



Paul Frew, Michelle McIlveen & Patsy McGlone
Members of the NI Legislative Assembly
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw, Stormont
Belfast, BT4 3XX

28 November 2023

By email.

Paul, Michelle and Patsy,

RE: Positive Action for Male Victims of Abuse

I write to you in relation to the need for positive action for male victims of abuse and, in particular, criticisms related to Split the Difference's continued commitment to promoting this need.

Please be advised that I will publish a copy of this letter on our website and also share it with relevant stakeholders. I will address the criticisms directly and I must begin by expressing my sincere regret for the criticisms that you all, and your respective political parties, have been exposed to as a consequence of your kind and democratic act of sponsoring our event.

Split the Difference is not anti-women. Those who take the time to get to know me personally will find that my work as CEO is informed by over two decades experience of delivering services to, and advocating for, vulnerable female victims of domestic abuse. Split the Difference's mission is, plain and simply, to encourage consultation, guidance and policy that supports the needs of men and boys equally to women and girls.

I am currently at a significant disadvantage in terms of addressing the specifics of ‘concerns’ that have been raised with you. The coalition of ‘women’s rights groups’ who cosigned the letter to you have yet to share any of their ‘concerns’ directly with me.

I will directly address the most significant ‘concerns’ published by the Belfast Telegraph and Mediahuis UK Ltd to-date. These are as follow:

1. [Split the Difference] “seem... to reduce focus on violence against women and girls and attempt to reduce funding to these services.”

Page 1 of [our summary briefing](#), shared with delegates who attended the event in Parliament Buildings, explicitly states that: “*Split the Difference do not promote or support positions that advocate removing resources from female victims to address the significant gaps in support and protections for male victims that we highlight.*” This principle was promoted several times during the event.

There is no evidence to support the assertion made by the chair of the Women’s Policy Group (WPG). It is projection, plain and simple. There is significant evidence to show that members of the WPG have promoted this false assertion as part of an orchestrated attempt to, first cancel and then, undermine an event convened for the explicit purpose of encouraging a much needed focus on intimate violence experienced by boys and men.

2. [Split the Difference makes] false assertions [and] misuse of statistics that are not in the service of boys and men.

To date, Ms Crory and WPG members have provided absolutely zero evidence to support this damning claim. Split the Difference welcomes scrutiny of our empirical evidence based analysis and note that [the Belfast Newsletter effectively independently verified](#) two of the three [myth busting facts](#) that we provided MLAs with at our successful event last Monday.

3. MLAs have provided platforming to people who argue that the high rates of domestic abuse encountered by the PSNI is: “*all some kind of fabrication.*”

To date Ms Crory and WPG members have put zero evidence into the public domain to support this outrageous false allegation. The fact that 20% of all crimes currently recorded by the PSNI was specifically highlighted during the MLA Briefing.

As we enter a period of 16 days of global activism against gender based violence, it is relevant to note that WPG members regularly draw attention to the fact that the PSNI report that they receive a call relating to domestic abuse every 16 minutes. WPG members rarely, if ever, also acknowledge the reality that 1 in every 3 of the victims of domestic abuse that the PSNI come into contact with are male.

4. “[Split the Difference’s] videos include allegations against organisations, including that Women’s Aid indoctrinates women against men and operates like a crime network.”

To date, Ms Crory and WPG members have provided absolutely zero evidence to support this damning claim. If you are aware of any then please forward it to me by return.

5. “There is no suggestion any other organisation represented [at the briefing event] has engaged in any misogyny.”

My understanding is that at least one member of the WPG raised ‘concerns’ with MLA sponsors about at least one other NGO member of the Men’s Federation NI. My understanding is also that the NGO that raised these concerns provided you all with a portfolio of screenshots that appear to provide quite disturbing prima facie evidence of [omnipresence](#) and willful intent to cause someone harm by monitoring their social media accounts in an obsessive manner.

6. “Split the Difference’s social media presence has previously shared a number of posts and memes that appear to display a level of misogyny.”

