



Community Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland
'Building Safer, Shared and Confident Communities'

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1.0 Introduction WCRP

1.1 WCRP Vision

“Our vision is of communities where women are recognised and valued as equal partners working towards a future based upon shared values of equality, participation and inclusion.”

1.2 WCRP Mission Statement

“To work in partnership to support and strengthen the voice of community based women’s organisations”

1.3 Background

The Women's Centres' Regional Partnership (WCRP) is a partnership of four lead regional women's organisations linking with fourteen frontline women's organisations across Northern Ireland to provide support and services to women living in disadvantaged areas.

1.4 The four key lead partners of the Partnership are the Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA), Women's Support Network (WSN), Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) and The Women's Centre, Derry. The fourteen Women's Centres are spread across Northern Ireland with seven from the Greater Belfast and Lisburn area, four in the North West and three in Dungannon, Magherafelt and Craigavon. Together the WCRP seeks to develop and strengthen a regional infrastructure which will support community based women's organisations across Northern Ireland.

1.5 There are four aims to the Partnership encouraging collaborative and strategic work on key areas such as influencing policy, identifying needs and gaps in relation to training, education and childcare services, improving communication on good practice and lessons learnt across the sector, sourcing potential sources of funding, etc.

1.6 The Women’s sector has played a key role in building and promoting, social, economic and political change in Northern Ireland. A review

carried out in 2001 highlighted that through its infrastructure, comprising regional support organisations, networks, women's centres and local groups engaged in a diverse range of activities, it has made a valuable contribution to promoting equality, social and economic inclusion, peace-building, and the development of the voluntary sector and volunteering¹ of funding, etc.

1.7 The WCRP tackles women's inequality and disadvantage and supports community development in the most marginalised and disadvantaged communities and works for policy change. The principles of interdependence, co-operation, participation, representation and good practice will be at the heart of the partnership's work.

1.8 The WCRP welcomes the opportunity to comment on the *New Community Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland* consultation.

¹ Where to from Here: A New Paradigm for the Women's Sector in Northern Ireland. NIVT, 2001.

Response to Consultation

2.0 Safer Communities

2.1 Crime in Northern Ireland

The WCRP recognises that Northern Ireland is a 'comparatively safe place to live' however we don't believe that people in Northern Ireland experience life on a comparative basis; they care about where they live not how it compares with other countries and regions so; the focus of the Strategy must be on addressing crime in Northern Ireland.

The Strategy states that: *'recorded crime and anti-social behaviour has been on a downward trend in Northern Ireland in recent years. We want to build on that success and continue to reduce levels of crime and anti-social behaviour over the longer term'*(2.1.1) yet later in the document the Strategy states: *'We will continue to work with partners including PSNI, Policing Board and Crimestoppers to encourage reporting particularly for those crimes which are underreported'*(4.4.2).

The WCRP would like to draw the Department's attention to the difficulty that lies within these two statements. It is clear that; 'Recorded crime' must first be reported; but if the aim of the Department is to measure success by a reduction in recorded crime; how can the Department then expect its Partners to encourage more reporting if success is to be measured by a decrease in recorded crime?

2.2 Early Interventions for Long Term Crime Reduction

The WCRP agrees that Early Intervention to reduce the risk factors that lead to offending is very important and should not be limited to an individual's early years. Addressing the underlying causes and problems such as low education accomplishment, poverty, social class and cultures and lack of community activities needs to be considered. Enforcement measures as

proven in other parts of the UK do not necessarily lead to a reduction in crime and anti-social behaviour².

Specific risk factors require the Department of Justice to work across a range of Departments and agencies to share learning and resources. The women's centres we represent for example; are the driving force behind many early intervention strategies, their reviews and evaluations are not assessed by the Department of Justice, PSNI etc to take account of how many young people their interventions have succeeded in keeping 'off the streets' and out of trouble.

2.2.1 Early Years

The WCRP is keen to state that whilst we agree that Early Intervention is not limited to Early Years; the importance of resourcing Early Years should not be underestimated. The Department of Justice must take a leadership role in emphasising to the Executive and other Departments; the short sighted nature of making budget cuts to Sure Start and Early Years.

