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Office



Department of  
**Health, Social Services  
and Public Safety**

An Roinn  
**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta  
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***“HIDDEN CRIMES***

***SECRET PAIN”***

**A CONSULTATION PAPER ON A PROPOSED REGIONAL  
STRATEGY FOR ADDRESSING SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN  
NORTHERN IRELAND**

**JANUARY 2007**

**CONSULTATION RESPONSE DOCUMENT**

## CONSULTATION RESPONSE QUESTIONNAIRE

You can respond to the consultation document by e-mail, letter or fax.

Responses should be sent to:

e-mail: [sexualviolenceunit@dhsspsni.gov.uk](mailto:sexualviolenceunit@dhsspsni.gov.uk)

Written: Sexual Violence Unit  
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety  
Room C4.8 Castle Buildings  
Stormont  
BELFAST BT4 3SQ

Fax: (028) 9052 0529

Further copies of the consultation paper are available by telephoning 028 9052 0271 or text phoning 028 90527668 or via the internet at: [www.dhsspsni.gov.uk](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk) or [www.nio.gov.uk](http://www.nio.gov.uk)

Responses must be received no later than **27April 2007**

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I am responding: as an individual  on behalf of an organisation

(please tick a box)

Name:

Job Title: DIRECTOR

Organisation: THE NEXUS INSTITUTE

Address: 119 UNIVERSITY STREET

BELFAST

BT7 1HP

Tel:

Fax:

e-mail:

## **PART 1 - INTRODUCTION:**

***The regional strategy will use the term sexual violence, which is defined as follows:***

*'Any behaviour perceived to be of a sexual nature which is unwanted or takes place without consent.'*

### ***Q.1 Is this definition of sexual violence acceptable?***

***Response:*** In general there was a mixed response as to whether the definition of sexual violence was acceptable. Some thought it was adequate, however many felt it was not comprehensive enough, i.e. providing further detail on 'perceived violence and a threat to victims.'

Majority felt that a more detailed definition was required.

## **PART 2 - PREVENTION:**

### ***Q.2 What will be the most effective ways to increase understanding of the realities of sexual violence among the general public, including children?***

***Response:*** An awareness raising campaign to promote change in public attitudes & social behaviours and to dispell myths/stereo types. Society need to be educated & encouraged to talk openly. To achieve this it will be necessary to embark on an intensive marketing campaign to include television & radio adverts, posters, billboards, slogans on merchandise & leaflets etc. Myths about sexual offenders and survivors should be challenged. Target groups to include schools, colleges, community groups, places of employment. NEXUS already provide education & awareness programmes and feel strongly that education is the key and that is should be incorporated into the curriculum.

Continued - Appendix 1

***Q.3 Which key target groups could contribute to supporting the process of increasing public understanding of the realities of sexual violence?***

***Response:***

Statutory: Police, Probation, Social Services, Boards, CARE Teams.

Public Sector: Hospitals, GP Surgeries, Health Visitors, Midwives, Mental Health Services & a comprehensive media input.

Voluntary Sector: NEXUS, NSPCC, Child Line, Women's Aid, Men's Groups, Minority & Ethnic Groups, Parents Advice, Pastoral Groups, Women's Groups & Youth Groups.

NEXUS has worked in the field of sexual violence for over 23 years and has a vast experience and expertise within this area. They have seen at first hand the devastating consequences of sexual violence on the individual and family members. They have campaigned for many years to raise awareness to increase public understanding of the realities of sexual violence.

***Q.4 How best can children's attitudes to sexual violence be gathered?***

***Response:***

There are a number of ways to gather this information. As children are more accessible through schools, questionnaires could to be distributed, informal interactive talks, websites etc. Obviously a different approach would be required for primary & secondary schools.

A sample study of families throughout Northern Ireland.

Parents Groups, Youth Groups & Family therapists/counsellors.

It is essential to use the voice of the child/young person.

NEXUS feel this is an identified area for NSPCC.CHILDLINE. However there is a role for other agencies such as NEXUS within the education system.

