



Federation Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive

A Response to: The Housing Selection Scheme – Preliminary Consultation Paper

June 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 2010/11 indicate that there were more recorded crimes with a domestic motivation (9,546) than the combined total of all the following crimes (9,471). These include all recorded sexual offences (2,120), robbery (622), armed robbery (562), hijacking (122), theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle (2719), arson (1884) dangerous driving (699), handling stolen goods (194) and offences under anti-terrorism legislation (19).
- PSNI Statistics for 10/11 indicate that they responded to a domestic incident every 23 minutes of every day of the year.
- The total of 9,546 crimes with a domestic motivation in 10/11 represents an average of approximately 1 domestic crime every 60 minutes in Northern Ireland.
- The number of all recorded offences of murder in Northern Ireland in 10/11 total 20. Those classed as having a domestic motivation total 7. Therefore, 35% of all murders in Northern Ireland in 10/11 had a domestic motivation.
- There were 550 rapes (including attempted Rapes) in Northern Ireland in the period 2010/11.

(Source: PSNI Statistics 2010/11)

- 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 2010/11 N.B. "Adult" defined as aged 18 and over)

(** Women's Aid Federation NI)

7.0 Comments

- 7.1 Women's Aid Federation NI welcomes the publication of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Housing Selection Scheme Preliminary Consultation Paper and the opportunity to comment upon the document on behalf of our ten local groups. The following comments reflect their collective views.

8.0 Consultation Questions

- 8.1 *Do you agree that based on a risk-removal approach to intimidation and given the changing political situation in Northern Ireland, as well as the tools available to address serious disputes and harassment, intimidation cases should no longer attract absolute priority for rehousing through an additional award of 200 points under the Selection Scheme?*

Women's Aid does not agree with the proposal to remove the additional award of 200 points. In acknowledging the rationale for re-examining the rules pertaining to cases of intimidation in light of the increased political stability in Northern Ireland, we would wish to preface our comments by stating our strong opinion that the rule in respect of intimidation should be extended beyond sectarianism, race, disability, sexual orientation and anti-social behaviour, to specifically include domestic violence. It is clear in our view that the experiences of Women and Children who have been subjected to domestic violence, meets the requirements of the current Rule 23 (Pg.7), namely that, "the applicant's household must, in the relevant circumstances, be at high risk of death or serious injury."

It is entirely appropriate and indeed necessary in our view, that in such circumstances an applicant's case should have priority and should take precedence on the waiting list for permanent rehousing. We welcome the Executive's on-going commitment to ensuring that where a person is considered to be in serious and imminent danger they will be removed from that danger and offered alternative accommodation on an emergency basis.

We also fully endorse NIHE's efforts to support individuals who are experiencing intimidation but who express a wish to remain in their own home. To this end we continue to view the Executive's introduction of the pilot Sanctuary Scheme for those experiencing domestic violence, to be a positive development, as is the commitment to roll this initiative out across all NIHE districts.

Women's Aid continues to urge caution in the use of mediation to resolve neighbourhood disputes. We would urge that this practice not be used in cases where domestic violence is suspected or reported. In this regard we would also encourage the Executive to be alert to the potential for underlying domestic violence in cases where anti-social behaviour, such as noise nuisance is reported. We remain fully committed to working with NIHE to support those who have experienced domestic violence in Northern Ireland.

8.2 *Do you believe that if the 200 Intimidation Points currently awarded under the Scheme were to be removed, the Primary Social Need factors (Appendix 2) adequately recognise and give due weight to the range of circumstances in which a person is forced to leave their home because of violence or serious risk of violence or lose their home because of an unforeseen disaster e.g. fire/flood?*

Whilst we acknowledge that the Primary Social Needs Factors (Appendix 2 Rule 43, Pg.30) clearly recognise and prioritise domestic and sexual violence, we are generally concerned by the suggestion on page 10 of the consultation document that differing forms of trauma can be easily equated. There is no question that the loss of a home due to fire or flood is an enormously traumatic experience for an individual and their family. However, our organisation would contend that trauma is experienced on an individual basis and what may be viewed as a temporary setback for some can be enormously debilitating and an on-going source of anxiety and concern for another. Similarly, in cases involving domestic violence, the risk to the well-being, physical safety and security of the individual and their family is seldom transient but rather is likely to be sustained over a protracted period.

Indeed there is considerable evidence to suggest that the point of leaving an abusive relationship can be the most potentially dangerous time. Additionally it is not uncommon for an individual who has experienced domestic violence, to be subjected to further intimidating behaviour, including threats of violence, by relatives and friends of the perpetrator living within their community.

Women's Aid would suggest that any process of allocating and removing Intimidation Points requires much greater exploration and that NIHE should work in conjunction with organisations such as Women's Aid to ensure that some of the most vulnerable and at risk individuals in our society, often with complex needs, are not fundamentally disadvantaged.

8.3 *Do you agree that additional Interim Accommodation points should be awarded after further periods spent in temporary accommodation?*

In respect of the suggestion that additional Interim Accommodation Points should be awarded incrementally to recognise time spent in temporary accommodation by those applicants who are owed the full statutory housing duty under homelessness legislation (Full Duty Applicants; FDAs), Women's Aid is of the opinion that accommodation points should be awarded to all FDAs regardless of their living arrangements pending permanent housing.

Once again Women's Aid would welcome some engagement with NIHE on this matter and on the weighting and sequencing of any additional points.

For further information about this response contact:

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