

## Older People's Commissioner for Wales - Candidate's personal statement

I am excited to apply for the position of Older People's Commissioner for Wales; a unique opportunity to independently promote and champion the rights and voices of older people whilst supporting and driving Wales' vision to become an age friendly nation.

The following two examples demonstrate my **commitment to promoting and safeguarding the interests and rights of older people** and the enhanced knowledge and understanding that I have in respect of **the issues facing older people and the range of services used by them**.

I am recognised as an expert Chair of Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHR) involving older people; examining the circumstances of an individual's death and identifying learning to prevent future deaths. It is of paramount importance to me that the older person's voice is heard through the review and I work with their family, friends and members of their community to understand how they lived their life, what they enjoyed and the issues they experienced. Whilst each review is different I have found commonality in respect of the **issues the older person faced** which include experiences of domestic abuse and coercive and controlling behaviours, financial abuse, their ability to be heard, physical and mental health and well-being, accessibility of services that meet their needs, loneliness and isolation, rurality, digital exclusion, transport, carer dynamics and the intersectionality of vulnerabilities and needs.

As the Chair, I work alongside a range of services used by older people including primary and secondary health services, social services, housing providers, Department of Work and Pensions, employers, community groups and specialist and voluntary sector organisations e.g. Age Cymru, Citizens Advice and Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Services to examine the contact that the individual had with them, their individual and collective responses and to identify barriers the older person experienced in these accessing services. The scope of DHRs that I have chaired has provided me with an enhanced **knowledge and understanding of these services' operational** practices, the strategic and policy frameworks in which they operate and the challenges they face including increased demand for services, complexity of needs, resourcing and the recruitment and retention of a skilled workforce.

My detailed and analytical reports demonstrate how I apply **Equality and Diversity principles** and the **UN Principles for Older People** to underpin my analysis of operational, strategic and systemic responses to older people. By identifying learning, highlighting good practice from the UK and beyond and making recommendations I aim to **promote and safeguard the interests of older people**. My recommendations have resulted in positive changes in practice including awareness raising campaigns and community-based responses focused on older people's experiences of abuse, practitioner's training and the commissioning of a bespoke support service for older people experiencing abuse. Published examples of my DHRs can be accessed at <https://www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk/safer-pembrokeshire/domestic-homicide-reviews>.

In 2023, I was commissioned to develop the Mid and West Wales Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy. As with all the work detailed in my CV, individuals voices and experiences were central to my approach in developing the strategy. I met with a diverse group of older people who spoke extensively about their relationships and living situations, the services they received, the quality of their interactions with public services, what worked and what aspects caused them issues and what was necessary in order for them to feel safe and live well. Building on previous work undertaken for the Older People's Commissioner and reviews of public services this engagement further enhanced my **in-depth understanding of the issues facing older people in Wales** including (but not exhaustive) the availability and accessibility of services, ageism and discrimination, participation, transport,

social isolation, independence, location and quality of housing, access to care, support services, income, education and employment, delivery of appropriate interventions, safety and safeguarding. As a result of this engagement I prioritised older people within the regional strategy and proposed individual agency and partnership actions that were needed to improve responses to older people. The outcome of this work was a regional strategy which prioritised the safety and safeguarding of older people and ensured access to specialist, bespoke services to meet their needs. I presented my draft strategy to the Regional VAWDASV and Safeguarding Board articulating the evidence base and rationale for the prioritisation of older people, their rights and interests. My strategy and delivery plan were approved by the regional, strategic partnerships who have taken ownership for their delivery. A copy of the strategy can be viewed at <https://cysur.wales/vawdasv/vadwadsv-strategy/>

All of my work is reliant on maintaining a detailed knowledge and understanding of Welsh and UK legislation and policy, how they translate at a regional and local level and what they mean for the rights and equalities of different groups of people in their day to day lives. The DHR and strategy work detailed above demonstrate how I use my in-depth knowledge and understanding of the **broad policy context in which services working with older people in Wales operate** to underpin my work. These devolved and non-devolved policy areas include Safeguarding, Housing and Homelessness, Criminal Justice, Community Safety, Health and Well-being, Social Care, Public Health, Environment, Transport, Education, Employment and Equality and Diversity. I am also conversant with the local and regional governance structures that bring services together to collectively deliver the duties embedded in legislation including the Social Services and Well-Being Act (2014) and the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015). I understand how *Age Friendly Wales: Our Strategy for an Ageing Society* and Age Friendly Communities bring together devolved policy areas to deliver a vision that supports people of all ages to live and age well.