***Q.5 What will be the most effective ways to (a) develop, deliver and evaluate initiatives aimed at encouraging the development of social attitudes that will support the prevention of sexual violence and (b) which key influencers could contribute most effectively to the process of dispelling myths and changing social attitudes?***

***Response:*** We all have a role to play in dispelling myths & changing social attitudes, there is a clear role for politicians. Through provision of adequate funding, encouraging partnership and communication between all interested parties, i.e. multi-agency bodies.

NEXUS are currently proactively delivering a number of tailor-made programmes to raise awareness of sexual violence, including personal development courses to examine and encourage positive social attitudes towards sexual violence. However, the delivery of these programmes are ad-hoc. Many schools are reluctant to let us deliver these programmes. Perhaps a mandatory initiative should be introduced to the schools. The effectiveness of such programmes could be measured by talking frankly about sexual violence and encouraging discussion will lead to more disclosures and the demand for services like we offer will increase in the short-term. In the long-term, preventative initiatives as well as substantially more convictions.

***Q.6 Should Government give a clear message ahead of public opinion, to stem the tide of normalising sexual violence in society?***

***Response:***

YES, UNEQUIVOCALLY. It would be extremely positive for Government to give a clear message ahead of public opinion. Having access to far superior resources and contacts. It is imperative that every avenue be explored to gain as much public attention as possible.

Government need to make changes to the law, sending a clear message to offenders.

***Q.7 What steps could the media take to support the process of increasing public understanding and awareness of the realities of sexual violence?***

***Response:***

The media has a vital role to play in this whole process and should not be underestimated. It is a very powerful tool for communicating with the public, and so it should be motivated & encouraged to promote an accurate & informed message to the public. Reporting should be realistic and sensitive to the impact sexual violence has on the victim/survivor. The public should be encouraged to comment via phone-ins & newspaper etc. More investigative programmes.

A special task force or committee could be established to feed into and/or inform the media of appropriate relevant and accurate information. This could involve already well established agencies working in the area of sexual violence.

***Q.8 What key messages should be promoted in relation to how healthy relationships and respect can help to prevent sexual violence?***

***Response:***

Everyone has a right to be respected, including children. It is important to respect each other and recognise individual human rights.

Children have the right to say NO and the right to tell.

It is important not to suffer in silence and to look after self and not the whole family circle.

Any form of violence is unacceptable.

***Q.9 In addition to the education and training sector, what other sectoral groups and influencers have a role in delivering relevant messages?***

***Response:***

Health Promotion; A & E Dept; GP's; Legal professionals; Police; Youth organisations; Media; Local celebrities to help address the stigma.

Voluntary organisations such as NEXUS who work with survivors of sexual violence and already play a role within schools, colleges, church & youth groups delivering relevant programmes and promoting appropriate messages.

***Q.10 What more could Government do to promote the importance of healthy relationships in society?***

***Response:***

Government should promote healthy relationships through hard-hitting advertisements, mandatory programmes in schools and colleges and provide realistic funding to resource voluntary agencies to ensure that these programmes are run.

It should be viewed as an important aspect of the education curriculum and be a major part of the mental health programme.

Government should look at influences in society and address them appropriately.

NEXUS feel that as well as a bottom up approach, i.e. family work, the government must reflect their beliefs through the judicial system.

**Q.11 What mechanisms could be used for the ongoing collection of data?**

**Response:**

Organisations such as NEXUS, NSPCC & Childline will have a large role to play in devising mechanisms for the collection of data. PSNI, Probation, Courts & Social Services will also play a large part.

NEXUS already have an extensive database of current clients which can be utilised. Other agencies can also be included, e.g. counselling, mental health, victims support, pastoral etc.

There needs to be more structured and specific methods for collation & analysis of data and more emphasis on research among the agencies involved,

This needs to be reflected in government funding enabling the appropriate agencies to carry out the collation & analysis.

**Q.12 In what ways can consistent messages and guidance be developed about specific risk factors and how best could the task of co-ordinating the multi-sectoral aspects of addressing known risk factors be taken forward?**

**Response:**

Government to identify Minister & Department to co-ordinate relevant information.

Through the creation of more multi-agency groups made up of all interested working parties and clear agreement of individual roles within the strategy.

The Western Board Interagency Group is a good example of how consistent messages and guidance can be developed.

**Q.13 What practical measures could be developed to promote personal safety, generally, and to protect those most at risk, in particular?**

**Response:**

Through the design and development of strategies to address the issues around safety.

