

**Men's Alliance Northern Ireland
Consultation Response to:
Northern Ireland Housing Executive
Draft Supporting People Strategic Intent 2026–2031**

INTRODUCTION

Men's Alliance Northern Ireland

[Men's Alliance \(NI\)](#) supports male victims and survivors of domestic abuse. We provide support for their entire journey to over 2000 men who have experienced domestic abuse in Northern Ireland, providing them with 1-2-1 and peer support, signposting to services, and help with Legal issues and Social Services. We also advocate on behalf of male victims and survivors, raising awareness of their experiences, the challenges they can encounter when seeking help and the lack of Support Services available to them.

Draft Supporting People Strategic Intent 2026–2031

[The Supporting People \(SP\) Programme](#) promotes independent living and prevents homelessness by providing services across four thematic areas: Homelessness, Disability & Mental Health, Young People & Older People.

[The Draft Strategic Intent](#) provides a framework to prioritise the work of the SP programme over the next five years, it includes four strategic aims:

- Closing the Gap Between Service Need and Supply;
- Improved Outcomes for Service Users;
- Drive Financial Efficiency and Agility; and
- Collaborate with Partners to Improve Programme Impacts.

The Supporting People Modernisation project (SPM) 2025 to 2027 is the primary mechanism to deliver the strategic aims and priorities in the short to medium term. The SPM will deliver a set of evidence-based improvement recommendations and operational efficiencies to provide better outcomes and improved lives for service users.

RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT SP STRATEGIC INTENT

Men's Alliance welcomes the opportunity to respond to the NI Housing Executive's Draft Supporting People Strategic Intent (2026–2031). The Supporting People (SP) programme plays a pivotal role in providing housing-related support to vulnerable individuals in Northern Ireland, including people at risk of homelessness due to domestic abuse.

We also welcome that the NIHE are carrying out a programme of modernisation actions to implement evidence-based improvement recommendations and operational efficiencies across the SP Programme.

It is our sincere hope that this modernisation process will lead to improved support for male victims of domestic and sexual abuse (with or without children) seeking service provision and support from the SP programme.

The SP Programme does not currently provide specialist domestic abuse services, such as refuge, floating support and safe accommodation options for men. Annually, approximately 15% of individuals or households seeking support from NIHE due to domestic abuse are male.¹

The proportion of male victims currently seeking support from NIHE is significantly lower than the estimated proportion of victims of domestic abuse in NI who are male.² In our experience many male victims do not seek help from NIHE because they do not believe help is available to them.

Strategic Needs Assessment

We note that the delivery of the Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA) is identified as '*the key priority*', as it will inform future SP Programme priorities and the potential reprofiling of services through Stage 3

The purpose of conducting this SNA is to provide a robust evidence base of current and projected housing-related support needs at local and thematic levels.

¹ [NIHE Domestic Abuse Action Plan 2024](#), page 12.

² See PSNI Data on page 4

Men's Alliance and other advocates for male victims stand ready to work with NIHE to provide robust evidence of need. It is common knowledge that there are significant gaps in support services for male victims.

The Supporting People Strategic Intent 2026–2031 must be robust, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of all people experiencing housing-related vulnerability. **Without explicit inclusion, male victims will remain effectively invisible within core strategic housing support planning for at least another five years.**

Men's Alliance ask that the Strategic Intent and SNA deliver the following outcomes:

- An equality impact assessment of support services currently delivered by the SP Programme to inform the SNA.
- Inclusion and involvement of male victims advocates in stakeholder engagement and the SNA.
- Explicit recognition of male victims of domestic abuse and their housing support needs in the SP Programme.
- Measurable objectives to ensure male victims can access appropriate housing-related support, including floating support options within SP services.
- Funding and commissioning commitments for gender-inclusive domestic abuse accommodation services, including refuge, floating support and safe accommodation options that are accessible to men.
- Staff training requirements within the SP programme to ensure frontline staff can identify and respond appropriately to male victims.
- Monitoring and reporting mechanisms to track service uptake, outcomes and unmet need by gender, as part of programme performance frameworks.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Evidence of the Need to Support Male Victims

Recent research into male experiences of Inter Partner Violence (IPV) in Northern Ireland concluded that the issue is ‘*a significant public health issue which warrants immediate attention*’ and that Public Authorities, including NIHE, should act to support male victims.³

Male victims constitute a significant proportion of domestic and sexual abuse victims in NI. PSNI data shows that:

- 1 in 4 child victims of sexual abuse;
- 1 in 5 adult victims of sexual abuse;
- 1 in 3 adult victims of domestic abuse, and
- 1 in 3 victims of domestic homicide are male.

Research by NISRA has found that:

- Adult men experience similar levels of physical, economic and online violence when compared to adult women.
- Both Men (10%) and women (18%) encounter psychological violence.⁴
- Young males (47%) experience online abuse at similar levels to young females (50%), and experience more verbal abuse in person, (69%) and physical assault (59%) than young women (60% & 46%).⁵

Many male victims face additional barriers to reporting and seeking help, including stigma, fear of not being believed or losing their children, concerns about negative social responses, prejudice and discrimination from some support service providers.

Such barriers mean that official figures likely understate the true prevalence of abuse experienced by males and it is estimated that men are three times less likely than women to report abuse.⁶

³ Spikol, et al (2024): [Male Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence](#). QUB.

⁴ NISRA (2025): [Ending Violence Against Women and Girls: Experiences and attitudes of adults in NI](#).

⁵ NISRA (2022): [Ending VAWG: Experiences and Attitudes of 16 year olds in Northern Ireland](#).

