



Federation Northern Ireland

## Northern Ireland Executive

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## Response to: Draft Budget 2011 - 2015

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## February 2011

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24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline - 0800 917 1414

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## **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 General Comments**

- 7.1 Women's Aid Federation NI welcomes the publication of the Northern Ireland Executive's Draft Budget 2011-2015 and the opportunity to comment upon the document on behalf of our ten local groups. The following comments reflect their collective views.
- 7.2 Whilst it is positive that the Executive has aspired to a four year budget, unlike the Scottish Executive which has agreed to one year, our organisation is deeply concerned by the overall lack of cohesion, cross-departmental and inter-departmental working contained in this budget.
- 7.3 In reading the 12 departmental draft budgets, it is clear that what has resulted from this process is a lack of clarity and detail and a fragmented series of competing priorities and objectives.

- 7.4 This might well have been addressed by the presence of a Programme for Government and the associated Public Service Agreements and delivery reports, which would have afforded the necessary framework for a more integrated approach to the work of the Northern Ireland Executive.
- 7.5 It is also troubling, as has been observed by NICVA, that a number of Government Departments have produced unbalanced budgets, where the level of planned expenditure exceeds the allocated funding.
- 7.6 Additional funds would seem unlikely and the scope for revisions to the budget would appear to be extremely limited. Indeed the published figures in respect of the percentages of Departmental spend, would suggest that the consequences of pursuing additional resources could potentially have devastating consequences for individual Departments.
- 7.7 This raises the issue of revenue generation. We understand that the Executive considered revenue raising measures to a total value of £1.6 billion over the Spending Review period but only approximately one half of this figure was considered sufficiently robust for inclusion in the budget.
- 7.8 Women's Aid joins with NICVA in advocating for a more creative and inventive approach to revenue raising, for example, considering new approaches to the use of European funding, further development of social enterprise and the use of social investment bonds, such as have been utilised in England.

## **8.0 Impact on the work of Women's Aid**

- 8.1 The impact of the lack of cohesion in the budget can clearly be evidenced in the work of Women's Aid.
- 8.2 Domestic Violence and its consequences are cross-cutting issues; this is clearly evidenced through the work of the Government's strategic approach to addressing domestic violence, Tackling Violence at Home which has made a demonstrable difference to the lives of those who have experienced domestic violence in Northern Ireland and which takes a cross-departmental, multi-agency approach to the delivery of programmes and initiatives.
- 8.3 In the absence of this type of integrated approach what tends to result are departmental initiatives which are often contradictory, un-

necessarily costly and counter-productive. Similarly, utilising this approach, it is impossible to fully assess and address need.

- 8.4 For example, Tackling Violence at Home recognises the impact of domestic violence on children and the need for early intervention to address this need.
- 8.5 However, the decision by OFMDFM to abolish the Children's Fund from March 2011, has directly resulted in the loss of vital Children's workers from some of our local groups, whose individual funding can now no longer be sustained. Others are on protective notice of redundancy.
- 8.6 In the context of an already appalling lack of long-term sustainable funding for children and young people's services in Northern Ireland the impact of the loss of these highly skilled and experienced individuals is incalculable.

## **9.0 Welfare Reform**

- 9.1 An additional source of on-going and significant concern to Women's Aid is the programme of welfare reforms proposed by the Coalition Government at Westminster.
- 9.2 It is the opinion of our organisation that many of these changes will have a potentially highly detrimental impact both upon the women and children who use our service and on our ability to continue to deliver the level of service provision which we currently offer.
- 9.3 Of particular concern are changes in respect of Housing Benefit which, for example, could see an individual who has claimed Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) for 12 months or more, losing 10% of their Housing Benefit entitlement.
- 9.4 Our refuges depend upon the receipt of Housing Benefit to maintain our services. They already sustain a loss of income from the removal of pre-existing rent arrears from the Housing Benefit supplied to women in receipt of benefits, staying in refuge. An additional 10% cut would have an enormously detrimental impact on the income available to our refuges.
- 9.5 Changes in respect of the requirement for unemployed lone parents with a youngest child of 7 years or older to move from Income Support to Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), requires them to actively seek work or to face benefit sanctions.

- 9.6 These changes are taking place in the context of a currently limited jobs market in Northern Ireland which offers few suitable sources of employment for lone parents. Additionally there appears to be a fundamental failure to address the wider implications of childcare provision here, which is frequently, expensive, inaccessible and inadequate.
- 9.7 This is likely to be further compounded by the cut in the childcare element of Working Tax Credit which will result in a fall in the percentage of costs covered by Tax Credits from 80% to 70%.
- 9.8 Of central importance to these issues is the on-going absence of a much needed childcare strategy for Northern Ireland to address these pressing matters.

## **10.0 Health**

- 10.1 In supporting the decision to protect the health element of the DHSSPS budget, we share with Age NI the concern that the social care element has not been afforded similar protection and join in their call for spending on social care to be maintained, for a similar commitment in terms of additional funding for preventative and re-ablement projects as in GB and a fundamental review of how social care is delivered in Northern Ireland.
- 10.2 Of particular concern to Women's Aid is the potential reduction in grants to the Voluntary Sector.
- 10.3 Since its launch in October 2005, DHSSPS has been the lead agency driving forward the Government's cross-departmental, multi-agency strategic approach to addressing domestic violence in Northern Ireland, "Tackling Violence at Home" and its associated action plans.
- 10.4 Women's Aid has continued to support the strategy and has engaged pro-actively as participants in the interagency Tackling Violence at Home Regional Strategic Group (RSG) chaired by DHSSPS and the Department of Justice and answerable to the Inter-Ministerial Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence at Stormont.
- 10.5 Our organisation also engages proactively in all the relevant sub-groups, including the Protection and Justice Sub-Group, Prevention and Support Sub-Group the Children and Young People's Sub-Group and the Training sub-group.

