

WOMEN'S AID

Women's Aid Submission to the Public Consultation on Commissioning Human, Social and Community Services.

February 2016

SECTION ONE INTRODUCTION

Women's Aid welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Public Consultation on Commissioning Human, Social and Community Services.

Women's Aid is a leading national organisation that has been working in Ireland to stop domestic violence against women and children since 1974. In this time, the organisation has built up a huge body of experience and expertise on the issue, enabling us to best support women and share this knowledge with other agencies responding to women experiencing domestic violence.

Our work includes:

National Freephone Helpline

Our National Freephone Helpline (1800 341 900) is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and provides support and information to callers experiencing abuse from intimate partners and their family, friends and professionals. It is the only free, national, domestic violence Helpline with specialised trained staff and volunteers, accredited by The Helplines Partnership and with a Telephone Interpretation Service facility covering 170 languages for callers and professionals needing interpreting services.

One to one support visits and Court Accompaniment

We provide face to face support visits and Court Accompaniment in the greater Dublin area. Court Accompaniment is a specific service providing support to the particular needs of women seeking legal redress in the Courts regarding violence by a current or former husband or partner.

Dolphin House Family Law Support and Referral Service

Women's Aid also operates the Dolphin House Family Law Support and Referral Service, in partnership with the Dublin 12 Domestic Violence Service and Inchicore Outreach Centre. This is a free and confidential drop in service for women who are experiencing abuse in a relationship, located in the Dublin District Family Law Court.

Training and Development

Women's Aid is a centre of excellence in training to statutory, voluntary and community organisations as they develop and maintain organisational responses to women and their children experiencing domestic violence. Training participants include health and social care professionals, staff from community groups throughout Ireland and Women's Aid National Freephone Helpline volunteers.

Policy and Communications work



WOMEN'S AID

Making Women and Children Safe

WOMEN'S AID

5 Wilton Place, Dublin 2, Ireland.

Tel: 01-6788858 Fax: 01-6788915

Email: info@womensaid.ie

www.womensaid.ie

National Freephone Helpline 1800 341 900

Registered charity number 6491

WOMEN'S AID

The sum of the above contacts with women experiencing domestic violence and their supporters enable us to have a good picture of the issues that need addressing to improve systemic responses and we use that information in our policy and communication work. We provide relevant information and recommendations to government and other relevant agencies on the nature and prevalence of domestic violence, the barriers faced by women experiencing domestic violence and the gaps in existing legislation/systems.

Women's Aid Statistics¹

- In 2014 there were 13,655 contacts with Women's Aid, in which 16,464 disclosures of domestic violence against women were made (including emotional, physical, financial and sexual abuse).
- The National Freephone Helpline answered 11,167 calls and 707 face to face meetings were held with 421 women. (The helpline operated on a 10am to 10pm, 7 days basis in 2014).
- Our Court accompaniment service went to court 191 times with 109 women.
- The Dolphin House Support and Referral Service supported 293 women in 313 face to face drop in sessions throughout the year.

Funding

Until June 2014 we provided training to staff of the Local Community Development Program, and to Family Resource Centres until June 2015. In July 2014, Women's Aid was delighted to receive funding under the Scheme to Support National Organisations to provide support to organisations working with people who experience poverty, social exclusion and inequality. This funding, which is administered by Pobal on behalf of the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government is essential in order to allow us to continue our input into the community and voluntary sector and to disadvantaged target groups in particular.

SECTION TWO SUMMARY OF MAIN CONCERNS

Women's Aid understands that community organisations need to be accountable and that public funds need to be spent in the best way to provide quality services and improve communities.

We understand commissioning as "a strategic planning process linking resource allocation with assessed current and future needs".

We are already working in such a planned and strategic way and recognise the value of needs analysis, good planning and strategic resource allocation.

However we have the following concerns in relation to the move towards commissioning community services and to an outcome based model in Ireland:

1) Commissioning and competitive tendering

As the Commissioning in Human, Social and Community Services - A Rapid Evidence Review indicates, commissioning and competitive tendering are often used interchangeably. We are concerned that commissioning will **in practice** become equivalent to competitive tendering.

1 Women's Aid Impact Report 2014



WOMEN'S AID

Domestic violence is a very specific sector, which requires specialised work and skills. Competitive tendering of domestic violence services is very problematic for the following reasons:

- Tender being awarded to organisations (either for profit organisations or generic charities) that do **not** have specific experience in the field of violence against women. In other jurisdictions, where domestic violence services were put up for tender, this has resulted in a loss of specialist refuges and in a loss of quality of service.

For example the tendering process in the UK has resulted in a loss of specialist refuges to generic providers, and “in funding cuts for many specialist domestic violence refuges, restrictions on refuge services and sadly, the closure of some refuges across the country”².

