

**Committee for Justice, Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill**  
**Record of Issues Raised by Individuals at Informal Meetings**  
**Informal Meeting 6 July 2020 – Individual B**

**Present:** Paul Frew MLA

**In attendance:** Kathy O'Hanlon, Senior Assistant Clerk  
Allison Mealey, Clerical Officer

Mr Frew MLA met with Individual B via video call to discuss her experience of domestic abuse and of the response by justice bodies/agencies and others.

**Introduction**

Individual B began by detailing how, approximately one year ago, she visited a solicitor regarding the treatment that her husband had subjected her to which included controlling behaviour, verbal abuse and financial manipulation. Although divorce proceedings are ongoing, she would have liked her husband to be held to account legally for his behaviour. The solicitor, however, advised Individual B that nothing could be done as there was no law against her husband's actions. Individual B said her husband knew that there is no law against the behaviour he subjected her and she felt this enabled him.

**Personal experience of domestic abuse**

Some of the examples of abuse recounted by Individual B during the meeting are detailed below.

Financial control

Individual B explained that her husband has taken their two businesses from her as he made sure that her name was not affiliated with them. He also had been transferring money into secret accounts to which she has no access.

Individual B advised that her parents paid for their house to be painted as her husband told her he had no money to do this, though he had the resources to fly to another country a few months later to participate in a sporting event. Individual B highlighted this to her husband and reminded him that her parents needed to be reimbursed for their loan to paint the house. Individual B said that some money was paid back by her husband but stopped before being fully paid as he cried to her and said that he had no money. Individual B said that the only time her husband cried was regarding the financial side of things and that she believes this was a ruse to gain her sympathy.

Individual B told how her husband had failed to pay their mortgage for six months and when they went to a meeting regarding their mortgage repayments, her husband 'forgot' to bring his bank details so Individual B provided her bank details which then left her responsible for their mortgage payments. Individual B advised that her husband left her soon after this and as she is now responsible for the mortgage repayments, she has taken on a number of jobs in order to keep paying their mortgage. These jobs include: cleaning toilets, washing pots,

mucking-out horses and walking dogs. Individual B described working 20 hour days so that she can pay the mortgage.

Individual B wants to sell the house and move on with her life but her husband has put too high a valuation on the house, which so far has prevented it from selling. Some years ago, Individual B's parents gave her and her husband a loan to start their businesses which has still not been paid off in full. Selling the house will allow part of that loan to be repaid, but her parents may then need to take Individual B and her husband to court for the outstanding sum.

Individual B will have no accommodation once the house is sold, and will be bottom of the list for social housing.

The need to pay £2-4,000 upfront for divorce proceedings is an added financial difficulty.

### Physical Intimidation

Individual B mentions physical intimidation by way of her husband bringing his family members around constantly and that he and a relative caused damage to some of their property and removed property over an unspecified period of time. She said that members of her husband's family were rude to her, disrespectful of her home and they would have removed things from her property without permission. Individual B mentioned that they want her mentally and financially on her knees and that she has been informed that her husband wants her dead.

Individual B detailed her husband pushing and shoving her, smashing their television and throwing things; she also believes her husband was not nice to her pet dog. Individual B said that she was threatened with physical violence on a weekly basis and at one point, her husband told her to f\*\*k off and die. Individual B said that during this time, she felt that she was like a vegetable and that she was just functioning and no more.

Individual B described how the only thing her husband did in the home was make a cup of tea after dinner. Individual B recalled one particular occasion where she remembered hearing her husband stirring a cup yet she knew they did not have sugar. Individual B said that within 20 minutes, she was asleep. She recalls feeling more and more like a vegetable and when she mentioned how she was feeling to her husband, he threatened to take her to see a Doctor who would stick a lot of needles into her for tests, knowing that she has a fear of needles. Her husband became angry and said she was accusing him of doping her, when she hadn't mentioned the word 'doping' to him. Individual B stated that any time she came close to the truth with regard to her husband's behaviour she was exposed to physical and verbal abuse and threats.

Individual B feels that her husband's behaviour is an act of revenge at her having called the police a number of years ago when he came at her and frightened her.

### Mental and verbal abuse

Individual B explained that she had to endure passive aggressive behaviour, verbal abuse and mimicking of her by her husband which she found very difficult to take. Her husband's behaviour was insidious, calculated and controlled.

