



Federation Northern Ireland

A written submission in response to:

Supporting People Housing Related Support Strategy

Northern Ireland Housing Executive
May 2013

Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland

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Open to all women and men affected by domestic violence

Contents

Section		Page
1.	Summary of key points	3
2.	Introduction to Women's Aid in Northern Ireland	5
3.	Context/Background	6
4.	Principles, strategic vision and objectives	8
5.	Cross cutting policy themes and context for housing relating support	8
6.	Client group specific housing related support	11
7.	Key actions	16
8.	Concluding comments	17
9.	Contact details	17
	Appendices: Additional statistical data regarding domestic and sexual violence and abuse	18

1. Summary of key points presented in this consultation response:

In response to the Supporting People, Housing Related Support Strategy 2012-2015, Women's Aid wishes to highlight the following key points which have been raised in the full consultation response which follows:

1. Women's Aid recognises and commends the significant progress made since the introduction of the Supporting People Programme, particularly in relation to addressing the complex needs of victims of domestic violence. The programme has been instrumental in creating and sustaining safety and support services for women and children experiencing domestic violence, including access to safe refuge accommodation and a network of floating support services.
2. Women's Aid welcomes the continued commitment from Government, to fund the Supporting People programme.
3. The NIHE (Northern Ireland Housing Executive) has been highly successful in its role of Administering Body for the Supporting People programme. Women's Aid strongly believes NIHE should retain this role in the future, to build upon success, promote continuity and ensure a regional strategic approach.
4. Women's Aid strongly agrees with the need to link with current relevant government strategies and broader policy themes. We are seriously concerned to note, upon review of appendix 2, there is no reference to Tackling Violence at Home¹ the Government Strategy for addressing domestic violence. We see this as a serious omission which we wish to see rectified in the final strategy document.
5. It is crucial that the commissioning model implemented to support the strategy should be clear and transparent. Women's Aid also believes the model must demonstrate values of efficiency, effectiveness and equity across Northern Ireland.
6. There remains an ongoing necessity for both refuge accommodation and floating support to ensure the complex needs of all women and children who experience domestic and sexual violence and abuse are met. Women's Aid strongly advocates for prioritisation of both in line with the Housing Related Support Strategy.
7. There is a severe lack of appropriate social housing in Northern Ireland. Women's Aid remains seriously concerned in relation to current and future availability of housing to meet the needs of women and children who have experienced domestic and sexual violence and abuse. Women's Aid anticipates this huge gap will be further exacerbated by the proposed Welfare Reform Bill and would seek further clarification in relation to how the challenges presented to housing through the reform will be addressed.

¹Northern Ireland Office (2005) *Tackling Violence at Home - A Strategy for Addressing Domestic Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland*, 2005.

8. Women's Aid welcomes and is completely committed to, a comprehensive review and remodelling of refuge provision across Northern Ireland, to ensure services meet quality standards (including disability and health and safety regulations) align with government strategy and are based upon the needs of women and children.
9. There are huge gaps in service provision for women, with alcohol/substance dependency who are also victims of domestic and sexual violence. Women's Aid wishes to highlight the links between domestic and sexual violence and abuse and alcohol/substance dependency and strongly believes there is a definite need, for separate supported emergency accommodation to meet the distinct needs of this client group.
10. Women's Aid agrees there is a need for separate temporary accommodation for women who are approaching the end of a custodial sentence, to support them in the transition to living an independent life. We wish to highlight links with domestic and sexual abuse which many of these women will have suffered, as children and in adult life and believe there is a need for tailored support including separate emergency accommodation, to help address these experiences of domestic and sexual violence and abuse.
11. Women's Aid commends the positive steps that have been put in place to address youth homelessness. Research highlights that many homeless young people have come from families where domestic and sexual violence and abuse has been prevalent. Women's Aid believes there is a definite need, for specialist support services and tailored emergency accommodation for this group.
12. Women's Aid wishes to emphasise the clear links between domestic and sexual violence and abuse and mental health. Where there is a history of domestic and sexual violence, individuals will require additional tailored support to enable them to take positive steps to improve their situation.
13. Finally, Women's Aid welcomes the opportunity to respond, on behalf of all our member groups, to the Supporting People Housing Related Support Strategy 2012-2015 as part of the overall consultation process.

