



Federation Northern Ireland

RESPONSE TO

**The Department of Finance and
Personnel**

**Review of 2010-2011 Spending
Plans**

March 2010

Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland
129 University Street
BELFAST BT7 1HP

Tel: 02890 249041

Fax: 02890 239296

General Email: info@womensaidni.org

Website: www.womensaidni.org

24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline - 0800 917 1414

Core work of Women's Aid: Background information & statistics

1. Introduction

Women's Aid is the lead voluntary organisation in Northern Ireland addressing domestic violence and providing services for women and children. We recognise domestic violence as one form of violence against women. Women's Aid seeks to challenge attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate domestic violence and, through our work, promote healthy and non-abusive relationships.

2. Core Work of Women's Aid

The core work of Women's Aid in Northern Ireland, including Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland and the 10 local Women's Aid groups is:

- To provide refuge accommodation to women and their children suffering mental, physical or sexual abuse within the home.
- To run the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline.
- To provide a range of support services to enable women who are leaving a violent situation to rebuild their lives and the lives of their children.
- To provide a range of support services to children and young people who have experienced domestic violence.
- To run preventative education programmes in schools and other settings.
- To educate and inform the public, media, police, courts, social services and other agencies of the impact and effects of domestic violence.
- To advise and support all relevant agencies in the development of domestic violence policies, protocols and service delivery.
- To work in partnership with all relevant agencies to ensure a joined up response to domestic violence.

3. Women's Aid Statistics (2008 - 2009)

- 12 refuges with 300 bed spaces, playrooms and facilities.
- 1058 women and 890 children sought refuge.
- 15 resource centres for women seeking information and support; group work and training.
- 2,814 women and 2,753 children accessed the Floating Support service enabling women to access support whilst remaining in their own homes and communities.
- 2,753 children and young people accessed protection and

support services.

- Move-on houses for women and children leaving refuges.
- In 2008/09 the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline open to anyone affected by domestic violence, managed 27,663 calls. This represented an increase of 14% on 2007/08
- Volunteers are a core part of the Helpline team: throughout the year they contributed a total of 3,268 hours to the service, an average of 9 hours per day, 365 days of the year

3.1. Additional Women's Aid Statistical Data

- During the last 10 years Women's Aid across Northern Ireland gave refuge to 12,579 women and 12,748 children and young people
- During the last 14 years Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland managed 212,215 calls to the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline

4. Statistics: Domestic Violence & Violence Against Women

- Domestic violence is a violation of Article 5 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights – that “no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”;
- Domestic Violence is a crime. PSNI statistics for 2008/09 indicate that there were more recorded crimes with a domestic motivation (9,211) than the combined total of all the following crimes (9,155). These include all recorded sexual offences (1,943), robbery (650), armed robbery (508), hijacking (125), theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle (2954), arson (2002) dangerous driving (746), handling stolen goods (220) and offences under anti-terrorism legislation (7).
- PSNI Statistics for 08/09 indicate that they responded to a domestic incident every 22 minutes of every day of the year.
- The number of all recorded offences of murder in Northern Ireland in 08/09 total 24. Those classed as having a domestic motivation total 7. Therefore, 29.2% of all murders in Northern Ireland in 08/09 had a domestic motivation.
- There were 381 rapes in Northern Ireland in the period 2008/09, 23 attempted rapes and 1,134 crimes classified as sexual assault/sexual activity.

(Source: PSNI Statistics 2008/09)

- Official sources (NISOSMC) estimate that up to 80% of sex crimes are not reported.
- The joint NIO, DHSSPS Strategy “Tackling Violence at Home” estimates that the cost of domestic violence in Northern Ireland, including the potential loss of economic output, could amount to £180 million each year.
- UNICEF research released in 2006, showing per capita incidence, indicates that there are up to 32,000 children and young people living with domestic violence in Northern Ireland.
- Where the gender of the victim was known, 76% of adult victims of domestic crimes recorded by the PSNI in 2007/08 were female.*
- Over 30% of all domestic violence starts during pregnancy.**
- Violence Against Women is not limited to domestic violence, it includes amongst other crimes murder, rape, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, trafficking, sexual stalking and sexual harassment.

(*NIO Statistics & Research Branch Bulletin 16/2008 “Experience of Domestic Violence: Findings from the 2007/08 Northern Ireland Crime Survey, 2008, pg.2. N.B. “Adult” defined as aged 17 and over)

(** Women’s Aid Federation NI)

The following comments and observations by Women’s Aid Federation NI on the DFP consultation on the Review of the 2010-2011 Spending Plans are made on behalf of our members and reflect their collective views.

