DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL ABUSE STRATEGY

2024–2031

Tackling Domestic and/or sexual abuse is
everyone's business

ACTION PLAN YEAR 1 - 3

Department of Health
An Roinn Sláinte
Männystrie O Poustie
www.health-ni.gov.uk

Department of Justice
An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
Männystrie O tha Laa
www.justice-ni.gov.uk

Introduction

This is an initial three year action plan to support delivery of the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2024-2031, which seeks to identify challenging yet realistic action across the five Pillars of the Strategy.

Where possible, each action has been costed, although it is acknowledged that in some cases initial scoping and preparatory work will need to be progressed in order to identify reliable resource implications. This initial action plan is intended to provide a strong foundation that future action plans will build on and progress. It will be reviewed at the mid and end points to take account of its impact and effectiveness; emerging issues; and to inform the development of subsequent action plans.

Interface with Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Action Plan

The actions set out in this action plan have been developed to meet the outcomes and key priority areas identified in relation to each pillar. However, we have also sought to reflect Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) principals in taking forward actions where that is appropriate.

Resource Considerations

A number of actions set out in this Action Plan will require additional resources, including funding to deliver them and, on that basis, may only be delivered if funding is secured or implemented at a pace that funding permits. Where additional resource is needed, this is identified in the Plan.

PILLAR 1: PARTNERSHIP

Driving change together through joint commitment, leadership and partnership working.

OUTCOME	KEY PRIORITY AREAS
A coordinated response to domestic and/or sexual abuse informed by victims' voices and community engagement.	Working collaboratively across all government Departments and with statutory, voluntary and community and faith organisations to tackle domestic and sexual abuse.
	Having effective governance structures underpinning the strategy's delivery with a performance framework to monitor outcomes and impact.
	Informing policy, legislation and service development with better quality data, research and shared learning.
	Having increased opportunities for victims' voices to be heard and ensuring the strategy's delivery is underpinned by intersectionality recognising that many people have multiple needs and face multiple barriers.

ACTIONS	LEAD	PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME	COST
1. Review existing governance structures to support the new strategy and to ensure appropriate alignment with interdependent strategies and work areas. Under this action, we will consider the potential to strengthen the role of the Local Domestic and Sexual Abuse Partnerships and maintain alignment with /complement EVAWG structures as appropriate.	DoJ DoH TEO	Other Government Departments, statutory agencies and voluntary and community sector organisations	Year 1	Cost TBC
2. Identify and agree funding priorities for the strategy.	DSA Strategy Oversight Board	N/A	Years 1–3	Cost neutral
3. Identify and implement mechanisms to enable engagement with those with lived experience, making effective use of those which already exist, including under the EVAWG Strategy as appropriate.	DoJ DOH TEO	Other Government Departments, statutory agencies and voluntary and community sector organisations	Year 1	Cost TBC

ACTIONS	LEAD	PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME	COST
4. Develop and maintain partnerships with the research community, taking account of opportunities for a collaborative approach through EVAWG structures as appropriate.	DoJ DoH TEO	QUB UU	Year 1–3	Cost TBC
5. Develop and manage a communications plan related to implementation of the strategy, taking account of interdependencies and alignment with EVAWG as appropriate.	DoJ DOH TEO	Other Government Department's Press Office	Year 1-3	Cost TBC
6. Examine how existing inter-agency review mechanisms (eg DHRs and parallel processes) operate, how they relate to each other and streamline as necessary.	DoJ DoH	SPPG PSNI SBNI	Year 1	Year 1 – cost neutral Year 2–3 – dependent on proposal suggested
7. Consider the impact of intersectionality, including barriers faced by specific groups. Identify and implement measures to address these, subject to funding, taking account of opportunity for collaborative work to support EVAWG outcomes as appropriate.	DoJ DoH TEO	Other Government Departments, statutory agencies and voluntary and community sector organisations	Year 1–3	Year 1 – cost neutral Year 2–3 – dependent on proposal suggested
8. Work to develop baseline data on the prevalence of domestic and sexual abuse, public awareness and the experience of victims through inclusion of questions in the revised Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey, taking account of opportunity for collaborative work to support EVAWG outcomes as appropriate.	DOJ DoH TEO	Other Government Departments	Year 1–3	Cost TBC

PILLAR 2: PREVENTION*

Preventing domestic and/or sexual abuse from happening by challenging the attitudes and behaviours that foster it and intervening early where possible to prevent it.