These points are explored in greater detail in the main body of our consultation response which follows.

2. Introduction to Women's Aid in Northern Ireland

Women's Aid is the lead voluntary organisation challenging and addressing domestic and sexual violence and abuse in Northern Ireland. Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland manages the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline which is open to all women and men experiencing domestic violence. There is currently a network of local Women's Aid groups throughout Northern Ireland providing refuge and a range of emotional and practical support services, including outreach and aftercare to women and children suffering from domestic violence. Women's Aid also provides a range of tailored, age appropriate support for children and young people, this work is further documented in the Women's Aid strategy for children and young people "Our Place-Safe Space" and the directory of services for children and young people.

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

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

Every day across Northern Ireland, another four women and children come to stay in refuge because they are not safe in their own homes. Refuge accommodation provides a temporary place of safety for women and children fleeing from domestic and sexual violence and abuse. Women can stay in refuge for as long as is needed to rebuild their lives and get the support they need. Women's Aid refuges provide an individually tailored and responsive service, which is based upon a woman's needs and those of her children. Refuges can provide respite, safety and support and while accommodated in refuge, women and children can be supported to come to terms with their situation and can be encouraged to make positive plans for the future. In addition to 12 twelve refuges, Women's Aid also has 15 resource centres across Northern Ireland for women seeking information and support, group work and training. Last year 3,663 women and 4,152 children accessed the Floating Support service enabling women to access support whilst remaining in their own homes and communities. These figures are increasing on a yearly basis as the organisation reaches out to families experiencing domestic violence across Northern Ireland.

1.1 Women's Aid statistics (2011 - 2012)

- 831 women and 586 children sought refuge.
- 3,663 women and 4,152 children accessed the Floating Support service enabling women to access support whilst remaining in their own homes and communities.
- In 2011/12 the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline, open to all women and men affected by domestic violence, managed 43,949 calls. This represented an increase of 14.5% on 2010/11.

Additional Women's Aid statistics and statistics relating to Domestic violence and violence against women are provided as an appendix (appendix 1)

3. Context/Background

- Women's Aid Federation NI recognises and commends the significant progress since the introduction of the Supporting People Programme and through the original strategy, Supporting People, Changing Lives 2005 -2010. The programme has demonstrated a huge commitment from Government to helping vulnerable people live as independently as possible in the community. The programme has enabled the establishment and development of key partnerships, to strategically manage accommodation and housing related support services, to prevent crisis and tackle social exclusion. Women's Aid believes the Supporting People programme has fulfilled an important function effectively, particularly in a society moving out of conflict and we commend the key successes that have been achieved.
- In particular, Women's Aid believes the Supporting People programme has been instrumental in creating and sustaining safety and support services for women and children experiencing domestic violence. The programme has enabled women and children to access safe refuge accommodation. The introduction of a network of floating support services in 2002 has also been highly significant and successful. The floating support services run by Women's Aid are essential to support victims of domestic violence and effectively contribute to sustaining tenancies and preventing homelessness.
- Women's Aid welcomed the appointment of NIHE as the Administering Body for the Supporting People programme and has, since the programmes establishment developed strong links and effective partnerships with key Supporting People staff. Women's Aid strongly believes the NIHE should retain this role of Administering Body to build upon success, promote continuity and a regional strategic approach. It is, we believe, imperative that the key successes achieved in the area of domestic and sexual violence and abuse are not lost in any future review/reform of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Rather, we believe such achievements need to be further progressed and strengthened through a strategic regional approach, based upon equality and equity.

- Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland welcomes the publication of the Supporting People, Housing Related Support Strategy 2012-2015. We welcome the opportunity to comment upon the document on behalf of our local Women's Aid groups as part of the strategy consultation. Overall we found the strategy to be well researched and comprehensive. The strategy is wide ranging and acknowledges some of the challenges presented by welfare reform and the difficult economic circumstances which currently exist. We would however, stress the need for a much stronger emphasis on how the strategy will meet the challenges presented by Welfare Reform, of which, we strongly believe, there will be many, and which could undermine the aims of this strategy.

