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Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Gyfiawnder Cymdeithasol, y  
Trefnydd a'r Prif Chwip  
Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

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Jenny Rathbone MS  
Chair  
Equality and Social Justice Committee  
Welsh Parliament

SeneddEquality@senedd.wales

21 January 2025

Dear Jenny

I am writing to provide an update from the Welsh Government one year on from the publication of the Equality and Social Justice Committee's report on a public health approach to preventing gender-based violence.

I welcomed the broad thrust of your conclusions at the time, which were in line with our VAWDASV National Strategy 2022-2026 that adopted a public health approach to tackle the causes as well as the effects of gender-based violence. This work continues to be delivered through our VAWDASV Blueprint collaboration and overseen by the National Partnership Board which I co-chair with Emma Wools (Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales).

Annex 1 provides an update on each of your recommendations. In future, we will consolidate updates on these recommendations within our statutory VAWDASV Annual Report.

**Jane Hutt AS/MS**

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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.

## ANNEX 1

### How we must all play our part: a public health approach to halting the epidemic in gender based violence – Welsh Government progress update

**Recommendation 1.** *The Welsh Government should adopt a whole-of-government approach and work with partners across public services, the private and third sectors to promote gender equality and inclusivity in Wales. To help to achieve this it should implement a 'gender equality test' which assesses the impact of all policy decisions and legislative proposals on gender equality with the aim of reducing gender disparities. The gender equality test should be introduced as soon as feasibly possible and should be applied to all Welsh Government decisions from December 2024 onwards at the latest.*

We are taking action to improve the Welsh Government's Equality Impact Assessment which forms part of the wider approach to assessing the impact of policies in an integrated way. As one of the protected characteristics covered in the Equality Act and Public Sector Equality Duty, gender is included within the review. This is expected to be completed by summer 2025. The team has engaged with policy officials across the organisation and is producing a new template for the assessment of equality impact, which will be rolled out alongside new guidance, support, and training for staff. These changes will strengthen our capability to assess the impact of our policies and legislation on women.

The team is also working to further mainstreaming equality, including gender equality, across the organisation.

**Action 1.** *The Welsh Government should ensure all equality plans address gender disparities, challenge stereotypes and foster a culture of respect and equality. It should work with partners on detailed actions it will take in the short, medium and longer-term to improve public awareness about gender issues, promote women in leadership, and enforce rights that guarantee equality and freedom from discrimination, harassment and violence. An update on these actions should be provided to the Senedd in Plenary within six months of the Senedd debate for this report and annually thereafter.*

The key mechanism to report on progress to address gender disparities and challenge stereotypes is the Gender Equality Forum (GEF). The GEF advises on equality issues across Wales and brings together internal and external stakeholders working on gender equality issues across Wales. An update was presented to the GEF on 4 December 2024 on the "Advancing Gender Equality in Wales Plan". Minutes of this meeting and the updates against each objective will be published on the Welsh Government's [Gender Equality Forum](#) webpages in January 2025.

**Recommendation 2.** *The Welsh Government should embrace its role as an innovator and leader in applying a public health approach to gender-based violence, by:*

- *identifying opportunities to raise awareness and generate shared understanding of the approach and Blueprint;*
- *contributing to the evidence base of what works by proactively publishing progress updates and resources used to underpin the Blueprint;*

A core briefing about the VAWDASV Strategy and Blueprint has been finalised and shared with key stakeholders to generate a better understanding of the VAWDASV Strategy and Blueprint structure. A 7-minute briefing is distributed quarterly to all stakeholders including the VAWDASV National Partnership Board and National Programme board members, all workstreams, regional advisors, PCC VAWDASV Policy officers and survivor voice panel members which informs them of the ongoing developments for each of the Blueprint Workstreams.

In addition, the latest VAWDASV Blueprint annual progress update was published on 25 November 2024, which provides an update against each of the high-level actions published in March 2023.

**Recommendation 3.** *The Welsh Government should set out how the development and evaluation of policies which address the intersectionality of GBV will be informed by data, evidence, and analysis. In particular the Welsh Government should provide the Equality, Race and Disability Evidence Units with clarity regarding their priorities and agree timescales for completion of key milestones by end of April 2024.*

The Equality Race and Disability Evidence Units mission is to improve the availability, quality, granularity and accessibility of evidence about individuals with protected and associated characteristics so that we fully understand the level and types of inequalities across Wales. This will enable decision makers across Wales to develop better informed policies and measure their impact for all groups of people. The Evidence Units run an evidence program of work to meet evidence needs and publishes a regular update on progress for key projects on its website [Equality, Race, and Disability Evidence Units | GOV.WALES](#)

I would also like to provide an update on the VAWDASV national indicators. A task and finish group was established in 2023 to develop and build on the work undertaken on national indicators in 2019. This group involved collaboration between Welsh Government colleagues from policy teams and Knowledge and Analytical Services. The group identified a number of challenges that need to be addressed as part of a review of the national indicators, including:

- A lack of alignment with the VAWDASV National Strategy and other key national strategies such as the Well-being of Future Generations and the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan;
- Measurement issues due to a number of the indicators describing intended outcomes or behavioural change rather than specific, quantifiable measures; and
- Data source challenges due to a significant portion of the anticipated data sources outlined in the 2019 technical document being unsuitable for use or no longer available.

