6th Annual Domestic Violence Conference

Improving Service Provision - Delivering Protection and Support

Findings of the Home Affairs Committee Report

Margaret Moran MP

Context

- All Party Group Set Up in 1997
- The Government has introduced more legislation on DV and FM than any other
- Consistently called for violence against women strategy
- eConsultation - Over 250 anonymous posts from 130 individuals on a whole range of subjects, from service provision to children to perpetrator programmes, religion, education and support.

HASC Report on DV, FM and 'Honour'-Based Violence focused on:

- Implementation of Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004, especially on increased reporting and convictions & greater provision of support for victims
- Public education and raising awareness
- Criminal and civil justice processes
- Support for victims including finance and refuge services
- Perpetrator programmes
- Multi-agency approaches and the barriers that exist to their effective operation

Nature of abuse

- Domestic violence is the largest cause of morbidity worldwide in women aged 19–44, greater than war, cancer or motor vehicle accidents.
- 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men in the UK will experience domestic violence at some point in their lives.
- Domestic violence accounts for 16% of all violent incidents reported to or recorded by the police. Around 2 women a week are killed by their partner or former partner.

Nature of Abuse

- The UK Government has adopted the following non-statutory definition of domestic violence: *"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"*
- Home Office figures suggest there are around 12 "honour" killings each year, but the total is likely to be far higher
- Spectrum of other forms of violence associated with "honour"

What those affected told the eConsultation

- *"Having experienced many kinds of abuse the physical abuse is horrible but the verbal and emotional abuse are far worse ….The emotional abuse goes on for a long time and believe me that's what you need help with"* – dot.com

- *"….being beaten so bad you just curl up and wish to die but then you hear him say he is going to kill you and the children with a gun …..In the mean time your toddler wakes up crying he then comes towards you with a gun…you beg him not to shoot you instead he throws the gun and comes at you and your daughter and punches you repeatedly in the face and head you both fall on the floor and feel like giving up"* – louie

What those affected told the eConsultation (cont'd)

- *"We need the community and the professionals to understand this is a human rights issue…that every person has a right to make choices in their lives and that as professionals we should not hide behind "cultural issues" so cannot interfere, may upset the community etc. The attitudes and views on this subject are what used to be, and to some extent still is in the arena of domestic violence".* – anonymous

- *"My parents would never think what they did to me was 'forced'. They genuinely thought they knew what was best for me. In ALL relationships…there is always one party who thinks they know what's best for the other"* – The Real Me

Improving service provision – the Committee's recommendations: Housing

Refuges

- A post code lottery of provision; insufficient emergency housing for victims across the UK – both in refuges and in social housing
- We were told by witnesses that 15% of women fleeing violence are unable to access a refuge place and the Haven refuge in Wolverhampton, which we visited, told us it turns away just over one third of referrals due to lack of capacity

Improving service provision – the Committee's recommendations: Housing

Refuges (cont'd)

- Even less specialist provision for minority ethnic women, including forced marriage victims. We were told that nationally only 30 refuge providers specifically support Asian women and only 6% of local authority areas have specialist refuges

- We **recommended** that the Government assess the shortfall in refuge space, producing a timetable for delivering additional spaces and reporting back against this

Improving service provision – the Committee's recommendations: Housing

Sanctuary Schemes

- We were in favour of Sanctuary Schemes – although we noted teething problems in some areas, for example Councils providing inadequate security measures, such as a simple lock or bolt

- We **recommended** that the Government carry out a national evaluation of the schemes including possible perverse incentives in the system

Improving service provision – the Committee's recommendations: Housing

Long term housing

- We were concerned over the lengthy waiting times for women and children to be re-housed from refuges – in some cases a wait of up to 2 years. These delays of course have the knock-on effect of blocking precious spaces in refuges

- We **recommended** an amendment to the Housing and Regeneration Bill to ensure that domestic violence victims be given priority need for local housing. We also **recommended** that the Government take action to make private rental accommodation more accessible to victims of DV

Government response

The Government responded to our recommendations as follows:

