

**Minutes of the NI Domestic Violence & Law Sub Group Meeting held in
the Conference Room, 19th Floor Windsor House, Belfast on
Thursday, 15 September 2005 at 2.30pm.**

Present:

<u>Mr Ken Nixon RM</u>	<u>Chair</u>
Ms Eileen McAllister	PBNI
Insp. Robin Dempsey	PSNI
Mr Austin Harper <i>(substituting for Mrs Durkin)</i>	NICtS
Ms Anne Graham	NIWAF
Ms Sharon Harley	NIO
Ms Marie Brown	Foyle Women's Aid
Ms Alice Beggs	Secretary

ITEM 1: APOLOGIES

1.1 Apologies were received from Mr Mervyn Bates RM, Ms Edell Fitzpatrick (PPS), Jacqui McGarvey (SHSSB), Ms Claire Irvine (OLR), Mr Paul Doran (PBNI), Mrs Jacqui Durkin (NICtS), Mr Peter O'Brien (Law Society) and Fiona Greene (Victim Support).

ITEM 2: MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 16 JUNE 2005

2.1 The minutes of the meeting on 16th June 05 were agreed.

ITEM 3: MATTERS ARISING

3:1 On behalf of the sub group, the Chair commended Mr Doran on his very significant contribution to its work over the preceding years and wished him success in his new post.

3:2 The sub group welcomed the launch of the North & West Belfast Forum Domestic Violence Video on 150905 and commented on its clear and effective message.

ITEM 4: REGIONAL STEERING GROUP ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

4.1 The Chair referred to the minutes of 160605 having been before the RSG at its meeting on 080905 and on this basis of this confirmed that Mr Mervyn Bates RM would become a member of this sub group.

4.2 Sharon Harley updated the sub group as regards the media campaign. It has been revised to take account of gender neutrality and the fact that anyone can be a victim of domestic violence. It includes television and radio advertisements together with posters on public transport and in washrooms of

public houses. Distribution will be province wide to include rural areas to a greater degree than in the previous campaign. By agreement at the RSG, agency logos are to be removed from posters. The campaign launch is scheduled to coincide with the Strategy launch on 101005. The sub group agreed that the work was solidly done.

4.3 Sharon Harley advised that NIO are to commission research into the available services/support for victims of domestic violence so that facts/figures can be gathered to support a business case for a 'One Stop Shop'. She advised that NIO are considering a pilot scheme (to commence in March 2006) however, it is dependant on funding and therefore there is the requirement to prove need.

4.4 Ms Harley commented on the Strategy which is presently being finalised and which has been endorsed by David Hanson, NIO Minister. At the launch, there will be speakers on each of the three strands i.e. Prevention, Protection & Justice and Support.

4.5 Referring to the RSG minutes of 290605, the sub group unanimously endorsed the appointment of Sharon Harley as Deputy Chair. Ms Harley will assume Chair of the sub group from January 06 and NIO will take on secretariat responsibilities.

Action: To be included on the agenda for the next meeting.

ITEM 5: PPS DRAFT POLICY FOR PROSECUTING CASES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

5.1 Members were reminded that responses to the draft policy were to be sent to PPS by the 30th September 05.

ITEM 6: DRAFT LAW REFORM (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) (NI) ORDER 2004

6.1 The secretary advised that OLR /NICtS are seeking to coordinate the commencement date of the above legislation with the launch of the Strategy in October.

Action: To be included on the agenda for the next meeting.

ITEM 7: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, CRIME AND VICTIMS ACT 2004; and DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOMICIDE REVIEWS

7.1 It was reported that the Implementation group had discussed the outstanding provisions of the Act, particularly restraining orders on acquittal. The secretary is to contact Catherine McGinley (Policy & Legislation Division of NICtS) to ascertain whether implementation will necessitate an amendment to court rules.

Action: Secretary to note.

7.2 Sharon Harley advised that she had met with the Home Office who are drafting guidelines for homicide reviews. These guidelines will issue for consultation for a three month period from November 05, however there may

need to be a separate consultation for NI. Ms McAllister expressed concern about resources needed for such an exercise and the capacity to release staff for a lengthy period of time.

Action: To be included on the agenda for the next meeting.

ITEM 8: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INVESTIGATORS (DVO's) POLICY & TRAINING

8.1 Robin Dempsey advised that feedback to the policy has been received and is being analysed for any inconsistencies. He noted that PSNI would need to train sufficient numbers of officers to ensure successful operation. He also distributed pocket cards to the sub group containing information/contact details for victims of domestic violence and advised that 60,000 have been issued to date (to NIWAF, NICtS etc). The Chair acknowledged this positive development.

Action: To be included on the agenda for the next meeting.

8.2 Marie Brown advised that Strabane DV Unit is now in operation and is looking forward to the establishment of a similar Unit in Limavady.

ITEM 9: NON-VIOLENT RELATIONSHIPS PROJECT (NVRP)

9.1 In the absence of Mr Doran, Sharon Harley advised that the RSG membership was hopeful that further funding would be forthcoming. Mr Andrew Hamilton, Deputy Permanent Secretary of DHSSPS is taking the issue forward. The sub group considered this to be a promising development.

Action: To be included on the agenda for the next meeting.

ITEM 10: CHILD CONTACT CENTRES (CCC's)

10.1. The secretary informed the sub group that Laura McPolin (OLR) and Fergal Bradley (DHSSPS) are examining the subject of supervised contact in private law cases. Ms McPolin was unable to attend today's meeting but advised that OLR/DHSSPS are aware of the issues regarding Child Contact Centres and are considering same within the confines of extreme difficulties, notably financial constraints.

10.2 Mr Harper advised that Mr Justice Gillen is to raise concerns about the approach to funding of such centres with Shaun Woodward, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at NIO, at their forthcoming meeting.

Action: To be included on the agenda for the next meeting.

ITEM 11: ANY OTHER BUSINESS

11.1 Sharon Harley advised that the domestic violence leaflet has been forwarded to the Plain English Society and the aim is for a launch date to coincide with the Strategy launch however, this may not be feasible.

11.2 She further advised that she had attended with Kevin Shiels (DV Unit) at the Home Office as part of 'Corporate Alliance' where it was proposed that all

employers are to introduce policies on domestic violence. This is to be taken forward by the RSG Action Plan.

ITEM 12: DATE OF NEXT MEETING

12.1 The next meeting of the sub group is arranged for **Thursday, 24th November 2005 at the Conference Room, 19th Floor Windsor House, Bedford Street, Belfast starting at 2.30pm.** The usual light refreshments will be available.

10 October 2005

Secretary