OUTCOME	KEY PRIORITY AREAS
The public is informed about the different types of domestic and/or sexual abuse and its impact on victims including children and young people.	Raising cross-sectoral and public awareness, so that those at risk of, or experiencing, domestic and sexual abuse, recognise it, its various forms and know that help and support is available.
	Preventing domestic and sexual abuse from happening by empowering people to safely challenge attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that foster domestic and sexual abuse.
Domestic and/or sexual abuse is identified and responded to earlier.	Building capacity among people working in frontline and public-facing roles to identify and respond effectively to domestic and/or sexual abuse, including in relation to children and young people, at the earliest opportunity. This includes learning from Domestic Homicide Reviews, improving practice to identify, support and safeguard.
	Supporting and encouraging employers in the public, private and other sectors to make workplaces safer by raising awareness of domestic and sexual abuse and promoting workplace policies with effective measures to support staff.

ACTIONS	LEAD	PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME	COST
1. Undertake an assessment of current training provision for statutory and front-line providers; develop consistent reporting structures; and identify and address any gaps in content, access and uptake.	DOJ DOH TEO	DfC DE EA CJOs	Year 1–3	Year 1 – cost neutral Year 2–3 – additional costs to be met by agencies
2. Continue to promote public awareness of DSA; how to report and access support – DAART NI website, leaflets, social media, conferences, Balmoral show, further runs of advertising etc. (subject to funding).	DoJ DoH	PSNI, Voluntary and community sector	Year 1–3	Cost TBC

ACTIONS	LEAD	PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME	COST
3. Establish an information portal/central repository for victims and survivors; parents and carers; professionals; voluntary and community organisations; and the general public, taking account of, and aligning with, parallel resources (such as My Justice Journey and EVAWG knowledge hub) to ensure inter-connectivity.	DOJ DOH TEO	DfC DE CJOs Voluntary and Community sector	Year 2	Cost neutral
4. Implement recommendations arising from the review of Routine Enquiry for Health Visitors and Midwifery.	DoH	PHA BHSCT Women's Aid	Year 2	Cost TBC.
5. Deliver capacity building measures including:				
(a) Produce and publish a Reflections booklet for Social Workers on Domestic and Sexual Abuse.	DoH	N/A	Year 1	Cost TBC
(b) Ensure that those working in Health and Social Care are supported to promote positive sexual health and to utilise patient contacts to identify patients at risk of harm.	DoH	N/A	Year 1–3	Cost TBC
(c) The JBO network to review site accommodation with a view to establishing if a safe place can be identified that could be used if a person suffering from domestic abuse needed a private space to access help from support organisations.	DfC	N/A	Year 1	Cost neutral
6. Produce and promote guidance for employers to enable them to fulfil the new statutory obligations under the Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022.	DfE	Labour Relations Agency	Year 2-3	Costs TBC

ACTIONS	LEAD	PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME	COST
7. Develop costed options to enhance measures to address abusive behaviour (outside of the judicial system) and take steps to support implementation, subject to funding.	DOJ	PBNI NIPS PSNI	Year 1–3.	Year 1 – cost neutral Year 2–3 – dependent on proposal suggested
8. Promotion of Domestic Violence and Abuse Disclosure Scheme (DVADS).	DOJ	PSNI	Year 1–3	Cost TBC, subject to available resources
9. Continued delivery of DHR arrangements to capture learning from domestic homicides.	DOJ DHR SOF	PSNI PBNI DOH HSCTs Voluntary and community sector	Year 1–3	£93K per annum
10. Introduce measures to improve DHR structures and processes to ensure the process is effective and robust.	DOJ	PSNI PBNI DOH HSCTs Voluntary and community sector	Year 1–3	Year 1 – cost neutral Year 2–3 – dependent on proposal suggested