Individual B told of how she had caught her husband having an affair which he repeatedly denied. Individual B had viewed text messages between her husband and another woman which had been sent on a 'dark messenger.' Individual B explained that 'dark messenger' deletes text messages after a chosen time, such as 10 seconds, one minute, one day etc. Individual B believes that her husband had used this tool as a method to gas-light her into believing that he was not having an affair.

Individual B explained that she was left almost housebound as her husband did not want her going out; she detailed one particular occasion where she needed dental treatment but her husband repeatedly evaded taking her to see a dentist and also made comments such as, 'who wants to look at you?'

Individual B mentioned that her husband made fun of her for not having as many friends on a social media account as he had.

Individual B said that she felt that she was 'mental' as a result of this abuse. She stated that even participating in today's meeting was frightening for her and that she has good and bad days. She told how she had kept a diary and that at one point, she considered committing suicide as a result of the abuse she was subjected to by her husband.

### **Experience of justice bodies/agencies and others**

- The court proceedings are for Individual B and her husband's divorce and not for domestic abuse.
- Individual B believes that the divorce proceedings are being used as a weapon against her, with her husband prolonging the processes – for example, her husband still has to hand over financial papers almost a year after she handed hers over. Individual B believes her husband wants to drag the process out for two years but the divorce could have been finalised within six months under other grounds.
- Individual B stated that she searched the internet for advice on the action she could take with regard to her husband's behaviour. Numerous websites suggested his behaviour could be deemed 'narcissistic', but none suggested that she should contact the police to report his actions.
- Individual B has been advised to seek counselling. She suggested a need to be careful of religious-based counselling as some beliefs may see many things as 'a wife's duty.'

### **How this legislation would or could have helped if it had already been in place**

- Individual B said that had there been a law against her husband's behaviour she would have felt more inclined to report him to the police and would have had evidence to do so. Individual B stated she felt that in some ways it would have been better had her husband beaten her up.
- Individual B said that, when the legislation is passed, she will look to set up a website which makes it clear these actions are types of domestic abuse and that will direct victims to report the perpetrator to the police.

*After Individual B participated in the informal meeting, she provided some further information on her experience of domestic abuse, which is attached at appendix A*

## Appendix A

Hello,

Thank you for allowing me to 'speak'.

There are a few more points to add if I may.

The intensity of his behaviour escalated from February last year, when he said he owed 6 months mortgage and i refused point blank to ask my parents for money. I knew he was playing me just couldn't get the evidence..

i) lack of empathy.

Emotional withholding.

My [REDACTED] went through cancer treatment last year February.

Zero response from him.

My 2 ponies were put to sleep last May.

Again zero response apart from his statement about being unphased by it.

Was fit to tell me all about the vets gun.

ii) sex

Last time we had sex [REDACTED]

I had to make him stop, he carried on separately. I was bruised for a week. I didn't know who that person was next to me.

iii) the other woman's husband was on medication for PTSD etc.

Ex was fit to tell me that 'M' had a habit of not always taking his medication.

Such intimate knowledge astounded me, 'M' tried overdosing and ended in the [REDACTED] 24hr watch ward when his wife admitted affair.

iv) asking me not to be here at [REDACTED] when he collects remaining wood framing lengths.

Coming with a brother to collect but I can't be here.

Threatening he can walk in anytime.

I said I was advised to change them ,(i haven't..can't afford ) told him I have cameras.

I have one inside linked to my phone.

I became paranoid re food if I thought he'd been in.

V) saying to solicitors, he's no money for bills, when he clearly he's filling Facebook with his ventures away, concerts in [REDACTED] etc!

For me, financially is the big strain.

For someone that wanted free he's slower than a slow thing! But I outed them to her husband.

So I upset their plans, yes they had plans,

So I must be 'punished' for it.

"Everything was quiet till you reared your head"

The law needs also to look at where there is a constant 3rd party involved. As far as I'm concerned she was adding to my hurt by advising, egging him on, plotting etc. and savings, I am aware that they have an account where money had been taken from this household and hers not forgetting his mother's banking for him.

I wish the Law would confiscate electronic equipment where phone calls emails could be seen and banks, building societies etc, dates and times.

I'm lucky that the fight in me is coming back.

I so nearly didn't make it,

I was a shell of a person, not recognising the woman in the mirror. Shame, nervousness, I physically shook but, that may have been withdrawal symptoms of whatever was in my tea.

There are so many other things but it is exhausting. I have evidence to all the scenarios above.

Thank you for your time.

Regards

Individual B