

Minutes of the sixth meeting of the Regional Steering Group on Domestic Violence

Tuesday 6 December 2005 at 10.00 a.m.

Room 144, Parliament Buildings, Stormont

Present: Conal Devitt (NIO) - Chair
Catherine Reilly (UCHT)
Maxine McCutcheon (MAP)
Clare Irvine (OLR)
Mandy Kilpatrick (NICtS)
Pauline Leeson (CiNI)
Susan Reid (Victim Support)
Deirdre Webb (EHSSB)
Eamon McTernan (WHSSB)
Cheryl Lamont (PBNI)
John Devaney (EHSSB)
Peter O'Brien (Law Society)
Anne Graham (WAFNI)
Ken Nixon (Resident Magistrate)

Apologies: Liz Shaw (SHSSB)
Andrew Hamilton (DHSSPS)
Margaret Donaghy (MCRC)
Michael Graham (NIHE)
Brendan Devlin (DSD)
Hilary Harbinson (OFMDFM)
Leslie Frew (DHSSPS)
Margaret Black (NHSSB)
Robin Dempsey (PSNI)
Grace Henry (Help the Aged)
David Mann (DE)

In attendance: Kevin Shiels (DV Unit)
Sharon Harley (NIO)
Marie Austin (DV Unit)
Elaine Farrell (DV Unit)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Mr Devitt welcomed everyone to the sixth meeting of the Regional Steering Group and in particular Mandy Kilpatrick (NICtS) who has replaced Jackie Durkin as a member on the group and also Deirdre Webb (EHSSB) who is a new member. Mr Devitt explained that Andrew Hamilton was now standing down as chair of the Group in line with the decision taken at the first meeting that the position should be rotated annually. Members agreed that Mr Devitt should take over as chair.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2005

2.1 Members agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2005 without amendment.

3. Matters arising

3.1 Vulnerable Adults Forum Representation

Mr Shiels advised members that Grace Henry was due to update the group on the position in relation to representation for vulnerable adults but had been unable to attend the meeting. Members will be updated in due course.

3.2 Allocation of domestic violence funding

Mr Shiels advised members that he was seeking advice from Leslie Frew and Finance Division in DHSSPS to enable RSG's allocations of DV funding to be made as soon as possible to Boards (for local DV partnerships) Barnardos, the Non Violent Relationship Programme, the DV helpline, and successful applicants to the DV Development Fund.

3.3 Disability issues

Mr Shiels informed members that, following discussions with Disability Action, Monica Wilson (Chief Executive) has advised that she is happy to offer advice on any policy or other issue relating to disability matters. Mr Shiels said that each Sub-Group or agency represented at RSG should consult with Disability Action whenever appropriate, either via the Chief Executive or Karen McGrath.

3.4 Draft Regional Good Practice Guidelines

Mr Shiels reported that following the issue of the first draft of Regional Good Practice Guidelines to the Local DV Partnerships, a meeting had taken place with some representatives of the partnerships to consider the document. A number of amendments are to be made to the document and it should be ready for issue to RSG and Sub-Groups in the New Year for consideration.

3.5 Routine Enquiry in maternity units

Mr Shiels advised that following discussions with Vera Kelso, DHSSPS Nursing Officer and Eithne Gilligan, Women's Aid Federation, it has been agreed to develop a Departmental circular to set out DHSSPS policy on routine enquiry within maternity units. The circular of guidance should issue from the Nursing and Midwifery section of DHSSPS in early 2006.

3.6 Strategy and Action Plan

Ms Austin reported that approximately 2000 strategy and action plan documents had been issued to date and that feedback indicated that the Strategy launch and coverage had been well received.

4. Update on work on Sub-Groups

4.1 *Domestic Violence and Law Sub-Group*

Mr Nixon informed members that the Domestic Violence and Law Sub-Group had last met on 24 November 2005 and that the minutes would issue soon. Mr Nixon provided an update on the work of the Sub-Group:

- The issue of child contact centres was ongoing. OLR/DHSSPS are currently examining the subject of supervised contact in private law cases.
- NIO are to commission research into the available services/support for the victims of domestic violence. Ms Harley would be updating members on this.
- Ms Harley will assume the Chair of the DV and Law Sub-Group from January 2006.