Access to information & knowledge of where to go for support via leaflets being available in schools, colleges and in public settings.

Individuals knowing they have the right to say NO under ANY circumstances even if they have been drinking or if it is a parent/carer abusing.

Wider issues should be addressed, e.g. Street lighting & CCTV etc.

Provision of more funding for organisations to deliver personal safety campaigns.

**Q14 (a)How can we stop sexual violence happening to children (b) what actions can be taken to better protect young people from sexual assault and (c)what role can the media play in bringing this about?**

**Response:**

Provision of education and awareness throughout all education establishments by agencies who specialise within these particular areas.

Educating children around appropriate touch and acceptable behaviours.

The abusers are always to blame.

Encourage young people to tell appropriate adult who they feel they can trust.

Working with adult groups to cascade information down to the 'home'.

The abusers should have a clear message that they will be caught and punished.

Use Media in advertising campaigns and programmes of interest around the theme of sexual violence and abuse, e.g. Spotlight NI & Insight.

***Q.15 What type of protection under the law should children and young people have?***

***Response:***

Children/young people have the right NOT to be abused in their own homes. Underage sexual violence should be dealt with more sternly. Perpetrator should be removed from the home immediately with no exceptions.

Specific legislation where it is not provided, and children/young people should be made aware of their rights.

Support for the child/young person when dealing with the legal system, an identified independent adult to monitor situation and keep the child/young person informed at all stages.

***Q.16 How do we ensure that the legal system is better able to provide children with protection and justice when they have experienced sexual assault?***

***Response:***

After consultation with a number of NEXUS' clients, current & previous, regarding what worked and what didn't all agreed that the current legal system was a system for adults servicing children.

The current system lets down the victim of sexual violence.

When convicted & without exception, it should be mandatory for offenders to take part in treatment programmes.

NEXUS feel that there is a need for the development of a specific legislation for children, this should be produced through consultation between the legal profession, government and sector specific groups. There should be barristers and solicitors who are solely trained to work with children/young people.

***Q.17 What additional actions are required to protect sexually active young people from abuse and exploitation?***

**Response:** NEXUS feel strongly that education & awareness on sexual abuse should be mandatory in schools and that a proactive education programme on what is abuse & exploitation. This could be tied in with sexual health & personal development programmes.

Many young people believe it is because someone cares about them. Some are not aware of the age for sexual consent in Northern Ireland. They are not being informed of the law even at a basic level.

Young people need not only the knowledge but also the confidence to follow through his/her instincts. They need to have a safe and confidential place where they can go to express or enquire about their concerns.

There is a need for development of groups, helplines, programmes & media awareness to address this issue.

NEXUS currently provide education & awareness programmes, but with limited funding are restricted to the amount of work carried out.

***Q.18 How can awareness be raised among children and young people about sexual exploitation?***

***Response:***

Through Schools, colleges, church & youth organisations. Should be mandatory part of education curriculum but provided by relevant/experienced staff/education worker.

There are a variety of games, programmes, videos & leaflets available to raise awareness amongst young people/children of sexual abuse/violence.

NEXUS has youth education workers who currently provide such awareness in schools, colleges and youth settings who use a variety of literature, interactive discussions, role-play, quizzes, drama, games and videos to get the message across. However, due to limited funding we only have two workers for a short period of time and therefore access to these programmes are greatly oversubscribed.

***Q.19 What are the key messages to be developed in relation to early intervention with (a) adult perpetrators and potential perpetrators and (b) with young people who display sexually harmful behaviour?***

***Response:***

There are several key messages to be developed.

Firstly, we need to challenge the stereotypical images and myths that the general public have about perpetrators. All too often, the image of a shifty looking man in a greasy grey rain mac is the picture associated with sex offenders. We clearly need to get the message out that the majority of sex offenders are family men, dads, uncles and grandfathers and that they are living amongst us often in positions of trust and power. This fact does not seem to be grasped by the public as it is abhorrent to contemplate that someone they know, like and even respect can be an abuser. This message needs to be strongly hit home.

Secondly, the public needs to know that perpetrators need help. These people are damaged individuals and in order for them to stop abusing they need to undertake specialised treatment programmes.

