



Federation Northern Ireland

The Department of Justice

A Response to: Consultation on Long-Term Policing Objectives

April 2011

Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland

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24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline - 0800 917 1414

Core Work of Women's Aid: Background Information & Statistics

1.0 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.

2.0 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.

3.0 Women's Aid Statistics (2009 - 2010)

- 12 refuges with 300 bed spaces, playrooms and facilities.
- 1077 women and 854 children sought refuge.
- 15 resource centres for women seeking information and support; group work and training.
- 2,938 women and 3,617 children accessed the Floating Support service enabling women to access support whilst remaining in their own homes and communities.

- Move-on houses for women and children leaving refuges.
- In 2009/10 the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline, open to anyone affected by domestic violence, managed 32,349 calls. This represented an increase of 17% on 2008/09.

4.0 Additional Women's Aid Statistical Data

- Since 1999, Women's Aid across Northern Ireland gave refuge to 13,656 women and 13,602 children and young people.
- During the last 15 years Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland managed 244,564 calls to the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline.

5.0 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”;
- 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, 75% of adult victims of domestic crimes recorded by the PSNI in 2009/10 were female.*
- Over 30% of all domestic violence starts during pregnancy. **

6.0 Domestic Violence: Crime Statistics

- Domestic Violence is a crime. PSNI statistics for 2009/10 indicate that there were more recorded crimes with a domestic motivation (9,903) than the combined total of all the following crimes (9,864). These include all recorded sexual offences (1,944), robbery (600), armed robbery (557), hijacking (119), theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle (2975), arson (1980) dangerous driving (865), handling stolen goods (226) and offences under anti-terrorism legislation (7).

- PSNI Statistics for 09/10 indicate that they responded to a domestic incident every 21 minutes of every day of the year.
- The total of 9,903 crimes with a domestic motivation in 09/10 represents an average of approximately 1 domestic crime every 53 minutes in Northern Ireland.
- The number of all recorded offences of murder in Northern Ireland in 09/10 total 18. Those classed as having a domestic motivation total 7. Therefore, 38.9% of all murders in Northern Ireland in 09/10 had a domestic motivation.
- There were 461 rapes (including attempted Rapes) in Northern Ireland in the period 2009/10.

(Source: PSNI Statistics 2009/10)

- Official sources (NISOSMC) estimate that up to 80% of sex crimes are not reported.
- 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.

(*Findings from the PSNI Crime Statistics Report 2009/10 N.B. "Adult" defined as aged 17 and over)

(** Women's Aid Federation NI)

7.0 Comments

7.1 Women's Aid Federation NI welcomes the publication of the Department of Justice's consultation on Long-Term Policing Objectives and the opportunity to comment upon the document on behalf of our ten local groups. The following comments reflect their collective views.

8.0 Do you think the right themes have been identified? Are there any others that have been overlooked?

8.1 Our organisation is supportive of the themes identified in the consultation document.

8.2 We agree with the statement contained in point 23 (Pg.11) that the human rights dimension to policing needs to be upheld and that

policing in all its forms needs to recognise the rights of the individuals who engage with and are engaged by it. Similarly we fully support the rights of the community to enjoy effective policing.

- 8.3 Women's Aid further supports the theme of Policing with the Community and agrees that the delivery of effective policing relies on a contract between the Police Service and the Community that it serves.
- 8.4 We further agree that policing with the consent and support of the community is likely to be much more efficient and effective.
- 8.5 In the context of Point 34 (Pg.14), we would suggest that the themes of Policing with the Community and Policing in Partnership cannot and should not be explored in isolation. It is our contention that there are fundamental links between the two.
- 8.6 Similarly, in our opinion, it is vital that the Police Service should continue to engage beyond the justice agencies to the voluntary and community sector and to build upon this engagement. These relationships and partnership working should be seen as an important link in the chain.
- 8.7 Community and voluntary sector organisations are often at the forefront of addressing need within the community and of providing a voice for some of the most vulnerable and at risk individuals in our society.
- 8.8 They also provide invaluable insight and expertise both within their own communities and in the context of specific issues such as domestic and sexual violence.
- 8.9 Our organisation for example, has pro-actively engaged with the PSNI both at District and Regional level.
- 8.10 This has resulted in some excellent examples of innovative partnership working and the development of joint operational protocols which have made a demonstrable difference both to policing objectives and to the care and support available to those who have experienced domestic violence in Northern Ireland.
- 8.11 Similarly, organisations such as Women's Aid have highlighted policing issues within our community, which has previously been hidden or denied such as Human Trafficking.
- 8.12 It is our strongly held opinion that existing examples of best practice in respect of partnership working and community

