

**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Room 412
Parliament Buildings
BELFAST
BT4 3XX

E-mail: Hugh.Farren@niassembly.gov.uk
Tel: 028 9052 21360
Fax: 028 9052 1667

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Mr Jonathan Bill
Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
BELFAST
BT4 3XX

Dear

The Committee welcomes the opportunity to consider and respond to the draft sexual violence strategy '*Hidden Crimes, Secret Pain*' and is grateful for the information provided on the responses to the consultation. At the meeting in Magee College on Thursday 28 June 2007, the Committee heard evidence from departmental officials and raised a number of issues.

The Committee fully supports the comprehensive collaborative approach employed to develop the draft strategy, including the establishment of an interdepartmental steering group. The need for continued collaborative working is particularly crucial in taking forward and implementing the strategy.

The Committee appreciates the enormous courage required by victims to give evidence in court and has grave concerns about the level of sentences imposed and the remission available for offenders at the end of the process. While appreciating that such matters fall outside the remit of the Department, the Committee would ask that these concerns be brought to the attention of the relevant criminal justice authorities, including the Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice, Kit Chivers, who will be examining this and other issues.

The Committee stressed the need to tackle society's attitude to sexual violence and welcomes the recognition of the role that education can play in prevention. The Committee also has serious concerns about the potential negative influence of the media through, for example, violence on television, games and videos, and would urge the Minister to work with media bosses where possible to address these issues.

The Committee supports the development of a Sexual Assault Referral Centre and urges that this be set up as soon as possible. The Committee believes that the centre must be accessible to all victims of sexual violence irrespective of where they live.

I should be grateful if you would keep the Committee advised of developments on this issue.

Hugh Farren
Committee Clerk