



Date 03 June 2008

Better support and care for domestic violence victims

Victims of domestic violence in Wiltshire and Swindon are receiving better support and care, thanks to new specially equipped courts.

A pilot programme of weekly Specialist Domestic Violence Courts (SDVCs) began at the start of the year and received Home Office accreditation in April.

The initiative will be formally launched at Swindon Magistrates' Court on Tuesday 10 June, where work that has been achieved to date across Wiltshire and Swindon will be recognised.

The event has been organised by the Wiltshire Criminal Justice Board (WCJB), which manages the criminal justice system at a local level.

The SDVC programme was launched to improve the support and care provided to victims by offering a co-ordinated community response combining both criminal justice and non-criminal justice interventions and responses.

The programme introduces dedicated court slots in magistrates' courts to hear cases involving adult defendants.

Special arrangements are made for victims and witnesses, including separate entrances and waiting areas.

In addition, the courtrooms will accommodate the use of screens and giving evidence by video link.

Staff from CPS, Courts, Police and Probation as well as specialist support services work together to identify, track and risk assess domestic violence cases, support victims and share information so that more offenders are brought to justice.

The scheme was extended across the country after being trialled in a number of areas.

The implementation of the programme for Swindon and Wiltshire has been delivered through the WCJB's sub-group – the Criminal Case Management Group (CCMG).

This multi agency group worked towards the 11 core components required to achieve the accreditation status.

Specialist Domestic Violence Courts have a number of key aims, including a reduction in re-offending rates and an increase in the number of successful outcomes, which is measured by three factors: a guilty plea, a conviction after trial and proof in absence.

Although it's early days, preliminary figures show these aims are being achieved.

Statistics show the percentage of successful outcomes has risen since the pilot began at the start of 2008. For the period of January-March this year, 75 per cent of cases dealt with and finalised across Wiltshire had a successful outcome, compared with 69.7% for October-December last year.

Meanwhile, while 39 per cent of all recorded incidents involved repeat victims between October-December last year, the figure fell to 35.9% for the period of January-March 2008.

SDVCs are being held locally at Chippenham and Swindon Magistrates' Courts.

Diana Fulbrook, Chair of the Wiltshire Criminal Justice Board, said: 'Domestic violence is destructive and has an enormous negative impact on the victims and families involved. The Wiltshire Criminal Justice Board therefore has this as one of its priorities, to reduce the number of repeat incidents, and works with the Community Safety Partnerships in Wiltshire and Swindon to address domestic violence in the county.'

Specialist domestic violence courts in other areas have been effective in dealing quickly and efficiently with those committing this type of offence, whilst providing a full range of support services for victims, so the Board is delighted that Wiltshire will now benefit from having specialist courts. All the agencies are committed to their success and are working with a range of other agencies, both statutory and voluntary, to reduce domestic violence across Wiltshire.

For help and advice on DV issues contact the National 24hr DV helpline 0808 200 0247 or the Men's Advice Line and Enquiries (MALE) 0808 801 0327, or Victim Support Wiltshire 01380 729476. In an emergency always call 999.

Members of the media are invited to attend the launch, which will run from 4.30-6pm, on Tue 10 June 2008, at Swindon Magistrates' Court.

Keynote speakers (WCJB chairman Diana Fulbrook and Wiltshire Police Chief Constable Brian Moore) will be available to photograph at 5.30pm.



NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The Wiltshire Criminal Justice Board (WCJB) was set up in April 2003 to manage the CJS at a local level. It, along with the other 41 Local Boards across England and Wales, reports to the National Criminal Justice Board which supports them in their work to meet Public Service Agreement targets at a local level and reduce crime in Wiltshire
2. Wiltshire's CJB comprises chief officers from the police, the Crown Prosecution Service, HM Courts Service, the Probation Service, the Prison Service and the Youth Offending Service.
3. For further information please visit: <http://lcjb.cjonline.gov.uk/Wiltshire> or call Chloe Boyce, WCJB Communications Officer, on 01225 781216.