

LISBURN AND CASTLEREAGH CITY COUNCIL

Public Meeting of the Policing and Community Safety Partnership, Harmony Hill Presbyterian Church Hall on Tuesday 21 March 2023 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Ms Y Craig (Vice-Chairperson, in the Chair)
Councillor S Skillen
Ms A Playford
Ms P Yellamanty

IN ATTENDANCE: PCSP Officer (JB)
Member Services Officer (BF)
PCSP Administration Officer

Designated Organisations
Superintendent Kelly Moore, PSNI
Chief Inspector Iain McCormick, PSNI
Mr D Marley, NIHE

Commencement of the Meeting

The Vice-Chairperson, Ms Yvonne Craig, welcomed everyone to the meeting. She provided an overview of the agenda and the theme for the evening, which was, 'Ending Violence against Women and Females'. She conveyed the Partnership's thanks to the organisations who would provide presentations to the meeting and to the representatives of the agencies and charities which had provided information stalls at the venue.

1. Apologies

Apologies were reported from the Chairman (Councillor J Gallen) and Councillors N Anderson, A Gowan, John Palmer; together with J Bentley, G Conroy, and P Leeson.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest

3. PSNI - Tackling Violence against Women and Girls & Domestic Abuse

The District Commander, Superintendent K Moore, addressed the meeting and reported that the PSNI across the Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council area had identified three thematic areas in addressing violence against women and girls, i.e., building trust and confidence, relentless perpetrator pursuit and supporting victims, and the creation of safer spaces.

She then introduced Inspector Steve Hicks who reported that, within the Council area, there had been 1,713 recorded instances of violence against women and girls in the past year, which was a reduction of 14.7%. Regarding domestic incidents, 781 crimes against females had been recorded, which was a reduction of 11.5%. He added that a majority of offenders were known to the victim, either through being an intimate partner or family member. He gave an overview of a number of safeguarding initiatives which

the PSNI supported, such as 'Ask for ANI' and 'Ask for Angela', which were codeword-based scheme for those who felt threatened to access emergency support from trained staff in pharmacies and licenced premises respectively.

Detective Sergeant Lynsey Nichols, from the Public Protection Branch (PPB), then concluded the PSNI's presentation by giving an overview of the remit of the PPB, which included the following:

- Child Sexual Exploitation
- Central Referral Unit
- Child Internet Protection
- Child Abuse
- Domestic Abuse & Adult Safeguarding
- Rape Crime
- Offender Investigation Unit

She outlined the key aspects of the Domestic Violence & Abuse Disclosure Scheme, which was a formal mechanism enabling individuals to make enquiries to the PSNI regarding previous incidents of abuse by a partner with whom they were in a relationship with, or who was is in a relationship with someone they knew, should they have a concern that the individual may be violent or abusive past.

4. Women's Aid Belfast and Lisburn

Women's Aid support worker Vicki Kearney provided a wide-ranging presentation and outlined that organisation's agreed definition of domestic violence, i.e., 'domestic violence was the intentional and persistent physical or emotional abuse of a woman or a woman and her children in a way that causes pain, distress or injury'. She explained that Women's Aid in Lisburn had support workers based in the main PSNI station and the body sought to challenge attitudes and beliefs which perpetuated domestic violence. Through their work, Women's Aid promoted healthy and non-abusive relationships and provided confidential support, information and emergency accommodation for women and children affected by domestic violence. She added that emotional and practical support and information was provided in a range of settings, such as family homes, a safe community setting or at the women's aid resource centre.

5. ASSIST NI Advocacy Service

The meeting then received a presentation from Ela Kasiak, representing the ASSIST NI advocacy service. She explained that ASSIST NI had been established by the Department of Justice in 2021, and was a Northern Ireland-wide service, based in 29 police stations, whose aims and objectives were to provide the following:

- Advocacy – a voice for victims within the criminal justice system
- Support – in the immediate aftermath of domestic or sexual abuse and throughout the criminal justice process
- Safety – continuous risk assessment and safety planning
- Information – guidance and information about specialist support services
- Services Together – a coordinated response involving a range of statutory, voluntary and community support

Ms Kasiak explained that the advocacy service consisted of three organisations, which had expertise in supporting victims of domestic and sexual abuse, which were, Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid, Foyle Women's Aid and Men's Advisory Project. Bespoke advocacy and access to specialist help and support was provided to those victims who might find the criminal justice process intimidating.

The Partnership was then advised that referrals to the service were made by partners for those deemed to be at most at risk of further harm. She added that the ambition of ASSIST NI was to ensure that victims of sexual and domestic violence were safe, informed and supported through the justice process. As such, the organisation sought to ensure that victims were provided with trauma-informed, victim led, bespoke support to meet individual needs and manage risk.

6. Questions Raised

The Vice-Chairperson thanked the organisations for their presentations and invited attendees to pose questions. The following matters were raised and addressed:

- Councillor J Craig sought information in respect of the use of body-worn cameras by officers in responding to domestic violence incidents. Superintendent Moore confirmed that the Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council area had one of the highest percentages across Northern Ireland of officers activating their body-worn cameras when attending such situations for evidence gathering and officer safety.
- In response to a question regarding the reporting and prosecution of historical abuse cases, both Superintendent Moore and the Detective Sergeant Nichols confirmed that there was no time limitation in making a complaint to the PSNI.
- Superintendent Moore clarified a query raised in how the PSNI managed reported violence against members of the LGBTQ+ community stating that such instances remained a priority across the district. Inspector Hicks outlined also the training that student officers received during their initial training.

Conclusion of the Meeting

The Vice-Chairperson thanked those present for attending, particularly those groups which had provided information stalls.

Several individuals congratulated the Partnership for the nature and scope of what had been deemed a very worthwhile event.

The meeting ended at 8.40 pm.

Chairman