



Nexus

Breaking the Cycle of Sexual Abuse
and Abusive Relationships



Breaking the Cycle of Sexual Abuse and Abusive Relationships in Local Communities

Local Government Elections - May 2023

Introduction

According to PSNI Trends in Recorded Crimes 2021-22, the number of sexual offences reported in Northern Ireland reached the highest level recorded. There were **4,059** such incidents reported during 2021/22, up from 3,328 in the previous year. Of the 4,059 incidents, there were **1,247** Rape Offences and **2,812** 'Other Sexual Offences'*.

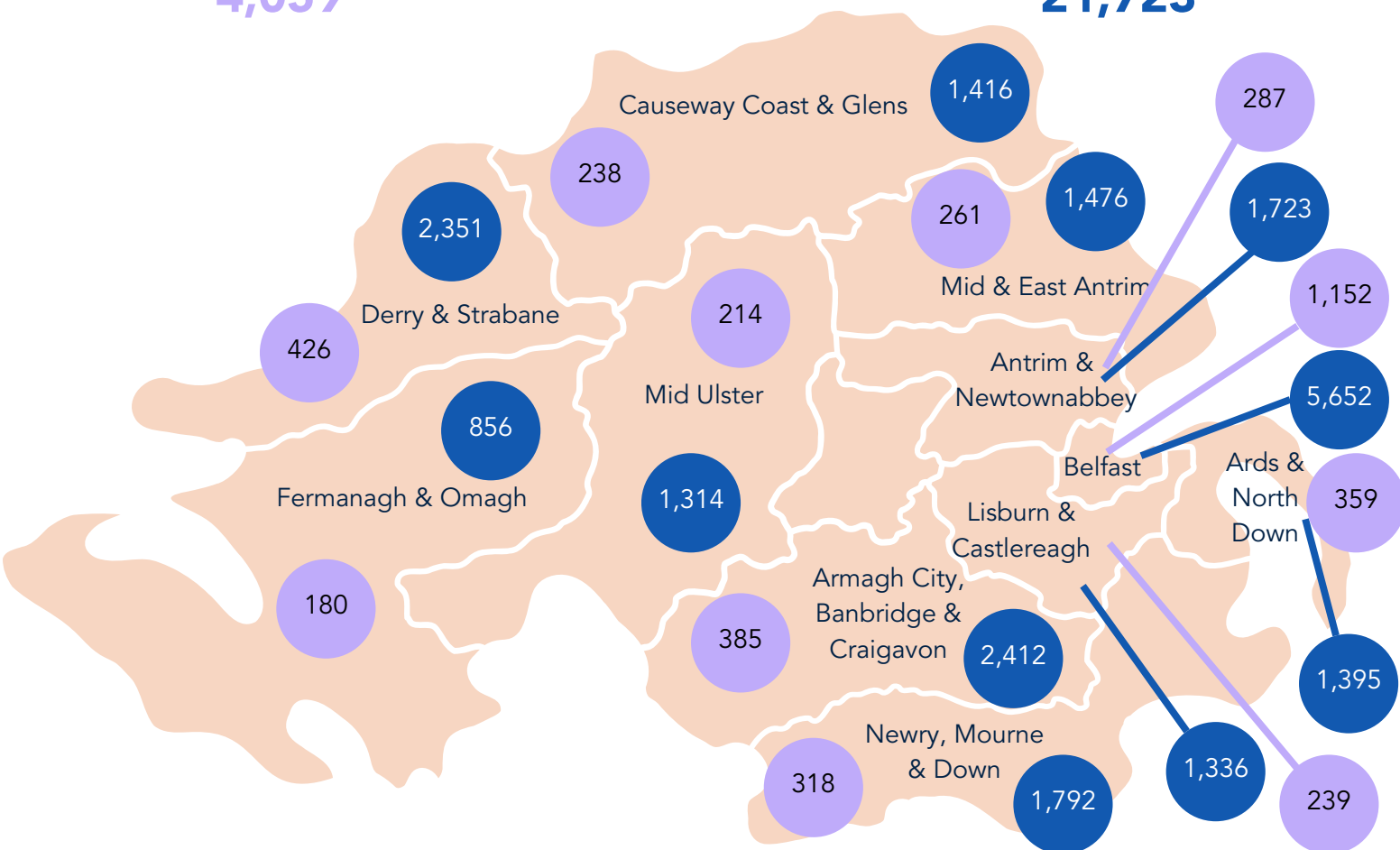
There were also **33,186** Domestic Incidents and **21,723** Domestic Crimes**. We know these are just the 'tip of the iceberg' and that many crimes of this nature go unreported.