Consultation Process

1. Women’s Aid is concerned that it is not clear that the document is actually a public consultation on revised spending plans. The document does not provide details on how to respond or a closing date for responses. Furthermore we wish to highlight that the document is largely inaccessible and contains technical, economic terminology

unlikely to be clearly understood by a substantial proportion of the population.

In this context, we would wish to highlight the Department of Finance and Personnel's Equality Scheme which provides that "barriers to proper consultation will be removed by ensuring accessibility of language and appropriate formats in a timely fashion to ensure meaningful consultation."¹

Women's Aid would contend that the Department has not followed its own Equality Scheme with regards to these issues and we recommend that the Department revisits the wording in this document and follows its Equality Scheme in future policies.

Review of the NI Executive Budget Process 08-11

2. We note that in May 2008 the Department for Finance and Personnel undertook a review of the NI Executive Budget process 08-11. The overall objective of the review was to consider the arrangements for future Budget processes; to seek to further improve and embed the linkages between spending allocations, and the Programme for Government (PfG) and to establish stronger and more explicit linkages between the allocation of funding to Departments and the delivery of outcomes approved by the Executive. The review was also to examine future arrangements for direct public engagement, in the context where elected representatives in the Assembly now have a direct input to the Budget process, and ultimate responsibility for approving the Budget outcome. We note that DFP have yet to report on this review and we would call on DFP to urgently publish their report. In addition to its overall objectives the DFP review was to consider and make recommendations in the following areas:

¹ <http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/dfpequal.pdf>, pg 7.

- Linkage between Budget process and Programme for Government;
- Management of capital investment proposals;
- Engagement by departments with Statutory Committees of the Assembly;
- Supporting evidence to be provided by departments for the Budget process and in particular the content of spending proposals;
- Scope for greater cross-departmental co-operation in the funding of services;
- Consultation on draft proposals, including consultation with the statutory Committees of the Assembly; and,
- The integration of Statutory Equality and Anti-Poverty considerations within the Budget process.

Women's Aid had also anticipated that this report and its recommendations would have been made available in advance of the current consultation on the revised spending plans.

Gender Budgeting

3.1. Women's Aid is disappointed that a gender perspective has not been mainstreamed in the revised spending plans. OFMDFM has highlighted in the Gender Equality Strategy that "the gender perspective will be taken into account during the whole process of policy development in all the Government functions."²

3.2. The Council of Europe has published a handbook on Gender Budgeting and defines gender budgeting as "an application of gender

² OFMDFMNI *Gender Equality Strategy: A Strategic framework to promote gender equality for women and men 2006-2016*, Pg 35.

mainstreaming in the budgetary process.”³ According to the Council of Europe, gender budgeting involves three stages including analysis involving gender disaggregated data, determining the differential impact of the budget between men and women; reformulation of policies and redistribution of resources to ensure gender equality outcomes; and embedding gender equality within all budgetary processes.⁴

- 3.3. We agree that the approach highlighted in the Council of Europe’s handbook is vital to ensure that equality of opportunity on the grounds of gender is embedded in the budgetary process. Women’s Aid recommends that DFP adopts the approach published by the Council of Europe in its guidance on gender budgeting thus ensuring gender equality in budgetary processes, in this case in the revised spending plans for Northern Ireland.

4. **Children’s Services**

Women’s Aid notes the comments of Minister Michael McGimpsey MLA, made before the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety on 28th January 2010. Specifically with regard to children’s services the Minister stated:

Children’s services in Northern Ireland are underfunded by more than 30%, when compared with England; about 100,000 children in Northern Ireland are living in poverty, and some 11,000 children live with domestic violence every day. There has also been a huge rise in the number of children on the child protection register; last year, it increased to 2,500, which is a rise of almost 500 cases. On top of that, the number of children referred to social services has risen by a third over the past few years. How are we supposed to bridge the gap between the historical under funding of children’s services and the growing need while we are

³ Council of Europe (2009) *Gender Budgeting: Practical Implementation handbook*, Pg 5.

⁴ Council of Europe (2009) *Gender Budgeting: Practical Implementation handbook*, Pg 17.

in the teeth of successive cuts to healthcare? Our aim is to support families to stay together and to protect children. Early intervention and the early identification of risk are vital to ensuring that that happens. That requires investment in social services and in the teams that have been set up to help struggling families.