In New South Wales a very controversial tendering process resulted in a huge reduction of women and children’s refuges, with only 14 specialist domestic violence refuges left out of 78³.

Many services are now “generalist services” accommodating women who are homeless for any number of reasons, including substance abuse or mental health issues as well as women and children escaping violence. This is not always appropriate and is straining an already over stretched system. It can also deter women from accessing support services.

- Tendering being awarded with “value for money” as the only or main criteria, which would lead to a deterioration of the services provided to vulnerable service users. In other jurisdictions, this has also led to services reducing hours of operation (with many not being available 24/7 anymore) or programs, and to loss of expertise and understanding of the specific needs of women and children escaping domestic violence⁴.
- Generic service providers may not understand the specific needs of women and children experiencing domestic violence, for example the need for protection from the perpetrator and for anonymity.
- Faced with a competitive tendering process, organisations that have so far worked collaboratively may become competitive, not share resources and innovation or compete for clients
- Tender writing is a very time consuming process and smaller organisations may not have the skills or capacity for this task. Besides, this task would take considerable time away from service provision. The result is that tenders may well be awarded to the organisations with better tendering skills, rather than to the organisation with better specific domestic violence service provision skills.

2 Women’s Aid Federation of England, Why we need to Save our Services Women’s Aid data report on specialist domestic violence services in England, September 2014

3 SOS info sheet, November 2015 available at www.soswomensservices.com

4 http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/mar/09/no-place-to-hide-how-women-are-being-locked-out-of-domestic-violence-refuges?CMP=soc_568



WOMEN'S AID

Therefore we agree with the Wheel⁵ that Grant-allocation should remain a core method of funding available to commissioners and it should be the preferred approach where organisations provide a specialist service such as domestic violence services.

2) Outcomes based model

While Women's Aid understands the need for outcomes as a necessary tool for monitoring and evaluation of a service provider's work, it is necessary to point out that in our area of work it may be difficult to measure outcomes, especially in the short term. Not all of our work lends itself to outcomes measures. Some of our work like training delivery and public campaigns, etc., can be measured against pre-existing outcome measures; other work like our direct support services to women and our helpline is less so however this work is hugely valuable and responsive to the needs to the woman experiencing violence.

Therefore outcomes need to be broadly defined, inclusive of intangible achievements and with a long term view.

In particular, we are concerned by a narrow definition of outcomes, such as a woman leaving or getting an order under Domestic Violence legislation. Such course of action, is not always possible or even safest.

For example, it would be difficult to measure outcomes for a woman supported by our Helpline as we do not identify our callers. After her call, she may not call back again or not identify as a repeat caller, may or may not take action to change her situation or may do so after a long time.

A woman supported by a face to face support service or refuge may decide to return to her partner. This may well be the safest and best option she has available at the time, but her contact with the service may have increased her self-confidence, and given her information and options that she will use at a later date. Alternatively, she may want to take immediate action but be let down by other parts of the system, so that she is in fact unable to leave.

In short, service users' outcomes need to be broad and agreed with service providers and take into account intangible factors (feeling safer, increased self confidence and self efficacy), the time lag that may well exist between the time the service was provided and any "tangible" outcome, the fact that service users may not report back to us their decisions and actions, the fact that despite all the work done with a woman, there may not be a positive outcome for her if another part of the system lets her down.

Another issue regarding outcomes is the potential lack of recognition for system advocacy and prevention work.

Women's Aid for example has done huge amount of work in terms of awareness raising of domestic violence and of supports available, training of professionals and community development and in terms of legislative and policy changes to improve responses to women and children experiencing domestic violence. While it is

5 The Wheel, 2016, COMMISSIONING FOR COMMUNITIES Valuing the community and voluntary approach to human, social and community services



WOMEN'S AID

possible for us to measure the output of that work, it may be difficult to measure the outcomes, especially in the short term, or to attribute a particular outcome to our own work only.

This work is however essential to eliminate domestic violence in the long term, and must be acknowledged and valued.

3) Recognition of societal value

The Wheel's Commissioning for Communities report argues that the voluntary sector provides resources that the State would otherwise not be able to mobilise. These resources include, for example, extra funding, energy, commitment, specific expertise, and individual and community empowerment. The voluntary sector fulfills a bigger role than just service provider, it also has an essential social role in the development of viable and more just communities. This is referred to as Social Value.

We agree with the Wheel that it is imperative that this role of the voluntary sector is recognised in any new commissioning model and that community organisations are not seen only as service providers.

We also agree that a “key factor in acknowledging and promoting Societal Value will be a recognition that the current drift towards a commissioning or funding model that focuses exclusively on minimising public spending and cost to the state risks seriously compromising quality and effectiveness of services⁶”.

Therefore we recommend that “Societal Value”, as defined in the Wheel Report, must be incorporated into any commissioning models and be as valued as service user outcomes.