HOUSING

- *It disputed that there was a 'desperate shortage of refuge provision', citing monies invested in refuges through various Government initiatives*

- *In July the Government accepted that "there has been no recent comprehensive research" on the extent of current service provision for domestic violence victims, and undertook to "commission new research this summer that will look at the current provision of supported housing for people experiencing domestic violence"*

Government response

Study to look at accommodation and support provision for households at risk of domestic violence would start in Nov 08 and involve establishing:

- *The extent and type of temporary and settled accommodation available for households at risk of domestic violence in England, including the provision of support services delivered to both temporary and settled accommodation, and to households'*
- *The extent and nature of other options which enable households to remain safely in their homes*
- *Whether current provision meets the needs of households at risk of domestic violence and What gaps in provision exist*

Government response

SANCTUARY SCHEMES

- *The Government agreed more evidence was needed on the effectiveness of Sanctuary Schemes, and accepted our recommendation, undertaking to "research the effectiveness of schemes to enable households at risk of domestic violence to remain in their own homes" – to begin in November 2008 and complete in winter 2009.*

Government response

HOUSING AND REGENERATION BILL

- *In response to our recommendation on the Housing and Regeneration Bill, the Government announced a study to "establish an estimate of the numbers and circumstances of adults who do and do not receive sufficient assistance from local –councils and housing authorities". This is due to complete in winter 2009.*

FUNDING AND SERVICE PROVISION

We were concerned about the **commissioning and funding process** for services. We concluded:

- that a move to commissioning services locally was having a disproportionate impact on culturally-specific, or gender-specific services;
- that moving away from single group funding must not mean that only generic services are supported;
- and that Local Area Agreement National Indicators on domestic violence are inadequate and not even essential.

FUNDING AND SERVICE PROVISION (Cont'd)

In the light of these concerns, we **recommended**:

- that the Government reassess funding and commissioning arrangements, particularly those under 'Supporting People' fund;
- that a commissioning framework be drawn to include minimum national service standards;
- that the Government explicitly set out in its 'Guidance on Funding for Cohesion' the kinds of issues which may require specialist services;
- that the Government revisit LAA indicators to ensure they include prevention and early intervention work;
- and that the HER Commission be given a mandate to inspect local authorities annually on their provision of violence against women services.

Government response:
FUNDING AND SERVICE PROVISION

The Government said:

- *The Ministers for Women and Equality are concerned by the reports that public authorities are interpreting the gender equality duty to mean that funding from women-only services should or must be withdrawn. It would be a retrograde step if services for victims, including victims of so-called 'honour' crimes, were to lack the specificity needed.*

- *The Local Area Agreements (LAA) are outcome focused so any decision on how such outcomes are addressed is a matter for local areas. We will be constantly reviewing the effectiveness of Local Area Agreements in delivering a good standard of service for domestic violence victims.*

Key inquiry conclusions

- The Government has made **significant steps to improve** the UK's response to domestic and "honour"-based violence and forced marriage, including introducing new legislation on domestic violence

- Overall, Government response to DV is **disproportionately focused on criminal justice responses at the expense of prevention and early intervention**. More effective prevention would not only be better for victims, but also save the economy billions of pounds each year.

- We recommend the Government **adopts a national strategy on domestic violence** – or on violence against women more generally – to include an explicit emphasis on prevention and early intervention.

The Government's Response

In July, in response to our overarching conclusions, the Government said:

- In England and Wales the Government has in place a series of linked plans to address domestic violence (including forced marriage, 'honour-based' violence and FGM), sexual violence, trafficking and prostitution. These Plans have focused attention and funding on these issues on both a national and local level.

However, it recognised the value of taking a fresh look at work to tackle violence through the prism of gender, and announced a scoping project to audit current activity to tackle violence against women and consider what added value a violence against women strategy would bring.

Finally, good news!

The Home Secretary stated on 14th November 2008 that the Government would accept the Committee's recommendation for a VAW strategy and had already begun work on the detail of such a strategy. An announcement will be made in the coming weeks.