These posts are in no way intended to promote or display hatred towards women. I sincerely regret the fact that they have been perceived by some as misogynistic and also exploited by radical feminists to undermine an important discussion about human rights.

The screen-shots have been presented out of context and cherry picked from literally thousands of social media posts. They are also expressions of my sincerely held, empirical evidence informed, egalitarian beliefs.

If you would like to discuss the nuanced intention behind any of Split the Difference’s social media posts or re-tweets, please do not hesitate to contact me. For now, I will address one example of claims made about these cynically selected posts:

In one post the group appears to indicate support for the notion that the gender wage gap is a “myth”.

This claim was given significant prominence by Liam Tunney’s first article published in the Belfast Telegraph on the 22nd November 2023. Coincidentally, in the UK, the 22nd November was Equal Pay Day, as selected by the Fawcett Society on the basis that [this is purportedly the day when, because of the gender pay gap, women overall in the UK stop being paid for like work when directly compared to men.](#)

Every year, [the Women’s Equality Party encourages women across the UK](#) to set their professional email account to ‘out of office’ on Equal Pay Day to draw attention to this claim. Most women do not participate in promoting what is an extremely misleading message. Pay discrimination on grounds of sex has been illegal across the UK since 1970 and most women who remain ‘in the office’ continue to be remunerated at the same rate of pay as their male colleagues.

The Labour Relations Agency reported that in 2022: *“The gender pay gap for all employees in Northern Ireland (regardless of working pattern and excluding overtime) was 4% in favour of males.”* For those in part-time employment this gap widens and flips, whereby females earn more per hour on average than males.

Both women and men can obviously still potentially encounter pay discrimination but fixed pay grades agreed across many regulated industries mean that most women and men are guaranteed the same level of pay for like or similar work. Some particularly well paid professions attract higher levels of remuneration because they can be dirty, dangerous, require long hours or be otherwise unattractive to potential open market recruits. Men often tend to choose to work in such professions in significantly higher numbers than women.

Other complicating factors to acknowledge include the fact that the gender pay gap is much higher for women aged 40. This is reflective of division of labour trends within two parent family households, where a mother will often take lengthy periods of maternity leave and undertake primary caring responsibility for their children. In contrast the father will frequently work longer hours to provide for them. As a woman and a mother, I obviously support positive action measures to address the impact that motherhood can have on a woman’s career trajectory, lifetime earning potential and ultimate pension pot.

Northern Ireland has the smallest gender pay gap in the entire UK and, similar to all other UK regions, also has a significantly higher disability pay gap to be addressed. Despite this, progress towards the introduction of compulsory gender pay reporting is pushed by many as the bigger priority. This is evidence of the higher level of regard and concern legislators and administrations afford to women, in direct comparison to the level of regard and concern they afford to disabled people.

As you may appreciate, it would be impossible to communicate this level of detail and nuance in a maximum of 280 characters.

7. The Alliance Party claims that Split the Difference: "*hold outdated, wrong and dangerous views; [and that those who helped facilitate our briefing event at Stormont] "should educate themselves on the harm such tropes about women have."*

The Alliance Party's spokesperson on domestic abuse may be the source of the screenshots shared with the Belfast Telegraph. Ms Egan effectively boycotted our event on the basis that she believed her attendance might be perceived as an endorsement of screenshots in her possession that she considered to be '*entirely inappropriate*'.

The hypocrisy of those who seek to lecture and tone police others is inevitably revealed to be astounding. A cursory appraisal of Ms Egan's Party leader's own social media output reveals [the frequent promotion of sexist gendered terms and tropes](#). When I met with Ms Long in June she also conceded that, during her time as Justice Minister, she championed objective needs assessment criteria that directly discriminates against male victims of domestic abuse.

[Naomi Long may claim that 'every day is international men's day'](#), but as those who took the time to attend our briefing will know, every other day Northern Ireland loses a man or boy to suicide and, according to the Department of Health, a man living in the 20 per cent most deprived areas of Northern Ireland can expect to live ten years less than a women living in the most affluent.

