

Women's Policy Group NI

Key Briefings for Ministers: First Minister and Deputy First 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: Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG) and a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland

- **We have a draft VAWG Strategy that is ready for sign-off but needs appropriate funding allocations to ensure its full implementation. This work must be a priority for the new Executive and for The Executive Office (TEO) as a whole.**
- **We need a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, particularly in the context of the U.K.'s exit from the European Union. Significant work has already been carried out on creating a draft Bill of Rights during the last mandate. This needs to be urgently completed and signed off.**

Why are these measures important?

Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG) is at epidemic levels in Northern Ireland and there has been little improvement over the years. Excellent work was carried out by TEO between 2022-23

to produce a draft EVAWG Strategy that has now been fully consulted on, has additional research to solidify the recommendations, and that needs both sign-off and, particularly, funding to make it a reality. Northern Ireland remains the only jurisdiction on these islands without such a strategy, a reality borne out by our dismal statistics on VAWG, and to approve one without the requisite funding would be to make a meaningless gesture rather than the concerted piece of work that the sector stands ready to do should the funding be made available.

Northern Ireland has never seen the fulfilment of the promises of the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement in a number of areas; notably we still do not have a Bill of Rights. This is the time to codify the rights of all citizens, to protect them from erosion and to enjoy their full realisation and expression. Work has been carried out on this in the last mandate, and it should not take much to complete this work. Championed by our First and Deputy First Ministers, a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland could benefit all citizens.

What are we asking for?

- Urgent sign-off and adequate funding for the draft EVAWG Strategy
- Complete work and sign-off on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland

Further information

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

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