

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

Tuesday 13 March 2007 at 10.00 a.m.

Conference Room, 4th floor, Millennium House, Belfast

Present: Conal Devitt (NIO) – Chair
Annie Campbell (WAF)
Mark Goodfellow (NIO)
Jo O'Reilly (NIO)
Mairead Lavery (PPS)
Joan Hynes (NICtS)
Kevin Shiels (DV Unit)
Marie Austin (DV Unit)
Stephen Baird (DSD) *for Janis Hatchell*
Duane Farrell (Help The Aged/Age Concern) *for Grace Henry*
Pauline Mooney (PSNI)
Mark Peters (PSNI)
Mary Quinn (EHSSB)
Peter O'Brien (Law Society)
Colm Elliott (NSPCC)
Ethel Johnston (WHSSB)
Liz Shaw (SHSSB)
Catherine Reilly (UCHT)
Michael Sweeney (DV Unit)
Paul Cassidy (DV Unit)

Apologies: Leslie Frew (DHSSPS)
Mervyn Bates RM (NICtS)
Sharon Harley (NIO)
Michael Graham (NIHE)

1. Introduction

1.1 Mr Devitt (Chair) welcomed everyone to the eleventh meeting of the Regional Steering Group. He introduced Michael Sweeney and Paul Cassidy as replacements for Kevin Shiels and Marie Austin respectively, who were returning to work in the NI Assembly and thanked Kevin and Marie for their hard work and dedication in supporting the work of the Group.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2006

2.1 Members agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2006 without amendment.

3. Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Update on work on Sub-Groups

4.1 *Domestic Violence and Law Sub-Group*

Mr O'Brien informed members that the Domestic Violence and Law Sub-Group had met on 20 February 2007 and provided an update on developments:

- *Cost of Protection Orders*
He had met with the Legal Services Commission in relation to the costs incurred by victims who seek protection orders (in particular for working women who do not qualify for legal aid). This is a worthwhile engagement and work is ongoing.
- *Restorative Justice*
Restorative Justice is becoming a key issue and consideration was being given to inviting a representative to sit on the Domestic Violence and Law Sub-Group.
- *One Stop Shop*
Following the presentation on the "One Stop Shop" the Group was pressing ahead. However, further progress is dependent upon evaluation of the MARAC pilot in East Antrim which would not be available for a couple of weeks.

4.2 *Information Sub-Group*

Ms Reilly informed members that the Information Sub-Group had met on 25 January 2007 and provided an update on developments:

- *Guidelines for Employers and UK Corporate Alliance*
The Group agreed on 25 January that the Chair would write to employers and umbrella organisations encouraging them to adopt workplace policies. Mr Shiels advised that letters to employers and umbrella organisations have been drafted and will issue soon.
Action: DV Unit to issue letter to employers and umbrella organisations.
- *Young People's Behaviour and Attitudes Survey*
Members had expressed concerns with some of the questions in the survey questionnaire. It is important that the "correct" questions are asked to enable a standardisation of marking. This will be considered further at the next meeting of the Sub-Group on 30 March.
- *Collection and management of domestic violence data*
4 tenders have been received for the research project. These will be evaluated at a meeting on 14 March.

4.3 *Children and Young People Sub-Group*

Mrs Shaw advised that the last scheduled meeting of the Sub-Group has been cancelled. Another meeting is being arranged for April.

5. Helpline Report, October 2006-December 2006

- 5.1 Ms Campbell advised that the report for the period October 2006 – December 2006 did not show up any unusual trends. She drew attention to page 10 which highlighted activity over the Christmas week, and page 14 which detailed calls to the helpline by nationality. She also noted that the number of male callers to the helpline was down slightly on the last quarter.

6. Media Campaigns

- 6.1 Mr Shiels advised that a TV ad and 2 radio ads were broadcast from 14 January to 28 January (the campaign was extended to early February). Feedback from the campaigns is positive with other countries wanting to do similar campaigns.
- 6.2 Ms Campbell reported that there was always an increase in calls to the helpline during a campaign but figures were not yet available for the latest campaign. Ms Mooney advised that there were no official PSNI figures. However, DV Officers had asked to be given advance notice of any future campaigns as they tend to lead to an increase in reporting of incidents. It was noted that as PSNI is represented on RSG and responsibility for disseminating info to DV Officers should rest with PSNI.
- 6.3 On the question of funding, Mr Shiels advised that the 06/07 campaign has cost £130k. Contributions had been provided by PSNI (£20k), DSD (£10k) and NIO & DHSSPS (£50k each). He confirmed that NIO and DHSSPS would continue to contribute. DV Unit had made a bid for funding but the outcome was not yet known. Mr Devitt added that any other offers of funding would be welcomed.
- 6.4 Mr Shiels suggested that, in conjunction with PSNI, a future media campaign might focus on perpetrators. This will be considered further by the information Sub-Group.

7. Update on Draft Action Plan 2007/2008

- 7.1 Mr Devitt asked if members had any further comments on the draft Action Plan.
- 7.2 Ms Campbell considered that there needed to be a detailed discussion about the main priorities. Key NIWAF issues had not been included or had been watered down. The plan makes no mention of support for refugees and the continuing work of NIWAF. This is a key issue for NIWAF and is not mentioned. NIWAF is concerned that if issues are not in the Plan then they will not be able to secure funding. There are gaps in the Plan that need to be discussed, clarified and filled. Ms Campbell had also forwarded comments about the education sector and these had not been addressed. It is important that the education sector is involved.

