



A response to

Strategic Objectives for Policing

Northern Ireland Policing Board

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Freephone from all landlines and mobiles. Translation service available.

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

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 and sexual 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 (2014-15)

- 932 women and 689 children sought refuge.
- 71 women in refuge were supported during their pregnancies and 13 babies were born to women in refuge.
- 3,567 women with 4,186 children accessed the Floating Support service, and a further 2,395 women accessed other Women's Aid outreach services, enabling women to access support whilst remaining in their own homes and communities.
- 2,046 women participated in a range of group work and personal development programme including *Journey to Freedom* and *You and Me, Mum*.
- 352 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 129 children were referred to the Women's Safety Worker.
- The 24 Hour Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline, open to all women and men affected by domestic & sexual violence, managed 34,420 calls.
- 161 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 18,356 women and 16,924 children and young people.
- Between 1995 –2015, 463,855 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.
- 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 2014/15)

- Domestic Violence is a crime. PSNI statistics for 2014/15 indicate that there were over two and a half times more recorded crimes with a domestic motivation (13,426) than drug offences (8,937).
- Domestic abuse crimes (13,426) represented 13% of the overall crime in Northern Ireland (105,072).
- Police responded to 28,287 incidents with a domestic motivation – that’s one domestic incident every 19 minutes of every day of the year.
- The number of all recorded offences of murder in Northern Ireland in 14/15 was 16. Those classed as having a domestic motivation totalled 6. Therefore, 37.5% of all murders in Northern Ireland in 14/15 had a domestic motivation.
- Between January 2010 and March 2015, 8,363 Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) cases were discussed. In 7,955 of these cases the victims were female. 10,856 children were living in the same household as these victims and their abusers.
- There were 737 rapes (including attempted Rapes) in Northern Ireland in the period 2014/15.

(Source: PSNI Statistics 2014/15; PSNI MARAC Steering Group)

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

2. General Comments

- Women's Aid Federation welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Strategic Objectives for Policing in Northern Ireland 2016-2020 on behalf of our 9 local Women's Aid groups.
- We note that this document is high level and lacks detail as to how objectives will be met and measured. While we appreciate that there will be greater operational detail in the annual Policing Plans, we are of the view that this document should not be so general or removed from the practicalities of policing that it becomes obsolete or irrelevant. In particular, there should be a mechanism whereby progress over the next 4 years can be mapped against these objectives. It is also difficult to comment meaningfully on the sufficiency of detail provided in these Strategic Objectives without having sight of the corresponding annual policing plans, if that is where policing objectives and actions will be mapped out in better detail.
- It would be helpful if this document outlined in more detail how these Strategic Objectives will link up with the Annual Policing Plans, local policing plans and priorities of the PCSPs. In particular, how are the Policing Plan, local plans and priorities of PCSPs accountable to the objectives laid out in this document, how will delivery and compliance be measured and how will the positive impact of these objectives be mapped. A strategic framework to measure performance under these objectives at both regional and local policing level should be attached to this document, to ensure consistency of delivery, measurement and accountability across all policing districts.
- While we welcome the explicit mention of domestic violence under Overarching Theme 2 and Strategic Objective 2.2, we believe that domestic and sexual violence need to be prioritised in a more concrete manner. Domestic and sexual violence are violations of the fundamental human rights of victims, they isolate victims, and the widespread perpetration of domestic and sexual violence actively inhibit the aim of building an inclusive and cohesive society. Domestic abuse crime accounts for 13% of all reported crime in Northern Ireland³, and PSNI respond to a domestic violence incident every 19 minutes of every day. Women's Aid deal with a significant number of these police responses/referrals that come from the police. Unlike other crime, it is hidden and is unlikely to be identified as a local community concern via PCSPs due to its perpetration being behind closed doors. Therefore it is vital that the Strategic Objectives for Policing are explicit in highlighting domestic and sexual violence as priority areas for police to tackle, to ensure that they are included in local policing and PCSP priorities.
- The document alludes to the need to work in partnership throughout. While we fully support this approach, it is disappointing that the document does not specifically mention working in partnership with expert voluntary sector organisations. Organisations which support victims of crime can and do play a valuable role in delivering on policing objectives, and as such should be named as part of the partnership approach to policing, in line with the Justice Minister's own policing priorities for the next 10 years. Women's Aid believes that such an approach should include organisations that have been proven to meet standards of good practice through rigorous accreditation and regulatory processes, who comply with criminal justice guidance and who are recognised experts in their field.

³ 13,426 domestic abuse crimes were reported in 2014-15, this represents approximately 13% of the overall crime in Northern Ireland (105,072). Statistics taken from PSNI Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2004/05 to 2014/15: Annual Bulletin published 06 August 2015

- We would like to see more focus within the document on upholding the human rights of victims of crime, as per the Justice Minister’s long-term objective for policing over the next 10 years.

