

Women's Aid



NI Assembly Election Manifesto 2022

Key questions
to ask your local
candidates

Polling Day:
5th May
7AM - 10PM



New Mandate, New Opportunities: Supporting Victims of Domestic Abuse

On May 5th 2022, the public will go to the polls to elect 90 MLAs to the Northern Ireland Assembly, 5 of which will be representing your local area.

In the last mandate a number of key pieces of legislation were passed by the Assembly including, The Domestic Abuse & Civil Proceedings Act, and The Protection From Stalking Bill, which gave much needed extra protections to victims of domestic abuse. You have the power to vote for your local MLA who can help improve the lives of victims of domestic abuse in your community.

This new Assembly will have powers to help bring real change through legislation and decision making by Ministers, so it's a vital opportunity for you to use your voice and ask key questions of your candidates on how they will help victims of abuse as they canvass for your vote.

How does voting work in this election?

For electing MLAs to the Northern Ireland Assembly, a voting system known as Single Transferable Vote, or 'STV' is used.

STV means you don't put an 'X' in the box for one candidate only, but instead you can number rank the candidates on your ballot paper in order of preference like this example on the right.

You can vote on Polling Day (5th May 2022) at your designated Polling Station from:

7am to 10pm



7 Key Questions You Can Ask Candidates

1

"Do you support increased funding for the Housing Executive's Supporting People programme to help support victims of domestic abuse given the current cost of living crisis?"

The Supporting People Programme grant funds over 850 housing support services for up to 19,000 service users across Northern Ireland, including Women's Aid refuges throughout the province.

The Supporting People budget has not changed since 2009, meaning that today's cost of living crisis is not being reflected in the budget for these vital housing services. Spiraling bills in electricity, gas & oil mean Women's Aid Refuges are struggling to manage these additional costs without proper funding. Our refuges are vital lifelines for women, children & young people fleeing domestic abuse in your community, so it's essential that the budget for these services reflect the current economic climate we live in today, not the climate from over 10 years ago. Increased funding of the Supporting People programme is essential to help vulnerable people.

2

"Will you effectively lobby to ensure no funding given to the Northern Ireland Assembly returns to Westminster as unspent funds?"

Women's Aid have major concerns that funds distributed under Barnett Formula from Treasury during Covid-19 pandemic were not all spent. Towards the end of March 2020, we challenged local Government departments to assign funds, due to be sent back to Westminster, to support our work in tackling domestic abuse across Northern Ireland, an issue which escalated during lockdown restrictions.

Funds given to Northern Ireland should never be returned to Westminster, and Local Government need to have clear plans and processes in place to enable them to distribute additional funds as efficiently as possible, with clear transparency and accountability, to help those most vulnerable in your community.



3

"If there is no functioning Northern Ireland Assembly post election, will you take your full salary as a MLA?"

In the last Assembly mandate, Northern Ireland went 744 days (40% of the time) with a power-sharing Executive; 1,094 days (60% of the time) without. When we did have a functioning Executive & Assembly, a number of key pieces of legislation went through including, The Domestic Abuse & Civil Proceedings Act, The Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Bill, and The Protection From Stalking Bill to name but a few, which gave essential extra protections to victims of domestic abuse here.

When our Assembly is up and running, we can achieve so much for victims of domestic abuse. We strongly urge that effective mechanisms be put in place to encourage our politicians to stay at the table to allow our Assembly & Executive to function, including no full salary when there is no functioning Executive.

4

"Do you support sufficient funding and resources to be dedicated to the Domestic & Sexual Abuse Strategy and the Violence Against Women & Girls Strategy?"

Northern Ireland is currently the only part of the UK without a VAWG Strategy in place to tackle gender-based violence in our local communities. Women's Aid have long campaigned on this issue as we believe that women & girls shouldn't be afforded any less protections from gender-based violence simply because of their UK postcode.

The implementation of a new Domestic & Sexual Abuse Strategy, and the introduction of a VAWG Strategy, needs sufficiently resourced if these Strategies are to make a real & meaningful difference to the lives of women & girls in your community. We strongly urge our MLAs to realise how vital this funding is and use it to implement changes on the ground to truly tackle these issues for all citizens.