Benefits of Housing Related Support

- Women's Aid agrees with the benefits of the Supporting People Programme presented on page 5. We agree the programme can make a significant difference to people's lives and have witnessed this in our work with women and children affected by domestic and sexual violence and abuse.

Funding for the programme

- Women's Aid welcomes the continued commitment from Government, to funding the Supporting People programme through the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) 2011-2014/15 presented in section 1.7 (page 7).

Wide strategic agendas

- Women's Aid strongly agrees with the need for this strategy to link closely with a range of government strategies and broader policy themes. We also agree with the need for strong partnership working to implement the priorities identified.
- We are however, seriously concerned to note, upon review of appendix 2 (the key government strategies which impact upon and complement the strategy) that there is no reference whatsoever to **Tackling Violence at Home**² the Government Strategy which sets out a strategic approach to tackling domestic violence over a five year period. This strategy recommends a multi-agency approach to tackling domestic violence. Plans are in place for the amalgamation of this strategy with the Sexual Violence Strategy given the overlap in actions on both plans. The intention is to issue one new strategy after 2014. We find it surprising that there is no reference to either document, given the emphasis on and commitment to the protection and support of victims of domestic and sexual violence and abuse presented in this

²Northern Ireland Office (2005) *Tackling Violence at Home - A Strategy for Addressing Domestic Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland*, 2005.

strategy. We see this as a serious omission which we seek to be rectified in the final strategy document.

4. Principles, strategic vision and objectives

- Women's Aid welcomes and supports the principles underpinning the strategy. We particularly support the principle of flexibility and agree there is a need to provide services, service models and structures that are responsive to meeting the changing needs of clients, commissioners and the economic climate. We believe this needs to be balanced by a focus on involvement of service users to ensure a clear and well-grounded awareness of changing needs. Women's Aid continuously consults with service users and this has highlighted a range of changing needs and service user expectations. Such consultation has demonstrated a clear and definite strategic need, to review and remodel refuge provision, to ensure a more flexible accommodation model which will address all service user needs and expectations and provide high levels of quality provision.
- Women's Aid welcomes and supports the strategic vision and key objectives of the strategy. We also recognise the challenges in delivering on this vision in the current economic climate and within the challenges presented by Welfare Reform. We particularly welcome the focus on planning and delivering services in partnership with stakeholders.

5. Cross cutting policy themes and context for housing related support services.

Strategic planning, commissioning and development of services

- Women's Aid welcomes the ongoing monitoring of services outlined in section 3.1 (page 9). We believe this will inform strategic planning. Women's Aid has welcomed the introduction of the contract management framework and validation against QAF (Quality Assessment Framework). We also welcome the statement presented on this page *"Where necessary services will be remodelled/funding realigned within and across client groups to ensure the delivery of high quality services which achieve maximum value for money within existing levels."* This aligns with our view that many of our refuges are no longer of the required quality standard to meet need and require significant remodelling.
- Women's Aid refuges are unique to many other housing providers as they experience extremely high levels of usage, due to continuously high levels of occupancy with varying lengths of stay. Extreme wear and tear in refuges is inevitable due to the transient nature of refuge provision and the high levels of turnover in service users. Many refuges are now old and have become increasingly

run down. Disability access is also a problem for many refuges where facilities are not of sufficient quality to meet the needs of disabled women.

- Many refuges are now at a stage they are no longer “fit for purpose”. Consultation with service users has also revealed changing expectations and preferences including the provision of independent units and private bathroom facilities.
- While Women’s Aid prides itself upon refuge provision and the support services attached, the primary purpose of refuge provision is to provide safe temporary accommodation. Living in refuges for long periods of time can present difficulties and frustrations for families who are ready for and clearly desire independent living and a new start. This continues to be an issue of serious concern for Women’s Aid and highlights the need to remodel refuge accommodation to provide both communal living and independent units. Independent units can be used to promote independence, allow a family privacy while still ensuring that they are supported by all the services that are available in refuge. Ultimately independent units will provide a conduit between refuge and independent living in the community when a family leaves refuge
- While we understand the need to identify priorities and commission services through a comprehensive commissioning process, we believe this process needs to be clear and transparent to all stakeholders. It is essential that this process is based upon a thorough understanding and analysis of need and can demonstrate values of efficiency, effectiveness and equity. We also strongly believe in the need for a transparent model, involving both statutory and voluntary agencies at all levels.