3. Overarching theme 1: Communication and engagement

- Women’s Aid welcomes this overarching theme.
- We note that the Board has “set a number of indicators by which PSNI performance will be assessed”. However there is no detail in the document as to what these indicators are. The Policing Board should, through this document and process associated with it, measure the performance of the Annual Policing Plans against these strategic objectives between now and 2020.

Strategic Objective 1.1: to ensure increased trust and confidence in policing

- While confidence in policing can often be determined by area or community, it is also the case that certain *types* of victims may also have specific issues relating to confidence in police. Victims of domestic and sexual violence have historically reported lack of confidence in police due to domestic violence not being taken seriously, victim-blaming, domestic and sexual violence being de-prioritised in favour of policing other types of crime like terrorism or organised crime etc. While the policing response to domestic and sexual violence has improved significantly over the years, there still remain issues with women’s confidence in police.
- Women’s Aid therefore urges that more measures to identify and engage with such groups should be included in this document. For example, while statistics on reports made to the Police Ombudsman may be useful to gauge confidence in police relating to certain types of crime, it is not accurate for gauging confidence of victims of domestic and sexual violence. Victims of domestic and sexual violence are unlikely to report issues with police to the Ombudsman for a number of reasons. They will not only be suffering the impact of one specific incident or crime, but the physical and psychological impact of sustained abuse, most likely over months or years by the time they report the abuse to police. They may also be dealing with other issues in addition to their engagement with police, such as:
 - fleeing the home, moving area or moving to a refuge or temporary accommodation;
 - putting safety plans and measures in place for themselves and their children;
 - finding new schools, homes or jobs;
 - undergoing counselling or other support programmes to deal with abuse suffered;
 - engaging with family and civil courts over access to children.
- A more accurate means of gauging confidence and trust in police for victims of domestic & sexual violence would be through focus groups with those affected, in a safe and constructive environment. Such focus groups should be entirely victim-centred, voluntary, and organised through support organisations like Women’s Aid / NEXUS / MAPNI etc, who will understand the needs of victims and the trauma they have experienced.
- We would also suggest that confidence in policing could be enhanced by a commitment to improve follow-up from police after the point of initial contact and investigation. Many of the

women whom we have supported have expressed their frustration and confusion over the criminal justice system, especially when they report a crime and hear very little from police or other agencies after that. This not only crushes confidence in policing, it also discourages victims from continuing in the criminal justice process or engaging if they are victims of crime in future. There is a significant gap here where victims of domestic violence are concerned, particularly as they are usually repeat victims. In the view of Women's Aid, this gap could be effectively filled by domestic violence support workers. The presence of these Women's Aid workers in police stations in the Belfast area have proven extremely successful in providing an effective link between police and victims, and have enhanced victims' confidence in the criminal justice system and in policing. Such an initiative, if rolled out across all police districts, would significantly contribute to meeting this Objective.

Strategic Objective 1.2: To ensure the PSNI engages with communities to improve understanding of the impact of policing decisions and involve communities wherever possible in those decisions

- Although PCSPs are a useful forum for linking communities to policing, they often do not recognise or prioritise crime that is hidden or not on the public community agenda, like domestic and sexual violence. It would be helpful here if other mechanisms were outlined to demonstrate how the Board will reach out to hard-to-reach groups like victims of domestic and sexual violence to ensure that they are equally able to engage on policing.
- Equally it would be useful for this objective to include an aim for police to inform communities about hidden crime like domestic violence, and the need for more to be done in all communities to tackle it.

4. Overarching theme 2: Protection of people and communities

- Women's Aid supports this overarching theme and we are encouraged that domestic violence is specifically referenced.

Strategic Objective 2.1: to reduce harm caused by crime and anti-social behaviour with a focus on protecting the most vulnerable

- Although this objective mentions crime and anti-social behaviour, the focus in the narrative is solely on anti-social behaviour.
- Women's Aid supports the aim of reducing harm caused by crime and protecting the vulnerable. We believe that police have a vital role in protecting victims both from further harm from those who commit crime, and from the criminal justice system itself. To that end, we recommend that the objective adds an additional aim, to ensure that the actions of police actively prevent further harm being done to vulnerable victims. For example, in cases of rape or serious sexual assault, a victim can suffer re-victimisation if their complaint is not taken seriously, if they are not able to access specialist services like the Rowan or given the number of the 24 Hour Domestic and Sexual Violence Helpline to support them through their trauma, if insufficient evidence is collected leading to a decision not to prosecute, or if a victim feels confused and overwhelmed by the justice process due to lack of information or support.