I have **significant experience of working at a senior level**, having held leadership roles both within the public and third sector in Wales for over 15 years. As Chief Executive of Calan DVS I consistently demonstrated strategic leadership to high performing teams responding to needs of individuals experiencing domestic abuse in Wales, organisational and business development, income diversification and sustainable growth, performance and financial management and the promotion of excellence and best practice. My strategic vision and leadership resulted in recognition of Calan DVS as a progressive, dynamic and innovative organisation and individual accolades e.g. winning the UK Institute of Directors Director of the Year (2015). I have an excellent knowledge and understanding of **good governance**. As Chief Executive of Calan DVS I established and sustained robust organisational frameworks and policies that ensured transparency and accountability for decision-making, risk management, delivery and compliance resulting in the organisation winning a national Good Governance Award. As a Partnership Lead for Gwent Police I established multi-agency governance structures for a range of partnerships and work programmes ensuring stakeholders were able to actively participate in decision-making. As a previous Chair and Trustee of national organisations in Wales I also understand governance from a Board member perspective including roles, responsibilities, reporting structures, performance and financial management and compliance with statutory duties.

The diversity of my career has enabled me to develop **highly effective interpersonal, networking and presentational skills**. A fluent Welsh speaker, I am a confident and articulate communicator and an experienced speaker for national events. I have presented evidence at Senedd Committee in respect of Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence legislation/policy and have delivered presentations to national and regional forums including the National Safeguarding Board, Regional Partnerships, Public Service and Safeguarding Boards to promote awareness on a range of rights-based and equality matters. As

National Adviser, I built effective relationships with UK and Welsh Government officials and Ministers and regularly made written and verbal representations on a range of devolved and non-devolved issues including social policy and the funding and accessibility of equitable service provision. Presenting evidenced based arguments I successfully negotiated revisions to legislation and statutory guidance e.g. National Training Framework, Ask and Act and the protection of children from physical punishment. The work on DHRs and strategy development detailed above are examples of my ability to work in partnership with individuals, communities and a range of statutory and third sector organisations. By listening and understanding what is important and translating these into priorities and recommendations to improve policy and practice I have built and maintained effective and influential relationships across communities and the Public and Third Sectors in Wales. The scope and longevity of these relationships demonstrate my ability to command confidence through consistently demonstrating transparency, accountability, integrity, and objectivity in my actions and decisions.

I have over 10 years' experience of **interacting with the media** including managing and responding to requests for bilingual TV/Radio interviews relating to news items and current affairs. My ability to interact effectively with media outlets has resulted in me being a regular contributor on BBC Wales Today, S4C Newyddion and Politics Wales and my guidance is also sought in relation to best practice on subject specific documentaries e.g. Y Prif (2023), Byw Heb Ofn (2024). During live and pre-recorded interviews, I have provided objective analysis and highlighted best practice in relation to rights-based issues including equality and diversity, discrimination and abuse in order to drive progressive change.

I have comprehensive knowledge and experience of the **inspection and regulatory regimes** used to inspect public services used by older people in England and Wales. I have participated in single agency inspections and having established all-age safeguarding hubs in Gwent I contributed to the first joint inspection in Wales undertaken by Health Inspectorate Wales, Care Inspectorate Wales, Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Police and Fire and Rescue Services and Probation Inspectorate.

I am passionate about the opportunity to apply the skills and experience I have accrued to date to the role of the Older People's Commissioner, combining my multifaceted, wide-ranging capabilities with my specific knowledge of older people and the policy frameworks impacting the quality of their lives. I am eager to bring these elements together to promote and champion the rights and voices of older people in Wales and effect positive change.