Consultation Response:

Call for Views
New Strategy
to Reduce Offending
and Reoffending

By the Department of Justice

August 2026

MEN'S ALLIANCE
NORTHERN IRELAND
Against Domestic Abuse

Mens Alliance (NI)
Info@MensAllianceNI.co.uk

INTRODUCTION

Men's Alliance Northern Ireland

Men's Alliance (NI) supports male victims and survivors of domestic abuse (DA). We provide support to over 2000 men in NI, 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.

DA is often described as '*gendered violence*' and '*overwhelmingly*' perpetrated by men. PSNI, NISRA and ONS data consistently report that one in three victims are male and yet research, advocacy and state interventions often centre exclusively on female victims. This means that men's experiences may be minimised or ignored.

New Strategy to Reduce Offending and Reoffending

The Department of Justice (DoJ) have issued a call for views to help shape a new long-term strategy to reduce offending and reoffending in Northern Ireland.

The Department is seeking to build on learning from previous approaches and develop a clearer, shared direction across government to respond to the wider factors that contribute to offending and harm. They are seeking guidance on:

- what factors drives offending and reoffending;
- what works to prevent it; and
- what should be prioritised in the future.

To inform the structure of the new Strategy, they are also seeking views on adopting the following two strategic aims to reduce offending:

- Prevention and early intervention
- Strengthening deterrence, rehabilitation and resettlement

The following four overarching themes have also been proposed:

- Health & Wellbeing
- Community & Inclusion
- Education & Employability
- Justice & Rehabilitation

A formal public consultation on the draft strategy is planned for 2027, providing a further opportunity to comment before final decisions are made.

RESPONSE TO CALL FOR VIEWS

Overview

Men's Alliance NI welcome the Northern Ireland Executive's commitment, through the Programme for Government 2024–2027, to develop a new evidence-based, cross-Executive strategy to reduce offending and reoffending. The Call for Views rightly recognises that this is not solely a justice issue and that coordinated action across government and partners is essential. Victims must be central to any effective strategy.

In this response we seek to draw the Department's attention to issues and suggestions relevant to male victims of domestic abuse (DA), and how these intersect with the goals of reducing offending and reoffending.

These issues are relevant because:

- Untreated or inadequately addressed DA contributes to cycles of harm, trauma, mental health crises, homelessness, and secondary offending or reoffending by victims or others in the family.

- Ineffective perpetrator accountability, particularly where female perpetrators are involved, undermines deterrence and public confidence.

- Gender-biased service provision and justice policy responses create unequal protection and can drive re-victimisation or escalation.

Reducing offending and reoffending requires protecting all victims effectively and holding all perpetrators accountable. Ignoring or under-serving male victims of domestic abuse leaves a significant gap that perpetuates harm, undermines confidence in the justice system, and fails to maximise the strategy's impact.

We would be happy to provide further detail, meet to discuss, or contribute further lived-experience and research insights if the Department would find this helpful.

Key Data: Male Victims of Domestic Abuse in NI

Men's Alliance NI seek to draw the Department's attention to the following key facts relevant to this submission:

- One in every five crimes recorded in Northern Ireland involved domestic abuse.[1]
- One in every three domestic abuse victims encountered by the PSNI are male .[2]
- Around 41% of domestic homicide victims in recent periods have been male.[3]
- Men's Alliance NI estimate that when domestic abuse-related suicides are considered alongside domestic homicides, the majority of DA-related deaths may be male.[4]
- Justice disparities: Female suspects form a notable share of those identified by police (around 28% in some data), yet conviction rates for female defendants in DA cases are much lower (around 9% in some reported figures). Sanction rates for crimes against male victims appear lower than for female victims in available analyses. This risks under-deterrence of female-perpetrated abuse.[5]
- Under-reporting is acute. ONS survey data indicates that men are 3 times less likely than women to report abuse.[6] QUB research (2024) found that more than half of male DA victims in NI do not disclose to anyone, citing stigma, fear of disbelief, and concerns about being labelled the perpetrator.[7]
- The level of under-reporting is further impacted by the limited services and support available to male victims arising from the NI Executive's uniquely sex segregated approach to service provision in this area.
- There is no dedicated refuge or specialist emergency accommodation for male victims (and their children) in Northern Ireland. Access to crucial floating support services are also often not made available to male victims. Men often face homelessness, sofa-surfing, or remaining in abusive situations.[8]

These patterns are consistent with broader UK evidence that male victims face higher under-reporting and specific barriers rooted in societal expectations of masculinity, ideological informed service and strategy design, and professional assumptions.