The DE Early Years (0-6) Strategy Evidence Based Paper³ clearly stated that "Early childhood policies should be concerned not only with education and care services but also linked to issues of women's employment, child development, child poverty, health and social welfare."⁴ The role of women and mothers however, was ignored in their draft Early Years (0-6) Strategy. WCRP holds the view that any effective Strategy; including a *New Community Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland* that aims to address early years cannot be gender neutral.

In a period of recession and budget cuts we must be mindful of the research evidence which exists to show the historic under-funding of education in Northern Ireland, which is particularly stark in relation to early years and

² Burney, E. (2005) Making People behave; Anti-social behaviour, politics and policy. The Creation and Enforcement of Anti-Social Behaviour Policy, Cummomption, Willan Publishing

³ Evidence Paper 6.2.6

⁴ DE(2010) Early Years (0-6) Strategy Evidence Based Paper, pg 63

primary education. Recent research undertaken by Save the Children⁵ highlighted that in Northern Ireland the expenditure per child in the early years (£630 pa) was less than a third of that for children in GB (around £2,000). Not only is there lower expenditure on pre-school education, but also on Sure Start, with spend of £80 per child of that age in Northern Ireland, compared with £600 in England. This difference may reflect the more limited roll out of Sure Start in NI compared to England. The WCRP would like the Department of Justice when supporting early years and early stage intervention approaches to remember that we must still work to redress the historic underinvestment in Early Years in NI.

2.2.2 Early Years Contribution to Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

The WCRP believes that Early Years are crucial in laying the foundations for building a shared society after a period of deep conflict. Recent strategies and policy development by the Executive do not appear to reflect this. The Executive's *Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration* recently out for public consultation contained no reference to the significance of early years education in building shared communities. DE was also consulting on its Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education Policy (CRED) yet made no links to their 'Early Years (0-6) Strategy'.

The WCRP calls on the Department of Justice *New Community Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland* to include actions which acknowledge the crucial importance of embedding the principles of equality and diversity across the early years and the potential impact that this work will have on creating safer communities with fewer incidents of sectarianism and hate crimes.

2.2.3 Good Practice

The WCRP would like to draw the Department's attention to good practice that already exists. Women's Aid, for example, delivers; age appropriate preventative training programmes; social guardian training; 'Helping Hands' programme and more. The Department of Justice could take a lead role in

⁵ Save the Children (2009) *A Child's Portion: An Analysis of Public Expenditure on Children in the UK*. NI Briefing, Belfast: Save the Children.

encouraging other Departments such as DE and DEL to resource this training and incorporate such education into mainstream curriculum.

‘Safer Cities’ is a programme focused on Ecuador, Egypt, India, Papua New Guinea and Rwanda and inspired by a UN Women initiative that has some interesting suggestions⁶ the Department of Justice could consider in a *New Community Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland*

The ‘Safer Cities’ programme is based on support from local authorities, the engagement of civil society groups and partnerships with groups working on these issues. Measures include stronger laws and policies against violence in public spaces; training for urban planners, grass roots women’s groups and police; special audits to identify unsafe areas; mass media campaigns on ‘zero tolerance’ for violence against women; activities to engage local communities, men and adolescents of both sexes; and reviews of public sector budgets so adequate resources are spent on making public areas safe for women and girls.

2.3 Tackling Domestic Burglary

The WCRP are pleased that the Department of Justice will continue to consider how to best ‘*stabilise and reverse recent increases in domestic burglary*’ (2.4.6). The WCRP would recommend that in addition to new initiatives; more effective promotion of current available support such as; the PSNI’s Quick-Check scheme which aims to prevent bogus callers by providing a 24-hour telephone service allowing householders the opportunity to verify the identity of anyone calling at their door; such a scheme can only be effective if the general public are aware of it and know the number.