Drive for efficiency and value for money

- Women’s Aid understands the need to demonstrate efficiency and value for money. We strongly believe that quality must however be given equal consideration. We believe that a balance of both can be achieved through the points made in section 3.2 (page 9), particularly *through working with providers to explore new ways of providing services that make the best use of available resources.*

Performance, quality and outcomes

- Women’s Aid welcomes the introduction of an outcomes model presented in section 3.4 (page 10). Women’s Aid welcomed the introduction of QAF and has found this to be an effective tool to highlight development areas and ultimately improve quality of services. We have also welcomed the contract management process and have participated fully in this process, finding it worthwhile for quality review and also for building partnerships and relationships with Supporting People staff.

- While we welcome the introduction of an outcomes model, we do have some concerns related to the investment of time and resources this will require. The QAF system itself can be onerous to complete for Women's Aid groups, given the evidence required across the five core objectives and the amount of administration involved.
- We welcome an outcomes monitoring framework but strongly believe that such a model should present a **clear and workable system** that **measures what matters** in terms of both qualitative and quantitative outcomes for service users. In particular, we believe "softer" outcomes and those outcomes which demonstrate levels of social impact for service users should be included. We believe such a system should be developed in consultation with key stakeholders and providers to ensure universal understanding and buy in.

Tenancy sustainment, early intervention and prevention

- Women's Aid agrees there is a need to target resources at early intervention to sustain people in their own homes. The introduction of a network of Women's Aid floating support services in 2002 has been highly significant and successful. The floating support services run by Women's Aid are essential to support victims of domestic violence and effectively contribute to sustaining tenancies and preventing homelessness.
- While we agree with the need to focus on early intervention, we would also wish to highlight the continued need for crisis intervention for women and children experiencing domestic and sexual violence and abuse in the form of temporary refuge provision. We strongly believe there is a definite need for both temporary accommodation and floating support services to meet the varied and complex needs of women and children who experience domestic and sexual violence and abuse.

Access/referral and exit/move on from services

- Women's Aid agrees that effective pathways in to and out of services are integral to effectively assisting people to achieve independent living. However, we strongly believe there is much to be done to make this a reality.
- Women's Aid is seriously concerned that there is a severe lack of appropriate affordable social housing to meet needs. We believe this will be further exacerbated by the proposed changes to the Housing Selection Scheme and the Welfare Reform Bill.
- At present, there is a definite lack of 1 and 2 bedroom houses, to facilitate the changes that are being proposed, including the extension of the shared room rate to those under 35 and the focus on under occupied houses. We are concerned that

such changes could result in destitution or homelessness for those who cannot find social housing with the right number of bedrooms. It will also present difficulties for women moving on from refuge and could result in a possible “silting up” of temporary accommodation providers such as refuges. Our experience has shown that waiting times for women who have experienced domestic violence to be rehoused already vary greatly and many women and children find themselves in refuge accommodation for lengthy periods while they are waiting to be allocated suitable housing. We are concerned this will be further exacerbated by the proposed changes and as such will greatly hinder the availability of pathways out of refuge services.

- We would welcome more emphasis on the impact of welfare reform on accessing suitable move on accommodation and clarification on what steps will be taken to address the challenges presented.

6. Client group specific housing related support

Changing nature of homelessness

- Women’s Aid agrees the nature of homelessness has changed in recent years and also agrees with the contributing factors presented on page 14/15.

Issues with the “traditional” hostel model

- We agree that some traditional models of homeless service may no longer be appropriate. We can however only relate this to our own services, which we feel are no longer appropriate to meet needs. We strongly believe that refuge accommodation needs to be reviewed and remodelled to reflect changes in need, legislation, government strategy, quality standards and service user expectations. This has been outlined previously on page 9 of this strategy response.