Continued - Appendix 2

### **PART 3 - PROTECTION AND JUSTICE**

***Q.20 How can the policy and practices of the different criminal justice agencies be improved when addressing the needs of victims of sexual violence?***

***Response:***

Through joint working and creation of more multi-agency groups and keeping sight of the victim.

NEXUS feel that one person should be appointed to be in charge of a case and to keep the client informed throughout the whole process, currently not enough information is given to the client re: process. The criminal justice agency needs to ensure that the process is not elongated into months and months of waiting. It is too difficult & stressful for the client to remain focussed.

The whole process is very de-personalised. Although the judiciary deals in facts, staff need to acknowledge the personal nature of the incidents and the devastating effects sexual violence has on the individual, feelings of dirt, guilt & embarrassment. They need to remember they are dealing with real people and not just a number.

**Q.21 What areas should the criminal justice system prioritise when addressing cases of sexual violence ?**

***Response:***

Support & reassurance are paramount for the victim/survivor.

Ensure appropriate sentencing is available and the provision of treatment programmes for the offenders.

The adoption of an 'Inquisitorial' system as to the present 'Adversarial' system.

**Q.22 What types of improvements are required in the statistical information available within the criminal justice system?**

***Response:***

Statistical information needs to be more explicit.

Why does the PPS not take all cases to court and who makes these decisions?

***Q.23 What might be included in the terms of reference for an Inspection by the Criminal Justice Inspectorate of the handling of cases involving sexual violence?***

***Response:***

Timescales: From reporting to the police until the PPS make a decision.

Sensitivity with which a case is handled. (can be a factor on which victims decide to proceed with case).

Communication between victim & professional involved. (victim should be informed if a barrister decides not to proceed with case).

## **PART 4 – SUPPORT**

***Q.24 What will be the most effective way to identify necessary support services and models for resourcing and delivering them?***

***Response:***

Identify current available services/what is available elsewhere/ what can be learnt from these. Obviously the identification of necessary support services will take time.

Although we know the key voluntary & statutory services who currently provide services, there are also several organisations who provide generic counselling support and who would occasionally come across a survivor of sexual violence.

Recognised agencies will probably be happy to complete questionnaires, this should include all counselling agencies & caring agencies, private therapists.

Advertisements should be placed in all newspapers urging all practitioners to take part.

Public meetings have also been suggested, unfortunately these are not well attended.

Government need to provide realistic funding.

**Q.25** *What key services would contribute most to victim/survivor care and support?*

**Response:**

A more unified multi-agency approach from disclosure to judicial outcomes.  
Support throughout the process from point of contact.

Specialised counselling such as NEXUS services.

Practical assistance & advice, e.g. housing, benefits.

Information available & accessible on sexually transmitted diseases, HIV & pregnancy.

Family education & support. Currently there is no counselling provision for one-to-one counselling for those experiencing secondary traumatisation, e.g. partners, siblings. There is a need to develop age specific support services, e.g. child/adolescent. NEXUS currently provide support groups but these are limited due to funding restrictions.

**Q.26** *Is there a need to develop different services for different cohorts of victim/survivors, for example, due to gender, age or sexual orientation?*

**Response:** A definite 'YES' to this, services must fit the individual rather than the other way round. We need to ensure all individuals needs can be met where possible. There needs to be specific services for those with disabilities, namely the deaf who will require a translator in therapy sessions.

Adults, children & young people have varying and different needs therefore there should be a different strategy & approach for each, preferably multi-disciplinary. However, the issues are the same for all of these groups.

**Q.27** *How can services provided by HSS Trusts and the PSNI be better co-ordinated with those services provided by voluntary sector organisations to achieve the best outcomes for victims/survivors?*

**Response:**

An adoption of an overarching strategy feeding down into work which is ongoing at local/community level. After the initial mapping exercise to determine what services are available, there should be an avoidance of duplication of services.

Clients with severe mental health problems should be seen by HSS Trusts as they are better equipped and resourced to deal with this. The voluntary sector service providers could provide the bulk of counselling to both men & women who have suffered sexual violence but do not present with severe mental health disorders.

There needs to be a clear referral system in place between both sectors.

There is a need for regular specific forums, joint training & sharing of information/experiences.

Protocol/policies need to be put in place that create cohesion in their approach & an environment that lends itself to more communication & greater freedom of information.

