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**Northern Ireland
Rural Women's Network**

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Rural Women's Network (NIRWN's)

Response To

Local Partnership Working on Policing & Community Safety: A Consultation Paper

Department of Justice

Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN)

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) is a regional network established to articulate the voices of women in rural areas. It is jointly funded by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and the Department for Social Development (DSD).

1.2 NIRWN has six key objectives:

- Increasing the voice of rural women through giving them a voice at Policy level
- Playing an advocacy and lobbying role on behalf of rural women
- Capacity Building and Group Development for rural women
- Encouraging women in decision-making and providing representation for rural women
- Information and networking opportunities for rural women
- Working within the Women's Centres Regional Partnership to give a voice to rural women's centres

1.3 NIRWN welcomes the opportunity to comment on: 'Local Partnership Working on Policing & Community Safety: A Consultation Paper'. Our comments in relation to specific issues are set out below.

2.0 Response to Consultation

2.1 Do you agree that model two is the best option?

NIRWN is of the view that it is impossible to agree that Model 2 is the best option proposed for the new Partnership as the consultation document does not provide a similar level of detail for Models 1 and 3.

NIRWN feels that although more detail is provided for Model 2 it is still unclear whether the new Partnerships report in the first instance to the local Council structure or to the Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB) or the Department of Justice (DoJ). This requires clarification.

2.2 Do you agree that the new Partnerships should be called Crime Reduction Partnerships or do you have a suggestion for a different title?

NIRWN believes that CRP's does not, as a title, reflect the fact that Partnerships are local, rather than regional structures and would prefer a title which reflects the local work.

NIRWN also believes that the work of the Partnerships should not be confined by Crime Reduction, as 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.¹

¹ Crowell, N &. Burgess A (eds.) 1996, Understanding Violence Against Women

The Patten Report ² envisaged that DPPs would exercise responsibility for community safety. It is interesting that the title of this consultation document 'Local Partnership Working on Policing & Community Safety: A Consultation Paper' highlights *community safety* but the new proposed name has interpreted community safety as very one dimensional - 'crime reduction'. Communities need to feel safer, not simply receive statistics on how crime has been reduced in their locality.

The new Partnerships, NIRWN argues, should reflect their locality and their responsibility for diminishing the fear of crime as part of increasing community safety as well as reducing actual crime.

2.3 How can the new Crime Reduction Partnerships encourage local communities to become involved? How should the public be consulted and engaged?

Regarding effective consultation it is essential that there are clear regulations on what this should entail. Consultation findings should detail concerns and how they have been addressed or, propose to be addressed. It should also demonstrate that the consultation process considers section 75 groups and good relations.

NIRWN would need assurances that any consultation process would actively seek to engage with all consumers and take account of the diversity of our population by ensuring that consultation groups/events/surveys etc. represent the multiplicity of Northern Irish citizens. Engagement must be meaningful; how will the Partnerships acquire knowledge on the different needs and requirements of rural and urban dwellers and the S75³ demographics of the area to ensure the voice of those most marginalised in our communities are heard and their needs provided for?

² The Patten Report, 1998, A new beginning for Policing in Northern Ireland, NIO

³ Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

NIRWN argues that any consultation group should be gender balanced (taking account of CEDAW⁴ and UN Security Resolution 1325⁵), and reflect the multiplicity of society in their locality.

While NIRWN would expect the new Partnerships to work with local media networks to present their work, remit etc and engage the public locally; we believe that the DoJ has a key role to play to engage with the regional media, to help create an awareness and education on the role the media has to help to address crime and the fear of crime. The media plays a key role in fuelling the fear of crime in Northern Ireland. The fact that the media extensively and disproportionately cover crime stories, leads people to believe that there is more crime than there actually is. The consequence inevitably is that, believing we experience unduly high levels of crime in Northern Ireland, leads to unduly high levels of fear.

In relation to the media NIRWN would welcome a commitment from the DoJ to support the new Partnerships through appropriate media coverage of their work and remit; particularly in the launch phase.

NIRWN believes it is imperative that for the new Partnership structures to be effective; monitoring and evaluation of their work and remit must include consumers. The DoJ and the new partnership structures must establish a transparent mechanism for actively engaging with the public. This process could begin by; drawing on best practice gleaned from DPPs who actively make concerted efforts to engage with the public and liaising with those organisations who have experience and success in accessing those most marginalised in Northern Ireland.