4.2 *Information Sub-Group*

Ms Reilly informed members that the Information Sub-Group had last met on 13 September 2005 and provided an update on developments:

- Eugene Mooney (NISRA) had been appointed as Deputy Chair of the Sub-Group.
- The recent TV and radio campaigns had been very successful and it had been felt that the revised message on the "Dolls House" Ad had been more inclusive (Anyone can suffer so anyone can call).
- Eugene Mooney and Edel Robinson were considering draft guidance on the collection and management of domestic violence data and this guidance framework would issue in due course to all RSG and sub-group members.
- Consideration was being given to a possible audit of schools to consider the number that had taken up domestic violence training and to identify providers. This will be discussed further at the next meeting.
- Sub-Group members will be considering the possibility of including domestic violence questions in the "Young People's Behaviour and Attitudes Survey".

4.3 *Children and Young People's Sub-Group*

Mr Devaney advised members that he had been appointed Chair of the Children and Young People's Sub-Group following the retirement of Ken Wilson at the end of October 2005. Mr Devaney informed members that the Sub-Group had last met on 17 November 2005 and provided an update on developments:

- Pip Jaffa (Parents Advice Centre) will report back to the Sub-Group at the next meeting on the issue of accessing the view of children and young people affected by domestic violence.
- Contact was being made with the Anti-Bullying Forum to establish links between the Forum and the RSG.
- David Mann (DE) would be leaving his current post soon and that representation had been made to Eddie Rooney (Grade 3, DE) to have a replacement for both the Sub-Group and the RSG.
- Women's Aid had recently produced good practice guidelines on "Delivering Domestic Violence Preventive Education Programmes in Schools and

External Settings". It was agreed by the Sub-Group that this would be useful information for possible inclusion in any resources list issued e.g. by CCEA.

- Sub-Group members would be considering a report produced by Mary Barnish on behalf of the probation board, which detailed the impact of domestic violence on children and contained useful recommendations in relation to staff guidance.
- Members had agreed that information should continue to be shared between the Children Order Advisory Committee, RSG and its Sub-Groups in relation to domestic violence. Master Hilary Wells is a member of COAC and the RSG's C&YP sub-group and will continue to provide the link between the groups.

5. Domestic Violence Development Fund

- 5.1 Mr Shiels reminded members that the total amount available for the Domestic Violence Development Fund was £50,000 and was only available for 2005/06. Applications had been invited for projects with one-off expenditure, which would end on or before March 2006. Following a meeting on 23 November 2005 of an ad-hoc Sub-Group of RSG to consider the 20 applications received against the Fund's objectives, 12 were successful and 8 were unsuccessful. The sub-group then decided that rather than score successful applications, all successful applicants should be offered a reduced level of funding from what had been requested. All applicants had been advised of the decisions and offers made where appropriate. A paper was tabled outlining successful applications and a copy is attached at Annex 1.

NOTE: All these applicants have since confirmed acceptance of the offers made and arrangements are being made within the DV Unit to allocate the funding as early as possible in the New Year

6. Domestic Violence Workplace Guidance

6.1 *Final sign off by Regional Steering Group*

Mr Shiels asked all members to consider the draft of Workplace Guidance and report back within 2 weeks if there were any further amendments. Arrangements would then be made to have the guidance printed and distributed as widely as possible to all employers.

6.2 *Each Regional Steering Group member to report on progress or plans for a DV workplace policy within their own organisation*

- Susan Reid reported that a formal presentation had been made to the VSNI Board and that there was future plans for joint training with other organisations.
- Cheryl Lamont reported that there was a current policy in PBNI, which was under review at present.
- John Devaney reported that EHSSB and trusts were currently looking at the DV Strategy in its entirety and this would include the issue of workplace policy.