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[1] PSNI (2025) *Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland: 2024/25*
[2] Ibid.
[3] PSNI (2026) *Domestic Homicide Statistical Data (2007–2025)*.
[4] Men's Alliance NI (2026) 58% of Deaths Relating to Domestic Abuse in Northern Ireland Are Men.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Mankind Initiative (2023): Key Facts about Male Victims of Abuse.
[7] Spikol et al (2025): Male Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence
[8] See: Plea for refuge for male victims of domestic violence in Northern Ireland

Issues Relevant to Reducing Offending and Reoffending

1. **Victim safety and support as crime prevention:** Inadequate support for male victims increases the risk of ongoing abuse, retaliatory or secondary offending, family breakdown, and intergenerational harm. Children exposed to DA are at elevated risk of future offending. Leaving male victims without safe exit routes or trauma-informed support fails to interrupt these cycles.

2. **Perpetrator accountability and programme design:** Many existing DA interventions are designed primarily or exclusively around male perpetrators of violence against female partners. Female perpetrators and male victims are often poorly served. This limits effectiveness in reducing reoffending across the full spectrum of DA. Diversionary outcomes and lighter sanctions for female suspects, if systematic, weaken deterrence.

3. **False allegations:** False allegations of domestic abuse represent a serious but under-examined problem that particularly affects male victims. False allegations are a profound and specific weapon of coercive control that create a powerful barrier to help-seeking. Research and survivor testimony in Northern Ireland and elsewhere indicate that fear of false claims contributes significantly to under-reporting and to men remaining in abusive situations or becoming homeless rather than risking the family courts or police involvement.

   In the context of a strategy designed to reduce offending and reoffending, addressing false allegations is critical. When a perpetrator successfully weaponizes the justice system (including family courts), the actual victim is criminalized, causing severe trauma, while the true offender escapes rehabilitation and is emboldened to reoffend.

4. **Cross-cutting pathways (housing, health, employment):** Male victims frequently experience housing insecurity, mental health crises, and employment disruption as a direct result of abuse. These are classic criminogenic needs. A whole-of-government strategy that does not explicitly address male victims' access to these pathways will be incomplete.

5. **Alignment with existing strategies:** The Domestic and Sexual Abuse (DASA) Strategy 2024–2031 is described as gender-inclusive, yet practical provision remains heavily skewed. Visibility of male victims (including children) is further impacted by the NI Executive's Programme for Government prioritisation of violence against women and girls and corresponding EVAWG strategy that significantly overlaps and informs the DASA strategy. Ending violence against women and girls is essential, but must not result in zero-sum exclusion of male victims. Equality of protection under the law and in service design is required.

6. **Data, monitoring, and evidence gaps:** Strategy development requires robust, sex-disaggregated data on victims, perpetrators, outcomes, sanctions, reoffending linked to DA, and DA-related suicides/homelessness. Current gaps hinder evidence-based prioritisation and evaluation of what works.

7. **Evidence of Systemic Bias:** Research and data from multiple countries (including the US, UK, Canada, Portugal, Australia, and others) consistently document patterns of investigative and response biases by police and safeguarding services that disadvantage male victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) while often also prioritising or minimising the actions of female perpetrators.[9]

   Psychologists suggest that the worldwide phenomenon of male victims receiving less attention, research focus, justice and dedicated support, even though data shows substantial numbers of them, may be evidence of gamma bias on a systemic scale.[10]

   There is an increasing body of evidence to support our concern that public policy, policing, criminal justice, safeguarding and public service provision outcomes are significantly impacted by cognitive distortions in how public servants and politicians in Northern Ireland perceive and display regard to male and female victims respectively.

   A recent study commissioned by the Home Office found that female offenders are less likely to be arrested, charged, or convicted than male offenders, even when evidence is similar.[11] This disparity in justice is consistent with the PSNI and Court Service data trends we have highlighted on page 4.

   An analysis of 22 Domestic Homicide Reviews involving male victims in England and Wales found missed opportunities due to gender bias, dismissal of female-perpetrated abuse, insufficient guidance on male victims, and men being more likely to be arrested than supported.[12] The NI Department of Justice have yet to make public the findings of any of the limited number of NI based Domestic Homicide Reviews undertaken to date where the victim was male. We urge the Department to do so.

