

Jane Hutt AS/MS
Y Dirprwy Weinidog a'r Prif Chwip
Deputy Minister and Chief Whip



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref MA/JH/1873/20

John Griffiths AS/MS
Chair
Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee
Welsh Parliament

30 June 2020

Dear John,

Thank you for your letter dated 29 May requesting further information on the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on areas of my portfolio, following my attendance at Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee on 15 May. I have set out the responses to each of your questions under the following headings for ease of reference.

Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV)

As agreed during the course of my evidence session with the Committee, I have attached my response to the correspondence received from Women's Aid in relation to funding for VAWDASV (**Annex A**).

The revenue budget for 2017-18 was £4.5 million while the capital budget was £969k. At that time it was intended that the VAWDASV revenue budget should form part of the flexible funding pilot which would have seen 11 grants brought together into a single grant. The Welsh Government accepted representations from the sector and agreed that VAWDASV funding should continue to be ring-fenced and to increase the budget by £0.5 million in 2018-19.

The revenue budget was further increased two years later, in 2020-21 to £5.25 million. At the same time Cabinet agreed a one-year additional capital grant of £1.2 million to fund disbursed community-based accommodation for those fleeing domestic abuse. This brought the VAWDASV capital grant to £2.169 million in 2020-21. This was confirmed in the final budget agreement in March 2020.

All of the £1.2 million additional capital grant has been allocated through the VAWDASV regional partnerships, although we await final outcomes from Cardiff and the Vale, which opted to procure, rather than grant-fund projects in that region. This, and further detail is laid out in my letter of 28th April in response to Sara Kirkpatrick, the new Chief Executive of Welsh Women's Aid's, letter (**Annex A**).

We recognised the pressures facing the sector as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic and for this reason we discussed with Welsh Women's Aid how the organisation could work with us to provide strategic leadership to the sector. I have made £100k available to the organisation and asked for their proposals which, I understand, they have sent in draft this week.

More significantly, we have taken on board international evidence from previous crises, such as 2009 economic crash, and natural disasters such as the Christchurch earthquake, which shows these tend to lead to an increase in domestic abuse and sexual violence. The restrictions on movements imposed to protect public health is highly likely to exacerbate the impact of the pandemic on the incidence of VAWDASV. For this reason I made a successful application to Star Chamber for a further £1.575 million of revenue funding. This will help specialist service providers develop their resilience to weather the storm of Covid-19 and to prepare for the expected increase in demand for their services.

This year, therefore, the VAWDASV sector has seen an increase in ring-fenced revenue funding from £5 million in 2019-20 to £6.825 million in 2020-21 – a rise of 31.5%. Furthermore, there has been a rise in capital funding from £969k to £2.169 million – a rise of 124%.

Aside from ring-fenced funding, the VAWDASV sector is able to apply to the Voluntary Sector Emergency Fund (VESF) and to the Third Sector Resilience Fund (TSRF). To date the VAWDASV sector has been granted £343,536 from the VESF, with a further joint application from 10 Women's Aid organisations for £171,066 currently being assessed. There have been no applications from the sector to the TSRF, which we have been promoting with the sector.

Much of this funding has been made in response to the exceptional circumstances posed by the Covid-19 pandemic although the increased capital grant was made to relieve the pressures on refuges. While being one-off funding for this year, it will provide ongoing benefits. I believe the training, capacity building and improved resilience that will be facilitated by the additional £1.575 million, together with learning from working during lockdown will also serve to strengthen the sector in coming years.

Sustainable Funding Group for VAWDASV

We are committed to working with our long-standing partners to develop a model for sustainable funding for the provision of specialist services to underpin the delivery of the National VAWDASV Strategy.

My officials presented two proposals to the group for a sustainable funding model last year, one of which was based on the model adopted by the WCVA; the models were not accepted by the group. Eleri Butler (then CEO of Welsh Women's Aid), Natalie Southgate (Cardiff and the Vale Regional Partnership) and Karen Jones (Western Bay Regional Partnership) have also submitted a paper outlining their proposals for sustainable funding.

Since that time, the Sustainable Funding Group has met, with the last meeting held on 12 May. During the meeting members determined that in order to produce and agree a comprehensive sustainable funding model for Wales, we would need to conduct a full funding mapping exercise of VAWDASV provision across Wales. Members of the group agreed to co-ordinate the mapping exercise and officials will collate the responses and present them to the next meeting due to be held in mid-July. This will provide the basis to review the current provision and funding sources and identify any remaining gaps. A new completion deadline will be identified, agreed and set at the next meeting.

Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority (BAME) Communities

I am pleased to update you that the BAME Advisory Group has developed and implemented a Risk Assessment toolkit and also published their Socio-economic Report on 22 June 2020. The First Minister made a statement the same day, welcoming the report, with a formal response currently being prepared. The recommendations from the Socio-economic Report will form the basis of the Race Equality Action Plan for Wales, which is currently being developed, and which will be followed by extensive engagement with communities across Wales.

Elder Abuse

During the Covid-19 crisis, it has been particularly important to safeguard adults with care and support needs. They may be more vulnerable to abuse and neglect as others may seek to exploit disadvantages due to age, mental or physical impairment or illness. We are mindful that many people may not be reached via social or digital media routes. We are therefore seeking alternative means in order to reach this cohort.

The Welsh Government is working with local authorities and other partners to ensure that critical work to safeguard adults at risk remains a priority for services during the outbreak. We know that large numbers of older people for example do not have access to digital technology so I would be keen to ensure that local authorities and their partners continue to offer alternative methods of communications in order to reach the most vulnerable within their communities and to enable them to self-identify.