- Pauline Leeson enquired if there was an existing “sample” workplace policy, which her organisation could work from and Anne Graham (WAF) agreed to assist her with this and also any other charitable organisation which required guidance.

6.3 *Possible Corporate Alliance Event in 2006*

Ms Harley gave members some background information on Corporate Alliance. She explained that it was a group of companies and organisations working individually and collectively to address the impact of domestic violence in the workplace. She explained that it was intended for the Minister to host an event in Hillsborough Castle, possibly around April 2006, at which employers and organisations could “sign up” up to guidelines produced. It was envisaged that the civil service and other major employers should have a policy in place by this stage. Mr Shiels stated that by joining the UK Corporate Alliance, employers would only have a basic requirement of attending one meeting per year.

7. **Update on Raising the Standards Conference (6 & 7 February 2006)**

7.1 Mr Shiels advised members that invitations would issue soon for the Raising the Standards Conference. He explained that overall numbers were limited to 200, with approximately 40 places for Northern Ireland and that all those interested in attending should advise the Domestic Violence Unit ASAP. Ms Harley told members that the Minister would be doing the welcome address and hosting the dinner in Parliament Buildings on the first evening. There would also be a play and a further showing of the DVD “The Law on your Side”.

8. **Publicity Campaigns (review of 2005/06 and bids for 2006/07)**

Mr Shiels advised that a second burst of the TV, radio and poster publicity campaign was scheduled to run from 9 January through to early February 2006. The 2005/06 campaigns were funded mainly by DHSSPS and NIO but DSD had also made a contribution towards the running costs. It was hoped that other Departments involved in RSG would contribute to the funding of future campaigns in 2006/07 and beyond and he asked Departmental representatives to follow this up with their Information Offices.

9. **Research on One-Stop-Shop options for Northern Ireland**

9.1 Ms Harley reported that NIO had commissioned research with Deloitte into the feasibility and options for a domestic violence one-stop-shop which would best suit our set-up and needs. It was expected that a report with recommendations would be available in March 2006.

Note: A paper outlining the position on the One Stop Shop research and on Homicide Reviews is attached at Annex 2.

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10. 24-Hour Domestic Violence Helpline - developments

- 10.1 Mr Shiels reported that discussions were continuing on the further development of the Helpline, involving Women's Aid Federation and the 3 funders (Domestic Violence Unit, DHSSPS, Community Safety Unit of the NIO and the NI Housing Executive) and informed members that there would be an upgrade before the end of the financial year of the Helpline office accommodation and the telephone system (funded by the Housing Executive). It was also expected that all parties would sign off a new Service Level Agreement in January 2006. Ms Graham explained that the development of the Helpline depended on staff capacity and it was hoped that more calls could be answered by the end of the financial year when the new telephone system would be in place.

11. Update on Non-Violent Relationship Programme – funding and extension

- 11.1 Mr Devaney explained that funding had been made available to extend the NVRP. He said that although the Probation Board had previously managed it, Social Services would now be taking lead responsibility and would be working with PBNI and Women's Aid Federation to get the project started again. He advised that although the programme may not be running by the end of the financial year, it was intended to recruit staff and to have the other arrangements in place to start the programme in 2006/07. Ms Lamont advised that the NVRP program was complementary to the PBNI "Men Overcoming Domestic Violence Programme" and that she looked forward to working in partnership with the other organisations to assist with its implementation.

12. Proposal for a conference in Autumn 2006 – *Tackling Violence at Home – the position one year on*

- 12.1 Ms Harley suggested to members that it might be useful to hold a conference in Autumn 2006 to reflect on the previous year with regards to the Strategy and Action Plan and to celebrate what has happened to date and to look at what further action is required for Action Plan 2007-08. It was agreed to keep this item on the Agenda for the next meeting.

