



**A response to**

**Statutory Guidance for the Operation of**

**Community Planning**

**Department of the Environment**

**8 March 2015**

---

**Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland**

129 University Street  
BELFAST BT7 1HP

Tel: 02890 249041

Fax: 02890 239296

General Email: [info@womensaidni.org](mailto:info@womensaidni.org)

Website: [www.womensaidni.org](http://www.womensaidni.org)

**24 Hour Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline**

**Call: 0808 802 1414**

Email Support: [24hrsupport@dvhelpline.org](mailto:24hrsupport@dvhelpline.org)

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

## Contents

Section		Page
1	Women's Aid information and statistics	3
2.	Consultation response	6
3.	Contact Details	9

## 1. Women's Aid Information & Statistics

### 1.0 Introduction

Women's Aid is the lead voluntary organisation in Northern Ireland addressing domestic and sexual violence and providing services for women and children. We recognise domestic and sexual violence as forms of violence against women. Women's Aid seeks to challenge attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate domestic and sexual 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 violence 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 or sexual 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 and sexual 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 and sexual 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 (2013-14)**

- ) 999 women and 747 children sought refuge.
- ) 59 women in refuge were supported during their pregnancies and 15 babies were born to women in refuge.
- ) 1,084 one to one support sessions were held with children and young people in refuge.
- ) 3,558 women with 4,869 children accessed the Floating Support service, and a further 1,662 women accessed other Women's Aid outreach services, enabling women to access support whilst remaining in their own homes and communities.
- ) 1,554 women participated in a range of group work and personal development programme including *Journey to Freedom* and *You and Me, Mum*.
- ) 375 women 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. An additional 128 children were referred to the Women's Safety Worker in 2013-14.
- ) The 24 Hour Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline, open to all women and men affected by domestic & sexual violence, managed 55,029 calls.
- ) 150 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 17,424 women and 16,235 children and young people.
- ) Between 1995 – 2014, 429,435 calls were managed by 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.

- J Where the gender of the victim was known, 72% of adult victims of domestic crimes recorded by the PSNI in 2012/13 were female.<sup>1</sup>
- J Over 30% of all domestic violence starts during pregnancy.<sup>2</sup>

## **6.0 Domestic & Sexual Violence: Crime statistics (Source: PSNI Statistics 2013/14)**

- J Domestic Violence is a crime. PSNI statistics for 2013/14 indicate that there were more recorded crimes with a domestic motivation (12,720) than the combined total of all the following crimes (12,079) – possession of drugs (3764), shoplifting (6,372) and theft of a motor vehicle (1,943).
- J PSNI Statistics for 13/14 indicate that they responded to a domestic incident every 19 minutes of every day of the year.
- J The total of 12,720 crimes with a domestic motivation in 13/14 represents an average of approximately 1 domestic crime every 41 minutes in Northern Ireland.
- J The number of all recorded offences of murder in Northern Ireland in 13/14 total 17. Those classed as having a domestic motivation total 7. Therefore, 41% of all murders in Northern Ireland in 13/14 had a domestic motivation.
- J There were 550 rapes (including attempted Rapes) in Northern Ireland in the period 2013/14.

(Source: PSNI Statistics 2013/14)

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

---

<sup>1</sup>Findings 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

<sup>2</sup>Women’s Aid Federation Northern Ireland

## 2. Consultation response

- J Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland welcomes the publication of *Statutory Guidance for the Operation of Community Planning* and the opportunity to comment on it on behalf of our local Women's Aid groups.
- J We welcome the intention that community planning should result in "*provision of high quality, efficient services that respond to the needs of people and continuously improve over time*" espoused in the draft guidance. We are not convinced however that the balance between council, statutory and non-statutory participation in community planning has been struck within the guidance to ensure that this aim is fully met.
- J Not all important issues that require planning and funded services at community level are visible to the wider public. Domestic violence is one such hidden issue. Although domestic and sexual violence are pervasive in all parts of our community, irrespective of class, social standing or background, such abuse is not visible to the community and therefore it is rarely raised as a priority issue at public meetings. In fact, in our professional experience, unless Women's Aid is around the table in decision-making processes, domestic and sexual violence are invariably forgotten. This may also be due in part to the myths that surround domestic violence, and the mistaken belief that domestic violence only occurs in impoverished or working class communities.
- J It also tends to be the case that partnerships or statutory bodies which engage widely with the community tend to target what is popularly *believed* to be the biggest issues in a community, not what the most pressing issues actually are. One example of this is PCSPs, which in our experience often focus their efforts based on the community's perception of crime, not what actual issues are most prevalent. While we support efforts to engage and listen to the community and act on their behalf, this should not be at the expense of those vulnerable sections of the community that do not have a voice, or those victims who are less visible.
- J There is a real risk that, unless organisations that represent vulnerable or voiceless groups are an active part of Community Planning Partnerships, the needs of these members of the community will be overlooked. Therefore it is vital that organisations who represent vulnerable people who may not be able to speak for themselves, such as victims of domestic and sexual violence, are included around the table at all stages of community planning. Women's Aid represents the thousands of women who have been affected by domestic or sexual violence in Northern Ireland - this accounts for up to one in four women.
- J There are various specialist community and voluntary organisations which provide crucial support services to members of the community, and these organisations have an in-depth insight into the needs of the people they support and represent. This knowledge and expertise is essential to formulating an accurate evidence base of community needs. As the draft guidance states at 3.26, "*The sector is often best*

