



## **INVOLVING CLIENTS POLICY & PROCEDURES**

This policy was approved by the  
Management Committee of Foyle  
Women's Aid on

*Date:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Signed:* \_\_\_\_\_

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Women's Aid values and promotes self-help in its ethos and response to domestic violence and abuse against women and children.
- 1.2 As part of the process of self-help, Foyle Women's Aid seeks and reflects the views of women, children and young people in developing, reviewing or enhancing services, policies and practice on domestic violence.

## **2.0 POLICY STATEMENT**

2.1 Foyle Women's Aid values the participation and involvement of women, children and young people affected by domestic violence in its work, and believes that this involvement can help ensure that:

- Women are enabled to make decisions about things which affect them directly;
- The voices of children and young people are heard and reflected in any decision making which affects them;
- Women, children and young people are able to contribute their unique perspectives as clients to develop new services; to improve the delivery of current services, the development of local and regional policy and practice; and the planning and development of training; and
- Women are able to gain experience which may support their personal growth and confidence.

2.2 Women, children and young people who are current or former clients of Foyle Women's Aid can become involved in its operational and strategic work.

2.3 Foyle Women's Aid will support women, children and young people to have their voices and views heard and taken into consideration. This will include practical assistance, such as travel expenses, as well as other assistance, such as advocacy. In cases where women or children have special needs, support to enable them to communicate effectively (for example, interpreting and translating, signing, induction loop, large print or audio versions of information) will be provided wherever possible.

2.4 Women, children and young people will be consulted and involved on any issues which significantly affect their lives or their comfort. Such issues may include (but are not necessarily limited to):

- Changes in relation to the licence agreement, e.g. rent, service charges, repairs and maintenance;
- Changes to services currently provided - either services to be added, retained, removed or replaced); and

- Review of the information produced by Foyle Women's Aid.

2.5 This policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies:

- Equal Opportunities for Clients
- Collaborative & Partnership Working
- Comments & Complaints
- Confidentiality
- Child Protection
- Code of Conduct for Employers & Workers
- Safeguarding & Protection
- Whistleblowing

### **3.0 IMPLEMENTATION**

3.1 The Director has specific responsibility for the effective implementation of this policy. Each Line Manager also has responsibilities and all staff are expected to abide by the policy.

3.2 In order to implement this policy, Foyle Women's Aid will ensure that:

- All staff are made aware of the Involving Clients Policy through induction training. A staff handbook, outlining all organisational policies, is made available to all employees;
- All clients are made aware of the Involving Clients Policy in a timely and appropriate way;
- All staff understand the Policy and are able to fulfil their responsibilities; and
- Managers are aware of their responsibilities through appropriate and regular training.

### **4.0 PROCEDURES**

4.1 See Appendices 1 - 3

### **5.0 COMMENTS & COMPLAINTS**

5.1 Any member of staff who believes that they have been treated unfairly has the right to pursue a grievance through the procedure outlined in the Contract of Employment. Any volunteer who believes that they have been treated unfairly has the right to pursue a grievance through the procedure outlined in the Volunteering Policy.

- 5.2 Any breach of the Involving Clients Policy will be regarded as misconduct and may lead to disciplinary action.
- 5.3 Any other comments or complaints in relation to this policy should be raised in line with the Comments & Complaints Policy.

## **6.0 MONITORING & REVIEW**

- 6.1 The procedures will be reviewed on a regular basis to identify areas for improvement and, where appropriate, to make changes.

# PROCEDURES

## Appendix 1

### CONSULTATION

#### 1.0 Operational issues

- 1.1 All staff have responsibilities for consulting and involving current clients using the most effective means possible on the range of issues which are set out in the table in Appendix 2. Some of the methods shown in the table in Appendix 2 are a guide, but those highlighted in **bold** are mandatory. Wherever a mandatory method is shown, staff must use this method and may also reinforce it using any other appropriate methods.
- 1.2 Staff are also responsible for relaying views of individual clients, so that they can be considered. In consulting and involving women, children and young people in operational matters, staff will have regard to the guidelines for supporting them.

#### 2.0 Strategic issues

- 2.1 Current and former clients will also be encouraged to participate at a strategic level in the work of Foyle Women's Aid, as set out in Appendix 3. Members of staff will co-ordinate the involvement of current and former clients.

#### 3.0 Supporting Women, Children & Young People to Participate

- 3.1 All staff are responsible for providing women, children and young people with the support they need to make an effective contribution to the work of Foyle Women's Aid. They may do this by providing support directly or by accessing support from other agencies.
- 3.2 Workers routinely create and facilitate consultation opportunities for women on the day-to-day running of Women's Aid services, e.g. weekly house meetings to discuss subjects, such as health and safety and communal living; discussion groups on new developments in services, policy or practice; annual user forum meetings to review Women's Aid and other services.
- 3.3 As well as consulting women about Women's Aid's own services, workers can organise and facilitate consultations on relevant local and regional developments; proposed actions and initiatives of domestic violence partnerships; the Regional Steering Group (on domestic violence); children's services planning; community safety partnerships; district policing partnerships etc.

