

**Minutes of the seventh meeting of the Regional Steering Group on
Domestic Violence**

Tuesday 7 March 2006 at 10.00 a.m.

Room 144, Parliament Buildings, Stormont

Present: Conal Devitt (NIO) - Chair
Pauline Leeson (CiNI)
Deirdre Webb (EHSSB)
Cheryl Lamont (PBNI)
John Devaney (EHSSB)
Annie Campbell (WAF)
Anne Graham (WAF)
Michael Graham (NIHE)
Margaret Black (NHSSB)
Hilary Harbinson (OFMDFM)
Sharon Harley (NIO)
Edell Fitzpatrick (PPS)
Mairead Lavery (PPS)
Linda Robinson (Age Concern)
Pauline Mooney (PSNI)
Kevin Shiels (DV Unit)
Marie Austin (DV Unit)

Apologies: Liz Shaw (SHSSB)
Catherine Reilly (UCHT)
Maxine McCutcheon (MAP)
James Knox (Rainbow)
Ken Nixon (Resident Magistrate)
Eamon McTernan (WHSSB)
Mandy Kilpatrick (NICtS)
Clare Irvine (OLR)
Leslie Frew (DHSSPS)
Susan Reid (Victim Support)
Peter O'Brien (Law Society)

In attendance: Inspector Barbara Gray (PSNI) *for item 14 only*
Inspector Harry Millar (PSNI) *for item 14 only*

1. Introduction

1.1 Mr Devitt welcomed everyone to the seventh meeting of the Regional Steering Group and in particular Ms Mairead Lavery (Public

Prosecution Service) and Ms Annie Campbell (Women's Aid Federation who are succeeding Anne Graham and Edell Fitzpatrick respectively. On behalf of the Steering Group Mr Devitt thanked Edell and Anne for their commitment and contribution to the work of the Regional Steering Group.

- 1.2 Mr Devitt informed members that contact had been made with the Department of Education regarding representation on the RSG and its Sub-Groups. Members agreed that Mr Devitt should write to Mr Eddie Rooney from the Department of Education to highlight the need for DE representation.

Action: Mr Devitt to write to E Rooney regarding DE representation for RSG and Sub-Groups

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2005

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

3. Matters arising

3.1 Allocation of domestic violence funding

Mr Shiels advised members that the RSG's allocations of DV funding had been made to Boards (for local DV partnerships), Barnardos, the DV Helpline, and successful applicants to the DV Development Fund.

3.2 Routine Enquiry in maternity units

Mr Shiels advised that he had sent a draft Departmental (DHSSPS) policy circular on routine enquiry to Margaret Graham, DHSSPS Nursing Officer (Vera Kelso's replacement). Colleagues from the Nursing and Midwifery section of DHSSPS are working on the final draft and a meeting will be arranged with relevant bodies including Women's Aid Federation, to consider the circular before it is issued to maternity units.

3.3.1 Publicity campaigns – contributions from Departments

Departmental representatives were asked at the last meeting to explore the possibility of obtaining funding from their own Information Offices for the 2006/07 DV media campaign:

DHSSPS: Mr Shiels reported that Minister Shaun Woodward had asked that the total DHSSPS budget for publicity (06/07) be dedicated solely to the suicides issue. However Mr Shiels agreed to explore the matter further to establish if some funding could be found elsewhere.

OFMDFM: Ms Harbinson advised that no funding was available from her Department.

DSD: Mr Shiels informed members that a contribution may be made when details of the 2006/07 campaign are developed.

NIO: Ms Harley reported that funding would be made available.

Action: DV Unit to follow up on funding from DHSSPS.

3.3.2 The Domestic Violence Helpline refurbishment and installation of new telephone system (funded by NIHE) should be completed shortly. Ms Harley advised that consideration was being given to running the Radio Ad and to other publicity to coincide with the completion of works (possibly week commencing 27 March 2006).

Action: Ms Harley to liaise with WAF and explore media coverage

3.3.3 Members agreed that consideration should be given to airing the Radio Ad on the rising number of local radio stations.

Action: DV Unit to ask PR company to consider use of additional new local radio stations.

4. Update on work on Sub-Groups

4.1.1 Domestic Violence and Law Sub-Group

Mr Harley informed members that the Domestic Violence and Law Sub-Group had last met on 31 January 2006 and provided an update on the work of the Sub-Group:

- Pauline Mooney had replaced Robin Dempsey as the PSNI representative on the Group
- All PSNI Domestic Violence Officers had completed the investigator training course and the role of DVOs will be reviewed over the next few months
- Awaiting developments from the Home Office on the homicide reviews with regard to guidelines and consultation. It is probable that NI will have to produce its own guidelines and consult separately from the Home office
- Mr Mervyn Bates had expressed concern that information on the NVRP and the MODV was not readily available to the courts. Since then, Ms Lamont had agreed to provide the necessary information
- Deloitte had been appointed to research the feasibility of a One-Stop-Shop in Northern Ireland. Report should be completed by end of March 2006

- The Domestic Violence Law Leaflet had been published (launched at Raising the Standards Conference). Ms Harley expressed her gratitude to all involved in producing the leaflet.