ACTIONS	LEAD	PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME	COST
11. Conduct scoping exercise to determine how suicides could be brought within the scope of DHRs.	DOJ	PSNI PBNI DOH HSCTs Voluntary and community sector	Year 2–3	Scoping exercise cost neutral Cost of making operational TBC
12. Scope potential for professional qualification for social workers in domestic abuse, taking account of parallel, interdependent work in relation to EVAWG.	DoH	NISCC QUB UU	Year 2	Costs TBC
13. Explore the potential for the appointment of a Non-Executive Director on each Health and Social Care Trust Board for tackling and preventing domestic and sexual abuse and violence against women and girls.	DoH	HSCTs	Year 1	Costs TBC
14. Develop and implement a training programme on child (adolescent and adult) to parent violence to ensure that relevant frontline staff are sufficiently equipped with the right skills and knowledge to identify and respond to this form of domestic violence and abuse. This should also be extended to include their supervisors/managers.	DOH	SPPG	Year 3	Costs TBC

Measures to address abusive behaviours, under the Justice pillar are also relevant to Prevention.

PILLAR 3: CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

Preventing domestic and/or sexual abuse from happening and ensuring children and young people, who are victims, are seen and heard; and can access services and receive support, helping them to recover and taking account of their particular needs.

OUTCOME	KEY PRIORITY AREAS
An increase in the knowledge and skills of children and young people, and of supporting adults in their life, about forming healthy relationships, helping to prevent domestic and/or sexual abuse.	Supporting the education sector to build capacity, knowledge and skills to promote understanding about consent and healthy relationships and to teach about sensitive subjects such as domestic and sexual abuse, in an age appropriate and inclusive way, across schools and other youth settings, training facilities, Further Education Colleges and Universities.
	Improve understanding of domestic and/or sexual abuse and building capacity among parents, guardians and carers, supporting them to be able to confidently discuss the issue of healthy relationships with their children and young people.
Children and young people are supported, feel safe regardless of diversity of need, are guided into services quickly, and can access safe accommodation-based services.	Providing tailored, responsive and specialised support for children and young people in an age-appropriate manner, as well as wider family, to reduce the risk and impact of abuse; recover from trauma; understand their needs; and improve their health and well-being, including further implementation of the Gillen Review and consideration of a Barnahus-type model for Northern Ireland.
	Ensuring all children and young people can access sufficient accommodation, or housing support, that is safe and appropriate to their needs and circumstances or supporting them to remain in their home if they want to and it is safe to do so.
Children and young people feel confident to report domestic and/or sexual abuse, barriers to participating in the justice system are reduced and justice responses are effective.	Providing children and young people with accessible information and services to support engagement in the criminal justice process, in a way that ensures they feel protected and safe, including further implementation of the Gillen Review and consideration of a Barnahus-type model for Northern Ireland.

ACTIONS	LEAD	PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME	COST
1. Continue to deliver existing and introduce new measures and services recommended in the Gillen Review to improve the experience of child victims of sexual abuse; including: • Introduce children's SOLAs (subject to funding); • Support the Under 13 protocol and roll out permanently (subject to additional funding); • Scoping and development of options and costs for a Barnahus model for Northern Ireland; and • Ongoing development and launch (subject to funding) of arrangements to pilot pre-recorded cross-examination.	DOJ [U13 voluntary protocol is judge-led]	PSNI NICTS LCJO PPS DOH	Year 1 (subject to funding) Year 2–3 (subject to funding) Year 1–3 (subject to funding) Year 2	CSOLA - £140k TBC Year 1 - cost neutral (costs of implementing any agreed model will be determined) TBC
2. Consider the recommendations arising from the Safeguarding Board for NI, Equally Safeguarded report.	SBNI	N/A	Year 1	Cost - TBC
3. Continue to implement actions arising from the Online Safety Strategy to empower children and young people, parents/carers and those working with children and young people to recognise, prevent and respond to abusive behaviours online.	DOH	SBNI DE EA CCEA DfE DOJ DFC	Year 1–3	Cost neutral
4. Prepare detailed guidance for schools on Preventative Education.	DE	N/A	Year 1	TBC