Welfare reform

- We strongly believe welfare reform will have a huge impact on homeless households in Northern Ireland. Women’s Aid remains seriously concerned about the potential impact of welfare reform on women and children who are experiencing domestic violence. We view the proposed Bill as a major step backwards in relation to women’s rights and gender parity. Our concerns in relation to housing, once again, relate to the extension of the shared room rate to under 35 and the clear focus on under occupied houses.
- Such changes are accompanied by the severe lack of social housing. We strongly believe this will seriously impact upon women’s ability to leave refuge, find suitable

accommodation and live independently. It is an enormous step for a woman to leave an abusive partner. If children are involved, the decision is complicated further. If a woman feels that leaving her violent partner will put her in a situation where she is unable to find affordable social housing of an appropriate size for herself and her children, this could deter her from leaving the relationship altogether.

Length of stay in temporary accommodation

- Women's Aid agrees there is an issue regarding length of stay in temporary homeless accommodation. We also agree that opportunities in the social housing sector are becoming increasingly limited due to demand increasing supply. This will, we believe, be further exacerbated by the implications of welfare reform.
- While we are not opposed to making greater use of the private rented sector, we have serious concerns relating to affordability and hefty deposits associated with this option.

People who are homeless due to domestic violence and abuse

- Women's Aid greatly appreciates the ongoing support from the Supporting People programme and the continued commitment to funding the services outlined on page 17 of the strategy document. The Supporting People initiative has operated successfully at a regional level and has been instrumental in enabling the provision of safe temporary accommodation and quality services for women and children experiencing domestic violence. This has been highly valued by Women's Aid.
- It is, we believe, imperative that the key successes achieved in the area of domestic violence are not lost in any future review/reform of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Rather, we believe such achievements need to be further progressed and strengthened through a strategic regional approach, based upon equality and equity.
- This investment of funding in the area of domestic violence has created considerable savings to the public purse relating to the potential overall cost of domestic violence to our society. This investment has enabled a clear and strategic focus on earlier intervention and service provision. The Northern Ireland Strategy "Tackling Violence at Home"³ estimates the cost of domestic violence in Northern Ireland, including the potential loss of economic output, could amount to £180 million each year.
- It is important to note that many of the needs of women and children who have experienced domestic violence can only be met initially in the context of the safe, secure and supportive environment afforded by refuge, which enables women to re-

³ Northern Ireland Office (2005) *Tackling Violence at Home - A Strategy for Addressing Domestic Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland*, 2005.

build their lives. Women's Aid therefore strongly believes, there is a need for continued provision of both floating support services and emergency accommodation across Northern Ireland to ensure an effective response to need.

- Women's Aid strongly agrees with the statement provided on page 17 regarding the relevance of the refuge accommodation model. *"The traditional portfolio of accommodation has been in existence for 15-20 years but the expectations of service users are changing, especially around the nature of shared facilities."* This is consistent with other government strategies such as: **Facing the Future: Housing Strategy for Northern Ireland⁴** and the **Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland 2012-2017⁵**. It is also consistent with our own beliefs and vision for refuge development. The Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland, provides the opportunity "to engage with Supporting People colleagues and temporary accommodation providers, to complete a fundamental review of the temporary accommodation portfolio and to develop plans for the delivery of a cost effective response which balances the need for supported and unsupported accommodation"(page 19). It also proposes a fundamental review of the current temporary accommodation portfolio with regard to its strategic relevance, financial viability and access criteria, to be completed by 2014/15 (page 20).
- Women's Aid in Northern Ireland welcomes and is completely committed to the review and remodelling of refuge provision (previously outlined on page 9) to ensure that services are consistently delivering a high quality service, are based upon need and that physical accommodation is fit for purpose. Women's Aid believes that, strategically, the time is right to move forward with this innovative programme. It is essential this is progressed as a priority, in partnership with Housing Associations, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Department of Social Development.
- Women's Aid believes government investment in this review/remodelling programme will demonstrate a strategic and innovative approach, placing Northern Ireland as an example of best practice in refuge provision. It will also evidence a continued commitment from Government, to addressing domestic and sexual violence and abuse, by making a vision of best quality refuge accommodation a reality for all women and children accessing refuge accommodation in Northern Ireland.

