

# **WRITTEN EVIDENCE PAPER TO THE EQUALITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE**

## **Minister for Social Justice, 17 June 2023**

---

I welcome to opportunity to provide information in support of the Committee's inquiry into *The public health approach to preventing gender-based violence*.

I have addressed each of the Committee's areas of interest below and look forward to discussing further with the Committee on Monday 18 September.

### **National Strategy**

It is a statutory requirement under s3(1) of the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 for Welsh Ministers, following a general election, to prepare and publish a National Strategy to prevent gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence and to protect and support victims.

The National Strategy is the vehicle for delivering on the Programme for Government commitments to:

- a) strengthen the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy to include a focus on violence against women in the street and workplace as well as the home;
- b) expand the 'Ask and Act' and 'Don't be a Bystander' training and awareness campaigns;
- c) make Wales the safest place in Europe to be a woman.

The revised strategy has been prepared through extensive consultation with a Working Group of key partner organisations and survivors, as well as the National Advisers on VAWDASV.

### **National strategy objectives**

#### **Objective 1**

Challenge the public attitude to violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence across the Welsh population through awareness raising and space for public discussion with the aim to decrease its occurrence.

#### **Objective 2**

Increase awareness in children, young people and adults of the importance of safe, equal and healthy relationships and empowering them to positive personal choices.

#### **Objective 3**

Increase the focus on holding those who commit abuse to account and supporting those who may carry out abusive or violent behaviour to change their behaviour and avoid offending.

#### Objective 4

Make early intervention and prevention a priority.

#### Objective 5

Relevant professionals are trained to provide effective, timely and appropriate responses to victims and survivors.

#### Objective 6

Provide all victims with equal access to appropriately resourced, high quality, needs-led, strength-based, inter-sectional and responsive services across Wales.

Central to the strategy is a Public Health Approach to tackling VAWDASV. Articulated amongst the principles behind our strategy is the following core commitment;

“The principles of public health provide a useful framework from which to understand our approach and the ‘theory of change’ through which we intend to end VAWDASV. A public health approach understands the causes and consequences of violence, abuse and control. The approach is based on whole populations and, as such, depends on co-ordinated effort acknowledging the causes of health and social problems through multi-agency responses.

A public health approach to preventing VAWDASV improves the safety of all by addressing the underlying risk factors that increase the likelihood that an individual will become a survivor or perpetrator. There are four steps to a successful public health approach which are integral to this strategy:

- Definition of the problem through the systematic collection of information about the magnitude, scope, characteristics and consequences of violence.
- Establishment of why violence occurs using research to determine the causes and correlates of violence, the factors that increase or decrease the risk for violence, and the factors that could be modified through interventions.
- Investigation of what works by designing, implementing and evaluating interventions.
- Implementation of effective and promising interventions in a wide range of settings, including monitoring the effects on risk factors and outcomes.

The World Health Organisation’s Violence Prevention Alliance describes an ‘ecological framework’ which represents the interplay between individual, relationship, community and societal factors which interact to determine the risk of violence. In delivering this strategy we expect all decisions to be shaped by an understanding of this model and to seek to optimise the impact individual interventions have on the framework.

Prevention will lie at the core of the strategy. Whilst support for survivors and system change to improve outcomes for survivors remain part of the armoury, we wish to shift focus from symptom to cause through a public health approach. This does not mean that survivors can, or should expect any less from our approach. This is about expanding the impact of what we do to ensure that survivors as individuals are

supported holistically and that there is a wider societal effect which reduces the chances that they would experience VAWDASV in the first place. In this context prevention is an umbrella term meaning that VAWDASV and the harm it causes is prevented across the spectrum including:

- primary prevention: preventing violence before it occurs
- secondary prevention: responding to violence to minimise harm, improve services and prevent further violence
- tertiary prevention: preventing recidivism and intergenerational cycles of abuse.

Our public health approaches will expose a broad segment of the population to prevention measures and reduce and prevent violence at a population-level. This means we will seek to identify individuals who may become survivors, or perpetrators, of VAWDASV earlier but also we will employ population wide interventions to 'de-normalise' violence, coercive control, and harassment. This strategy adopts a life course approach to VAWDASV, inclusive of children and adults of all ages, including older people recognising features of abuse throughout an individual's life stages."

