



A response to

**Consultation on Draft Policing Plan 2014
– 2017**

(version dated 10th February 2014)

Northern Ireland Policing Board

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24 Hour Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline

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Text **support** to 07797 805 839

Freephone from all landlines and mobiles. Translation service available.

Open to *all women and men* affected by domestic & sexual violence

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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 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 & Sexual Violence Helpline.
- To provide a range of support services to enable women who are affected by domestic and/or sexual 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.

Throughout this consultation response, the term "Women's Aid" is used to reflect the overall Women's Aid movement in Northern Ireland, which is made up of our local Women's Aid groups and Women's Aid Federation. All local Women's Aid groups are members of Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland. Each Women's Aid group offers a range of specialist services to women, children and young people who have experienced domestic violence.

3.0 Women's Aid statistics (2012-2013)

- 880 women and 546 children sought refuge.
- 53 women in refuge were supported during their pregnancies and 14 babies were born to women in refuge.
- 1,517 one to one support sessions were held with children and young people in refuge.
- 3,659 women with 4,469 children accessed the Floating Support service, and a further 811 women accessed other Women's Aid outreach services, enabling women to access support whilst remaining in their own homes and communities.
- 1,591 women participated in a range of group work and personal development programme including *Journey to Freedom* and *You and Me, Mum*. 219 children were indirectly supported through their mothers' participation on the *You and Me, Mum* programme.
- 375 women with 519 children accessed support from a Women's Aid Women's Safety Worker while their partners or ex partners were undertaking the IDAP perpetrators programme provided by Probation Board Northern Ireland.
- The 24 Hour Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline, open to all women and men affected by domestic & sexual violence, managed 47,597 calls.
- 168 teachers were trained to deliver the Helping Hands programme in primary schools.

4.0 Additional Women's Aid statistical data

- Since 1999, Women's Aid across Northern Ireland gave refuge to 16,425 women and 15,488 children and young people.
- During the last 17 years Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland managed 374,406 calls to the 24 Hour Domestic & Sexual 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 DOJ, 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, 72% of adult victims of domestic crimes recorded by the PSNI in 2012/13 were female.¹
- Over 30% of all domestic violence starts during pregnancy.²

¹Findings from the PSNI Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2004/05 to 2012/13 N.B. “Adult” defined as aged 18 and over

²Women’s Aid Federation Northern Ireland

6.0 Domestic & Sexual Violence: Crime statistics (Source: PSNI Statistics 2012/13)

- Domestic Violence is a crime. PSNI statistics for 2012/13 indicate that there were more recorded crimes with a domestic motivation (11,160) than the combined total of all the following crimes (9,976) – all recorded sexual offences (1,948), shoplifting (5,890) and theft of a motor vehicle (2,138).
- PSNI Statistics for 12/13 indicate that they responded to a domestic incident every 19 minutes of every day of the year.
- The total of 11,160 crimes with a domestic motivation in 12/13 represents an average of approximately 1 domestic crime every 47 minutes in Northern Ireland.
- The number of all recorded offences of murder in Northern Ireland in 12/13 total 17. Those classed as having a domestic motivation total 5. Therefore, 29% of all murders in Northern Ireland in 12/13 had a domestic motivation.
- There were 533 rapes (including attempted Rapes) in Northern Ireland in the period 2012/13.

(Source: PSNI Statistics 2012/13)

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

7.0 Consultation response

- Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland welcomes the publication of the *Draft Policing Plan 2014 – 2017*, and the opportunity to comment on it on behalf of our local groups.

8.0 General

- Domestic violence is pervasive across Northern Ireland – the PSNI responds to a domestic violence incident every 19 minutes of every day of the year, and policing domestic violence takes up a substantial proportion of PSNI time. Yet domestic violence is only addressed specifically within this plan on pages 8, 10 and 12. This does not sufficiently reflect how persistent a crime it is or how seriously it needs to be taken by police.