2.4 Rural Crime

The WCRP agrees that a *New Community Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland* ‘needs to take account of the specific needs of rural communities across Northern Ireland’

⁶ <http://www.unhabitat.org/content.asp?cid=1433&catid=375&typeid=24&subMenuId=0>

The closure of rural police stations and the reduction in police resources presents huge difficulties for people living in rural and remote areas. The Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB) approved the PSNI *Estate Strategy* in May 2005 and since then 21 police stations, 20 in rural regions on the station review list have been closed.⁷ Rurality presents additional problems such as; distance, isolation, lack of services, and smaller populations. This has an impact on equity and social justice in rural areas. In times of difficulty, and reduced funding, it is easy to make a case for addressing the needs of the greatest number in a community or society and having them receive greatest attention. This focus may, however, leave the needs of the marginalised and disadvantaged even more excluded than usual.

A *New Community Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland* needs to challenge age-old presumptions about the nature of rurality and crime. Myths that still hold firm in the minds of the public, politicians, policy-makers and media of the stereotypical picture of rural communities; the vision of a homogeneous, tightly-knit, caring community can still persist in our collective consciousness.⁸

The WCRP welcomes the Department of Justice's engagement with DARD's development of a Rural White Paper Action Plan. The Draft Action Plan is currently also out for consultation however it only contains two contributions from the Department of Justice out of the ninety in total and the first (no 7 p.15) is simply an aspiration rather than an action. The WCRP would like to see more discernable actions contained both in the *New Community Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland* and in the Rural White Paper Action Plan that will actually deliver safer communities for rural dwellers.

2.5 Tackling Domestic and Sexual Violence

The WCRP welcomes the recognition in *New Community Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland* that '*Domestic Violence is a crime and is not acceptable in any circumstances*' (2.6.1)

⁷ PSNI (1995) Estate Strategy

⁸ 'Rural Issues'; Ciaran Lynch, Director of Rural Development at the Tipperary Institute

The WCRP welcomes 'Tackling Violence at Home', the new government strategy to address domestic violence and abuse; we are heartened to see our government recognising the extent and impact of domestic violence in Northern Ireland. 'Tackling Violence at Home' places women and children squarely at the heart of government measures. It is positive to see that the Department recognises the importance of preventing domestic violence as well as placing priority on accessible support for victims.

The WCRP expresses our concern that although the Tackling Violence at Home' strategy and *New Community Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland* have positive aims; there are no long term identified resources and disappointingly vague implementation plans. While *New Community Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland* states that the Department of Justice intends to; '*work in partnership with DHSSPS and other agencies to develop a single strategy by 2013*' (2.6.3), it is unclear how this co-ordination will actually happen. The WCRP would like to see other Departments named as partners and not simply DHSSPS Domestic and sexual violence is a cross departmental issue.

The WCRP calls for more emphasis and resources on family support; often the government resource services for women with little recognition of the support required for women with children. In relation to rural areas; rural women are often further disadvantaged due to isolation and lack of access to service provision. Re-homing of vulnerable women and families poses an additional problem for rural women, as emergency social housing is more often located in urban areas.

3.0 Confident Communities

3.1 Empowering Communities

The *New Community Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland* states that:

'We will support efforts to build the capacity of local communities to effectively identify and address local priorities around crime and anti social behaviour'
(4.3.2)

The WCRP is comprised of 13 Women's Centres which together with the wider Women's sector have played a key role in building and promoting, social, economic and political change in Northern Ireland. A review carried out in 2001 highlighted that through its infrastructure, comprising regional support organisations, networks, women's centres and local groups engaged in a diverse range of activities, it has made a valuable contribution to promoting equality, social and economic inclusion, peace-building, and the development of the voluntary sector and volunteering⁹.

Women's Centres are ideally placed to help 'build the capacity of local communities'. They provide a safe place in communities and offer independent support and sign posting services; they must be engaged, recognised and resourced to support this objective.

3.2 Encouraging the Reporting of Crime and Anti Social Behaviour

The WCRP welcomes the aim to '*encourage reporting, particularly for those crime types which are underreported*' (4.2.2). We would urge the Department to expand on this. Reporting is only the first step to achieving justice;

⁹ Where to from Here: A New Paradigm for the Women's Sector in Northern Ireland. NIVT, 2001.

energies and resources targeted solely on this first step may impact on the long term achievement of justice and thus discourage the reporting of crime. Those who report incidents of crime and anti-social behaviour must see tangible actions as a result if community confidence in the justice agencies which serve them is to be achieved.