*placed to reach and involve those sections of the community that the mainstream public sector may find hard to reach*". Women's Aid is concerned that the guidance in its current form may in practice exclude these vital voices in pivotal parts of the community planning process and may, as a consequence, fail to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in our society.

) While we welcome that the guidance's statements on inclusiveness at 3.27 and 6.7, we believe that the guidance needs go further and firmly embed an inclusive pathway for the views of representatives of vulnerable people and section 75 groups to be incorporated into the community planning process. It would be useful if specific standards or tools for community engagement were included along with the guidance to ensure that all Partnerships are engaging effectively with the right people at the right time in the right way. One way this could be done would be to draw up specific separate standards along the lines of the Scottish National Standards for Community Engagement<sup>3</sup> that all Partnerships must uphold. Although this guidance recommends that each partnership draws up an engagement strategy, we are of the view that there should be an overarching regional set of principles that apply to all council areas to ensure high standards are met and effective service delivery does not become a postcode lottery.

) The wording of the guidance is weak in a number of critical areas. For example, at 4.4 the document states that the council and its community planning partners "*may wish to consider*" issues such as:

- ⇒ effective participation of all Section 75 groups,
- ⇒ optimising information and expertise from existing partnership structures
- ⇒ Utilising existing partnerships to deliver on the community plan
- ⇒ Maintaining an agreed and effective partnership
- ⇒ Nominated personnel from participating organisations

In our view, these are not optional considerations, they are essential components of an effective community planning partnership which meets the objective needs of the community, and such practices must be embedded and mandatory in the community planning system.

) At 6.7, the guidance highlights that "*the voluntary and community sector will have information on the nature of the local community and, in particular, information on and routes to reaching hard to reach groups.*" This statement should be expanded to include a duty to not only consult with such groups but to use this information in the community planning process.

) At 6.8, while we agree that a range of views should be gathered, it is important to recognise that some groups and individuals have expertise on certain issues and that this should be given primary consideration. It is vital that expertise and best practice is not lost in the din of many competing voices in a bid to collect a wide range of views.

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/94257/0084550.pdf>

- J Community planning should also be a link between the national, regional and local, and should ensure that local actions are effectively taking forward and implementing regional strategies and government commitments at grassroots level. This should be expanded on at 7.2, and a list of strategies that require delivery and action at local level should be included here.
- J We recommend that the list of cross-cutting strategies/policies at Annex A is expanded to include the Gender Equality Strategy, and that the Stopping Domestic & Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland Strategy is referenced correctly.
- J Women's Aid also endorses the views of the Committee for the Administration of Justice (CAJ) that:
  - "the community planning process should also pay regard to the affirmation within the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement of 'the right of women to full and equal political participation' and ensure that this full and equal participation is developed across the structures of the community planning process. A relevant international framework for women's participation in peace building is found within UN Security Council Resolution 1325 women, peace and security. Commitments to the inclusion of women in the community planning process should be inserted at section 4 'Partnership Structure and Governance' in particular in the 'Community Planning Partnership' sub section and 'Community Involvement Process' section of the guidance."*

### 3. Contact Details

For further information about this response please contact:

Louise Kennedy  
Regional Policy and Information Co-ordinator  
Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland  
129 University Street  
BELFAST  
BT7 1HP  
Tel: 028 9024 9041

Email: [louise.kennedy@womensaidni.org](mailto:louise.kennedy@womensaidni.org)

Website: [www.womensaidni.org](http://www.womensaidni.org)

**24 Hour Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline – 0808 802 1414**

**Email Support: [24hrsupport@dvhelpline.org](mailto:24hrsupport@dvhelpline.org)**

**Text support** to 07797805839

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