, however there were no provisions in place for providing the victims with additional physical security measures.

In September 2002, the CRU in partnership with the London Borough of Harrow (LBH) Housing Department officially launched the 'Sanctuary Project', which assists repeat victims of domestic violence and hate crime to feel safe and remain in their homes, without having to make themselves voluntarily homeless. It is not limited to council or housing tenants and includes any person who is threatened with violence.

The main feature of the project is the creation of a 'Sanctuary Room', which consists of having an internal door replaced with a solid core door, reversing it to open outwards, so that the door jamb acts as an additional barrier. Two mortice bolts, three steel hinges, hinge bolts and a door viewer are also added.

Additional security can be provided, i.e. locks on windows and doors, grilles, gates, fire escape ladders and anti arson letterboxes.

The 'Sanctuary Project' is now seen as a positive response to domestic violence and hate crime and a close working partnership has now been forged between all of the agencies involved, i.e. Harrow Police Community Safety Unit, Housing Services, Harrow Women's Aid, Social Services and the Harrow Women's Centre.

Since its launch, numerous repeat victims of domestic violence and hate crime and their children, have benefited from the scheme and the feedback shows that their fear of crime has been dramatically reduced.

The London Borough of Harrow have recently achieved 'Beacon Status' in recognition of their work towards preventing homelessness and they continue to actively support this project.

What does the 'Sanctuary' Scheme consist of?

Every 'Sanctuary Project' is tailored to accommodate the needs and circumstances of the individuals involved. The security recommendations generally fall into three categories:

- (i) **'Sanctuary'** – this is where a door to a main room, generally the master bedroom, is replaced with a solid core door and reversed to open outwards. Two mortice bolts are fitted to the inside of the door, one at the top and one at the bottom, along with three large steel hinges, hinge bolts and a 180 degree door viewer. This provides a safe room or 'Sanctuary' for victims to call for and await the arrival of police fire safety equipment is also provided.
- (ii) **'Sanctuary Plus'** – this would normally have all of the above elements plus additional security features, i.e. grilles, extra 'Sanctuary' doors to the front and rear of the property, 'London' and 'Birmingham' bars, and window locks.
- (iii) **'Sanctuary Minus'** – this does not include a safe room, but could include a number of the other security options described in (ii), i.e. changing window locks and door locks, etc.

In the majority of cases, victims are also provided with fire safety equipment, which includes smoke detectors, break glass hammers and collapsible fire escape ladders from the Sanctuary room.

Who is eligible for a 'Sanctuary'?

The 'Sanctuary Project' is not limited to Council or Housing Association tenants and includes any person, who is threatened with homelessness due to domestic violence, hate crime or other violence.

What can make referrals under the Sanctuary scheme?

A number of key agencies involved with tackling domestic violence can make referrals. These are

- Police community safety unit who deal with hate crime
- Homeless Persons Unit
- Housing Management services
- Women's Aid
- Women's Centre
- Social Services

What is the criteria for who you are able to help under the scheme?

The criteria used is very simple. The service is available, regardless of whether the victim is a woman with a family or on her own. It is available free of charge to victims regardless of type of tenure. The only test is that agency referring must be satisfied that without the work the victim would be likely to become homeless.

How successful has the scheme been?

71 households have been referred under the scheme since September 2002 when the scheme was fully established. 57 Sanctuaries have been completed which is an 80% completion rate compared to referrals.

Out of those referrals not carried out. Half were cancelled by the Police Crime Reduction Team who visited and either did not consider the property could be made safe or were not able to proceed due to the scope of the work. The other half were cases where the victim did not want the work to be carried out.

Tenure of referrals

(i)	Council tenants	30%
(ii)	Housing Association tenants	25%
(iii)	Housing Association leased temporary accommodation properties	15%
(iv)	Private rented or owner occupied	30%

Average cost of each completed sanctuary - £800.00. Known cases where the victim has moved out following a sanctuary – 1 case.

Who pays for the work?

The Homelessness Service pays for the work through it's 'Invest to Save' approach to homelessness prevention. There is no means testing of victims and all qualify for the scheme regardless of tenure, even owner-occupiers.

My local authority does not have an Invest to Save homelessness policy. Is there some other way we can fund it.

Yes there are alternatives. In Harrow we pay for the work through our homelessness Invest to Save budget because it keeps the scheme simple and allows a fast response. However, there are other possible ways to fund the scheme.

- (i) For Council tenants – It is not unreasonable for work to be paid for through the Housing Revenue account. Councils have responsibilities to ensure the safety of their tenants.
- (ii) For stock transfers councils or Housing Association tenancies. The same arguments apply as in (i) above.
- (iii) Home Repair grants are possible under a council's private sector renewal grants policy. Most councils will have a policy to provide small home repair grants for people on means tested benefits. An assessment of means would be needed in such cases which could delay installation of a sanctuary.
- (iv) Home Safety grants – often available via Home Office money targeted at crime reduction especially hate crime.