**Q.28** *Which organisations could benefit victims/survivors by having clear protocols for joint working?*

**Response:**

PSNI, NEXUS, Women's Aid, Victim Support, Rainbow, PBNI, Samaritans, GPs, Psychiatry/Mental Health Departments, Compensation Agency.

**Q.29** *What are the advantages of developing a uniform model of assessment (to complement the DHSSPS model) for assessing the risks of young people who present with sexually harmful behaviour?*

**Response:**

Early involvement in deciding and developing strategies is paramount for all specific working agencies/groups. It would be advantageous to develop a model providing it was drawn up and agreed by all services involved. However, the advantages would definitely have to be for the client and not necessarily the service providers.

When developed it would ensure that the appropriate referral is made to the most suited agency in order that the young person receives the help that is needed at the earliest opportunity to dissuade possible sexual deviation in the future.

**Q.30** *Taking account of existing help-line facilities already in place, is a 24 hr sexual violence regional help-line needed in Northern Ireland?*

**Response:**

Yes strongly recommend, possibly through SARC, perhaps a six month trial initially. This would confirm if this facility is really needed.

Staff would need specific training.

**Q.31** *What will be the most effective ways of increasing awareness about services that are available?*

**Response:**

Information packages available to all health care facilities.

Media campaigns (seasonal renewals), all public venues, conferences, education, CAB & Directory of Enquiries. Use of IT etc.

***Q.32 To which services should regional standards apply and how should standards be monitored?***

***Response:***

To all relevant/specific parties, Medical, PSNI, PBNI, Counselling.

A regulatory body who could monitor annually through a format of quality assurance/auditing etc.

***Q.33 What (a) skills and training and (b) support, do people working directly with victims/survivors of sexual violence need?***

***Response:***

Ongoing update on all services available & current legislation.

Continual updated research and learning.

***Q.34 How best could a Training Strategy feed into existing multi-disciplinary training plans in statutory and voluntary sector agencies?***

***Response:***

The strategy must create a greater cohesion in the overall approach to what meets the emotional needs of the survivor.

Need to identify more specific training related to the issue.

Government funding to provide training and to enable attendance.

***Q.35 Should training about the nature, incidence, impact and response to sexual violence be incorporated into pre-qualification training for relevant health professionals?***

***Response:***

Yes, especially mental health professionals, GPs, midwives & psychiatrists. However, this should be followed up when staff specialise as all pre-qualification training is generic, suggest annual refresher training.

It is vital that professionals know how to respond, in particular to disclosure of sexual violence. Their reactions can be a major deciding factor in whether the victims seeks help or not.

**PART 5 - EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

***Q.36 Are the proposals in this document likely to have an adverse impact on equality of opportunity or on good relations with regard to the Section 75 categories of people described above? Please give details of any qualitative or quantitative evidence. If yes, please state how these adverse impacts could be reduced or alleviated in the proposals.***

***Response:***

No, the proposals are wide reaching and will address the needs of all.

***Q.37 If you feel the adverse impacts cannot be alleviated within the current proposed actions, please suggest alternative actions that could be considered to reduce the adverse impact.***

***Response:***

***Q.38 Have the needs of the Section 75 categories of people been fully addressed in the proposals? If not, please provide details.***

***Response:***

Therapy For The Disabled: This is an area that needs to be addressed. NEXUS does not have the resources to provide this kind of specialised intervention, but is aware that there is a real need. Interpreters for the deaf need to be trained in counselling skills.

Ethnic Minorities: Sexual violence affects us all, irrespective of whom we are or where we come from. As Northern Ireland is emerging as a Multi-Cultural society, we also need to encourage people from different ethnic backgrounds to train as counsellors and support workers in this field.

***Additional Comments (please refer to Questions if continuation from above)***

The NEXUS Institute is the largest province-wide agency providing specialised counselling to adult survivors of sexual abuse for over 20 years. NEXUS has lobbied for many years for a Northern Ireland Strategy on sexual abuse and thus welcomes this draft document.

As the only organisation that provides short & long-term counselling to hundreds of adult male & female survivors of sexual violence & with an impressive track record in this field, we hope that this strategy, when implemented, will provide us with sufficient core funding to continue our service provision. NEXUS, like most voluntary agencies, has been struggling in an uncertain funding climate to continue to provide quality and professional counselling to cope with ever increasing waiting lists. The added pressure of continuously raising funds in addition to providing therapeutic intervention can create a stressful work environment.