⁴ Department for Social Development (2012) Facing the Future: Housing Strategy for Northern Ireland 2012-2017, consultation

⁵ Northern Ireland Housing Executive (April 2012) Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland, 2012- 2017

People with alcohol and/or substance dependency who are homeless

- Women's Aid supports the development of a range of services for people with alcohol and/or substance dependency. We agree that the range of services offered needs to be sufficiently flexible in order to facilitate progression towards independence.
- We would wish to highlight the links with domestic and sexual violence and abuse with this client group. Some women experiencing domestic and sexual violence and abuse can develop unhealthy coping mechanisms such as alcohol misuse which can result in dependency. While Women's Aid is completely committed to supporting these women, their unique circumstances and complex needs mean they are not always suitable for communal living in temporary accommodation.
- We agree there is a definite need for joint work with a range of professionals including health and social services, community mental health and community addiction teams. Our experience however, has highlighted a serious gap in service provision for this group of women, including lengthy waiting lists, barriers in accessing of services and a lack of tailored support. Women's Aid believes there is a definite need for separate supported emergency accommodation to meet the distinct needs of this client group.

Accommodation for female offenders

- Women's Aid agrees there is a need for temporary accommodation for women who are approaching the end of a custodial sentence. Research has highlighted a link between domestic and sexual violence and abuse and female offenders with many coming from a background where domestic and sexual violence and abuse has been present, either through childhood or through intimate adult relationships.
- We believe there is a need to provide specific refuge provision for these women to support them in the transition from custody to living an independent life. Women's Aid welcomes the intention to progress further work in this area, to determine the requirement and potential viability of such a service in Northern Ireland and welcomes any opportunity to inform or be part of this area of work.

Young people who are homeless or leaving the care of social services

- We agree that youth homelessness is a growing problem that needs to be addressed. We welcome the range of actions that have been progressed to date to address this issue but agree that additional services are required.

- Research highlights links between youth homelessness and domestic and sexual violence and abuse with many homeless young people coming from families or relationships where domestic and sexual violence and abuse has been prevalent.
- Women's Aid believes there is a definite need for specialist services, including tailored support and tailored emergency accommodation for this group. We agree that an interagency approach is required to meet the needs of young homeless.

Mental health

- Women's Aid concurs with the points made in section 4.3.3 (page 30) regarding mental health. We agree that people with mental health experience a range of problems in relation to housing.
- We wish to emphasise the links between domestic and sexual violence and abuse and mental health. This interrelationship is clearly documented in research. Domestic and sexual violence can impact upon all areas of an individual's life and can be extremely damaging to both physical and mental well-being with individuals struggling to cope and often resorting to unhealthy coping mechanisms.
- An article by Hegarty (2011)⁶ in The British Journal of Psychiatry identifies domestic violence as, "a hidden epidemic associated with mental illness." (Pg.168). Hegarty cites her own research (2006) and that carried out by Campbell, Laughton and Woods, (2006) which indicates that, "Domestic violence is a common hidden problem for women attending clinical practice and is a major cause of mental ill health globally." (Pg.169).
- Where there is domestic and sexual violence, individuals will require additional tailored support to enable them to take positive steps to improve their situation. Once again, our experience of working with this client group has revealed serious gaps in service provision, including lengthy waiting lists and a lack of appropriate housing provision. While Women's Aid is committed to supporting these women, their complex needs mean they are not always suitable for communal living and require a proactive partnership approach from a range of agencies and professionals.
- We welcome a clear government focus on this issue and the development of housing support services that will *provide a central part of an effective recovery pathway for people with a mental health need; providing the basis for individuals to recover, receive support and help and in some cases to return to work or education.*

⁶ Hegarty, K, (2011) "Domestic Violence: the hidden epidemic associated with mental illness" The British Journal of Psychiatry 2011 198: 169-170

Physical and sensory disability

- Women's Aid welcomes the clear focus on physical and sensory disability provided on section 4.4 (page 32). Research⁷ suggests that disabled women may experience more abuse than non-disabled women, and their impairments may be used by their abusers in order to increase both the abuser's power and control, and the woman's vulnerability and isolation. This research, commissioned by Women's Aid Federation England suggests that disabled women experience a greater need for services, accompanied by far less provision, and therefore lose out on both counts.
- Women's Aid remains committed to meeting the needs of disabled women experiencing domestic violence using our require services. However, we are severely restricted in terms of our current refuge provision. Facilities in several refuges are severely limited and in many cases not of adequate standard to meet needs. In the past, this has unfortunately resulted in an inability to accommodate some women with physical disabilities.
- To ensure refuge provision is accessible and tailored to this client group, it is essential that the review/remodelling of refuge provision across Northern Ireland is progressed as a priority.