8.1 Introduction (pp 6 – 7)

- We note that this plan has been formulated following consultation with PCSPs (para 1.4). Consulting with PCSPs does not equate to an open public consultation process in line with equality requirements, and it is disappointing that a full public consultation did not take place. Consulting only with PCSPs may not effectively identify the priorities that need to be tackled, and may focus more on the public perception of crime levels and priorities rather than the actual levels and priorities. Domestic violence is a hidden crime so it is rarely raised as a 'priority' by communities in the same way as anti-social behaviour or burglaries. Therefore the consultation process used masks the level of serious crime caused by domestic violence across all communities. Any such consultation process must be able to capture the full range of policing priorities and accurately reflect where those priorities lie.
- The limited consultation that Women's Aid contributed to was also flawed for a number of reasons. The Survey Monkey consultation questionnaire that was sent out to stakeholders was inadequate to allow full expression of our views on the Plan. For instance, it presumed that all respondents were responding on behalf of one specific policing area, whereas Women's Aid responded regionally. It also failed to allow for wider issues to be tackled beyond those within the questionnaire, and only on limited occasions did it allow for responses beyond ticking boxes.
- In our view, something as important as Northern Ireland's 3 year policing plan should allow for greater input and discussion, and be thoroughly consulted on

with the public and all stakeholders. A full 12-week public consultation, in line with section 75 requirements, not only gives expert organisations the appropriate time and scope to provide useful input, but it will also foster confidence in policing by demonstrating that such processes are open and transparent.

- We welcome the recognition that there are issues where “specified numeric target may not be viewed as the most appropriate method of assessing progress or performance” (para 1.5). Domestic and sexual violence and abuse both fall under this category, as reduction in reporting numbers often don’t equate to reduction in perpetration of these crimes. Higher numbers of victims reporting incidents to police can instead reflect improvement in confidence in police, and success in breaking the silence and taboo surrounding domestic and sexual violence. It would have been helpful during the consultation process to have had the opportunity to discuss how targets based on this reality could be developed relating to policing domestic and sexual violence.
- Women’s Aid would challenge the statement at para 1.6 of the plan which says: “Although Local Policing Plans are published separately, they are consistent with the Northern Ireland Policing Plan”. In our experience, this has not been the case concerning the local police response to domestic violence. Our service users and local groups have reported inconsistencies in police service provision and response to domestic violence incidents across Northern Ireland – these may differ between policing districts or between individual officers. In addition, although domestic violence is identified as a government and policing priority at regional level, this has not always translated into the same level of commitment and priority at local level. We have experienced difficulty in ensuring that the agreed actions and aims of the Tackling Violence At Home domestic violence strategy and Northern Ireland Policing Plan are reflected in local plans, and if these priorities are not reflected and implemented at local level then the regional plans become totally ineffective.

8.2 Confidence in Policing

- Under ‘Improved Confidence in Policing’ we note that there are a number of means by which the views of victims are recorded. Unfortunately, all of these surveys remain problematic for collecting the views and experiences of victims of domestic and sexual violence. As a consequence, the voices of domestic violence victims are often missed. It would have been helpful to include a discussion in full consultation about how collecting information from DV victims could be improved upon.

8.3 Personal Policing

- We would like to point out that the statement at the top of page 8 that says “following public consultation, you identified the issues which cause you most concern” is inaccurate. A full public consultation did not in fact take place and we were not given sufficient opportunity to identify the issues for domestic and sexual violence victims that cause most concern.
- We note with concern that domestic violence has been categorised under “crime & anti-social behaviour” within the plan. This categorisation is highly inappropriate as the serious harm inflicted upon victims in abusive relationships is not comparable to anti-social behaviour. Domestic violence is not merely inconsiderate or negligent behaviour; it is persistent, intentional and deliberate abuse of a person, often resulting in serious injury or death. The Policing Plan should reflect the seriousness of this form of abuse within the plan.
- There are also serious ramifications for conflating domestic violence and anti-social behaviour. For instance, there is potential to victim-blame if domestic violence is seen through an anti-social behaviour lens – police call-outs, noise disruption etc can be consequences of such abuse, but a victim should not be branded as being from an ‘anti-social’ household because of these circumstances beyond her control or because they happen to encroach upon the tranquillity of her neighbourhood.
- Labelling domestic violence as merely ‘anti-social’ downplays its seriousness, and plays into the old myths that ‘it’s just a domestic’ as opposed to being a serious form of abuse. This is in stark contrast to the fact that nearly one third of the murders in Northern Ireland last year were domestically motivated.
- We note that there are some specific numerical targets for improving outcomes for some crimes but not others. For example, there is a target of 7% increase in outcome rates for crimes with a domestic motivation. It would be useful if the Policing Plan explained how such a number was calculated, particularly for organisations like Women’s Aid who work with victims in the criminal justice system on a daily basis. By contrast, there is no measure or target to reduce domestically-motivated homicides, which is a serious

oversight considering the percentage of homicides or attempted murders that are domestically motivated.