SECTION 3 REPLIES TO QUESTIONS

1. About you

Name:	Margaret Martin
Title (if applicable):	Director
Organisation (if applicable):	Women's Aid
Sector (if applicable):	Violence against Women
Address:	5 Wilton Place, Dublin 2
Email:	margaret.martin@womensaid.ie
Reason for Contributing to Consultation:	service provider

2. Proposed definition of commissioning

a) What is your preferred definition of Commissioning?

We agree with the Wheel that commissioning should be defined as “a strategic planning process linking resource allocation with assessed current and future needs. Commissioning is broader than procurement or

⁶ Ibidem page 7



WOMEN'S AID

competitive tendering⁷.

3. Proposed Stages and Features of the Commissioning Process:

a) What do you consider to be the key stages and features of a commissioning process?

All models proposed in the Review provide a good summary of the stages of commissioning.

What is key for us is **the degree to which service providers**, who have extensive and specific expertise in working with women and children experiencing domestic violence, **are consulted at all stages of the process**, including for example: needs analysis and gaps, agreement on outcomes and on reporting requirements and development of service models that best assist women and children.

b) Do any of the featured models outlined in the literature review - or from your own knowledge and experience – seem most suitable to the Irish context?

We do not have a strong preference in terms of the models proposed.

What is key is that, at all stages, system advocacy, prevention work and social outcomes are taken into consideration. In this regard, it may be worth exploring more **Commissioning for Social Value** as a possible model.

In terms of not dividing the sector and maintaining collaboration, there may be lessons to be learned from the **Alliance Contracting** model, however more information is needed on both these models and an exploration of how they would be applied in Ireland and in the domestic violence sector⁸.

4) Proposed Principles of Commissioning

a) Outline the principles that you believe should underpin a commissioning approach in Ireland

- Commissioning will recognise the importance of work in the Community and Voluntary sector and as a result, this will support both work that can be measured easily in terms of outcomes and work that is less easy to measure but nonetheless essential
- Commissioning should recognise and value the importance of systemic advocacy, prevention work and community development / benefits to the wider community as well as service provision
- Commissioning should provide quality and accessible services, which must remain free to users
- Commissioning should provide full cost recovery for voluntary organisations (funding of administrative and back office work)
- Commissioning should include a range of funding methods, not just or mostly tendering. In particular specialist areas of work, such as domestic violence, should retain grant allocation as the preferred method
- Commissioning should provide multi-annual funding (needed for planning, continuity and reducing “paper work”), as well as adequate advance notice of any changes
- Commissioning should not result in a huge increase of administrative/reporting/compliance work

7 Ibidem page 5

8 Commissioning in Human, Social and Community Services - A Rapid Evidence Review page 23 - 24



WOMEN'S AID

for small voluntary organisations, which would take much needed resources from their core work

- Commissioning must recognise the need of putting service users' needs at the centre of any change

5. Transitioning Arrangements

- a) What pre-cursors will be required to transition to a Commissioning approach?
- b) What improvements would you say are required to increase readiness for the services for which you are familiar?
- c) What are the potential risks to overcome?

Women's Aid's experience is largely confined to annual grants, tendering and service level agreements. This funding did provide stability but were not conducive to indepth planning, however, they did provide a good indication of the level of income available for service provision each year.

A move to a commissioning approach is a whole new process for the domestic violence sector and will require clear timeframes and good communications systems as well as capacity building on both sides of the commissioning process to facilitate needs analysis and realistic outcomes.

It is important to clearly distinguish between commissioning services for concrete items like waste collection, etc., from specialist social services like domestic violence when considering outcomes and key performance indicators. For example there is a common misunderstanding that women should separate from abusive partners without a realisation that separation including prior to and afterwards is a particularly dangerous time, and often escalates risk rather than reducing it. Also 23% of our service users experienced violence from ex intimate partners. This kind of specialist knowledge need to be included in the design of outcomes and KPAs.

The Commissioning approach might also be supported by the knowledge generated by well researched background papers and strategic and implementation plans would assist providers in addressing identified needs.

The risks are most linked to competitive tendering and would include the loss of specialist services, the loss of quality service and the loss of intra-sector collaboration, as described above. In terms of general commissioning the risks include an ever increasing workload in terms of paperwork and reporting requirements.

6. Further Submissions

(a) Having reviewed and considered the literature review and in view of your own experience, please submit any other matters, apart from those discussed above, that you deem necessary for further consideration as part of this programme of change. Women's Aid endorses the recommendations included in the Wheel document 'COMMISSIONING FOR COMMUNITIES'.



WOMEN'S AID

Making Women and Children Safe

WOMEN'S AID

5 Wilton Place, Dublin 2, Ireland.

Tel: 01-6788858 Fax: 01-6788915

Email: info@womensaid.ie

www.womensaid.ie

National Freephone Helpline 1800 341 900

Registered charity number 6491