13. Any other business

- 13.1 Ms Harley advised members that both herself and Mr Shiels have been invited to speak on the Strategy at the Judicial Studies Board AGM in April 2006.
- 13.2 Ms Irvine reported that following the appointment of Jeff Rooker to the post of Children's Minister, all Permanent Secretaries of relevant Departments are to meet on a regular basis to decide which issues should be included on the Minister's agenda. She suggested that this could be an opportunity to ensure that children's issues are kept on the agenda and that use should be made of the multi-agency approach. Mr Shiels advised that any children's issues could be raised via the Children and Young People Sub-Group.

14. Dates of the next meeting

14.1 The following dates were agreed for the next meetings of the Regional Steering Group:

- 7 March 2006 at 10.00 a.m.
- 6 June 2006 at 10.00 a.m.
- 19 September 2006 at 10.00 a.m.
- 5 December 2006 at 10.00 a.m.

ANNEX 1

ORGANISATION	PROJECT	GRANT SOUGHT	NOTES	DECISION
Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid	Directory of Services for Victims and their children in Belfast area	£10000	Directory to be developed by a dedicated worker	£7000 offered
Colin Domestic Violence Partnership	Training and awareness raising programmes and admin costs	£8000	To deliver sessions on 'Impact of Domestic Violence on Women' in local venues To deliver sessions on 'Impact of Domestic Violence on Children' To organise 2 information days in local community.	£7000 offered
Down Domestic Violence Forum	Promotional materials	£2500	Pull-up display boards Headed note paper Compliment Slips Pens, key rings etc	£2000 offered
Fermanagh Women's Aid	Multi-Media Projector	£3500	For training purposes	£3000 offered
Lisburn Domestic Violence Partnership	Reprint of Directory of Services for Lisburn area and other promotional material	£5000	Reprint of Directory; desktop information pads Headed notepaper 2 pop-up display stands	£3000 offered
New Life Counselling Service	Awareness raising for practitioners and Board	£4000	Domestic Violence – exploration of its impact	£3500 offered

	members		and available support services. 2-day residential training programme for up to 20 people, including practitioners and members of the Board.	
Women's Aid Federation	Design, translation and printing costs of materials for ethnic groups	£5850	Reprint Hindu and Urdu materials Upgrade Portuguese translation Develop materials in Russian, Polish, Spanish and Bulgarian Design and produce a poster women from all communities will identify with Distribution of info	£3000 offered

North Down and Ards Partnership	Inter-agency awareness raising seminars	£5050	Seminars for Ulster Community Hospitals Trust staff. Directed towards staff who do not currently receive training	£4500 offered
North Down and Ards Partnership	Information Booklet	£2200	Reprint of Information Booklet on DV services	£2000 offered
Shelter NI	Education Programme	£5200	Course – Changing Futures - to be offered to young people who may/may not have experienced DV (in consultation with other young persons support agencies).	£5000 offered
Women's Aid -Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Larne & Newtownabbey	Fittings for resource centre for women and children	£7000	To fit out children's room and training room for new centre	£4000 offered
Women's Aid Newry, Mournes, South Down and South Armagh	Prevention training for primary and secondary schools	£10000	Helping Hands, No Fear/Heading for Healthy Relationships. Employment of trainer (will be assisted by trained and experienced volunteer). Will allow schools to avail of training at significantly lower costs	£6000 offered

TACKLING VIOLENCE AT HOME ACTION PLAN – STRAND TWO – PROTECTION AND JUSTICE

Under the Protection and Justice Strand of the action plan there are two major initiatives for which the Northern Ireland Office (NIO), Community Safety Unit has lead responsibility. These are:

Under - Improving the Sharing of Information

- (i) *To develop a set of procedures and guidance on Domestic Homicide Reviews for consultation; and*

Under – Improving Services to All Victims

- (ii) *To examine the feasibility of piloting a one-stop shop project to improve rates of prosecution of domestic violence cases*

There has been some recent discussion around these initiatives both at the DV and Law sub-group meeting on 24 November and the Regional Steering Group (RSG) meeting on 6 December. While Community Safety Unit has been identified as the lead agency, both these initiatives are wide-ranging in terms of partnership working and will require the involvement of a number of organizations, represented on the RSG, to see them through to fruition. I thought it might be useful therefore to set out in some more detail how it is envisaged these initiatives might best be taken forward and to seek your help in doing so.