- We note that there is some mention in this section of working in partnership with relation to burglaries. However there is no mention of working with local Domestic Violence Partnerships across Northern Ireland. We would urge that this work is included in the plan, as its absence implies that there is in fact no ongoing partnership work being carried out in this area which is completely false.

8.4 Professional Policing

- We note that the target time limit to update all victims of crime on what is being done to investigate their case is 10 days. This is much too long for victims of domestic and sexual violence, as such a delay could place victims in at high risk of serious injury or death. This is precisely why lumping domestic victims into all crime types can be so dangerous. Victims of domestic and sexual violence need to be able to take decisions on their safety on the basis of accurate, up to date information about their case, and their confidence in the PSNI's response is partly-based on knowing that police will keep them informed about their perpetrator's whereabouts and any other information that could affect their safety.
- Under 'Effective Joint Policing', we note that to "increase reporting of Domestic Abuse / Domestically motivated violent crime" is included as a measure. We welcome this, but would also recommend the inclusion of an additional specific measure to 'raise awareness of domestic violence as a crime and dispel myths about domestic violence'.
- Under 'Providing Information to the Community', we note that one outcome is raising awareness of the non-emergency number 101. As an organisation that supports victims of domestic violence crime, our latest information on this number was that it was being run as a pilot, and that no decision had been taken on whether to roll it out across Northern Ireland. Such a decision may have a substantial impact upon our service users. It is crucial that an evaluation of the pilot takes place and that the outcomes are disclosed to support organisations like ourselves. It is also essential that all domestic and sexual violence victims remain able to use 999 to report incidents in the

interests of their safety, and that this message is relayed strongly to the public as part of any awareness raising.

- Under “continuous improvement” (page 11), we are concerned that there is no explicit mention of training of PSNI officers to understand domestic and sexual violence. Our women have continued to voice concerns that PSNI officers who respond to domestic or sexual violence-related call-outs don’t understand the nature of domestic or sexual violence, and consequently fail to respond appropriately to their situation. Training of responding officers, not only DAOs, is needed to rectify this shortcoming.

8.5 Protective Policing

- Under “reduced levels of activity and harm caused by individuals or gangs involved in organised crime” (page 12), there is a mention of “human exploitation”, yet there is no clarity on what this actually includes. If this term encompasses human trafficking, it would be useful for the term ‘human trafficking’ to be included in the Plan so that there is no misunderstanding as to what constitutes exploitation within the Plan.
- Under “Reduced level of violent crime” (page 12), we note that there is no specific numerical target to improve the current outcome rate for rape crime. If it is possible to formulate concrete percentage targets for other types of crime, it should be possible to do so for sexual violence crime. Given the disappointing clearance rates for these types of crime, it would perhaps improve confidence in the police response to sexual violence if there was a public commitment to reach specific targets.
- We are extremely concerned at the inappropriate language used to describe sexual violence crimes under “improved service to vulnerable people” (page 12). The phrase “victims of *serious* sexual crime” (own emphasis added) feeds into the myth that there are sexual crimes that are not serious, when this is not the case. All sexual crime is serious and has a devastating impact upon victims and their families, and such unhelpful language serves to create a false hierarchy of victims and denies a victim’s experience of the serious crime committed against them.

- Under “Improved service to vulnerable groups” (page 12), we recommend the inclusion of a firm commitment from the PSNI to signpost victims of crimes to the appropriate support organisation such as Women’s Aid.
- Under “Enhanced confidence and reassurance to the public” (page 13), we note that PPANI is mentioned. However there is no mention under the section of what the PSNI intend to do to tackle the serious issue of serial domestic violence perpetrators.

9.0 Contact details

For further information about this response please contact:

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