The key conclusion from the task and finish group is that the mapping showed a significant gap between the potential data available and their applicability to the national indicators, necessitating a need to conduct a wider mapping of the data landscape for VAWDASV in Wales. To address this, we will be commissioning two pieces of research:

- An investigation of the data landscape of Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence in Wales. This exercise will involve assessing the data currently available at a national level and identifying potential sources that are high-quality, reliable, and repeatable.

- A comprehensive theory of change. This will ensure that the indicators are effectively aligned with the purposes of the VAWDASV Act and the objectives of the VAWDASV National Strategy 2022-2026 and can capture meaningful progress.

**Recommendation 3, Action 3.** *The Welsh Government should set out the timelines for the creation of the Central Repository and how the repository will support collaboration, knowledge sharing and facilitate research. In particular, the Welsh Government should identify opportunities for researching interventions that engage men and boys specifically in order to add to the evidence base on this issue.*

As I set out in my response in February 2024, we have adjusted our plans for a Central Repository to take account of the changing landscape of VAWDASV in Wales and the critical importance of focusing available resources on delivery and front-line services in particular. I will take every opportunity to ensure available resources are used as effectively as possible.

The bedding in of the VAWDASV Blueprint over the last two years has demonstrated this is a function which can best be served by other means. In this case, the communications framework for the Blueprint now provides a vehicle for agencies to share relevant evidence and research. In addition, the VAWDASV Research Network for Wales, established at the end of 2021, has brought together an inclusive research community to research, collaborate, and work towards the elimination of VAWDASV.

VAWDASV evidence planning is an iterative process, and progress on workstream evidence requirements and research undertaken is reported on in the VAWDASV Annual Report and Blueprint high level update.

**Recommendation 4.** *The Welsh Government should take urgent action to ensure that fast-tracked, specific and specialised therapeutic services are available for all babies, children and young people who experience or witness gender-based violence and provide details of these in response to this report.*

Officials have undertaken a review of the existing provision and landscape across sectors including CAF/CASS, Social Services, Education and Health which demonstrates existing work taking place across Wales. The review, for example, highlights work within local authorities, who commission a range of services for children and young people and their families when they have been affected by violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

It is evident from the review that further work is required in this area, particularly around understanding the specific provision in Education and Health services and alignment to VAWDASV specialist provision. A cross-governmental approach to these issues is required and I have shared this review with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Cabinet Secretary for Health.

I have previously provided examples of how Welsh Government funds a number of specialist VAWDASV sector services directly to provide therapeutic support and recovery interventions for children and young people. Regional VAWDASV teams are also funded and have devolved authority to commission services in line with population need. The VAWDASV Blueprint Children and Young People's workstream is currently working on several actions to improve the landscape for survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence. In line with the public health approach, I intend to continue my partnership approach across the public and specialist sector to encourage our partners to prioritise and take ownership of any recommendations that develop as part of the Blueprint's programme of work.

**Recommendation 4, Action 4.** *Some of the particular challenges faced by migrant women were set out in our report: ‘Gender based violence: The needs of migrant women’. We will be requesting an update to the recommendations and conclusions of that report in Spring 2024.*

We have assessed progress against the recommendations set out in the Equality and Social Justice Committee’s report ‘Gender based violence: The needs of migrant women’ report and collated a summary update:

**Language and Interpretation Services:** The Welsh Government is addressing language and interpretation issues for migrant women by utilising the Wales Interpretation and Translation Service (WITS) and developing e-learning modules for public sector staff. WITS provides high-quality interpretation and translation services to ensure that language barriers do not prevent migrant women from accessing essential services. The e-learning modules aim to equip public sector staff with the necessary skills to effectively communicate with non-English speaking individuals, thereby improving service delivery and support for migrant women.

**Support for NRPF Victims:** The Welsh Government has funded Bawso to deliver the ‘top up’ pilot to support migrant women who are victims of sexual and gender-based violence and have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) in 2024-25. This funding has continued to ensure that migrant victims in Wales with no recourse to public funds are offered additional support whilst navigating the complex immigration landscape, including safe housing, legal assistance, and healthcare services. Ongoing analysis is taking place to identify the most appropriate and sustainable route of supporting people moving forwards.

**Annual Updates on NRPF Work:** The Welsh Government will publish annual updates on its NRPF work via the VAWDASV Annual Report, including the activities of the NRPF steering group and progress on supporting migrant women with NRPF. These updates will provide transparency and accountability, highlighting the achievements and challenges faced in supporting migrant women. The annual reports will also outline future plans and initiatives to further improve support for this vulnerable group.

