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Y Dirprwy Weinidog Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Jenny Rathbone MS
Chair, Equality and Social Justice Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
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10 October 2023

Dear Jenny,

Thank you for your letter of 25 September requesting further evidence for your inquiry on public health approaches to preventing gender-based violence (GBV).

Does the Welsh Government provide targeted support to social workers to deal with cases of VAWDASV among women and children?

There are strong links between the social services workforce teams and the delivery of the VAWDASV through a tiered training framework organised and delivered through the Regional Safeguarding Boards. Through VAWDASV grants and Social Care Workforce Grants, both funded via Welsh Government, specialist training is delivered to the social care workforce to support identification, assessment and support for cases of VAWDASV among women and children.

The ongoing specialist training social workers receive specifically develops knowledge necessary to understand domestic violence and abuse, and defines the role of professionals in ensuring people's safety. [Recognising and responding to domestic violence and abuse - A guide for social workers](#) advises social workers that if their role is specifically about safeguarding, they 'should also be confident in identifying and assessing risk (often by using the DASH – domestic abuse, stalking and harassment and 'honour'-based violence – tool), safety planning and liaising with specialist support services'.

It is important to recognise that overall responsibility for tackling VAWDASV is within the responsibilities of the Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip's portfolio, however, the Health and Social Services sector has a vital role to play. We have published a number of statutory guidance documents under powers conferred by section 15 of the VAWDASV Act. This includes 'Ask and Act' guidance, published as part of the National Training Framework on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. The aim of

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

the Framework is to ensure that high quality and consistent training is available across the breadth of the public and specialist sector.

'Ask and Act' is a key part of the Framework and professionals who work within the field of Health and Social Services are recognised as a priority group for Ask and Act training in our statutory guidance. The 'Ask and Act' programme is a national programme and is fully operational across all regions of Wales.

What work is being done to protect women and their children from post-separation abuse?

Children's and Adult's Services work alongside Domestic Abuse Resource Teams for cases pre and post separation to support safety planning. We know that the greatest risk period is when someone is separating from a perpetrator. This support can include access to a refuge, local authority housing, an allocated Independent Domestic Violence Advocate, specialist therapeutic intervention for children within the family unit, along with practical support. Such services are funded via a Welsh Government VAWDASV revenue grant, Police Crime and Commissioner, local Authorities and wider third sector funding. Children's and Adult's Services are core participants in Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences, which are multiagency meetings where information is shared on the high risk domestic abuse cases, to optimise information sharing and multiagency coordination of risk management planning. Additionally, there have been developments in perpetrator programmes to develop a tiered intervention approach to address risk spectrums.

In 2020, UK Government's Ministry of Justice Harm Panel published their report '[Assessing Risk of Harm to Children and Parents in Private Law Children Cases](#)'. The report highlighted the work of Cafcass Cymru which has, as part of Welsh Government, played a positive role in the [Family Courts Pathfinder pilot](#) in North Wales since February 2022. This project aims to better safeguard and improve the experiences of victim-survivors of Domestic Abuse and other forms of harm, and specifically engages with children encountering the Family Justice system. A brief update on the progress of the Pathfinder implementation following the first year of operation can be found [here](#). Cafcass Cymru is advocating for the UK Government to roll out the pilot to other parts of Wales.

Developing this pilot would bring targeted support and protection for women and their children from post-separation abuse, as current provision falls under the remit of the VAWDASV support services. These services enable women to protect themselves from further abuse and their children from the impact of a former partner who wants to use the 'system' to extend their coercive control. Despite the effectiveness of these support services, we recognise we need to do more and I am working with the Minister for Social Justice through the VAWDASV blueprint to increase our offer here.

Responses to the consultation on the draft VAWDASV strategy highlighted the importance of understanding the impact of VAWDASV across a whole life span. There is a danger that needs of children and young people have not been adequately recognised to date. Objective 2 of the national strategy is to increase awareness in children, young people and adults of the importance of safe, equal and healthy relationships and empowering them to positive personal choices.

We are delivering this strategy and objective with a specific blueprint workstream addressing the needs of children and young people. Together with the work already done on Safeguarding and Education policy development, the group will ensure that there is clarity and cohesion in parallel approaches to Safeguarding and VAWDASV and the needs of children and young people are met.

How do Social Services work with schools, Cafcass and other partners to advocate on behalf of children and young people to ensure their voice is being heard?

You ask about the role social services play in working with partners to ensure children's voices are heard. Social care practitioners are advocates for children and adults and draw wider practitioners and agencies together to ensure the individual is at the centre of planning and shaping the responses to their needs. Cafcass Cymru practitioners have a specific statutory function to ensure children's voices are heard and listened to and are appointed by the Courts.

It is imperative that children's rights are embedded throughout practice and accessible. Since 2017, as part of the National Approach to Statutory Advocacy (NASA), children and young people have a right to an 'active offer' of advocacy from a statutory Independent Professional Advocate (IPA) when they become looked after or become subject of child protection enquiries leading to an Initial Child Protection Conference. This offer enables local authorities and advocacy providers to deliver a national consistent approach to advocacy support.

A further example of national action can be seen through the All Wales Safeguarding Procedures. The Procedures and the Practice Guides which support them require each practitioner and organisation to play their part and to contribute to safeguarding and promoting the well-being of the child. This involves intra and multi-disciplinary working in order to better understand the individual and their circumstances and their needs for care, support and safety.

I hope this information is useful.

Yours sincerely,



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