engagement should be established, fully resourced and rolled out across Northern Ireland.

- 8.13 However, it has been a source of continuing disappointment to Women's Aid that domestic violence, whilst frequently raised as an issue of concern, is often absent in both District and Regional Policing Plans.
- 8.14 Women's Aid would strongly recommend that given the severity, nature, extent and impact of the crime of domestic violence, it should always be included as a mandatory priority in all Policing Plans in Northern Ireland.
- 8.15 Domestic violence is an issue of community safety and an important component of neighbourhood policing. Crimes with a domestic motivation make up a significant proportion of the overall policing workload and resources, as is clearly evidenced by the statistics outlined in point 6 of this response.
- 8.16 However, it remains a substantially under-reported crime, often shrouded in secrecy and denial, the effects of which are largely known only to the victim and those closest to them.
- 8.17 As a result, it is frequently over-looked or absent from crime surveys, with much greater emphasis given to more "visible" concerns such as anti-social behaviour and car crime.
- 8.18 It is therefore essential that whilst the community are pro-actively involved in policing and in informing the delivery of operational support (point 30), the PSNI must also take a lead in establishing policing priorities based on the evidence of manifest need.

9.0 Do you think the draft objectives are the right ones? How might they be improved?

- 9.1 Women's Aid is broadly supportive of the five long-term objectives for policing.
- 9.2 Our organisation agrees with the objective that the Police Service is free from external interference on operational matters. That it is accountable within the rule of law; answerable to the community through the Policing Board for operational decisions; and accountable to the public through the Policing Board, the Department and the Assembly for the use of public money. (Objective 5)

- 9.3 We would also strongly suggest that this objective should include the requirement for the PSNI to take regular cognisance of new recommendations emerging from bodies such as the Policing Board and should be pro-active in their response to these recommendations.
- 9.4 In acknowledging and accepting the Department's position (Point 14, Pg.9) in respect of long-term, projected targets around crime levels or types of crime, we are of the strong opinion that it is essential that voluntary and community sector organisations such as Women's Aid are in a position to have some form of active input and consultation on the development of targets and methods of evaluation.
- 9.5 For example, for many crimes success would be judged by a reduction in the overall number of reported incidents and crimes. However, Women's Aid would contend that an increase in the number of reported incidents of domestic violence may actually represent an increased confidence, awareness and willingness to report and to engage with the PSNI and as such may actually be an indication of positive and successful policing in respect of this type of criminal activity.
- 9.6 It would therefore be important to work in partnership with organisations such as Women's Aid to explore what other approaches might be taken in respect of appropriate, objective evaluation in specific areas of crime.
- 9.7 We further feel that pro-active engagement and consultation with the voluntary and community sector is particularly important given that the objectives for this strategic approach are designed to be in place for up to ten years.
- 9.8 We also feel that it is vital that the objectives clearly state the Police Service's commitment to bringing perpetrators, including those who have committed domestic and sexual violence, to justice and to stopping repeat offending.
- 9.9 In this context, we also note with disappointment that the objectives, in stark contrast to other recent Departmental and Ministerial initiatives, do not take a victim-centric approach to addressing crime and criminality. We feel that this represents a significant omission.

For further information about this response please contact:

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