

PRESS STATEMENT FROM WEST CORK WOMEN AGAINST VIOLENCE ON THE DELAY IN OPENING WEST CORK PROTECTIVE SERVICES UNIT

West Cork Women Against Violence, the domestic violence support service has wholeheartedly supported the initiative taken by the West Cork Garda Division to establish a Protective Services Unit in our region.

Under the *Garda Siochana Modernisation & Renewal Programme*, such specialist units are recognised as the way forward in more effectively and sensitively responding and investigating offences such as sexual and domestic violence, child abuse, sex trafficking and other related matters. The Protective Services Unit is a place of safety and support for the victims of such crimes providing specialist Garda interviewers with access to other specialist support services which victims may require.

These types of units and their approach have been operational for more than 20 years in other European jurisdictions and further afield. Ireland is already lagging behind in this respect.

Here in West Cork, the West Cork Garda Division has been determined in its efforts to establish such a unit in our region. In this, it has the full support of our organisation. All of the various processes and steps necessary were put in place last year with a view to having the west Cork Protective Services Unit operational by the end of 2017. All that remains is for the Minister for Justice to give the instruction to release funds for the rental of the building to house the Unit. No explanation for his inaction in doing so and the failure to have the Unit opened as planned has been provided by the Minister. Several attempts in recent weeks to obtain a response from the Minister by local TD, Margaret Murphy O' Mahony have met with silence.

Victims of the kind of crimes which the Protective Services Unit are tasked with dealing are amongst the most vulnerable in our communities; children and individuals subjected to levels of fear and abuse that require our immediate concern and attention. In West Cork, we have shown a unity of purpose across all the relevant agencies and services to establish this most vital of responses to that need. West Cork Women Against Violence believes the Minister must show the same sense of purpose and concern by making the necessary arrangements to allow the Protective Services Unit become an operational reality in West Cork.