

Sonas submission to the Commission for Future Policing in Ireland

30 January 2018

Sonas welcomes the opportunity to contribute to **the Commission for Future Policing in Ireland**. Sonas recognises the importance of the Commission's work in carrying out a fundamental review of the role, structures, leadership and management, ethos and culture of policing and existing oversight and consultative arrangements, and will highlight some very positive changes emerging within An Garda Síochána. Sonas's submission will focus specifically on policing domestic violence, provide an overview of the experiences of women and children dealing with the Garda in relation to these crimes and offer suggestions to improve management, policy and practice of this issue.

Sonas is the largest provider of frontline support services to women and children experiencing domestic violence in the state. In 2017 we supported over 1,300 women and children across the Greater Dublin Region and Wicklow. Sonas services include:

- 24/7 crisis refuge based in West Dublin
- Outreach and Visiting Support services covering the greater Dublin area and Wicklow
- Crisis Intervention Service specifically working with women and children where they live, including in homeless services, and Dochas Women's Prison
- Domestic violence support via staffed accommodation based services in South Dublin (Clondalkin), Dublin City (Ringsend and Killester) and more recently Wicklow
- Safe Homes – an innovative service in Dublin, which works in partnership with An Garda Síochána

Our starting point are the needs of the women and children we support, *their* specific safety and welfare needs shape our response. Partnership is key to our approach and we work closely on the ground with both statutory and non-statutory services, particularly Gardai and Tusla social work teams.

Our experience in relation to areas covered by the Commission for Future Policing terms of reference...

Sonass has 25 years experience of providing direct frontline support to women and children experiencing domestic abuse. Sonass has extensive experience of risk and safety assessment¹, planning and management with women and children experiencing domestic violence as well as managing additional security concerns:

- supporting clients to make statements
- supporting clients to apply for orders
- accompanying clients to court for orders as well as custody and access arrangements
- working with Gardai and other statutory agencies, in relation to crisis response, e.g. after a domestic violence incident
- managing security concerns related to perpetrator risk (specifically, Sonass site based services)

Sonass works directly with children. We have separate support teams for women and children which work in parallel with each other. As a result of our experience and approach, we have gained expertise and insight into the impact of domestic abuse on children and families in a domestic abuse context. We work closely with Tusla social work teams on child welfare and protection concerns.

Sonass would respectfully remind the Commission that the review of policing in Ireland, will operate in the context of:

- 1 in 7 women stating they had experienced physical violence by a partner at least once in the course of their lifetime since the age of 15; our experience of providing frontline services aligns with national findings; *disclosure* rates are much lower than the *prevalence* figures even in the case of the most serious incidents; and the number of women applying for orders is lower again.

¹ Client risk assessment and safety planning across Sonass services is carried out using the UK Association of Chief Police Officers' accredited CAADA DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking, Harassment and Honour Based Violence) risk assessment tool¹ implemented as standard across the UK since 2009. We have incorporated the DASH metrics in our database system across all services in order to optimise safety planning for clients as they move through Sonass service or exit services and to ensure services are evidence informed, effective and targeted

- A current national domestic violence framework that has no standardised method of risk assessment such as the DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking, Harassment and Honour Based Violence) risk assessment tool which is used in neighbouring jurisdictions by both police and domestic violence services; which ensures both statutory and voluntary are recording the same information.
- A current domestic violence framework that has no standardised risk management system similar to those used in neighbouring jurisdictions such as the MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) type system – a risk management structure where relevant professionals share information on high risk cases of domestic violence and abuse with the view to optimising safety planning for the women and children in these high risk cases

We are making the following observations and recommendations based on the terms of reference of the review.

Sonas recommendations in relation to the Commission's terms of reference:

Structures and management arrangements required for the most effective delivery of policing

- Sonas welcomes the proposed fundamental review to include all aspects of the management and function of An Garda Síochána. Sonas has very positive relationships with individual gardai districts and individual gardai, but would propose a structured relationship with An Garda Síochána, such as through the Protective Services Units.

Recommended action:

We would ask the commission to consider the development of a comprehensive national domestic violence framework in order to close the gaps in safety and protection around women and children experiencing domestic violence. Such gaps include:

- A domestic abuse risk assessment, as stated in the 2nd National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual & Gender Based Violence (Cosc, 2016 – 2021)

- A multi agency response to supporting high risk domestic abuse cases, such as the MARCA in the UK
- Improved data collection – both in terms of reported incidents (prevalence rates), and in terms of orders served.

Appropriate ongoing professional development for all personnel to meet the challenges of modern policing.

- Sonas welcomes being involved in the partnership in the Joint Tusla and Garda domestic violence training that is currently being rolled out in Wicklow, and is to be expanded into the South East Dublin (Tusla area), but would recommend that this training be rolled out nationally. This training is being evaluated by Trinity College Dublin and Cosc, and initial feedback from gardai is that it is very useful and informative.

Existing and emerging issues identified as key challenges for Ireland’s model of policing, e.g., evolving nature of crime, society (including increasing diversity) and public expectations and their relevance to structures, service delivery models, public confidence, performance measures etc.

- There is a gap in the protection of women and child victims of domestic abuse in relation to orders under the Domestic Violence Act. These gaps have been stated in Sonas’ submission to the improved Domestic Violence Bill, specifically in relation to women who are in non-contractual relationships, i.e. dating relationship, and not living together, and for young people under the age of 18. While these gaps are outside of the scope of the Commission for the Future Policing in Ireland, an issue remains in relation to the serving of domestic violence orders. There is no set way of serving orders under the Domestic Violence Act at present, leaving women in vulnerable situations if a garda has not served the order. There can also be delays, due to a lack of resources, on the serving of the order, again leaving a family unprotected. It is Sonas’s experience that there are times when the breach of an order cannot be classed as a breach, as it is unclear if and when the domestic violence order has been served.

- **Recommended action:**

Domestic Violence Orders are always served by Gardai to the respondent, particularly in high risk cases, and that appropriate timeframes for the serving of orders are put in place.

Valuable elements of police culture that exist are recognised and maintained

- Sonas has very positive and productive relationships with different garda divisions. One example is the multi agency approach in the Safe Home service, which was piloted in Dun Laoghaire / Rathdown in 2014, and is now available across Dublin. This pilot initiative was dependent on partnership working with the Gardai to allow for the delivery of a community based service for low to medium risk victims of domestic abuse. In the absence of a national framework to address domestic abuse on a multi agency level, the approach taken by the management in this area allowed for this pilot, and following a very positive evaluation by Trinity College Dublin, is now mainstreamed and has been named in social housing policy. However, this work needs to be replicated for each garda division in the greater Dublin area, as it is not a systematic response.
- Similarly, the Ballymun Domestic Abuse Coordination Team are a great example of initiative and drive within the gardai, that enhance service delivery to victims of domestic abuse. The team have dedicated gardai to work on domestic violence cases, but the added value from this team is the interagency collaboration that occurs between the gardai and domestic violence service providers.
- The Garda Domestic Abuse Intervention Policy is also a welcome development, in that if implemented, could greatly add to the safety and wellbeing of women and children who have experienced domestic abuse. The policy states that an Order under the Domestic Violence Act does not have to be in place for a garda to make an arrest if an incident of domestic violence is suspected, such as an assault. This would address the burden on the victim to report the crime, who might be too scared to report the incident, especially if there isn't somewhere safe to go while a case is being built.