



# **Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy**

**Year 7 Action Plan - Addendum**

**April 2023 – March 2024**

Highlights and Moving Forward



Department of  
**Health**

An Roinn Sláinte  
Mánnystrie O Poustie

[www.health-ni.gov.uk](http://www.health-ni.gov.uk)



Department of  
**Justice**

An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt  
Mánnystrie O tha Laa

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## Introduction

An addendum to the Year 7 Action Plan (which covered the period April 2022 – April 2023) has been developed to outline how we intend to move forward for the remainder of this calendar year (April 2023 – March 2024).

A copy of the Year 7 Action Plan, which includes actions and activities undertaken during 2022 – 23, can be accessed online via either of the [Department of Health](#) or [Department of Justice](#) websites. Significant progress has been made on delivering this plan, with around three quarters of actions now completed – see further detail below. However, we are clear that there remains much more to do to.

The addendum builds on the progress made against earlier ambitions and targets as well as setting out foundational work for a new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy which will require approval from incoming Ministers and a Northern Ireland Executive. It is important to note that the current *Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy* will remain in place until any new strategy is introduced.

## Highlights from 2022-23 and Moving Forward

Our actions and activities continue to deliver against the five strategic strands under the current strategy:

### Strand 1: Driving Change through Co-operation and Leadership

Much of the work in this area, over the past year, has focused on sharing learning and evidence to inform the development of a new draft Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy. This has included the analysis of evidence from a ten week Call for Views (91 written responses and 661 surveys) which informed the development of the draft strategy, later consulted on during 7 February and 2 May 2023 (which generated 90 written responses). The Innovation Lab in the Department of Finance also undertook research on the Local Domestic and Sexual Violence Partnerships to consider how they might be strengthened. Departments also updated the Northern Ireland Executive, during 2022, on progress to address domestic and sexual abuse.

As we approach the end of the current strategy we will continue to reflect and take stock, with an end of strategy report planned. Importantly, we intend to build on the expertise and knowledge that has been shared. An analysis of the consultation responses will be used to refine and finalise the new draft Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy for incoming Ministers and a Northern Ireland Executive. This will include the development of a performance framework and a Year One action plan. We will also continue to seek opportunities to secure resources to support the new strategy's implementation.

### Strand 2: Prevention and Early Intervention

A great deal of work has been taken forward to increase awareness of domestic and sexual abuse and in particular, of the new domestic abuse offence. This work included multi-media advertising campaigns, animations and the development of an e-learning package. The roll out of Operation Encompass across 1162 educational settings in Northern Ireland has also been a significant achievement under this strand, resulting in 3,160 referrals being made by police. Behavioural Change Programmes, run by the Probation Board NI, were also

delivered across all five of the Health and Social Care Trusts.

Further development and upscaling of animations and market research undertaken during 2022-23 will inform future communications, including the bystander approach. Roll out of Operation Encompass will continue to facilitate information sharing with pre-schools, schools, colleges and training facilities for pupils under 18. Additional work on abusive and offending behaviours will also be progressed drawing on learning from the previous year.

### Strand 3: Delivering Change through Responsive Services

In the last year, activities supporting this strand included the continued development of the Identification and Referral to Improve Safety (IRIS) project with 40 GP practices; and the piloting of the Ask for Ani Code Word Scheme in four Jobs and Benefits Offices to provide anyone at risk of domestic abuse with support in accessing help.

These projects have given us the opportunity to explore how we might want to build more responsive services. However, such approaches need to be evaluated which will be a focus in the coming months, including learning from (and a review of) Domestic Homicide Reviews; the uptake of new domestic abuse e-learning training across the public sector; and a review of Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences to inform future strategic direction.

### Strand 4: Support

A permanent Remote Evidence Centre (REC) which includes separate bespoke facilities for children was opened in Belfast. Reviews of, and research on, key support services were also undertaken, such as the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline and the Sanctuary Scheme.

Building on work in 2022-23, we will continue to progress work to introduce Sexual Offences Legal Advisers for children (CSOLAs). We will also be considering the outcome of the reviews undertaken in conjunction with service providers. Further reviews will be progressed in relation to ASSIST NI's advocacy service.

### Strand 5: Protection and Justice

Various measures were introduced to improve protections for victims and enhance access to justice. Police domestic abuse champions received additional training on the new domestic abuse offence; new offences of stalking and threatening or abusive behaviour were introduced; and clarification provided on the law on the 'rough sex defence'. A voluntary protocol to expedite serious sexual offences cases involving very young witnesses under 13 years old continues to operate in Belfast and Antrim Crown Courts. Domestic Violence and Abuse Disclosure Scheme (DVADS) guidance was also revised.

Building on the work of last year, a training statement will be published on the new domestic abuse offence and we will further promote the DVADS scheme. A range of new criminal justice measures will also be introduced including Stalking Protection Orders, a non-fatal strangulation offence as well as offences of up-skirting; down-blousing and cyber flashing. Draft regulations for new Domestic Abuse Protection Notices and Orders, which are well developed, will be further progressed and preparatory work for introduction undertaken.