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[9] Machado & Santiago (2025): Police Responses to Male Victims of Intimate Partner Violence.
[10] **Gamma bias** is a hypothesized cognitive distortion in how societies perceive and discuss gender issues, proposed by psychologists Martin Seager and John Barry. It builds on earlier ideas of alpha bias (exaggerating/magnifying gender differences) and beta bias (minimizing/ignoring them). Gamma bias occurs when these operate simultaneously: certain gender differences or patterns are amplified while others are downplayed, often in ways that portray masculinity more negatively and femininity more positively overall. See: Seager & Barry (2019): Gamma bias and the gender distortion matrix.
[11] Barton-Crosby and Hudson (2021): Female perpetrators of intimate partner violence
[12] Homicide research reveals society 'blind' to male victims of domestic violence

Proposed Strategic Vision, Aims and Overarching Themes

The proposed Strategic Vision ("A safer, fairer Northern Ireland where opportunity, support and partnership working prevents harm and reduces offending and reoffending") and the supporting slogan of "Working together to create better life chances and choices" are welcome. Fairness and equity must explicitly encompass equal protection and support for male victims if the vision is to be realised in practice.

We broadly support the proposed strategic aims and overarching themes as a coherent framework for a whole-system approach. They appropriately recognise that offending and reoffending are driven by interconnected factors spanning health, housing, education, employment, justice responses, and community supports, and that progress requires prevention alongside effective rehabilitation and resettlement.

- **Strategic Aim 1:** Exposure to domestic abuse and coercive control is itself a significant driver of harm, trauma, mental ill-health, and later offending risk (including for children who witness or experience it). For this aim to succeed for male victims, early intervention services must be accessible, stigma-free, and designed to recognise male experiences of abuse. Without specialist pathways, many men will continue to remain invisible until crises escalate into homelessness, mental health emergencies, or secondary contact with the justice system. Prevention work must therefore include awareness-raising that challenges myths about DA being exclusively male-on-female, alongside practical support that enables men (and their children) to leave abusive situations safely.

- **Strategic Aim 2:** Deterrence requires consistent, evidence-based accountability for all perpetrators of DA, including female perpetrators. Current disparities in sanction and conviction rates risk weakening this element. Rehabilitation and resettlement pathways must also be responsive to male victims who themselves become involved with the justice system (for example through retaliatory behaviour, survival crime linked to homelessness after leaving an abusive home, or the fallout from false allegations). Stabilising lives for these men requires access to safe accommodation, trauma-informed mental health support, and family/relationship interventions that do not default to gendered assumptions.

- **Strategic Theme 1:** Improved health, wellbeing and resilience is critical. Male victims of DA experience very high rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidality. Earlier intervention to address trauma and mental ill-health must include male-specific or fully male-inclusive services. The current scarcity of specialist counselling and the absence of refuge provision leave a major gap that this theme should prioritise closing.
- **Strategic Theme 2:** Housing insecurity and employment disruption are common consequences of DA for male victims. Supporting stable futures requires that these pathways recognise and respond to the specific barriers faced by men leaving abusive relationships.
- **Strategic Theme 3:** The complete absence of dedicated emergency/refuge accommodation and floating support services for male victims in Northern Ireland is a glaring failure under this theme. Without safe exit routes, prevention and early intervention cannot function effectively for a third of recorded DA victims. This must be treated as a strategic priority.
- **Strategic Theme 4:** Restorative and rehabilitative models have value, but they must be applied carefully in DA cases and must not dilute accountability. Modernising processes to be trauma-informed is positive, provided training equips practitioners to identify male victims, female perpetrators, bi-directional violence and the dynamics of false or tactical allegations without bias.

The proposed aims and themes provide a strong architecture. Their success in reducing harm and reoffending will depend on whether they are implemented in a genuinely inclusive way that treats male victims of domestic abuse as a priority group requiring tailored recognition, services, and justice responses, while maintaining robust deterrence against all forms of DA and misuse of the system through false allegations.

The underpinning foundation of collaboration, partnership, data-sharing, and shared leadership is vital. It should include systematic collection and publication of sex-disaggregated data on victims, perpetrators, outcomes, and unfounded allegations, plus meaningful involvement of male-victim specialist organisations and survivors with lived experience. Without this, the whole-system ambition risks replicating existing blind spots.