## 4.0 Guidelines

4.1 The following guidelines set out some of the key ways in which workers can support clients. Workers are responsible for using the most appropriate methods of support according to each person's needs.

- Try to make participation opportunities as informal as possible. Women may be attracted to them if events feel like low-key social occasions. A chat over tea and biscuits can achieve as much, or more, as a formal meeting.
- If a woman has support needs in relation to communication (e.g. literacy, translation, interpretation, hearing, sight or speech difficulties), assess these and ensure that the necessary support is in place for her to participate. Access any outside support from other agencies that women or children may need in order to voice their views.
- Always offer opportunities to get involved and encourage take-up. Let women know they can come along and just listen if they want. It may take time for some women's confidence to build enough to offer an opinion.
- Offer one-to-one opportunities to state views and listen carefully, so you can relay these without changing their meaning or emphasis. A lot of valuable information about the service will come your way via informal encounters – make sure you feed this information through as well.
- If women choose not to participate, try to find out why this is. A woman may not feel ready to engage or she might like to try with some support. Try to find the best way to support her involvement (e.g. pair her with a friend; make it clear she can just attend and listen; find out her views and offer to express them at a meeting).
- When working with children and young people, incorporate consultation and involvement into play sessions and fun activities. Try combining discussion about the issue/s with a fun or interesting activity which rewards involvement. Keep sessions short and entertaining. In particular, with young people, encourage them to help set the agenda and to exert some control over the situation, for example, by making their own rules for the consultation or involvement exercise.
- When working with former clients on the Management Committee, ensure that they have opportunities to go through the papers with a staff member or another Committee member prior to the meeting to ensure they are familiar with the information and issues presented. Seat them with more experienced Committee members who can offer support during the meeting. Offer to debrief them following meetings, so that they have an opportunity to practice and develop skills.
- Any consultation that has involved current or former clients will be evaluated to assess its impact on the outcome of the process and in relation to the effectiveness of the method of consultation adopted.

## PARTICIPATION ON OPERATIONAL ISSUES

ISSUE	WHO TO CONSULT/INVOLVE	METHOD <i>Mandatory methods are shown below in bold</i>	TIMESCALE	OTHERS INVOLVED
<b>Changes to the Licence Agreement, rent and charges.</b>	Women – each resident must agree to any change in her occupancy agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>By letter to each licensee</b> in addition to</li> <li>▪ House Meetings</li> <li>▪ One-to-one meetings</li> </ul>	Minimum 28 days' notice prior to any changes	Housing association; NIHE
<b>Repairs and maintenance or changes to housing management policies</b>	Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>By letter to each client</b></li> <li>▪ House meetings</li> <li>▪ Specially convened meetings</li> <li>▪ Noticeboards</li> </ul>	Minimum 14 days' notice prior to any changes	Housing association; NIHE
<b>Permanent or long-term changes in the level of service provided (increases or decreases)</b>	Women, children and young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>By letter to each client if withdrawing or reducing service provision</b></li> <li>▪ House meetings</li> <li>▪ Play sessions</li> <li>▪ Specially convened meetings</li> </ul>	Minimum 28 days' notice prior to any changes wherever possible.	Funders; H&SS Trust; Supporting People

ISSUE	WHO TO CONSULT/INVOLVE	METHOD <i>Mandatory methods are shown below in bold</i>	TIMESCALE	OTHERS INVOLVED
<b>Proposed redecoration and refurbishment</b>	Women, children and young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>In writing to each licensee</b></li> <li>▪ House meetings</li> <li>▪ Play sessions</li> <li>▪ One-to-One Meetings</li> </ul>	Minimum 14 days prior to any works beginning	Housing association; landlord; contractors
<b>Changes to published information about services provided by Foyle Women's Aid</b>	Women and young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ House meetings</li> <li>▪ Specially convened meetings</li> </ul>	Minimum 14 days' notice prior to any changes	Housing association; Supporting People; H&SS Trust; funders; key stakeholders; & general public
<b>Major repairs of interior or exterior, including new fixtures and fittings</b>	Women, children and young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>In writing to each licensee</b></li> <li>▪ House meetings</li> <li>▪ Play sessions</li> <li>▪ One-to-one meetings</li> <li>▪ Noticeboards</li> </ul>	Minimum 28 days' notice prior to any changes	Housing association; contractors; & landlord



## PARTICIPATION AT A STRATEGIC LEVEL

PARTICIPATION OPPORTUNITY	METHODS	STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES
<b>Management Committee</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informal social events</li> <li>• Membership of Management Committee</li> <li>• Training and supporting former client members to participate effectively</li> <li>• Providing written guidance for Management Committee members on their role and responsibilities</li> </ul>	Chair of Management Committee; Senior manager
<b>Ad-hoc groups consulted on development and changes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Events organised for clients and former clients</li> <li>• Training and supporting former clients to participate effectively</li> </ul>	Relevant project workers and/or managers
<b>Local and regional developments and initiatives on domestic violence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Events organised for clients and former clients</li> <li>• Training and supporting former clients to participate effectively</li> </ul>	Relevant project workers and/or managers