



## **FREE LEGAL ADVICE SERVICE LAUNCH FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS**

Domestic abuse victims are being thrown a legal lifeline in the form of a brand new free 24:7 service from local solicitors. It was launched in July in collaboration with the National Centre for Domestic Violence (NCDV). Through the service, victims of domestic abuse are put directly in touch with a solicitor who can help provide fast, free advice and support on a range of legal services, such as accessing rights to children; housing and financial matters; and obtaining injunctions against perpetrators.

Steve Connor, Chairman of NCDV, said: "Domestic abuse is a cowardly and horrific crime that affects all sectors of society. I'm confident that by standing together in Hertfordshire we will send out a message that this crime will not be tolerated. The new service will empower victims to take control from the first time they seek help"

Efforts to manage domestic violence in Hertfordshire are being co-ordinated by the Domestic Violence Programme Board, which is chaired by Assistant Chief Constable Heather Valentine. She said: "Currently in Hertfordshire, domestic violence accounts for 22 per cent of all violent crime and we are committed to providing better services for victims and their affected families. It is hoped that through this new fast and effective service, more victims will be encouraged to come forward."

Detective Superintendent Jon Chapman, the Constabulary's champion in protecting vulnerable people, said: "We are delighted that NCDV are now extending their services to Hertfordshire, as we are committed to making the county a safer place for everyone. The legal advice offered through the new service is provided free of charge through legal aid. This new infrastructure and support increases the safety of victims and their families; and ultimately gives them the chance to take back control of their lives,"

Victims of abuse can get help 24 hour help, 365 days of the year by calling: 08709 220704 or free phone: 0844 80 44 999. Help and advice can also be accessed by sending NCDV in a text message to: 60777.

The service is launched just a few weeks after the first dedicated domestic violence court was started at Dacorum Magistrates, and plans are already underway to provide a similar service at Central Magistrates within the next few months. As part of the implementation plans, magistrates, courts staff and crown prosecutors were given domestic violence awareness training and the victims themselves are given improved support and guidance during the court process and beyond. Instrumental in providing the support are the Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) who are now working in the Western and Central areas. Plans to introduce IDVAs in the Eastern Area of the county are also being worked upon.