Reducing offending and reoffending requires protecting all victims effectively and holding all perpetrators accountable. Ignoring or under-serving male victims of domestic abuse leaves a significant gap that perpetuates harm, undermines confidence in the justice system, and fails to maximise the strategy’s impact.

Recommendations for the New Strategy

We recommend that the Northern Ireland Executive and the Justice Department take the following action:

- **Visibility:** Explicitly recognise male victims of domestic abuse (including intimate partner violence, family abuse, and same-sex relationships) as a priority group for protection, support, and inclusion in outcomes frameworks. Adopt truly gender-responsive (not nominally gender-neutral) approaches that address distinct barriers and needs for all victims.
- **Data:** Improve data collection and publication of sex-disaggregated statistics on DA incidents, crimes, sanctions, convictions, reoffending, housing outcomes, and DA-linked suicides/self-harm. Include male victims in all relevant monitoring of the new strategy.
- **Perpetrator Programmes:** Ensure perpetrator programmes and interventions are available and effective for female perpetrators and for abuse against male victims. Evaluate existing programmes for inclusivity and outcomes by victim/perpetrator sex.
- **Offender Pathways:** Integrate trauma-informed, male-inclusive pathways into offending cessation and resettlement work (housing, mental health, employment, family relationships).
- **Justice and Prevention:** A strategy that aims to reduce offending and reoffending must carefully address the issue of weaponized false allegations. Failing to do so risks perpetuating secondary victimisation of men, undermining the credibility of genuine DA claims, and allowing forms of coercive behaviour to go unchallenged. Robust investigation, evidence-based decision-making (rather than gendered assumptions), and appropriate consequences for proven malicious complaints are essential to protect all parties and maintain the integrity of the system.
- **Victim Support**: Commission or expand sustainable, specialist support services for male victims, including counselling, advocacy, legal advice, and dedicated emergency/refuge accommodation (suitable for men with children where needed). Provide core statutory funding rather than short-term project grants.
- **Inclusive Emergency Housing:** Allocate dedicated funding for emergency accommodation for male victims and their children. Currently, a severe lack of male refuge space forces many victims to return to abusive environments, which directly escalates the risk of further violence or retaliatory offenses.

- **Training:** Train frontline professionals (police, probation, housing, health, courts) to recognise and respond appropriately to male victims without gendered assumptions.
- **Awareness:** Address under-reporting and stigma through targeted awareness campaigns that explicitly include male victims and challenge myths that DA is exclusively male-on-female.
- **Statutory Compliance:** Conduct a robust equality impact assessment of the draft new strategy in advance of the planned 2027 public consultation stage. Ensure that the New Strategy (and all related policies, practices and strategies) fully aligns with the Department's stated equality commitments and their statutory duty to combat sex discrimination and promote equality of opportunity between women and men. See appendix 1 for a summary of the statutory duty.

APPENDIX 1 - THE DUTY TO COMBAT SEX DISCRIMINATION

We urge all Northern Ireland Executive Ministers, Members of the Legislative Assembly and Department Officials to be mindful of their statutory duty to combat sex discrimination and promote equality of opportunity between women and men.

Domestic and sexual abuse are grave violations of human rights, against which victims have a legal right to protection and redress through the courts. They can involve the breach of a number of rights protected by The Human Rights Act 1998, most particularly:

- Article 2 - the right to life;
- Article 3 - the right not to be tortured / subject to degrading treatment;
- Article 8 - the right to respect for private and family life;
- Article 14 - the right to be free from discrimination.

Sex discrimination in service provision and public policy has been illegal in Northern Ireland since the 1970's.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires public authorities to show due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between nine equality grounds, including between men and women.

Public authorities must also address the intersecting needs and experiences of people with more than one protected characteristic. For example, the provision of accessible and equitable support services for older men with disabilities experiencing domestic abuse, or young men from an ethnic minority background at risk of forced marriage.

The NI Victims Charter 2015 establishes that women and men are entitled to be recognised and treated in a respectful, dignified, courteous, sensitive, tailored, professional and non-discriminatory manner by the service providers covered by the Charter, irrespective of their gender.

The European Convention of Human Rights; UN Conventions on both the Rights of the Child, and Rights of People with Disabilities; The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse and The EU Victims Directive all contain articles asserting protection from discrimination due to personal characteristics. Even The Istanbul Convention encourages State Parties to apply the Convention to all victims of domestic violence, including male children.