4.1.2 Mr Devaney informed members that a meeting between the Domestic Violence Unit, Community Safety Unit and relevant organisations will take place on 21 March 2006 to consider how best to take the Non-Violent Relationships Programme forward.

4.2 *Information Sub-Group*

Ms Shiels (in Ms Reilly's absence) informed members that the Information Sub-Group had last met on 12 December 2005 and provided an update on developments:

- Draft guidance (framework) on the collection and management of domestic violence data is still being developed but would issue shortly to all RSG and sub-group members for comment
- Since the launch of the Free-phone Helpline, with the exception of October 2005, there had been an increase of at least 100 reports of domestic violence per month to the police
- 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
- Sub-Group members will be considering the possibility of including domestic violence questions in the "Young People's Behaviour and Attitudes Survey"
- A letter had issued to the main churches seeking help to update existing 'Domestic Violence Guidance for Faith Communities' (published in 1999 by the Regional Forum on Domestic Violence NI)
- A domestic violence website - within the DHSSPS home site – is being developed. Members will be given the opportunity in due course to view the draft website and make comments/suggestions.

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

Mr Devaney informed members that the Sub-Group had last met on 23 February 2006 and provided an update on developments:

- Ms Pauline Leeson from Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) attended the meeting to update members on the Participation Network Initiative, which is currently being led by CiNI and the Northern Ireland Youth Forum. The overall aim of the project is to develop the capacity of statutory bodies to fulfil their duties to

effectively engage, consult with and involve children and young people in decision-making

- A meeting will be arranged shortly between representatives of the Sub-Group, DV Unit and DE colleagues to consider how key education issues can be moved forward. This is an opportune time as DE is reviewing policies on child protection
- Contact will be made with PSNI to discuss opportunities to address DV issues on school visits
- Members considered a request by Justice Gillen to look at research on the impact of domestic violence on children and to explore the need to commission further research. Members agreed that no further research was needed at this time and agreed to forward reports by Mary Barnish (Probation) and Humphreys/Mullender on the impact of domestic violence on children to both Justice Gillen and the Children's Commissioner.
Note: Copies of both reports will also be sent to all RSG and Sub-Group members and Local Domestic Violence Partnership Chairs (for information)

5. Draft Multi-Agency Training Strategy

5.1 Mr Shiels informed members that the DV Unit had developed the draft Multi-Agency Training Strategy to a stage where a definite steer was now needed from the RSG as to how best the Strategy could be developed further. Members agreed the following:

- A Training Sub-Group should be established to further develop the Strategy
- The Sub-Group should consist of those with experience in domestic violence training and generic training
- Confirmation of commitment from relevant organisations should be sought
- RSG members should consider nomination of representatives from their individual organisations
- A stock take of skills should be carried out when all nominations to the Sub-Group have been received
- Training for trainers should be considered at the outset
- Draft Strategy should be issued to Sub-Groups and Local Domestic Violence Partnerships for comment

Mr Shiels asked that all nominations to the Sub-Group and comments on the draft Strategy be sent to the DV Unit by 31 March 2006.

Action: Members to forward nominations to the Sub-Group and comments on the draft Strategy to the DV Unit by 31 March 2006

Action: DV Unit to issue draft Strategy to Sub-Groups and Local Domestic Violence Partnerships for comment

6. Draft Regional Guidelines on Good Practice

- 6.1 Members were reminded that comments on the draft 'Northern Ireland Good Practice Guidelines for Local Domestic Violence Partnerships and Individual Agencies' were due by 16 March 2006.
Action: Members to send comments to DV Unit by 16 March 2006.

7. Domestic Violence Workplace Guidance

- 7.1 *Final sign off by Regional Steering Group*
Members agreed the final version of 'Developing a Workplace Policy on Domestic Violence – Guidance for Employers'. Arrangements will be made to have the guidance printed and distributed as widely as possible to all employers.
- 7.1.2 Mr Shiels informed members that the Northern Ireland Civil Service and the Northern Ireland Assembly had officially introduced a workplace policy on domestic violence and abuse.
- 7.2 *Official Launch of Guidelines and Corporate Alliance event*
Mr Shiels informed members that Minister Hanson had agreed to host an event in Hillsborough Castle, on 22 May 2006 (11.00 a.m. – 2.00 p.m.), to launch 'Developing a Workplace Policy on Domestic Violence – Guidance for Employers'. The aim of the event is to encourage employers and organisations to sign up to the guidelines produced and join the UK Corporate Alliance Against Domestic Violence.
Note: Corporate Alliance website can be found at <http://www.corporateallianceuk.com/>
- 7.3 Ms Harley agreed to contact procurement to explore the possibility of including a contract compliance clause in relation to a domestic violence workplace policy for tendering companies. Consideration should also be given to exploring the matter with the Equality Commission.
Action: Ms Harley to contact procurement regarding contract compliance

8. Raising the Standards Conference (6 & 7 February 2006)

- 8.1 Members considered a copy of the workshop feedback from the Raising the Standards Conference. It was agreed that the Group should be mindful of the findings when considering projects but that the

majority of the key points raised were already being taken forward by the RSG, its Sub-Groups and member agencies.