Although we have tried to honestly answer most of the questions that the draft consultation poses, there are, nonetheless, some areas that the strategy does not address.

**Family Therapy:** Although our specialised intervention centres on the victim, we at NEXUS believe that there is a huge gap in services with regard to Family Therapy. Individuals are part of a family and in many cases, the family has often experienced the secondary trauma of sexual violence. There is little or nothing in the way of family therapy to meet this gap. NEXUS regularly receive requests from families who are quite clearly suffering and in need of help, even though we provide Family Education & Support Groups on an occasional basis due to restricted funding, this is an area which needs to be addressed.

**Measuring Outcomes:** NEXUS feel it is essential that a regulatory body is set up within the counselling field, especially for those counsellors/organisations who work with survivors of sexual violence. In addition there should be a uniformed method of measuring outcomes, e.g. NEXUS use a 3-tiered monitoring & evaluation system or the use of psychometric tests favoured by the statutory services.

**Referral Pathways:** Referral pathways to accessing counselling are varied and often confusing across Northern Ireland and across the voluntary/statutory services. NEXUS would like to see clear & uniform regional referral pathways, e.g. those clients who have severe mental health problems should be retained by the psychosexual unit or CMHT as they have access to a wide range of psychiatric resources. Referral to agencies like NEXUS should be self-referral.

NEXUS hopes that sexual violence will be a priority for government action & that the strategy will:-

Lead to the availability & equity of access to services for survivors.

The process by which sexual offenders are investigated & tried is reviewed.

That an intensive & hard hitting campaign to raise awareness & provide preventative action to a society imbued with myth & stigma around sexual violence.

THE NEXUS INSTITUTE

RE: "HIDDEN CRIMES SECRET PAIN"

RE: INTRODUCTION:

1.25 As an agency that specialises in providing counselling to adult survivors of sexual abuse, we provide over 300 sessions per week across the province and have a further 250+ individuals on our waiting list. We believe that this is just the tip of the iceberg, and that the sensitive nature of sexual violence and the fact that so many perpetrators of this are known to the victim or are family members prevents many people from coming forward and disclosing.

1.26 Once again, only a small percentage of our clients actually prosecute. Some clients have prosecuted only for the PPS to decide not to take the case forward. Again, shame and the idea of exposing a family member is too much to expect from a client and of course proving historical abuse cases can be challenging.

1.45 Nexus warmly welcomes a study on the extent and severity of sexual abuse. For years, NEXUS has been struggling to cope with huge waiting lists and yet we know that abuse is a lot more prevalent than we think. A major study will give credence and support to our claims and give an accurate picture of what we already know. It will also highlight the need for government action.

NEXUS believes that preventative and early action on sexual violence must be a priority. Fostering a change in public attitudes towards sexual violence is long overdue. Sexual violence is an uncomfortable issue for a lot of people who would prefer not to discuss it, but we must endeavour to raise awareness and educate people, stimulate debate and discussion and empower the public to adopt a sense of responsibility in tackling this issue and thus break the cycle.

Appendix 1 Q. 2 continued:

There should be a clear message for children that they are not always safe in their own homes.

Appendix 2 Q 19 continued:

For convicted sex offenders these programmes need to be mandatory and for those potential abusers, there needs to be an awareness that help is at hand without fear of reprisal. We feel that everyone has a responsibility as parents and citizens to be watchful for displays of sexually harmful behaviour in young people. If we recognise this, then we have a duty to confront this situation and guide the young person into seeking help with programmes such as those offered by Stop it Now. There needs to be more support available to young [people who display sexually harmful behaviour. They do not need our derision, they need our help sooner rather than later.

There needs to be a clear message:-

- You cannot continue to abuse.
- It will not be tolerated.
- You will be caught.

This needs to be backed up with funding for agencies that are given this responsibility.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR COMMENTS**

Produced by:  
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety,  
Castle Buildings, Belfast BT4 3SQ

Telephone (028) 9052 0271

Text phone: (028) 9052 7668

[www.dhsspsni.gov.uk](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk)

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