3.3 Fear of Crime

The WCRP believes that the Department of Justice must include measures and actions within *New Community Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland* for addressing the perceptions of safety and fear of crime.

The fear of crime is a significant factor in how safe people feel in their communities. Fear of crime is a prevalent issue today. Many people in Northern Ireland express anxiety and fear about crime and about being victimised. The level of fear that a person holds depends on many factors: gender, age, past experiences with crime, where someone lives, sexual orientation and their ethnicity. All of these factors have an impact on fear levels.

The links between social exclusion and the incidence of crime in deprived communities and the negative consequences especially for older people are well documented. Gender has been found to be the strongest predictor of fear. Women have a much greater fear of crime than men. Women's fear comes mostly from their vulnerability to sexual aggression: women are ten times more likely to be sexually assaulted than are men.¹⁰

A New Community Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland must acknowledge the Department of Justice's role and responsibility for diminishing the fear of crime as part of increasing community safety as well as reducing actual crime.

¹⁰ Crowell, N & Burgess A (eds.) 1996, *Understanding Violence Against Women*

4.0 Delivering in Partnership

4.1 The role of the voluntary and community sector

The WCRP are pleased to note that the *New Community Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland* acknowledges that *'the voluntary and community sector already plays an important role in delivering a range of services and support to citizens, including those which help reduce crime and anti-social behaviour and those that help victims and witnesses of crime'* (5.4.1). In this respect the Department of Justice are ahead of most of the other Executive Departments.

It is true that strong partnerships already exist on a number of fronts however, the WCRP argues that these need to be coordinated and delivered in an; equitable, integrated and strategic fashion and must be adequately resourced. In a climate of reduced available funding it is often the voluntary and community sector that is impacted first which; will inevitably lead to a reduced capacity to support the work of the Department of Justice unless resourced directly to do so.

The expertise and good practice evident in the community voluntary sector needs to be harnessed at planning stages within communities. The DoJ and the new partnership developments must establish a transparent mechanism for actively engaging with the voluntary and community sector.

4.2 Resources

The WCRP believes that a best value focus should not mean simply focus on reduction of costs and overheads but how to deliver the best quality service and outcomes for local people.

The WCRP would like to express our concern over the use and interpretation of the phrase ‘innovative approaches’. Whilst the WCRP acknowledges the need for innovation in certain instances, we would ask the Department to take care not to under-resource ‘tried and tested’ programmes in favour of new ones; we would like the Department to be cognisant of innovative approaches currently in action in various parts of Northern Ireland that could be rolled out in an equitable fashion across Northern Ireland.

The Department must be careful when ‘*targeting resources at areas of greatest need and where they will have greatest impact*’ that this is not done by a numerical headcount, thus concentrating resources in cities and large towns further marginalizing those already most isolated and vulnerable. The WCRP would like clarification on how ‘*greatest need*’ will be determined as clear and transparent mechanisms will be essential for success and equity across the region.

4.3 Measuring Success

The WCRP argues that measuring success; monitoring and evaluating the Strategy must include consumers. The Department of Justice must establish a transparent mechanism for actively engaging with the public.

Regarding effective consultation it is essential that there are clear regulations on what this should entail. Findings from consultations should be recorded effectively; detail concerns and how they have been addressed or, how the Department proposes to address them. Any consultative engagement process must take account of section 75 groups and good relations. The WCRP argues that any consultation group should be gender balanced (taking account of CEDAW¹¹ and UN Security Resolution 1325¹²), and reflect the multiplicity of society in their locality.

¹¹ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations>

¹² <http://www.peacewomen.org/un/sc/1325.html> UNSC 1325 emphasises the distinct position of women in conflict and post conflict situations. It calls on member states to act in several areas, including the promotion of women in decision making institutions

Conclusion

The WCRP would like to commend the Department of Justice on the production of *New Community Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland* for consultation and their willingness to show leadership and direction to the Executive and its Departments to help achieve a fair, just and safer community.

We have drawn your attention to our specific issues and concerns that we have with some of the detail of the *New Community Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland* consultation document and await your response to these with interest.