- 7.3 Mr Devitt pointed out that the Action Plan sets out what can be realised within the next year. Mr Devitt asked if the key issues should be discussed now or if a dedicated meeting should be arranged.
- 7.4 Mr Shiels reminded members that the draft plan had been discussed at the October workshop. He pointed out that the main themes cannot be changed as they come from the 5 year strategy.
- 7.5 There was a general feeling that the Plan needed more focus and that the main priorities need to be identified. Also, Education needs to be persuaded to become involved.
- 7.6 It was agreed that a small sub-group would meet within the next 4 weeks to consider the Action Plan with the view to having the plan finalised in advance of the next RSG meeting in June. Ms Campbell pointed out that NIWAF had prepared a short Key Issues paper which should form the basis for further discussion.
Action: WAF Key Issues paper to be circulated to members for consideration. Members to let DV Unit know who will attend the sub-group meeting. DV Unit to contact DENI re attendance at sub-group meeting and further meetings of RSG.

8. Way forward on Guidance Documents

- 8.1 *Guidelines of the Constitution and Operation of Local Domestic Violence Partnerships*
 Mr Shiels asked if the Group was content for this document to issue. He confirmed that Ethnie Gilligan had examined the document and was content. Mr Farrell suggested that paragraph 2.5 from the “Faith Communities” document should be included in all documents. This was agreed. It was further agreed that the document would be finalised at the meeting of the Information Sub-Group on 30 March.
Action: Para 2.5 to be added. Document to be finalised at the Information Sub-Group meeting on 30 March.
- 8.2 *Guidance for Agencies Who May Come Into Contact With Victims of Domestic Violence and Abuse*
 Mr Shiels reminded members that originally there was only to be one document for agencies and LDVPs. However, the RSG had decided that the document be separated. This document has not yet been issued for consultation. Ms Reilly considered that the document was a useful overarching document that local agencies could adapt for their own staff.
Action: Information Sub-Group will consider wider consultation at next meeting.
- 8.3 *Guidance for Faith Communities*
 Mr Shiels advised members that this document was drawn up by a small working group and now needed a wider consultation of the faith communities. Ms Mooney commented that it was an excellent document that made

reference to child and domestic violence and rightly made reference (in para 8) to the statutory duty to contact either social services or the police. However, she added that it may be worthwhile providing advice on who to contact and how that contact is made.

Action: It was agreed that the document should be issued for consultation and would then be considered again by the Information Sub-Group.

8.4 *Guidance for MPs/MLAs*

Mr Shiels advised members that the Home Office had issued guidance for MPs nationally and that it was desirable that local guidance was also available. It was agreed that the document should refer to political representatives, rather than MPs and MLAs. Ms Mooney was concerned that para 8.2 of this document was not in keeping with current police policy. Police have a duty to pursue prosecution where an offence has been committed. Ms Mooney agreed to provide a form of wording for this paragraph. It was agreed that comments would be forwarded within 2 weeks after which time the document would be finalised and issued.

Action: Ms Mooney to provide a form or wording for paragraph 8.2.

[Ms Mooney subsequently advised that the paragraph should be deleted.]

Action: Members to submit comments within 2 weeks.

9. **Review of Public Administration**

9.1 There is still a degree of uncertainty about the implications of RPA at local level. It was expected that LDVPs would reorganise in line with the new trust structures and reduce to 5. Ms Mooney confirmed that there would be 8 District Commands under RPA and that the new District Commanders have been appointed. The DCs are now considering the filling of the DVO posts. Mr Elliott was concerned that agencies might move in different directions, and that issues might “fall between stools”. Ms Campbell pointed out that the position should be clearer at the next meeting in June.

9.2 It was agreed that this will be a standard agenda item. RPA updates will continue to be copied to members.

10. **Draft Multi-Agency Training Strategy**

10.1 Mr Shiels reported that a bid for funding for a training co-ordinator had been made but the outcome was not known. This will be followed up as the training strategy cannot proceed without the co-ordinator.

Action: DV Unit to follow up on bid for funding.

11. **Raising the Standards Conference**

11.1 Mr Devitt reminded members that the next “Raising the Standards” Conference is in Guernsey on 8/9 October. However, the Raising the Standards Group is meeting in Dublin on 16 March and some ideas for an NI presentation at the conference would be needed. A 20 minute presentation would be required and ideally it should be a joint statutory sector/voluntary sector presentation.

11.2 Ms Campbell suggested that Domestic Violence in a changing Political Climate would be unique to NI from the point of view of a post conflict society. Ms Campbell also referred to the "You and Me Mum" programme which explores the situation of women and children in a post violent relationship. Mr Shiels reminded members that a suggestion had been made about a presentation on the costs and consequences of DV to victims (legal costs, loss of earnings etc...). These will be considered further.

12. Any other business

12.1 The following events were highlighted for members' information:

- ½ day seminar on 24 April, Enterprise Centre, Banbridge @ 9.15am;- Children's Services Planning Group sharing the results of a scoping exercise on the response of professionals to incidents of domestic violence, including feedback, services available and identified gaps. Also, staff member studying for PhD will share the results of research on the impact of domestic violence on victims.
- 30 April, Long Gallery, Stormont, Launch of a new Programme on Elder Abuse in NI (funded by Comic Relief).

13. Date of the next meeting

13.1 The next meeting is scheduled for 12 June. Mr Devitt queried if members would welcome the meeting being held somewhere other than in Belfast. This might allow for more local input.

13.2 Mr Elliott suggested that the meeting could be held at the WHSSB HQ in Londonderry. Local WAF could be involved. This was agreed.