- 10.6 In addition, all of our local groups are active participants in their local Domestic Violence Partnerships which link to the work of the RSG.
- 10.7 During the ensuing years since 2005, this cross-departmental, multi-agency strategic approach coupled with the work of the Domestic and Sexual Violence Unit of the DHSSPS, has resulted in a number of very significant and positive developments in respect of the care and support provided to those who have experienced domestic violence in Northern Ireland.
- 10.8 One of the most significant achievements has been the establishment and funding of the Freephone 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline, open to anyone affected by domestic violence and managed by Women's Aid Federation NI. The service is available 365 days of the year.
- 10.9 During the period 1st April 2009 – 31st March 2010, 32,349 calls were managed by the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline, which represented a 17% increase on the previous year.
- 10.10 Funding for this vital service represents quite literally a lifeline for those subjected to systematic and sustained violence and abuse in their own homes and communities.
- 10.11 13,539 callers to the Helpline during the period 1st April 2009 – 31st March 2010 reported experiencing mental health conditions, including anxiety, panic attacks and suicidal thoughts. This represented 70% of callers. Only a minority of callers had received a formal diagnosis.
- 10.12 This further highlights the potentially devastating consequences of increased waiting lists particularly in respect of mental health provision and restricted access to community care in Northern Ireland.
- 10.13 Any reductions in the grants awarded to local Women's Aid groups through local Trusts would have a severe impact on their ability to meet the demonstrable needs of the women and children victims of domestic violence for whom they work. It is essential to maintain these front-line direct services.

## **11.0 Education**

- 11.1 In light of the significant proposed cuts in education spending, Women's Aid is deeply concerned about the future sustainability of



our preventative education work and capacity building with teachers in Northern Ireland, which represents a vital long term investment in child protection and safeguarding as well as domestic violence awareness.

## **12.0 The Voluntary and Community Sector**

- 12.1 Women's Aid shares with Age NI and other representatives from the voluntary and community sector, the concern and disappointment that the vital work and added value provided by the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland, has not been recognised in these budget proposals.
- 12.2 This is particularly egregious given the extent to which the sector delivers public services and supports the work of the Northern Ireland Executive and in all probability will be required to do so to a considerably greater extent going forward, in challenging economic times.
- 12.3 In keeping with Age NI, we would cite a recent report from the Northern Ireland Audit office which highlighted that a number of principles contained in the 1998 Compact between the Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in Northern Ireland, were not being supplied as widely or systematically as they could be.
- 12.4 The report specifically aspired to maximising the sector's contribution to the policy process from development phase through to implementation, monitoring and evaluation; Developing the ability of all government funders to manage the funding relationship effectively and sector organisations' ability to deliver their full potential and to fully and consistently apply the good practice resourcing and funding mechanisms, including, for example cost recovery timelines of payments and proportionate monitoring and audit.
- 12.5 Continuing support for the infrastructure of the voluntary and community infrastructure is essential, without it front line work cannot be sustained; good practice flounders and accountability and good governance is threatened. Alongside this any duplication of infrastructure needs to be thoroughly examined, through a partnership approach between DSD and relevant organisations, and amalgamations agreed and implemented where necessary.

- 12.6 Relations between government and the voluntary sector need to be refreshed, revisiting the principles of the Compact. Long-term funding contracts, incorporating full cost recovery and linked to service delivery need to be agreed, which will address the on-going enormous waste of resources for many voluntary groups in continuous fund-raising and loss of experienced staff.
- 12.7 There are already many organisations and projects which deliver substantial benefits to the community and these projects which are already piloted and proven need to be maintained before money is skewed to the search for new 'innovative' projects. Organisations with the security of longer funding arrangements and clearer targets are better placed to encourage flexibility, innovation and deliver better outcomes.

### **13.0 Conclusions**

- 13.1 Women's Aid believes that the principles of human rights and equality should underpin any budgetary decisions. We are concerned that the present debate around government cuts has lost sight of the fundamental equality principles.
- 13.2 Any change in policy direction or major realignment of resources requires a robust, detailed Equality Impact Assessment to ensure it is not adversely impacting on the most vulnerable groups in society.
- 13.3 We would urge a vigorous re-introduction of the TSN policy whereby all government spending must take account of, and skew budgets towards those who are most in social need.
- 13.4 Government must not lose sight of the importance of emphasis on preventative work for e.g. the preventative education work which Women's Aid undertakes in schools or the need for proactively building a shared community in a society coming out of conflict. Without such work the level of need will not reduce instead it will escalate to the detriment of future generations.
- 13.5 We would urge caution in recognising the different strengths and remits of the voluntary/community sector and the public sector. One cannot replace the other. Any reduction in the public sector will impact adversely on the voluntary/community sector as it will inevitably increase need and disadvantage in local communities.

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