7. Key actions

- Women's Aid welcomes the key actions listed in section 5 (page 37) of the strategy document. In relation to tenancy sustainment, early intervention and prevention we welcome the intention to review the contribution of existing floating support schemes in assisting people and households to sustain and maintain their accommodation.
- We also welcome the intention to ensure equality of access to services across Northern Ireland and where necessary and financially viable, commission additional services to meet need. Women's Aid would like to highlight at this point that there is one area in Northern Ireland that does not have a floating support service for victims of domestic and sexual violence and abuse. We view this as a serious gap and welcome involvement in a regional review of services to ensure equality of access.
- We welcome the paragraph (5.12, page 39) relating to domestic violence and abuse. We particularly welcome the commitment to ensuring that the current range of refuge accommodation is fit for purpose and delivering a consistently high quality service. We would however welcome further reference to the nature, context and prevalence of domestic and sexual violence and abuse within society in this paragraph, including the fact that it can happen to anyone, irrespective of age, gender, social class, ethnic background etc.

⁷ Hague, G, Thiara, R, Magowan, P and Mullender, A (2008) *Making the links: Disabled women and domestic violence*, Executive summary from Women's Aid Federation England

- In relation to services for people with alcohol and/or substance dependency, we wish to highlight, once again the links between this and domestic and sexual violence and abuse. We strongly believe there are serious gaps for women struggling with these issues who are also victims/survivors of domestic and sexual violence. These women require a unique and tailored service which could include a separate refuge to provide tailored emergency supported accommodation.

6. Concluding comments

- Women's Aid Federation NI, once again, would like to commend the significant progress since the introduction of the Supporting People Programme and through the original strategy, Supporting People, Changing Lives 2005 -2010. Women's Aid believes the Supporting People programme has been instrumental in creating and sustaining safety and support services for women and children experiencing domestic violence.
- Women's Aid appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Supporting People Housing Related Support Strategy. Overall we found the strategy to be well researched and comprehensive.
- Women's Aid urges consideration of the points we have raised in our consultation response. We welcome any opportunity for further consultation.
- Women's Aid is committed to actively participating in the subsequent action plan and to working in partnership with all relevant agencies to realise the aims and objectives contained within the strategy.

7. Contact details

For further information about this response please contact:

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24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline - 0800 917 1414

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Appendix 1- Additional statistical data regarding domestic and sexual violence and abuse

Additional Women's Aid statistical data

- Since 1999, Women's Aid across Northern Ireland gave refuge to 15,545 women and 14,942 children and young people.
- During the last 17 years Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland managed 326,809 calls to the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline.

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.
- Over 30% of all domestic violence starts during pregnancy.

Domestic violence: crime statistics

- Domestic Violence is a crime. PSNI statistics for 2011/12 indicate that there were more recorded crimes with a domestic motivation (10,387) than the combined total of all the following crimes (10,327) – all recorded sexual offences (1,836), shoplifting (6,201) and theft of a motor vehicle (2,290).
- PSNI Statistics for 2011/12 indicate that they responded to a domestic incident every 21 minutes of every day of the year.
- The total of 10,387 crimes with a domestic motivation in 11/12 represents an average of approximately 1 domestic crime every 51 minutes in Northern Ireland.
- The number of all recorded offences of murder in Northern Ireland in 11/12 total 16. Those classed as having a domestic motivation total 3. Therefore, 19% of all murders in Northern Ireland in 11/12 had a domestic motivation.

- There were 553 rapes (including attempted Rapes) in Northern Ireland in the period 2011/12.⁸
- Official sources (NISOSMC) estimate that up to 80% of sex crimes are not papered.

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.

⁸http://www.psnipolice.uk/index/updates/updates_statistics/updates_domestic_and_hate_motivation_statistics.htm