In the same year Nexus supported **427** clients through counselling for sexual abuse and **47** family members. The following year (22/23) we supported **567** clients through counselling for sexual abuse and **73** family members. A **33%** and **55%** increase respectively and we continue to have a running waiting list.

Nexus also hosts the **Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline**. In the 21/22 reporting period **11,568** calls were made to the helpline, **11,418** webchats were conducted and **318** emails received. In the 22/23 reporting period all of these numbers have increased - **11,900** calls were made to the helpline (**3% increase**), **19,645** webchats (**72% increase**) and **609** emails (**91% increase**).

Total Sexual Offences 4,059

Total Domestic Crimes 21,723



*PSNI, <https://www.psni.police.uk/sites/default/files/2022-12/Police%20Recorded%20Crime%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%201998-99%20to%202021-22.pdf>

**PSNI, <https://www.psni.police.uk/sites/default/files/2022-12/Domestic%20Abuse%20Incidents%20and%20Crimes%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%202004-05%20to%202021-22.pdf>

It is clear that sexual abuse and abusive relationships impact people in every constituency in Northern Ireland and local action must be taken to address this. Nexus is calling on all candidates contesting the May 2023 Local Government Election to support the following pledges and commit to:



Council Staff Training and Support



Community and Industry Engagement



Investment in and Provision of Awareness Raising Campaigns and Resources

Council Staff Training and Support

Education and training are essential to breaking the cycle of sexual abuse and abusive relationships. Councillors must commit to **support and fund relevant training initiatives for council officials and staff**. The Trades Union Congress research 'Still just a bit of banter? Sexual harassment in the workplace in 2016', found more than half of all women polled have experienced some form of sexual harassment, including jokes or comments of a sexual nature, unwanted touching (such as a hand on the knee or lower back), unwanted sexual advances, sexual touching or attempts to kiss them*. We have seen evidence of this locally with high profile media coverage of action brought against local companies by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

In addition Councillors must commit to **creating safe workplace policies to support staff who have experienced, or are experiencing, sexual abuse and/or abusive relationships**. This could include paid leave, flexible working adjustments, paid counselling support, and safeguarding awareness training for managerial staff**. Providing a safe space at work should be paramount to the work of a Council and the right training and policies would make sure support is in place for anyone who needs it and better equip staff to handle disclosures.

*TUC, 2016. <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/still-just-bit-banter>.

** Equality and Human Rights Commission and CIPD. <https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/guides/supporting-employees-experiencing-domestic-abuse/>

Community and Industry Engagement

It is important that people feel safe where they live, work, go to school, and spend their leisure time. Councillors must **facilitate Community and Industry Engagement groups** to increase cooperation between local businesses, advocacy groups, schools, and more to ensure Community Safety. **Council-funded awareness campaigns, training for local businesses, and education workshops** are key areas for forums to communicate best practice and identify ways of spreading the message of support and zero tolerance towards sexual abuse and abusive relationships.

Investment in & Provision of Awareness Raising Campaigns & Resources

Councillors must invest in **raising awareness of sexual abuse and abusive relationships** so that constituents are aware of what healthy relationships are, can take action to end unhealthy relationships and seek help, advice and support if they experience them.

We have seen the success of schemes such as “Ask for Angela” and the ONUS SafePlace Programme*, a UK-wide training programme that gives businesses, community centres, worship centres, etc. accredited ‘safe place’ status and provides information and signposting to anyone impacted by domestic abuse. Funding for local programmes such as these are key to providing support and information for anyone impacted by sexual abuse and abusive relationships.

We would also call for **Councillors to work with Party colleagues in Councils across Northern Ireland and collaborate** so that all constituents can benefit from shared resources and knowledge.



Further Information

For more information please contact the Nexus Communications Team using the details below:

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