Delivery of the strategy is being undertaken through a Blueprint approach which brings together devolved and non-devolved organisations. The VAWDASV team is leading the delivery for Welsh Government but, in order to be a success, the strategy requires joint working with other departments including education, health, housing and crime. Adopting this Blueprint approach has enabled the establishment of new shared governance structure reflecting the joint ownership of this shared priority, tackling VAWDASV. Adopting a Public Health approach to our work will ensure that we remain focused. The underlying principles that guide our collective efforts are:

- to challenge public attitudes
- to increase awareness in children
- increased accountability for those who perpetrate violence and abuse
- prioritise and focus on prevention
- confident and informed workforce
- provision of inclusive and accessible services that are trauma informed and needs led

The work contributes to achieving all the well-being goals. It contributes also to Welsh Government well-being objectives, particularly: promote good health and well-being for everyone; build healthier communities and better environments; support people to make the most of their potential; build ambition and encourage learning for life; build resilient communities, culture and language; promote and protect Wales's place in the world.

The Blueprint workstreams will take forward and oversee work on key actions set out in the VAWDASV National Strategy 2022 to 2026, as well as identifying other priorities when drawing upon wider evidence/learning relevant to the VAWDASV agenda which must be in agreement with the National Programme Board. These Workstreams may change over time as progress is made and priorities develop. However, initially these will address:

- gender-based harassment in all public spaces
- workplace harassment
- tackling perpetration
- sustainable commissioning: whole system approach
- older people's needs
- children and young people's needs

### **Progress made to implement the VAWDASV Blueprint Programme up to 31 March 2023**

- National Partnership Board established.
- National Programme Board established.
- Six Workstreams established.
- Survivor Voice Scrutiny and Involvement panel recruitment commenced.
- The jointly funded Blueprint Programme delivery team recruited.
- [High Level Blueprint Action Plan](#) published.

### **Key actions to underpin the programme of work**

- Create a 'central repository of knowledge' as a staffed body to co-ordinate and disseminate what is known about VAWDASV and what works and to shape future research. To include Multi agency data on VAWDASV trends in Wales.
- The Welsh Government will review the National Indicators to ensure that they reflect this strategy and can be used to measure our progress in delivering our aims and objectives, and establish a pattern of reporting on progress against National indicators.
- Develop a Theory of Change model which will illustrate the priorities, activities and outcomes of the Blueprint Programme.
- In line with the Well-Being of Future Generations Act we will continue with a collaborative approach to implementing this Strategy to involve all relevant stakeholders and service users.
- Build upon lessons learnt and best practice to focus on what actions we need to prioritise, to develop our approach further.

### **Prevention and early intervention in strategy**

The VAWDASV strategy commits to making early intervention and prevention a priority. Whilst support for survivors remains an important part of the Welsh Government's work on VAWDASV, we wish to shift focus from symptom to cause through a public health approach. This approach will ensure a wider societal effect which reduces the chances that people experience VAWDASV in the first place. This includes:

- primary prevention: preventing violence before it occurs
- secondary prevention: responding to violence to minimise harm, improve services and prevent further violence
- tertiary prevention: preventing recidivism and intergenerational cycles of abuse.

Tackling male violence, and the misogyny and gender inequality that lie behind it, are how we will break the cycle and address the root causes of VAWDASV. We must challenge attitudes and change behaviours of those who behave abusively. It is not for women to modify their behaviour, it is for abusers to change theirs.

### **Public health approaches to preventing gender-based violence and the needs of different groups of women, including LGBT+, ethnic minorities, young and older people at risk of violence at home and in public spaces.**

As set out above the Blueprint structure is designed to support a public health approach to these issues through a collaborative approach involving devolved and non-devolved statutory bodies, third sector partners and survivors. The workstreams relating to harassment in public spaces and the workplace move our focus beyond the domestic setting which had framed our approach before this iteration of our strategy. The workstream relating to Perpetration provides the backbone for our focus on prevention and the workstreams on children and young people and older people provide a locus for collaborative policy development between stakeholders enabling these issues to be directly tackled.

Naturally, all parts of the Blueprint work to deliver the strategy which sets out golden threads of a public health approach, preventative working and a recognition of intersectional impacts on the likelihood of experiencing gender-based violence as well as the unique support needs that reflect these characteristics.