The Belfast Telegraph claim that Split the Difference has not responded to a number of requests for comment. This is yet further evidence of unprofessional, inaccurate and entirely cynical reporting. As you can independently verify, [I wrote to Liam Tunney](#) two days before [he published this false claim](#). At that time I advised him that Split the Difference has a policy of not engaging with yellow journalism.

It is also significant to note that the primary author of the attempted cancellation letter perceives herself to be '[*frequently maligned*](#)'. Ms Crory appears to have locked her X social media account last week after making disparaging remarks about the impact statement written by the late Ashling Murphy's grieving partner. As you may imagine, her now deleted post caused [a significant amount of upset](#) to [a significant amount of people](#), mostly [other women](#).

Ms Crory is the chair of the Green Party who lost their small NI Assembly mandate at the last election. A prominent member of their sister party in England recently advocated in Parliament for [a 6pm curfew for men on the basis that she believed that: 'discrimination of all kinds would be lessened'](#).

Last week, Ms Crory wrote to the Men's Federation to provide them with assurances that she was not the source of claims put to the Belfast Telegraph and that she had not, in fact, spoken to the Belfast Telegraph "[at all](#)". On the same day, the Belfast Telegraph published a lengthy article listing the concerns I have addressed in this letter. Ms Crory is attributed as the source of these concerns and a picture of her is featured prominently in the piece.

In short, I believe that Ms Crory has not raised her '*concerns*' with you in good faith, or with any degree of intellectual honesty. I would also propose that she has not earned the right to dictate who should be afforded equality of opportunity (or otherwise) in Parliament Buildings. In an open and democratic society, people have the human right to openly express their personal, political and empirical evidence informed views. This is a fundamental underpinning principle of parliament.

The Equality Commission NI have assured me that people living and working in Northern Ireland are protected from discrimination and harassment on grounds of political opinion and sex. The Equality Commission is a member of the WPG and I intend to test the validity of their assurances in court.

I will also be writing to the Commissioner for Standards to seek assurances from her that I have not been effectively black balled from being welcomed about the place in Stormont. More broadly, I will be requesting that she take steps to address troubling chill factors encountered by advocates for the human rights of boys and men.

To assist me, I ask that you forward a copy of Ms Crory et al's letter by return. I ask that you also share any additional '*concerns*' that have been raised with you about Split the Difference, or any other members of the Men's Federation NI. If it assists you to progress this request as a subject access request under Article 15 of the UK GDPR please do so.

I can assure you that everything we publish is backed by research and evidenced through government and academic reporting. It is and never will be our aim to cause anyone harm. We understand that many have not had the opportunity to look at in-depth, comparable research the way we have.

I especially hope that this experience has not challenged personal or professional relations between you all. Sex and sovereignty are two of humanity's most ancient of all political fault lines and Northern Ireland is clearly a much better place when its two communities work together in pursuit of the bright and shared future that I believe all of its citizens deserve.

Please consider that without the sharing of the allegations, this is nothing more than a smear campaign delivered in a very passive aggressive, unethical and discriminatory manner. I am more than happy to stand before any individual or committee and respond robustly to any of the allegations or concerns that have been made.

Split the Difference believes in family, our position on the work we do is that when we support a boy or man, we are also supporting their grandmother, mother, aunt, sister, wife and / or daughter. Likewise when we support a woman or girl, we are also supporting their grandfather, father, brother, husband, son.

I am a professional and always work in truth. For myself, I can easily ignore such unprofessional and, frankly, childish behaviour but when I walk into the rooms of Stormont I carry these families voices with me, every single one. I urge you to support evidence-based truth and, at the very least, afford me/us/our families the human right to know who has raised 'concerns' about us with you and why. All voices must be afforded the human right to be heard.

I will finish by once again expressing my gratitude for your support and my sincere regret if you have been troubled by any criticism in providing the equitable space for us to share our evidence.

My Best Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "SBurris". The letters are fluid and cursive, with the 'S' and 'B' being particularly large and prominent.

Sally-Anne Burris
CEO - Split the Difference

www.split-the-difference.com

Email: talk2us@split-the-difference.com