⁴ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations>

⁵ <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

2.4 How can it provide best value?

NIRWN 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 consultation document envisages new Partnership members being mainly drawn from the statutory sector, elected representatives, independent members and the third sector organisations. NIRWN believes this does create an issue when considering whether members should be paid. Statutory sector members, elected representatives and some third sector organisation representatives will be paid through their respective employers for their time spent engaging with the partnership. Consequently NIRWN argues that an equitable system of remunerating Partnership members who are independent or, are unpaid members of the third sector must be found. These Partnership members will be providing their time, expertise and representation for the benefit of the locality through the Partnership and this must be recognised.

2.5 We envisage the new Partnership members being mainly drawn, as now, from the statutory sector, elected representatives, independent members and third sector organisations. We would wish to afford flexibility to meet local needs there would be a uniformity of expectation and a set of minimum standards that all Partnerships would have to meet. Do you agree?

Historically female representation has always been poor in Northern Ireland. Just as career paths like construction and business are considered non-traditional routes for women; so participation in public and political life can equally be considered traditionally male preserves. While women's representation in public bodies, local authorities and political parties has increased in the last thirty years, women are still far from being on a par with men; in some areas the shortfall of female participation is considerably more

marked than others⁶. DETI's 2008 picture of *Women in Northern Ireland* provides the following detail:

- 33% of public appointments in Northern Ireland are held by women;
- On the 119 publicly appointed bodies in Northern Ireland, 23 Chair and Deputy Chair posts are held by women;
- Of the 108 members elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly in March 2007, 18 (17%) are women – we have one female MEP;
- 21% of local government councillors are women;
- 5 out of 26 District Councillors have a female Mayor / Chair as at July 2008⁷

Therefore the issue of appropriate gender representation needs to be integral to the membership of the new Partnerships. As with the consultation and engagement processes NIRWN would expect that any consultation group should be gender balanced (taking account of CEDAW⁸ and UN Security Resolution 1325⁹), and reflect the multiplicity of society in their locality.

Women comprise 51%¹⁰ of Northern Ireland's population and the new Partnerships should reflect this. NIRWN holds the view that the lack of gender parity that exists throughout Northern Irish society is a key factor in hindering the development of a new, shared future which the new Partnerships should be working towards helping achieve.

It is imperative that the Partnerships reflect grass-roots concerns and views. A bottom-up approach to inform response is required. It is important that there are opportunities to voice differing opinions.

NIRWN recognises and affirms the need for local Councils to have the flexibility to provide for and address local needs. We would state that the DoJ

⁶ Dr Helen Mc Laughlin, (2009) '*Women Living in Disadvantaged Communities: Barriers to Participation*'

⁷ DETI (2008) *Women in Northern Ireland*, p 22

⁸ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations>

⁹ <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

¹⁰ Census (2001)

needs to have mechanisms in place to ensure that rural people know who ultimately has final responsibility for their provision and to whom they need to take their concerns if they require their provision reviewed. It would be entirely unacceptable if individuals had their issues passed from Partnerships to local council to DoJ and even the PSNI; back and forth with no-one prepared to take responsibility. This becomes more complex with potential for difficulty when we consider the role of the Review of Public Administration and Community Planning. Rural people need to know who to approach regarding their Policing and Community Safety issues and who ultimately will take responsibility for addressing those issues on their behalf.

2.6 How do you want to hear back from the partnerships on how they are addressing your concerns?

Feedback from the Partnerships should be: regular, timely, issue specific and provided in an accessible format. The DoJ, while allowing for local council flexibility, have a responsibility to ensure that the quality of feedback across the Partnerships is equitable and the quality, content and delivery of feedback you can expect from your Partnership is not dependent on the local area in which you reside. The local councils will have a responsibility for integrating feedback mechanisms into existing and new local structures such as community planning.

How feedback from the Partnerships is conveyed should be directed by local people based on effective consultation. The Partnerships should aim to utilise all the media tools at their disposal; electronic, print, radio etc in accessible formats/language etc. ensuring no member of the locality is excluded from information and feedback on how the Partnerships are addressing their concerns.

2.7 Do you agree that the new Crime Reduction Partnerships should contribute towards meeting the local Council's equality duties, rather than having separate duties placed on them?

NIRWN believes that the new Partnerships, as structures linked to local councils to deliver for local peoples needs, should contribute towards achieving the local council's equality duties. For equality in Northern Ireland

to be achieved and maintained, it should be the responsibility of the whole community and most especially those designated to represent the community in structures such as these new Partnerships. An Equality Impact Assessment should be carried out to ensure that no one in our community is adversely affected by the proposed changes.