5

"Do you support a full review of the Family Courts & child contact system here in Northern Ireland?"

In the year 2020/2021, Women's Aid across Northern Ireland supported over 6,000 women & children in their local communities, and 530 women & 319 children stayed in a Women's Aid refuge here.

Many of the women & children we support tell us of their experiences with the Family Court system here, and how their abusers manipulate the system to further perpetuate the abuse through the Family Court system. They do this for example by the convicted abuser repeatedly bringing their victim into court over child contact, forcing the victim to have to be in the same room as their abuser, whilst simultaneously racking up thousands of pounds in solicitor fees for the victim who often is not able to access Legal Aid, and further pushing her into extreme debt - this system is not working and needs urgent review.

6

“Do you support changes to housing allocation and homelessness legislation for those escaping domestic abuse including BME Women?”

Domestic Abuse is one of the leading causes of homelessness in Northern Ireland as many women and their children try to break free from the cycle of abuse. For some women with children, the fear of being homeless is a reason they have delayed leaving the abusive household, as they fear leaving their children homeless.

Women's Aid support many women & their children through emergency refuge accommodation and helping them find secure housing as they build their new lives. However housing allocation and homeless legislation needs an overhaul to take into account the needs of vulnerable women & children, including women with no recourse to public funds & marginalised women from BME backgrounds. We strongly urge the new NI Assembly to introduce reforming housing legislation with the experiences of victims at the heart of the bill.

7

“Do you support and will you lobby the new Justice Minister for the introduction of a Domestic Abuse Commissioner for Northern Ireland?”

According to PSNI Statistics for the year 2020/2021, Domestic Abuse related crimes make up 1/5 of all crimes recording in Northern Ireland, with the Police receiving a report of a domestic abuse incident every 17 minutes. Domestic abuse is often an under reported crime, so these shocking reported statistics are just the tip of the iceberg of how big of an issue domestic abuse is in our community, and there needs to be a concentrated statutory voice to help.

A Domestic Abuse Commissioner, which already exists in England & Wales, is an independent voice that speaks on behalf of victims/survivors. The Commissioner uses their statutory powers, to raise public awareness and hold both agencies and government to account in tackling domestic abuse.



Who Are We?



Our Vision: The Women's Aid NI vision for the 21st century is the elimination of domestic abuse.

Our Mission: We exist to challenge attitudes, structures and systems which perpetuate domestic abuse. We work through our work to enable women children & young people to live free from abuse.

Our Ethos: Our strong ethos has been built upon our rich heritage of campaigning to end domestic abuse, which began in the 1970's and continues to be based upon our working premise of: **for women, with women, by women** which is inherent in our service development and delivery.

Key Figures in 2020/2021



**530 Women &
319 Children**

Stayed in Women's Aid
Refuges throughout NI



**6,005 Women &
6,450 Children**

Received floating support in
their local homes



10 Babies

Were born to women
staying in one of our Refuges



293 Women

Who were pregnant received
support from Women's Aid.



Every 17 Minutes

The PSNI respond to a
domestic abuse incident



12 Women

Have been murdered with a
domestic abuse motivation
since March 2020



1

Antrim, Ballymena,
Carrickfergus, Larne
& Newtownabbey
Women's Aid

T: 028 2563 2136

2

Armagh Down
Women's Aid

T: 028 3025 0765

3

Belfast & Lisburn
Women's Aid

T: 028 9066 6049

4A

Causeway & Mid
Ulster Women's Aid
– Causeway Office

T: 028 7035 6573

4B

Causeway & Mid
Ulster Women's Aid
– Mid Ulster Office

T: 028 8676 9300

5

Fermanagh
Women's Aid

T: 028 6632 8898

6

Foyle
Women's Aid

T: 028 7141 6800

7

North Down & Ards
Women's Aid

T: 028 9127 3196

8

Omagh
Women's Aid

T: 028 8224 1414

9

Women's Aid
Federation

T: 028 9024 9041