There is still a lot we don't know about the effectiveness of public health approaches to tackling gender-based violence but our strategic approach has been built on the available evidence of efficacy and in partnership with bodies such as Public Health Wales who have brought academic expertise and understanding to the development of the strategy. The Blueprint partnership allows us to learn together as we develop our public health approach and the creation of the Central Repository of Knowledge will provide a focus for developing evidence and evaluation.

As noted above, the Blueprint has developed and published a [High Level Plan](#) which set out the action groups will pursue. This plan says;

“Adopting a Public Health approach to our work will ensure that we remain focused. The underlying principles that guide our collective efforts are:

1. To challenge public attitudes
2. To increase awareness in children
3. Increased accountability for those who perpetrate violence and abuse.
4. Prioritise and focus on prevention.
5. Confident and informed workforce
6. Provision of inclusive and accessible services that are trauma informed and needs led.”

### **The role of the public sector and specialist services**

The Blueprint has captured the full range of public sector and specialist services in delivering our strategy to tackling violence against women and girls, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

The National Partnership Board is jointly chaired by the Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip and the Police and Crime Commissioner for Dyfed-Powys. Membership includes Police representatives as well members from specialist agencies such as New Pathways, Welsh Women's Aid and Safer Wales; Statutory bodies such as the Crown Prosecution service and HM prison and Probation Service; Other interests such as the Wales Refugee Council, the TUC and Public Health Wales as well as Children's, Older People and Domestic Abuse Commissioners.

Clearly the Blueprint work builds on a range of work already in place to support survivors and tackle gender-based violence.

We will achieve this through funding, awareness raising and education.

As noted above, the Welsh Government funds specialist VAWDASV sector organisations. This includes BAWSO, the leading organisation in Wales that supports VAWDASV survivors of FGM, forced marriage and honour based abuse. BAWSO works with communities with targeted interventions, out-reach and community based services to raise awareness of the impact of this abuse and violence with a view to stopping it before it occurs.

Raising children and young people's awareness of equality, respect and consent is crucial if we are to stop VAWDASV. We want to ensure all children and young people have access to developmentally appropriate, high quality learning that responds to their needs and experiences.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a statutory requirement in the Curriculum for Wales Framework and is mandatory for all learners. Schools and settings have an important role to play in creating safe and empowering environments in supporting learners' rights to enjoy fulfilling, healthy and safe relationships throughout their lives.

RSE will be implemented in primary schools, maintained nursery schools, and non-maintained nursery settings from September 2022.

In September 2020, resources for teachers were developed and circulated via the Hwb network to raise awareness of FGM and the signs that a young girl could be at risk of FGM.

In October 2020, an awareness raising training contract was awarded to Karma Nirvana, a specialist service supporting victims and survivors of honour based abuse, to provide twenty free virtual 'roadshows' to professionals working within Wales to build confidence when challenging honour-based abuse and forced marriage.

We continue to fund Hafan Cymru's Spectrum project, which promotes the importance of healthy relationships and raises awareness of VAWDASV. Spectrum also delivers training for school staff and governors about understanding the impact of domestic abuse on a child and promotes a whole school approach to tackling domestic abuse.

Within the Welsh Government's 'Programme for Government 2021-2026' there is a commitment to expand the 'Don't be a Bystander' training and awareness campaigns. Officials are currently scoping and developing a pan-Wales Bystander intervention training initiative that will be delivered to citizens of Wales. This initiative will include offering training to promote a prosocial and informed bystander intervention programme to the general public that will run alongside our current, established VAWDASV Communication campaigns. This is with the intention of creating genuine and lasting changes in societal attitudes towards VAWDASV.

This training initiative will be a key tool in our commitment to early intervention and prevention of VAWDASV. It will aim to develop individuals' skills to enable safe bystander engagement to prevent or respond to VAWDASV and will support our aim of changing attitudes; creating a culture change and to further promote the unacceptability of all forms of VAWDASV.

Survivor voices are essential to our work and must be heard at the highest level if we are to effectively tackle VAWDASV. That is why we are proposing that a dedicated Survivor Engagement Framework and work stream will form part of the delivery of the refreshed Strategy.

Over the last three years, the Welsh Government has been researching the most effective and safest ways of engaging with survivors of VAWDASV, most recently a dedicated research project on the barriers to those from diverse Communities engaging with Government. Findings from all aspects of research will be considered in any future work within victims and survivors.