⁶ Mankind Initiative (2023): [Key Facts about Male Victims of Abuse](#).

Approximately 75% of suicides in NI are male. There is a strong correlation between abuse and suicidal ideation and attempts. A domestic homicides review featuring male victims of domestic abuse found that opportunities to help them were missed due to gender bias and outdated stereotypes. **This bias dually inhibited male victims from reporting their abuse and public support services from recognising them as victims.**⁷

Housing and Support Needs of Male Victims

Domestic abuse can precipitate housing crises for survivors — regardless of gender — including forced separation from home, financial exclusion, homelessness or insecure tenancy situations. Key housing and support needs include:

- Access to safe, gender-appropriate accommodation (e.g., refuge, disperse housing, or sanctuary schemes).
- Support services that understand male experiences, including tailored engagement, trauma-informed support, and practical assistance.
- Pathways to settled housing and tenancy sustainment, including support to navigate benefits, employment, and safety planning.

The purpose of the SP programme is to fund a range of services to sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness. **Without clear strategic intent or actions specific to male victims of domestic abuse, there is a risk these supports will not be planned, commissioned or resourced in ways that meet gender-inclusive needs.**

⁷ Bates, L et al (2021): [What can we learn from Domestic Homicide Reviews with male victims?](#)

Gaps in Support and Service Provision for Male Victims

The NI Commissioner for Victims of Crime recently funded research mapping existing services for male victims to gain a clearer understanding of the current support infrastructure. Consistent with other research, **the review found evidence of significant gaps in service provision for male victim-survivors in Northern Ireland.**⁸

Despite the evidence that men represent a substantial proportion of victim-survivors in known cases of domestic and sexual abuse, there are limited services and supports available. Where dedicated services and support are available to male victims in NI, these are grassroots organisations run wholly or in part supported by volunteers and with precarious funding arrangements.

The research report concluded that: *‘the system is struggling to manage and support the complexity of need for victim-survivors of abuse more generally and that this has resulted in male victim/survivors being “overlooked” when it comes to provision of services and supports.’*

Findings from this review also indicate that there are challenging dynamics and contention within the domestic and sexual abuse support sector, particularly between men and women’s services. There was a sense from participants that this was in part fuelled by concerns over funding, which has been noted to contribute more generally to siloed working and competition within the community and voluntary sector.

Report recommendations included:

- Service improvement, including further exploration of gaps in provision e.g. expansion of refuges/shelters.
- More and sustainable funding.
- Raising awareness of the gender-inclusive Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy.

⁸ NI Victims of Crime Commissioner (2025): [Mapping Services for Male Adult & Child Victims of DASA](#)

Supporting People, Ending Homelessness

The NIHE recognises that domestic abuse is not specific to one particular gender or household type and have encountered an increasing proportion of presentations due to domestic abuse where the head of household is a male.⁹

Despite this, the Supporting People Strategic Plan confirms that the programme only currently provides help to women at risk of domestic abuse. Neither this plan or the NIHE's Homeless Strategy,¹⁰ articulate any specific outcomes, targets, or allocated actions to address the housing support needs of male survivors of domestic abuse.

This absence is notable given the strong correlation between domestic abuse and homelessness and the clear evidence male victims are at *substantial risk* of homelessness or precarious housing situations.¹¹

Omission of regard for male victims means that they remain effectively invisible within core strategic housing support planning.

Supporting People: Equality Screening

The equality screening process for the SP strategy did not identify a need to undertake an equality impact assessment or identify any steps to mitigate against adverse impacts for male service users arising from a programme that only provides help to women at risk of domestic abuse.

The screening document also actually identifies male victims of domestic abuse as: '*one of a number of groups who will particularly benefit from the NIHE's current supporting people strategy*'.¹²

The equality screening process for this draft strategic intent strategy cites the example of specialist support services for female victims of domestic abuse. Again it identifies no impact on equality of opportunity for male victims whatsoever.

⁹ NIHE: [Domestic Abuse Action Plan 2024](#)

¹⁰ NIHE: [Ending Homelessness Together Homelessness Strategy 2022-27](#)

¹¹ APPG on Homelessness: [Breaking the Link Between Homelessness & Domestic Abuse](#)

¹² NIHE: [Ending Homelessness Strategy Equality Screening](#)

It is also relevant to note that, in the context of Section 75 of The Northern Ireland Act 1998, The NIHE Domestic Abuse Plan notes that: ‘*While the Housing Executive is the main funder of refuge provision for women in Northern Ireland it is acknowledged that this action plan may identify a need for additional services beyond women at risk of domestic abuse.*’

The NIHE Domestic Abuse Plan does not appear to actually identify any specific need for additional services for male victims.

Equality and Legal Implications

Failure to acknowledge and plan adequately for male victims risks perpetuating systemic invisibility and unequal access to support. Such omissions have significant moral, practical and legal implications.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act places a statutory obligation on Public Authorities to carry out their functions with due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between men and women.

The Sex Discrimination Order (NI) 1976 also makes it unlawful to discriminate based on sex in providing goods, facilities, and services, prohibiting treating someone less favorably, applying discriminatory practices, or creating hostile environments.

Failing to adequately address the needs of male victims in NIHE’s public housing support strategy may:

- undermine equality of opportunity for male victims who require support;
- result in a failure to align with other statutory frameworks that acknowledge abuse irrespective of gender;¹³ and
- expose the programme to challenge on grounds of *disparate impact* if support services continue to be designed and delivered without appropriate gender-inclusive policy planning.

¹³ Such as the DASA Strategy 24–31, Victims Charter & Domestic Abuse & Civil Proceedings Act 2021.