

A Response to the consultation on -

Section 75 Screening
PSNI

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Introduction

The Women's Support Network (WSN), established in 1989, is an umbrella organisation with charitable status providing support for more than 40 community-based women's centres, women's projects and women's infrastructure groups. The WSN aims to achieve social, political and economic justice through the promotion of the autonomous organisation of women. The Network also aims to strengthen the collective voice for women's groups, to promote and develop networking to enable collective action and to influence policy and decision making processes. The WSN is an important vehicle for taking forward the common agenda of community-based women's organisations, many of which are based in the most disadvantaged areas of the city and which have experienced the worst effects of the political conflict.

The WSN welcomes the opportunity to respond to the PSNI's consultation paper on S75 Screening

The key equality issues in relation to policing in Northern Ireland for consultees.

The WSN has been made aware by organisations within the women's sector of the adverse equality impact of a 'gender neutral' policy in relation to domestic violence and sexual violence. We have been told that there is a reluctance to use the term 'women'. We strongly believe that this is a mistaken policy, which serves to obscure the extent to which women are victims of gender-based violence in all its manifestations. One consequence could be to reduce the level of resources for women's organisations working on such issues.

Are there any areas of PSNI policies that have not been identified as either core policing functions or support functions.

We believe that these are comprehensive policies. What is important is how these policies are put into practice and the level of resources given to different areas of policing.

Do consultees agree with the internal assessment on the twelve areas identified for EIA?

We would like to add additional comments on some of the areas identified, as they have particular importance for women's lives.

Policing Public Events – We would urge the PSNI to be aware of the need to include women within the community when promoting equality of opportunity and developing good relations. Too often PSNI/community dialogue ignores the presence of women and their potential role in diffusing tensions.

Non-Emergency Response – We believe it is important to consider social class/community background in how the PSNI responds to calls.

Recruitment – We welcome the fact that the under-representation of women within the PSNI will be considered and we hope that the result of this will be a move towards some form of positive action to increase recruitment levels.

Promotion – We welcome the fact that the lack of female officers within the PSNI has been identified. Women's unwillingness to put themselves forward for promotion opportunities form only one part of the picture. Attention must also be given to the attitudes of male officers in the force and the culture that exists. Gender sensitisation programmes aimed at those involved in promotion processes are also important.

1. Do consultees agree with the internal assessment on the 24 areas of PSNI for which the internal assessment has concluded that an EQIA is not required?

We do not possess any specific information to conclude otherwise.

2. Additional data, research or information to inform the assessment of impact on S75 groups of twelve areas detailed in Section 1.9.

Crime prevention - From research conducted by UU and QUB on 'Reimagining Women's Security in Societies in Transition', there would appear to be a greater fear of crime affecting women living alone and a perception that such crime is on the increase. This is having a detrimental affect on women's lives and we would strongly advise that further information is sought on this area.

Training and Education – The WSN would welcome further information on the training and education strategy for PSNI recruits and would urge the PSNI to make use of S75 organisations to inform that strategy, with the proviso that such groups be financially recompensed for their time.

3. Any additional areas of research, data or feedback that consultees feel should be considered?

We would reiterate our statement in Q1 that the 'gender neutral' approach has adverse consequences for women and we urge the PSNI to conduct research to evaluate the workings of the Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence policies.

4. Any changes to the proposed EQIA timetable?

No. We believe that the issue of recruitment is very important and welcome the fact that it will be considered in the 2005-6 period.

5. Any recommendations on ways to improve the PSNI consultation process?

The WSN would favour a more interactive approach rather than a paper exercise. If different stakeholders were invited to meetings, for example, key representatives of the women's sector in one session, we believe that there could have been an informative exchange of views that would have enriched the consultation process and we recommend this format for the future.

Appendix 1

WSN Member groups

Al-Nisa Women's Group
Ardoyne Women's Group
Ashton Centre
ATLAS (Lisburn)
Ballybeen Women's Centre
Ballymurphy Women's Centre
Belfast Travellers Education & Development Group
Brook (Belfast)
Citywide Women's Consortium
Derry Women's Centre
East Belfast Community Education Centre & Walkway Women's Group
Falls Women's Centre
Footprints Women's Centre
Greenway Women's Centre
Lenadoon Women's Group
Lesbian Advocacy Service Initiative
Northern Ireland Women's European Platform
Parenting Forum NI
Shankill Women's Centre
South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP)
Strabane & Lifford Women's Group
Windsor Women's Centre
Women's Information Group
Women into Politics
Women's News
Women's Resource Development Agency
Women's Tec