

Women's Policy Group NI

Key Briefings for Ministers: Justice Minister

6th February 2024

Introduction

The Women's Policy Group (WPG) is a group of policy experts and practitioners who advocate collectively for women and girls by promoting gender equality through an intersectional feminist lens. We challenge systemic injustice and discrimination affecting women and girls by informing society and influencing policy and law. Our work is informed by women and girls' lived experiences and rooted in international human rights law.

There are a number of issues that we have spent several years lobbying for and working towards, that could not be progressed because of the absence of government. Now that the Assembly has returned, we would like to outline our key priorities to every Minister, explain why these issues are important, and highlight what can be achieved if we begin early and focus on the long-term benefits of these actions.

Policy Issues: Outstanding Gillen Review recommendations, Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy, Hate Crime legislation and Family Courts

- **There are a number of outstanding Gillen recommendations that need legislation**
- **The Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy needs to be funded and implemented**
- **Hate Crime Legislation**
- **A review into the operations and procedures of the Family Courts in Northern Ireland needs to take place to ascertain what issues are arising and what can be improved**

Why are these measures important?

There are a number of key Gillen recommendations that we want to see progressed urgently. Priority should be placed on the implementation of recommendations relating to education for juries and reform of the “reasonable belief” clause, to take account of a failure to take any steps to ascertain whether the complainant consented.

The Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy needs to be implemented and fully funded. During the period with no government, and as a result of budgetary restrictions, a number of cuts were made to key services that enable such a strategy to be realised. These need to be, at the very least, reversed. A strategy without appropriate funding is not going to operate fully.

Hate Crime legislation has been consulted on a number of times, dating back to Judge Murrin’s Hate Crime Review, and it is time to pass meaningful legislation. This new legislation should include misogyny as a motivator of hate crime.

For some time, there have been concerns about some practices in place at Family Courts in Northern Ireland that are incompatible with some of the improvements made recently in the criminal courts and that may need to be examined more critically. A review is overdue into this area that is hard to examine from outside the Justice system.

What are we asking for?

- A commitment to bring legislation on the education of juries and on the “reasonable belief” clause, as recommended by Judge Gillen
- A workable funding package to implement the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy
- Hate Crime legislation that includes misogyny as a motivator of hate crime
- A review into the operations and procedures of Family Courts in Northern Ireland

Further information

If you have any questions or queries regarding this briefing, please contact:

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