Is this a voluntary or compulsory scheme?

The scheme is voluntary and the wish of the victim to remain in the home is paramount. The success of the scheme depends on a genuine and honest partnership between the Council, the Police, and the voluntary sector, often Women's Aid. If there is any question of compulsion a scheme will not work. Nor should the offer of security measures be used to back up a 'tough not homeless decision', where a woman does not wish to remain.

Through building up trust all agencies are committed to helping women remain in their home whereas in the past a victim would have no other option but to move.

How can support be provided to a woman throughout this process?

Ideally a Women's Aid Outreach worker or a specialist Support Officer should accompany the Police Crime Reduction officer on the initial visit to talk about the possibility of sanctuary work. The reality is that many councils may not have access to funds to provide support in every case. There are alternatives. Links can be made to Victim Support to ensure that a support worker can be provided to help a woman make a decision and provide ongoing support after the work has been completed.

The Police Community Safety Unit may be able to provide an officer trained in Domestic Violence issues to accompany the Crime Reduction officer. Using

volunteers recruited through the local Women's Aid may be a solution. It is important that support can be provided for anyone who needs it.

In my Council our Community Safety Unit or Crime Reduction Team cannot help. What can we do to implement a Sanctuary scheme?

What we describe above is the ideal partnership involving the Police, the Council and Women's Aid. However a scheme can be implemented in a number of ways.

A Council could use its own surveyor to inspect and specify the work or contract this function out. A homelessness officer could be used to talk through the options with the woman in her home. A specialist post could be established to undertake all functions including discussing the options, specifying the work and providing ongoing support. A council's Direct Service (DSO) could carry out the work instead of a private contractor. All these alternatives are realistic. However using the Police Crime Reduction team has some major advantages.

- (i) A consistent and sympathetic service for victims.
- (ii) Encourages victims to trust the Police and therefore be more ready to pursue prosecutions against perpetrators.
- (iii) The Police build up experience in specifying the security work saving time and money.
- (iv) Makes it easier to maintain confidentiality for the victim.

Should the scheme be on 24 hour, 7 day a week response?

We have put a lot of thought into this question. Initially we wanted a 24 hour, 7 day a week response. However, having thought through this issue we concluded that

- (i) The most important first response should be to make sure the woman is safe whilst a Sanctuary is considered. Respite emergency accommodation, or for the woman to stay with relatives and friends immediately following an incident, is perhaps a more sensible initial approach.
- (ii) It is important that a woman has time to make up her mind whether to stay with the help of a Sanctuary. She should not be pressurised into making a decision by an artificial timescale imposed by the council.

From referral to completed work will normally take up to 2 weeks but the process can be speeded up, if that is what the victim wants.

Do women feel safer with a Sanctuary?

Our survey of women who have had the work carried out records that they do feel safer. Often these are victims who have had to move several times disrupting their lives and the lives of their children.

Would you provide a Sanctuary for domestic violence victims where violence is from a partner inside the home?

This is not advisable. However, where a woman wishes to pursue legal action to remove her partner from the home, the availability of sanctuary security measures may help her make a decision to seek to exclude her ex-partner.

How does the referral process work?

Guide to the referral process

Stage 1	A referral agency provides the Crime Reduction Unit (CRU) with as much background information as possible.
Timescale	1 to 2 days, normally the same day.
Stage 2	The CRU contacts the victim to make an appointment to view the premises.
Timescale	1 to 2 days, normally the same day if a contact number is given and the victim is available.
Stage 3	The CRU will attend the premises and complete a security survey.
Timescale	1 to 7 days, an appointment has to be arranged which is convenient for the victim.
Stage 4	The CRU sends their recommendations to the Local Authority and the approved contractor.
Timescale	Normally the same day as Stage 3.
Stage 5	The Local Authority Housing Department will establish who the property belongs to and either give authority (for their own properties) or seek authority from the Housing Associations or private landlords for the work to be carried out.
Timescale	1 to 2 days, this can take longer if the property is managed by a Housing Association and is owned by a private landlord. All large Housing Associations have been instructed in the scheme and are willing to give permission for the work to be done.
Stage 6	The Local Authority will instruct the contractor when authority has been granted.

- Timescale 1 to 2 days, normally the same day.
- Stage 7 The local contractor will arrange to install the 'Sanctuary' recommendations.
- Timescale 1 to 7 days, depending on the availability of the client.

The Sanctuary Project

Description of works. This can be used in developing a specification for tendering the security work.

A contractor can be asked to provide a price for the following work.