ACTIONS	LEAD	PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME	COST
5. Ensure access to advocacy support for children and young people in the criminal justice system.	DOJ	PSNI Community and voluntary sector	Year 1–3	Cost TBC
6. Continue to hear and respond to children experiencing domestic abuse, as a strategic priority of the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland, through the delivery of the Domestic Violence and Abuse Committee's work plan.	SBNI	N/A	Year 1–3	Cost neutral
7. Promote knowledge, awareness and resources in relation to harmful sexual behaviour amongst front-line professionals.	SPPG	HSCTs	Year 1–3	Cost - TBC
8. Roll out Operation Encompass to non-statutory Pre School Education Providers (PSEP) and voluntary nurseries.	DE DoH	PSNI H&SCT EA	Year 3	Cost - TBC
9. Evaluate Operation Encompass Initiative.	DE	PSNI/EA	Year 1–2	Cost - TBC

PILLAR 4: SUPPORT AND PROVISION

Ensuring that all victims of domestic and/or sexual abuse can access tailored, responsive and specialised support and provision to recover and rebuild their lives.

OUTCOME	KEY PRIORITY AREAS
Victims are supported and feel safe regardless of diversity of need and are guided into services quickly.	Providing tailored, responsive and specialised support for victims, as well as wider families, to reduce the risk and impact of abuse; recover from trauma and improve health and well-being; and engage in the justice system in a way that ensures they feel protected and safe.
	Enabling services to better understand intersectional needs of individuals to ensure victims get the responses and support they need.
All victims of domestic abuse can access safe accommodation-based services.	Ensuring all victims can access accommodation, or housing support, that is safe and appropriate to their needs and circumstances.
	Supporting victims of domestic abuse to remain in their home if they want to and it is safe to do so.

ACTIONS	LEAD	PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME	COST
1. Oversee delivery of the current Advocacy Support Services.	DOJ	PSNI	Year 1–3	Cost - TBC
2. Monitor and oversee ongoing delivery of adult SOLA scheme.	DOJ	Victim Support NI PPS PSNI	Year 1–3	£195k plus £55,250 held by DoJ for recourse to Counsel
3. Implement Year 1 Actions of the Housing Executive's Domestic Abuse Action Plan.	DfC NIHE	While the Housing Executive is the lead partner the development and delivery of the Action Plan reflects the vision of Ending Homelessness Together and recognises that the Housing Executive will engage with a range of statutory and voluntary partners across a number of actions	Year 1 (NIHE Action plan May 2024 – March 2027)	The NIHE Action Plan will be delivered with existing resources and any costs will be included in budget bids submitted on behalf of the Housing Executive

ACTIONS	LEAD	PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME	COST
4. Consider the outcome of the MARAC review and identify and cost potential changes to the existing model for approval and implementation.	DOJ PSNI DOH	SPPG DE PBNI NIHE Voluntary and Community Sector	Year 1-3	Year 1 – cost neutral Year 2–3 – dependent on proposal suggested
5. Consider the findings of the IRIS, Advocacy Support and the DASS pilot evaluations to inform the future provision of advocacy in Northern Ireland.	DOJ DOH	PSNI	Year 1	Cost - TBC
6. Explore how more robust measures to improve protection for victims and survivors from unwanted contact from remand and sentenced prisoners who pose a risk of serious harm could be introduced.	NIPS	PSNI	Year 2	Cost neutral
7. Commissioner for Victims of Crime Office carry out Mapping of Services for Domestic and/or Sexual Abuse Victims – phase 1.	CVOCNI	N/A	Year 1	£30,000
8. Scope and provide support for the families of domestic homicide victims.	DOJ	AAFDA	Year 1-3	Cost - TBC
9. Provision of 24 hour DSA Helpline; and monitor and evaluate to inform future re-tendering exercise.	DfC DoJ DoH	N/A	Year 1 - 3	TBC
10. Enhance the quality of referrals and information sharing between PSNI and Social Services.	SPPG	PSNI	Year 1	Cost neutral
11. Undertake a phased roll-out of the Cadre approach to ABE interviews, subject to funding.	PSNI SPPG	HSCTs	Year 1-3	£1.2 million
12. Provide Housing related support to women at risk of Domestic Violence through the Supporting People Programme.	DfC	NIHE	Year 1-3	Year 1 – 5.2m Years 2&3 TBC

PILLAR 5: JUSTICE*

Ensuring justice responses are effective, supporting victims and holding individuals who are abusive to account, at the earliest opportunity.