- 4.1. Women's Aid has grave concerns at the potential/suggested implications of the revised DHSSPS spending on children's services and the delivery of children's rights. We would similarly be opposed to any plans to pull back on planned service developments across children's services, services to address domestic violence, or indeed in areas including mental health and learning disability services.
- 4.2. Women's Aid has welcomed the Families Matter Strategy and the investment made in family support and early intervention/preventative services. It should be noted that, as envisaged by the DHSSPS, much of the family support service development is and continues to be delivered by the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland. We are deeply concerned that it is these services and initiatives that would be threatened should the DHSSPS be forced to deliver its required savings. Frontline services would bear the brunt of the re-allocations, direct service provision to some of the most vulnerable and hard to reach in our communities, such as women and children who have experienced domestic violence, would be pulled back and inevitably the concern is that there will in fact be cuts to existing levels of provision should the Department be required to deliver further efficiencies.
- 4.3. Women's Aid holds the view that it is important to remember that it is not the case that the voluntary and community sector are solely delivering non-statutory provision; in many instances the voluntary and community sector are supporting the statutory sector in fulfilment of their statutory obligations, for example, Women's Aid's ongoing partnership work in the delivery of the Tackling Violence at Home Strategy. Where the sector is delivering such support this should be

protected and it must be recognised that the sector is well placed to deliver such provision in a manner that demonstrates value for money

Revised Spending Plans

5. Women's Aid is extremely concerned and disappointed to note that the DHSS&PS has the largest reduction in its budget in real terms. We are particularly concerned that this measure could harm vital services provided to women in Northern Ireland. In addition to other essential healthcare services, the DHSS&PS is the joint lead agency on the Government's Tackling Violence at Home Strategy. It is therefore essential in our view, that the Department, in addition to other relevant Government Departments and Agencies, are appropriately and adequately resourced. Women's Aid would ask that consideration be given to ring-fencing funding to allow for delivery of the action plans linked to this essential strategy.

6. In the wider context of healthcare provision for women in Northern Ireland, Women's Aid are concerned by recent reports by the Patient Liaison Group at the Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital that it believes that there are plans to close a ward with up to 20 beds.⁵ Women's Aid is of the opinion, that the loss of such vital resources in an environment which is overstretched and under-resourced will have potentially harmful implications. We also strongly recommend that DFP and DHSS&PS examines how services provided to users, in particular women, will be affected by these cuts.

Equality Impact Assessment

7. Women's Aid also notes with disappointment that there is no Equality Impact Assessment accompanying the document on the revised spending plans. OFMDFM's Gender Equality Strategy highlights that

⁵ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/8291842.stm

“as part of the process of developing policy priorities and budgets, DFP and OFMDFM consult widely on how the budget proposals may impact on different section 75 equality categories.”⁶

- 7.1. Women’s Aid notes the statement in point 1.5,⁷ of the consultation document, specifically, “NI Departments have been asked to publish summary details of the Equality, Good Relations and Anti-Poverty implications of the proposals in respect of the services they provide. In addition, an Equality Impact Assessment will also be carried out on the strategic choices involved in respect of the level of savings proposed for each department. The intention is that this will be completed before the revised spending plans are finalised.”
- 7.2 It is the opinion of Women’s Aid that an EQIA should form part of the decision making process. We would urge that the result of the EQIA should be released for consideration by Departments and stakeholders before the revised spending plans are finalised.

Conclusion:

Women’s Aid is acutely aware that we are currently operating in a very challenging financial environment. However we would strenuously urge Government to recognise, that for those most vulnerable in our society, including women and children who have, or are experiencing domestic and sexual violence, periods of economic difficulties and constraints, coupled by any associated or resultant cuts in service provision, can further exacerbate their suffering.

It is therefore essential that the vital support services offered by statutory and voluntary sector organisations such as Women’s Aid are protected and secured going forward, as frequently the services provided not only improve

⁶ Council of Europe (2009) *Gender Budgeting: Practical Implementation handbook*, Pg 36.

⁷ Department of Finance and Personnel (2010) Review of Spending Plans 2010 -2011, Pg 5.

lives and life chances but can quite literally save the lives of women and children in Northern Ireland.

For further information about this response contact:

Gillian Clifford
Policy & Information Worker
Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland
129 University Street
BELFAST BT7 1HP
Tel: 028 9024 9041

Website: www.womensaidni.org

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