Strategic Objective 2.2: To enhance current systems to improve the identification of repeat victims

- Women’s Aid welcomes the Strategic Objective to tackle repeat victimisation. Victims of domestic violence are particularly vulnerable to repeat victimisation due to the nature of abuse, and it is encouraging that the Policing Board has identified this as a priority issue.
- We believe that this objective could be phrased more robustly, and should include tackling and reducing the amount of repeat victimisation as well as identifying and supporting those victims. That said, we would not be supportive of a target attached to this objective to reduce the number of victims reporting domestic and sexual violence, as these are hugely under-reported crimes. Women’s Aid fully supports the PSNI’s current policy of aiming for higher levels of reporting domestic and sexual violence crime.
- We support the objective to “improve the service to repeat victims by ensuring systems and processes are put in place at an early stage to identify and thereafter protect these victims”. While the MARAC process is extremely important to protect high risk victims of domestic violence, it does not address the protection of low and medium risk victims. Reducing repeat victimisation, and escalation of violence and abuse, requires a process to be put in place to identify and work in partnership to protect low and medium risk victims. Such a multi-agency process could reduce the number of cases of domestic violence which escalate to the point of requiring MARAC intervention.
- We are supportive of the “partnership approach” to deliver this objective. It is encouraging that the objective specifically mentions PCSPs as having a role in protecting repeat victims - we would like to see this strengthened to specify that all PCSPs should have domestic violence and the reduction of repeat victimisation through domestic violence as a priority.
- We would also point out that partnership working with expert voluntary sector organisations like Women’s Aid is vital to the success of this objective, and should be specifically highlighted within it (see also our General Comments about partnership working at page 6). It is worth noting that joint working between the PSNI and Women’s Aid has been in place for a number of years, currently 3 PSNI Support Workers are located within the Public Protection Unit in Belfast and the local Lisburn station. This early intervention following a PSNI response provides an immediate pathway into a range of Women’s Aid services at the critical point of risk and need bringing very good long term outcomes for all involved, including women reporting increased confidence in the police. Most importantly it reduces both repeat incidents/assaults and the significant harm and risk that women and children experience. This work is not properly funded.
- In our professional experience, early intervention to recognise and disrupt patterns of repeat victimisation in domestic violence cases requires close collaboration between police, other justice and social protection agencies, and voluntary support organisations. It is by coordinating efforts, with the victim and her best interests at the heart of the process, that repeat victimisation will be disrupted. It is also important to recognise that one agency alone cannot achieve this, and the strength and expertise of each agency or organisation brings with it information, skills and knowledge to protect a victim and break them out of the cycle of violence. This is why police actions such as referring a victim to Women’s Aid or giving them information about specialist support at the earliest opportunity are so important. By working in partnership with voluntary sector experts, police can focus on more efficient policing in the knowledge that a trusted support organisation is fulfilling that support role. Such voluntary sector involvement also circumvents the barriers to victims coming forward in cases where those victims do not want to engage with police or statutory agencies, and reduces the risk of victims disengaging from the

criminal justice process. One useful example of such partnership working would be Women's Aid Domestic Violence Support Workers based in police stations, as described above.

5. Overarching theme 3: Offending is reduced

- We are disappointed that this section does not include a specific Strategic Objective to reduce serial perpetration of domestic violence. Serial perpetrators of domestic violence are a serious issue, and domestic violence crime has one of the highest risks of re-offending, often against the same victim. Serial perpetrators are identifiable through MARAC, where often the same perpetrator's name arises in relation to either the same victim or different high-risk victims at different times. It is not sufficient to only work to protect victims of domestic and sexual violence; their perpetrators must also be held to account and the strong message must be sent out that perpetrators cannot commit acts of abuse with impunity. Holding abusers to account for their actions through criminal justice interventions will also have a positive knock-on effect on victims' confidence in policing (Strategic Objective 1.1) and the number of repeat victims of domestic violence (Strategic Objective 2.2).
- Under Strategic Objective 3.2, we urge that sexual violence and rape crime are specifically mentioned as a type of serious crime. Unlike the downward trend in crime highlighted under this section, there has been a rise in reportage of rape and sexual crime. Women's Aid regards this as a partly positive sign that more rape and sexual crime is being reported. However the criminal justice response to rape and sexual crime, including the police response, needs to be improved to bring more perpetrators to justice and provide better support for victims and better handling of reports of sexual crime. We believe that it is important for sexual crime to be acknowledged as a priority issue within this document to ensure that this happens.

6. Overarching themes 4 & 5: To ensure justice is more efficiently and effectively served / Efficiency & Effectiveness

- Women's Aid supports closer working between the PSNI and PPS along the lines of the recommendations from Criminal Justice Inspection NI.
- To increase efficiency and effectiveness across policing, it is vital that police receive ongoing training to deal with different types of crime more effectively. Therefore we urge that an objective relating to training of police is added under this overarching theme.

7. Contact Details

For further information about this response please contact:

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