Officials are continuing to develop appropriate means of communications in order to reach the widest possible audience to highlight and reinforce the message that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. These approaches intend to support and reinforce the messages already produced by Regional Safeguarding Boards. Officials are working to provide guidance for those who are still operating in communities and may not be trained to recognise the signs of abuse or neglect. The guidance will cover signs to spot and what to do if there is a concern.

Data

Since 6 May, Public Health Wales (PHW) has included ethnicity and key worker status as a field in their Covid-19 rapid mortality surveillance enhanced reporting system.

Around 30% of the deaths notified via the PHW surveillance system did not have ethnicity recorded, and up to 18 June fewer than 10 deaths had been recorded for people from a BAME background. We know this is an undercount. Nevertheless, this is an important step forward in ensuring our surveillance data has this characteristic data.

Additionally, following requests by the Welsh Government, on 19 June the Office for National Statistics (ONS) published figures on the overall number of registered deaths in Wales where Covid-19 was involved from the start of the pandemic to mid-May. The ONS reported there were 44 deaths involving Covid-19 among BAME groups between 2 March and 15 May 2020.

We have also requested that ONS urgently consider the feasibility of extending the data they publish on deaths by occupation to include key data for Wales within their next article (currently scheduled for 26 June 26).

Voluntary Sector

The following table provides information on volunteering in Wales at 8 June 2020.

	No.
Total no. of volunteers registered	31,428
Increase since 1 March	18,071
No. in notified volunteer roles	7,188

The breakdown of total volunteers across Wales by Local Authority is as follows:

	AREA
5139	Cardiff
2512	Swansea
2101	Powys
1817	Newport
1652	Rhondda Cynon Taff
1591	Bridgend
1577	Caerphilly
1377	Flintshire
1374	Carmarthenshire
1275	Denbighshire
1260	Glamorgan
1293	Outside Area
1057	Conwy
1049	Pembrokeshire
902	Monmouthshire
884	Wrexham
868	Gwynedd
843	Torfaen
804	Neath Port Talbot
625	Blaenau Gwent
521	Ceredigion
456	Merthyr Tydfil
451	Anglesey/Ynys Môn

These figures do not take into account the large ground swell of informal community volunteers.

In terms of Emergency Third Sector Funds, charities are being prioritised on need in addition to the type of service being provided. The WCVA have published a list of all organisations supported by both the [Voluntary Services Emergency Fund](#) and [Third Sector Resilience Fund](#). The information is updated on a regular basis and is accessible via the embedded links.

Advice Services

As outlined in my recent response to your Committee Report '*Benefits in Wales: Options for better delivery*', officials are currently working together with UK Government officials, particularly with those from DWP, to ensure all measures being taken by the UK Government to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 are integrated with all current and new support being provided by the Welsh Government.

We will be building on action already undertaken in response to the current crisis when progressing our cross-Government Review of existing programmes and services. This will include further developing a set of principles and values on which a 'Welsh benefits system' will be based, taking account of feedback received during engagement for the Review, and building on the core principles the Welsh Government has already outlined of compassion, fairness, dignity and understanding.

Human Rights

The Contact Tracing App is entirely developed and delivered by NHSX, which is part of the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) in the UK Government. It will let people know if they have been near someone who has reported coronavirus symptoms and provide up-to-date guidance. It will also allow them to apply for a test if they start showing symptoms and it will give them the option of providing information to the app directly about their contacts if they test positive.

Human Rights analysis are undertaken as part of every impact assessment, and any questions relating to this should be directed to NHSX and DHSC, who are responsible for the App.

Partially Sighted People Accessing Priority Shopping

Where people can, we advise visually impaired people to seek the help of family, friends and support groups. Some supermarkets have put measures in place to help carers, volunteers and those shopping for others, and all supermarkets have introduced electronic vouchers or gift cards, allowing family, friends and volunteers to shop for others. This is set out at <https://gov.wales/getting-food-and-essential-supplies-during-coronavirus-pandemic>.

Where people do not have support locally, their local authority or local voluntary council can provide practical support.

Autistic Pupils Accessing School Hubs

We appreciate that the uncertainty arising from the unprecedented circumstances we are facing is particularly challenging for children and young people with additional learning needs (ALN) such as autism, along with their families and those who support and care for them. We are committed to doing everything possible to support these learners, parents and carers during this difficult time.

Schools closed for the statutory provision of education on 20 March. Since then, provision in schools and hubs has been available to vulnerable children and children of critical workers. Our definition of vulnerable children includes children with a statement of special educational needs (SEN). Schools have been working closely with colleagues in children's services to identify those who require access to provision. Each learner is considered on an individual basis to ensure that the hub can safely offer suitable provision and meet their specific needs.

We are asking local authorities to consider the needs of all children and young people with a statement of SEN, and to conduct a risk assessment to determine whether they will be able to have their needs met at home with support provided remotely. We have also advised that the assessment should involve parents or carers and the views of the child or young person, and be conducted through a multi-agency approach where possible. We are aware that securing a place in a hub has been difficult for a small number of learners with SEN. We are currently working with local authorities to develop guidance on risk assessments which will issue shortly. These risk assessments should be reviewed within the context of the increasing operation of education settings and in response to any change of circumstance for children, young people and their families.

In addition to the support available via schools and settings, there is a wide range of information available online to help support children with autism during the pandemic. Links to this information are available on the [ASDInfoWales](#) website, including a link to a useful [information pack](#) produced by child health professionals.

I hope this response provides the clarification required by the Committee. Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jane', with a horizontal line above the first letter.

Jane Hutt AS/MS

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