9 24-Hour Domestic Violence Helpline – update on developments

- 9.1 Ms Graham informed members that there had been a considerable increase in calls to the Helpline since the Free-phone was introduced and, in particular, from rural areas. Ms Graham agreed to send a copy of a 12-month report on Helpline activity to the DV Unit for distribution to members.

Action: Ms Graham to send DV Unit a copy of the 12-month report when available

10. Review of Public Administration

Mr Shiels reminded members of the possible impact the Review of Public Administration may have on RSG members and on Local Domestic Violence Partnerships as the number of trusts is reduced. There was a possibility that the DV Unit could move to a Regional Health Authority. Members agreed that the information sent by the DV Unit to members on the Review of Public Administration was helpful and asked that any further information received be circulated.

Action: DV Unit to keep members apprised of RPA developments and the issue to be kept on the agenda for future meetings for updating

11. Southern Area Domestic Violence Partnership and Collaborative Working event

- 11.1 Mr Shiels informed members that both he and Mr Devitt would attend an event hosted by the Southern Area Domestic Violence Partnership on Collaborative Working (Paul Mattessich, 7 April 2006). Members will be updated at the next meeting.

- 11.2 Members agreed that Local Domestic Violence Partnerships should be asked to forward details of any planned events to the DV Unit to allow for a co-ordinated approach be taken to maximising the opportunity for both publicising events and raising the profile of domestic violence through the media.

Action: Board representatives to contact Local Domestic Violence Partnerships regarding notification of events

Action: Members to notify DV Unit of all known events for 2006

Action: DV Unit to devise calendar of events

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

12.1 Members agreed that a conference should be held in Autumn 2006 (possibly October in the Comfort Hotel, Antrim) to reflect on the previous year with regards to the Strategy and Action Plan and to look at what further action is required for Action Plan 2007-08. Members agreed to consider the matter further and forward suggestions for the conference to the DV Unit.

Action: DV Unit to contact Comfort Hotel regarding availability for October 2006

Action: Members to consider content, format etc of conference and forward suggestions to DV Unit

13. Update on research into One-Stop-Shop options for Northern Ireland

13.1 As indicated under item 4.1.1, Deloitte had been appointed to research the feasibility of a One-Stop-Shop in Northern Ireland. Report should be available by end of March 2006.

14. Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference Pilot

14.1 Inspector Barbara Gray (Antrim DCU) and Inspector Harry Millar (Larne DCU) attended the meeting to update members on the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference Pilot:

- Pilot project will commence on 1 April 2006 covering 4 DCUs – Antrim, Carrickfergus, Larne and Ballymena
- Involves PSNI, Probation, Homefirst Adult Services, Eldercare, Childrens Services, Mental health, NIHE, Health, Women’s Aid, Victim Support
- Although police driven, it is recognised that the aims and objectives cannot be achieved alone
- Project will supplement existing PSNI domestic violence policy with additional procedures for officers attending domestic incidents – recognition of established risk factors, early intervention, evidence gathering, risk assessing and management
- A training package has been rolled out to operational police within the pilot area, emphasising the need to recognise risks and also providing a refresh of evidence gathering techniques.

- All agencies will be subject to existing protocols for the sharing of information and confidentiality
- Actions will be allocated, and subsequently reviewed, to reduce further harm to victims and children at high risk.

14.1.2 A question and answer session followed the presentation. In response to questions from members, the presenters made the following points:

- The biggest barrier to getting the pilot ready to go was getting the right people at the conference to discuss safety planning
- The victim will not attend the conference although he/she will be aware that the conference is taking place
- Efforts will be made to ensure that prosecutors are aware that a victim is the subject of a MARAC
- It may be possible to test during the pilot certain proposals coming from the NIO research into one-stop-shop
- There will be a press release (PSNI).

15. Any other business

15.1 Ms Fitzpatrick informed members that the PPS Domestic Violence Policy is due to be published at the end of March and agreed to issue a copy to all RSG members. She expressed her thanks to members for their contributions. Ms Fitzpatrick added that the PPS has adopted the definition of domestic violence and abuse as detailed in the 'Tackling Violence at Home' Strategy.

15.2 Ms Harley reported that Victim Support and Women's Aid had agreed a protocol on how the two organisations refer victims to each other etc. Consideration was being given to having a formal launch of the protocol to highlight it as an example to other organisations that want to do something similar.

14. Dates of the next meeting

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

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