Sanctuary (Description create a safe room in the home normally the bedroom)

Work	Cost
(i) Reverse door to a main room, generally the master bedroom, and replace with a solid core door which will open outwards.	
(ii) Fit two Mortice bolts to the inside of the door, one top one bottom	
(iii) Fit 3 large steel hinges and hinge bolts	
(iv) Fit 5 lever lock	
(v) Fit a 'London bar'	
(vi) Fit a 'Birmingham bar'	
(vii) Fit a 180 degree door viewer	
(viii) Provide a metal roll up fire escape ladder	
(ix) Provide a battery operated smoke alarm	
(x) Provide fire safety equipment to be specified	
(xi) Provide personal alarm	

A contractor can be asked to provide a price for each item. Not all these items would be needed on every sanctuary. What is required should be specified by the Crime Reduction Team officer or a surveyor on each inspection.

‘Sanctuary Plus’. (This describes a Sanctuary to one main room plus a number of additional security features to the property).

Description	Cost
(xii) <i>Reverse door to a main room, generally the master bedroom, and replace with a solid core door which will open outwards.</i>	
(xiii) Fit two Mortice bolts to the inside of the door, one top one bottom	
(xiv) Fit 3 large steel hinges and hinge bolts	
(xv) Fit 5 lever lock	
(xvi) Fit a ‘London bar’	
(xvii) Fit a ‘Birmingham bar’	
(xviii) Fit a 180 degree door viewer	
(xix) Provide a metal role up fire escape ladder	
(xx) Provide a battery operated smoke alarm	
(xxi) Provide fire safety equipment to be specified	
(xxii) Provide personal alarm	
Plus	
(i) Changing or fitting window locks	
(ii) Re-key front and back Mortice locks	
(iii) Change cylinder Yale lock to Mortice lock front and back doors	
(iv) Replace front and back doors with solid core doors and reverse	
(v) Provide a fire-proof letter box	
(vi) Provide a grille to standard size window	
(vii) Install covert security camera	

Again not all these items would be needed for every case but you should obtain a price for each item.

For some homes general security work may be all that is required, rather than creating a safe room. However our experience is that most cases required a full sanctuary plus some addition security work out of the list above.

The following case studies are based on actual referrals, but the names have been changed to protect the identity of those involved.

Case Study One

Sally is 36 years old and lives with her 12-month-old child in a two-bedroom ground floor flat owned by the Housing Association.

Police were called to her home by a neighbour stating that her ex-partner Steve, was trying to gain entry to the flat. When police arrived, he had gone.

Sally explained that Steve had been sending her text messages and telephone calls threatening to kill her and the baby.

Steve is a crack addict and is very violent.

Sally was very concerned for her and her baby's safety, as he has assaulted her on previous occasions over recent months and she believes that he is capable of carrying out the threats.

Sally was visibly terrified and stated that she didn't want to move to another property as she was settled at this address, however she had no option.

The Crime Reduction Unit carried out a survey at the flat and recommended the following security measures to be implemented free of charge under the Sanctuary Project:

Replace the front door with a solid core door. Reinforce the frame with 'London' and 'Birmingham' bars and reinforce the glass panel above the door. Fit three large steel hinges, hinge bolts, key operated door chain and 180-degree door viewer. Fit a letter box on the wall outside.

Fit collapsible grilles across the bedroom window at the front of the property and collapsible grilles across the French doors at the rear.

This work was carried out and Sally now feels happy to stay at the address. She said

"I feel 100% safer than I did before and I'm really pleased that I didn't have to move somewhere else. My baby and me are both settled in this flat and I can now sleep at night."

Case Study Two

Nicola is 29 year old and lives alone in her own two-bedroom ground *floor flat*.

Her ex-partner David had attended the flat and attempted to kick the front door in.

Nicola explained that she had finally decided to split up with her boyfriend following two years of physical abuse. Apparently David becomes very violent when he has been drinking. On this occasion he threatened to return to the flat with a gun and kill Nicola.

She has been living in fear and as a result of this latest threat, had temporarily moved in with a friend.

The Crime Reduction Unit carried out a survey at the flat and recommended the following security measures to be implemented free of charge under the Sanctuary Project:

Replace the front door with a solid core door, reverse to open outwards into the porchway and reinforce the frame where necessary. Fit two 5 lever mortice locks to the top and bottom of the door, three large steel hinges, hinge bolts, key operated door chain and 180-degree door viewer. Reinforce the glass panel above the door and fit a letter box on the wall inside the porchway.

Replace the back door with a solid core door. This door already opened outwards. Reinforce the frame where necessary and fit two 5 lever mortice locks to the top and bottom of the door, three large steel hinges and hinge bolts. All mortice locks keyed to the same key.

Replace the uPVC window handles with locking handles.

When the work was completed Sally said

“I didn’t think I’d be able to stay here anymore. I was terrified that he’d kill me. I now feel safe in the flat and have started to get a bit more self confidence”.