Domestic Homicide Reviews

Background

The Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 (Part 1 - 9) made provision for the establishment and conduct of domestic violence and homicide reviews.

It was subsequently determined that in taking this forward the NIO would follow the Home Office lead i.e. the Home Office would draw up draft guidelines and procedures, with the NIO to then consider what adaptations may be required to take account of Northern Ireland structures etc. before issuing for consultation.

Current Position

The NIO is awaiting the initial draft guidelines from the Home Office. Unfortunately the Home Office proposed procedure for drawing up the draft guidelines has been challenged and this has unavoidably delayed progress.

Way Forward

The NIO awaits the Home Office guidelines (the Home Office has been asked for an expected timeframe for completion of the guidelines). Once received these guidelines will be considered within a Northern Ireland context and when finalized will be issued for a consultation period of twelve weeks.

As stated above however this is a major piece of work which will require input from a number of stakeholder organizations to ensure the proposed procedures and guidelines properly reflect Northern Ireland structures etc. Timing of the engagement of stakeholders is crucial. The NIO does not want to unnecessarily engage stakeholders before there is something substantive to consider. Equally, the Department would want to ensure that all who should be involved are brought into discussions.

In relation to Northern Ireland, the following person/ bodies are listed within the Act (Part 1 - 9 subsection (4) (b):

- the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland;
- the Probation Board for Northern Ireland;
- Health and Social Services Boards;
- Health and Social Services trusts

In light of this it would be useful if, at this stage, RSG members representing the above person/bodies could consider and identify who in their organizations might be best placed to join with NIO in taking this forward or, if you consider this needs to be raised directly with your organizations, please advise who we should write to. Please respond direct to me – contact details as above by 16 January 2006

One Stop Shop for victims of Domestic Violence

Background

Respondents to the Tackling Violence At Home consultation paper supported the establishment of a One Stop Shop for victims of Domestic Violence – and this was carried forward to the Action Plan as (ii) above.

Current Position

It is acknowledged that there are already in existence a number of one stop shop models offering a varied range of services to victims. As set out in the Action Plan however the requirement is: *“To examine the feasibility of piloting a one-stop shop project to improve rates of prosecution of domestic violence cases.”* It was determined that this could be best done through the commissioning of research with a view to identifying a model best placed to serve victims in Northern Ireland. A Steering Group – Tom Clarke (Chair), Sharon Harley and Edel Robinson, Jo O’Reilly (Secretary) NIO and Kevin Shiels, DHSS&PS was formed to oversee this research project and the DV

and Law sub-group have agreed to act as an Advisory Group to the Steering Group. Having undertaken the required procurement exercise Deloitte Management Consultants have been appointed to take this work forward. Deloitte's have been advised that the minimum requirements for a One Stop Shop are:-

- Clear/better/improved partnership amongst the agencies;
- Increased prosecutions through the criminal justice system;
- Better protection for victims including clear links to perpetrator programmes;
- Positive impact for victims using the service; and
- Easy access to a seamless service.

Way Forward

The research is to be completed and recommendations made to the Steering Group by end of March 2006. As stated above however this initiative is wide-ranging in terms of partnership working and will require the involvement of a number of organizations, represented on the RSG, to see it through to fruition. In addition to researching existing schemes and talking to those involved it is envisaged that Deloitte will also wish to speak to a wide range of stakeholders e.g. local Domestic Violence Partnerships (perhaps through workshops) and to members of the RSG and sub-groups who will have a significant role to play. **I would therefore ask that if Deloitte staff do get in touch with you that you give them your full cooperation.** Deloitte have also been made aware of a number of contextual issues and have been asked to bear these in mind.

Once the research has been completed and recommendations received, further consideration will then be given as to how a One Stop Shop for victims of Domestic Violence might be progressed.

Sharon C. Harley

SHARON C. HARLEY

9TH December 2005