

Justice Committee

Stage 1 Scrutiny of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill

Note of Informal Discussion with Victims

Tuesday 16 May 2017

Video conference with victim (accompanied by support worker from Victim Support Scotland).

The victim is in her late 60s. She lived with the abuser in England. She moved to the north of Scotland to escape the abusive relationship. The events narrated are quite recent and she still feels threatened by the abuser.

- Members: Mary Fee, Liam McArthur and Fulton MacGregor
- Note takers: Frazer McCallum and Greg Black

Note of evidence

The victim was married to the abuser for a number of years. During this period she was subject to both physical and non-physical abuse. The latter was extensive, including:

- control over what she ate, where she went, who she could see, access to money and what she was allowed to buy
- not being allowed to maintain friendships
- false accusations that she was having affairs
- constant negativity
- abuse of a pet
- surveillance through home CCTV

This controlling behaviour had a severe impact on the victim, leading to a lack of self-worth and loss of identity. She felt stressed and at times unable to speak. The victim still feels unable to discuss some of the things that happened and is embarrassed about the abuse she was subjected to.

She described the abuser as someone who likes to cause pain. And as someone who can be charming when he wants to, but with an aggressive streak which he sometimes shows in his actions with members of the public. He has told her that he sees spirits and hears voices. Initially, she wondered if his behaviour was the result of dementia.

It took the victim a long time to pluck up the courage to try and leave the abuser. She knew that he would not let her simply pack her things and leave. Nor would she be allowed to take her car. He had prevented her from using her car during their relationship – only allowing her to drive it to the garage for its MOT, but even then accompanying her in his own car.

She finally left following an aggressive incident. She managed, via a library, to make contact with a support organisation and with its help moved from her home in England to make a new life in Scotland. She wanted to get as far away as she could from the abuser.

However, despite this move, he continued in his attempts to exert control over her. He sent her threatening messages stating that she could not get away so easily and making her fear for her safety. He managed to track her down to where she now lives and has confronted her there on a number of occasions. She believes that he may have used some form of tracking device and is also using a person living in her locality to keep track of her. She does not feel safe when she goes out – being concerned that the abuser might appear again.

The first time he appeared where she now lives, she agreed to return to England with him. This followed threats that he would commit suicide if she did not return. The abuse continued and she subsequently managed to escape back to Scotland.

The victim was positive about the help she has received from relevant support groups. Her experience with the police was mixed. She felt that they did not take her very seriously at first although this changed when they saw how persistent he was in pursuing her. She also questioned if there could be more ways to report abuse or concerns when victims so often feel trapped.

She asked the police in England to intervene when the abuser threatened suicide and when he claimed to have a gun. The local police in Scotland do keep a watch for him but do not regularly check-in to see how she is doing. She is not sure what else the police might do to make her feel safer. There is an interdict in force.