## Addendum, April 2023 – March 2024

No	Action	Lead	Delivery
1	Prepare and publish a <b>Consultation Summary Report</b> on the draft Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy.	DoH, DoJ	Jul 2023
2	Finalise the draft <b>Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy and a Year One Action Plan</b> to be ready for consideration by incoming Ministers.	DoH, DoJ	Oct 2023
3	Review the findings from the Innovation Lab's engagement with the <b>Local Domestic and Sexual Violence Partnerships</b> and prepare a costed options paper.	DoH, DoJ	Oct 2023
4	Develop a <b>Performance Framework</b> to support the new draft Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy, with indicators to measure outcomes and new terms of reference for governance and delivery groups, ensuring alignment with the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework.	DoH, DoJ	Oct 2023
5	Evaluate the <b>Identification and Referral to Improve Safety (IRIS)</b> primary care project.	DoH	Nov 2023
6	<p><b>Introduction of new criminal justice measures:</b></p> <p>(i) Non-fatal strangulation offence;</p> <p>(ii) Anonymity and privacy provisions – extended anonymity for victims and anonymity for suspects up to the point of charge, exclusion of the public in serious sexual offence cases and extended penalty for breach of anonymity;</p> <p>(iii) Stalking Protection Orders;</p> <p>(iv) New offences of up-skirting; down-blousing; cyber flashing; an adult pretending to be a child for the purpose of child grooming as well as the extended scope of abuse of position of trust offences to the areas of sport and faith and the offence of disclosure of private sexual images to include 'threats to disclose';</p> <p>(v) Progression of draft regulations, and preparatory work, to support the introduction of domestic abuse protection notices and orders in 2024; and</p> <p>(vi) A pathfinder project to test pre-recorded cross examination.</p>	DoJ	<p>Jun 2023</p> <p>Sep 2023</p> <p>Oct 2023</p> <p>Nov 2023</p> <p>Dec 2023</p> <p>Mar 2024</p>

7	Launch of <b>advertising campaigns</b> to promote public awareness of:	DoJ	
	(i) the new offence of non-fatal strangulation;		Sep 2023
	(ii) the new offence of up-skirting/down-blowing/cyber-flashing; and		Nov 2023
	(iii) the Domestic Violence and Abuse Disclosure Scheme.		Mar 2024
8	Continue to work with criminal justice partners to <b>embed new legislative provisions</b> including new non-fatal strangulation offence – with a particular focus on training, awareness and investigative standards.	PSNI	Sep 2023
9	Commence work to scope costed options to <b>reduce risk of abusive and offending behaviours</b> , including through behavioural change, complementing relevant actions under the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework.	DoJ	Oct 2023
10	Develop and commence implementation of an action plan to address recommendations from independent research commissioned on the <b>Sanctuary Scheme</b> .	DfC, NIHE	Sep 2023
11	Publish an updated <b>Policy for Prosecuting Sexual Offences</b> .	PPS	Oct 2023
12	Review findings of the Leonard Consultancy Review of MARAC report into <b>safety planning and risk management</b> in Northern Ireland, including perpetrator management, with a view to identifying opportunities for new operating practices and considering next steps.	MARAC Operational Board	Mar 2024
13	Pilot <b>Equine-Assisted Therapy and Learning</b> for children in care who have experienced domestic abuse.	DoH, BHSC	Oct 2023
14	Continue the roll out of <b>Operation Encompass</b> across Northern Ireland, providing for information sharing with pre-schools, schools, colleges and training facilities for pupils under 18, ensuring appropriate training and awareness.	DE	Sep 2023
15	Establish a Task and Finish Group to consider findings from the Education Training Inspectorate (ETI) <b>Preventative Curriculum Report</b> and consider next steps.	DE	Jun 2023
16	Prepare detailed <b>guidance for schools</b> on Preventative Education.	DE	Dec 2023
17	Launch <b>CCEA's Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) Progression Framework</b> and circulate to schools and Education Otherwise Than at	DE	May 2023

	School (EOTAS) Centres.		
18	Publish guidance to schools regarding Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) amendments to the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006.	DE	Jan 2024
19	Publish:	DoJ	
	(i) a statement setting out the level of <b>training</b> undertaken in relation to the new domestic abuse offence; and		Aug 2023
	(ii) an overview of the <b>operation</b> of the domestic abuse offence since its introduction.		Oct 2023
20	Begin to explore with partners options to create specialism in <b>Violence Against Women and Girls cases</b> in court proceedings including information provision for juries.	PPS	Oct 2023
21	Commence work to develop and roll out strategic <b>communications to tackle gender based violence and rape myths</b> using the bystander approach, aligning with relevant actions under the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework.	DoJ, PSNI	Sep 2023
22	<b>In relation to Remote Evidence Centres (REC):</b>	DoJ	
	• Maintain a REC in Belfast and Craigavon; and		Ongoing
	• Deliver a new full REC for central Belfast that will include separate bespoke facilities for children.		May 2023
23	Children's Social Services within each Health and Social Care Trust to begin implementing a Cadre approach to <b>Achieving Best Evidence (ABE)</b> Interviews, building upon the PSNI and SHSCT pilot.	DoH	Dec 2023
24	<b>In relation to Sexual Offences Legal Advisors (SOLAs):</b>	DoJ	
	(i) Monitor and oversee delivery of adult SOLA scheme, including arrangements to extend duration of existing provision; and		Nov 2023
	(ii) Introduce equivalent SOLA provision for children.		Dec 2023
25	Roll out of the new <b>Technology and Domestic Abuse Animation</b> to stakeholders, plus upscale to a wider audience by adding BSL and translation into the three other languages.	SE D&SV P'ship	Oct 2023
26	Consider interim findings from an <b>evaluation</b> of the <b>Ask for Ani</b> scheme piloted in Jobs and Benefits offices.	DfC	Mar 2024