OUTCOME	KEY PRIORITY AREAS
Victims feel confident to report domestic and/or sexual abuse, barriers to participating in the justice system are reduced and justice responses are effective.	Understanding better the factors contributing to high attrition levels (where a victim withdraws from criminal justice processes) and under-reporting in domestic and sexual abuse cases in order to improve these.
	Providing victims of domestic and/or sexual abuse with accessible information and services to support engagement in the criminal justice process, including continued implementation of the Gillen Review.
	Improving the efficiency of the justice system and how domestic and sexual abuse cases are dealt with in criminal, civil and family courts.
	Strengthening the police and criminal justice response to domestic and sexual abuse.
Individuals are held to account for their abusive behaviour and supported to change, with the risk of harm reduced and victim safety enhanced.	Supporting individuals to address and manage their abusive behaviours, sustain positive change and facilitate participation by a wider range of individuals.
	Working collaboratively to target the most prolific offenders, improving risk assessment and management.
	Providing integrated safety and support structures for victims where programmes to address abusive behaviours are undertaken.
	Improving protections for those at risk of abuse.

ACTIONS	LEAD	PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME	COST
1. Continue to take forward research to understand factors contributing to high attrition rates and under-reporting in domestic abuse and sexual offences.	DOJ	PSNI PPS NICTS ASG	To report on sexual offences strand by the end of 2024/25	No cost for sexual offences piece costs for DA TBC
2. Review options and cost a potential model for a revised Victim and Witness Needs Assessment Service and development of business case.	PPS PSNI Victim Support NI DOJ		Year 2 (subject to funding)	TBC

ACTIONS	LEAD	PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME	COST
3. In relation to the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021: (i) publish an annual training statement. (ii) prepare a statement on the operation of part 1 of the Act, covering the first three years of the domestic abuse offence. (ii) research the experience at court of witnesses (including witnesses who are children); and (iv) commission an independent report and make recommendations in relation to the operation of Part 1 of the Act.	DOJ	PSNI NICTS PPS CJINI	Year 1-3	£28,000 per year
4. Continue to deliver existing and introduce new measures recommended in the Gillen Review into serious sexual offences.	DOJ Victims Support Division	All CJO partners	ongoing	TBC
5. Take forward work to enhance the protections for victims of domestic abuse available to law enforcement and criminal justice agencies.	DOJ	PSNI NICTS PPS	Year 1-2	Cost TBC.
6. Consult on increasing the sentence involving the death or serious harm of a child and introduce primary legislation to make the change (subject to the outcome of consultation).	DOJ	LCJO PPS NICTS	Year 1 (consultation) Year 3 – (primary legislation)	Cost neutral
7. Introduce primary legislation in relation to “No Bill” entries to close any gaps in the law.	DOJ	LCJO PPS	Year 1	Cost neutral
8. Review the roll-out of the Domestic Abuse Legal Aid Waiver.	DOJ EAJD	LSA	Year 1-3	£12,500 per year, £37,500 in total

ACTIONS	LEAD	PARTNERS	TIMEFRAME	COST
9. Lay report before the Assembly in line with section 29 of the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 detailing action to be taken to protect victims from the financial burden of proceedings and to guard against legal aid being used to initiate proceedings to perpetrate further abuse.	DOJ EAJD	LSA NICTS DoJ CJJP	Year 1	TBC
10. Provide Domestic Abuse Contest Court prosecutor and additional prosecutor for Remote Evidence Centre (subject to funding)	PPS	N/A	Year 1	£26,000
11. Implement provision in the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (NI) 2021 to protect victims of domestic abuse from being cross-examined by perpetrators in person in family proceedings.	DoJ (Civil Justice Policy and NICTS)	LCJO Legal profession	Year 1	£24,000
12. Extension of provision for a Women's Support Worker for women in NIPS care who have disclosed to NIPS experience of domestic and/or sexual violence, abuse and exploitation (subject to funding).	DOJ	NIPS	Year 1	£55,000
13. To implement a Trauma Support Worker to deliver support services and counselling for women in NIPS care who have experienced domestic/and or sexual abuse in an intimate partner relationship.	DOJ	NIPS	Year 1	£20,000

*** Measures to address abusive behaviours, under this pillar are also relevant to the Prevention pillar.**



Department of
Health
An Roinn Sláinte
Männystrie O Poustie
www.health-ni.gov.uk



Department of
Justice
An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
Männystrie O tha Laa
www.justice-ni.gov.uk