## **VAWDASV Funding**

The Welsh Government funds VAWDASV regions and specialist services to provide invaluable and lifesaving support to all victims of VAWDASV, this includes early intervention, preventative and educational support, perpetrator intervention programmes, Independent Domestic Violence Advocates for high-risk victims as well as therapeutic recovery interventions for the ongoing support of those impacted by VAWDASV.

## **Education and Curriculum**

There is extensive guidance available to support education settings on preventing and responding to child sexual harassment and abuse, including our statutory guidance [Keeping Learners Safe](#). In addition, we have several WG funded helplines established in Wales, specifically Childline Cymru, Live Fear Free and MEIC.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a statutory requirement in the Curriculum for Wales framework and has a positive and protective role in learners' education.

RSE is intended to help children to develop healthy relationships and behaviours with their friends and families, based on kindness, empathy and respect. This is important for them to develop as 'healthy, confident individuals' with positive social, emotional and mental well-being.

RSE is also intended to keep children safe and to protect their well-being. This is critical as technology and society continue to change rapidly. RSE helps children recognise relationships and situations that might put them at risk of harm. It can support all children with what they need to know and what to do to keep safe and how to seek help.

In addition to the curriculum requirements, we are also developing guidance for education settings about how to ensure their environment and culture is free from damaging and limiting ideas around gender roles. This guidance will set out an approach where children and young people are listened to and empowered to call out unacceptable behaviours. It will help ensure no child or young people faces discrimination on the basis of gender or sexuality. This whole setting approach will cover a wide range of settings, including primary and secondary settings, Special Educational Needs settings and Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) settings. We know peer on peer sexual harassment is not limited to secondary schools and understanding how this is experienced at different ages is important to ensure we respond with appropriate and tailored interventions.

The Estyn review in to peer on peer sexual harassment in secondary schools that peer-on-peer sexual harassment is more prevalent online and outside school than in school. Through the [Keeping safe online](#) area of Hwb, we have developed resources to equip practitioners to educate and support learners with this issue. Following the publication of guidance for education settings in responding to incidents of sharing nude and semi-nude images a short [training module](#) to support schools to embed this guidance was published we encourage senior leaders in all schools to undertake this training.

We are also establishing a children and young people's advisory panel for digital resilience. Panel members will be invited to share their online experiences and provide opinions and insight that will shape and inform the direction of our work and all messaging/visual content will be tested with children and young people. We are working with a range of stakeholders, including the Police to develop a multi-agency peer on peer sexual harassment action plan. The action plan will outline the actions that will be taken by Welsh Government and partners to tackle peer on peer sexual harassment in education settings. We aim to publish the action plan during the autumn term.

The Welsh Government recognises the need to empower children and young people to inform our work, and their voices and lived experiences must be integral to everything we do. This will be at the heart of all our work in this space.



### **National Action Plan preventing and responding to child sexual abuse -**

The National Action Plan on preventing and responding to child sexual abuse sets out 33 actions for the Welsh Government and Safeguarding Board partners against 10 objectives to prevent child sexual abuse, protect children at risk of CSE and support the recovery of sexually abused children. The Plan includes actions on child sexual abuse, CSE and harmful sexual behaviour.

The Safeguarding Boards have statutory responsibilities to promote resources and training for practitioners on identifying and responding to CSE.

### **VAWASV in Health and Social Care**

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act changes the social services sector and includes changes such as:

- People have control over what support they need, making decisions about their care and support as an equal partner
- New proportionate assessment focuses on the individual
- Easy access to information and advice is available to all
- Powers to safeguard people are stronger
- A preventative approach to meeting care and support needs is practised
- Local authorities and health boards come together in new statutory partnerships to drive integration, innovation and service change

In the Social Services and Well-being Act, well-being means a person is happy, healthy and is comfortable with their life and what they do. This means being protected from abuse, harm and neglect. The Act has also given more powers to ensure adults and children are kept safe from abuse or neglect are stronger and there will be a national independent safeguarding board. If there is cause to suspect an adult or child is at risk, this **MUST** be reported to the local authority.

RPBs have been established as part of the Social Services and Well Being Act to:

- improve the well-being of the population
- improve how health and care services are delivered.

All Regional Partnership Boards must:

- produce a regional population assessments
- produce a regional area plan
- provide a regional annual report
- demonstrate citizen engagement and co-production.