**Review of NRPF Guidance:** An ongoing review of NRPF guidance includes an internal review, an external survey, and workshops with local authorities to improve implementation, with revised guidance expected by spring 2025. The review aims to identify gaps and areas for improvement in the current guidance, ensuring that it is comprehensive and effective in addressing the needs of migrant women with NRPF. The revised guidance will provide clear instructions and best practices for local authorities and service providers.

**Legal Advice for Migrant Women:** The Welsh Government has funded training and accreditation for staff to provide immigration legal advice and supports projects like Asylum Justice to safeguard legal advice for migrants. This initiative aims to ensure that migrant women have access to accurate and timely legal advice, helping them navigate the complex immigration system. By supporting organizations like Asylum Justice, the Welsh Government is committed to protecting the rights of migrant women and ensuring they receive the legal support they need.

**Engagement with UK Government:** The Welsh Government continues to engage with the UK Government to improve the provision of immigration legal advice and raises this issue at the Interministerial Board on Safety, Security, and Migration. This engagement aims to advocate for better policies and resources to support migrant women, ensuring that their needs are considered in national immigration policies. The Welsh Government is also working to influence UK-wide initiatives to improve the overall support system for migrant women.

**Data Sharing Restrictions:** The Home Office is considering policy recommendations to establish a firewall between police and immigration enforcement to prevent data sharing and increase victims' confidence in reporting. This policy aims to protect the privacy and safety of migrant women, ensuring that they can report crimes without fear of immigration enforcement. By establishing clear boundaries between law enforcement and immigration authorities, the Welsh Government hopes to build trust and encourage more migrant women to seek help when needed.

**Recommendation 5.** *The Welsh Government should request that Estyn's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales undertakes a national thematic review of healthy relationships in schools. The review should be included in the next available programme of thematic reviews and completed within the usual timescales.*

Estyn have confirmed that this will form part of the Estyn Thematic Review 2025/26 schedule, subject to formal agreement.

**Recommendation 6.** *The Welsh Government must take immediate action to ensure that teachers are reminded of the mandatory reporting duty placed on them in relation to female genital mutilation (FGM).*

The Welsh Government wrote to schools at the end of Easter Term 2024 to remind them of the mandatory duty to report cases or suspected cases of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). In addition, in October, VAWDASV policy officials presented to the Safeguarding Education Group, which consists of safeguarding leads across Wales, spotlighting the importance of recognising and responding to cases of FGM.

**Recommendation 6, Action 5.** *The Minister for Education should write to higher education institutions in Wales to remind them of the Welsh Government's expectations and direct the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research to work with universities to agree actions which strengthen preventative approaches across the sector.*

The Minister for Further and Higher Education has written to higher education institutions and Medr to highlight the importance of a strategic approach to preventing and tackling gender-based violence in universities across Wales. I am pleased to be working across portfolio areas on such an important issue, and I am aware that officials from across the VAWDASV and tertiary education policy areas are engaging regularly on these matters.

Medr, the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research, are responsible for funding and regulating the tertiary education and research sector in Wales. Medr representatives are members of the 'gender-based harassment in all public spaces' VAWDASV Blueprint

workstream, which provides helpful opportunity for engagement and participation through a partnership approach. Medr's strategic plan is currently being finalised, prior to formal submission to Welsh Ministers and I understand that following the consultation process, its revised draft will demonstrate their commitment to supporting the legislative and strategic approach to tackling VAWDASV in Wales.

**Recommendation 7.** *The Welsh Government should require its newly established Advisory Panel for Digital Resilience to agree its priorities and forward work programme at pace and publish these by the end of April 2024. The Panel should clarify which areas it will prioritise, estimated timescales for sequencing of its forward work programme and how it will address the significant areas of non-devolved policy and legislation relating to digital and online regulation.*

The Panel as referred in the original recommendation and known as the Keeping Safe Online Youth Group has been revised with a new delivery partner, Praesidio Safeguarding, who were appointed to facilitate meetings of the Keeping Safe Online Youth Group. The new group held its first meeting in November 2024. The group continues to comprise young people under the age of 16 and therefore does not have a purpose of identifying and reporting upon priorities. Its purpose is to ensure that youth voice is at the heart of the work of the Digital Resilience in Education Team, Hwb which provides the Keeping Safe Online are of Hwb.

The Digital Resilience in Education Team continues to focus on providing information, guidance and support on online safety and digital resilience for young learners, their families/carers and practitioners and school staff.

Engagement continues with industry experts to identify latest developments and trends pertaining to online safety and digital resilience and holds a Symposium on an annual basis (November) to bring these experts together to discuss priorities which inform the work plan for the Digital Resilience in Education Team for the coming year.

**Recommendation 8.** *The Welsh Government should work with health bodies to enhance the ability of healthcare professionals to identify and respond to GBV. To give effect to this recommendation the Welsh Government should:*

- *extend the Ask and Act duty to other health and social care professionals and issue revised guidance to GPs in the first instance;*
- *track and publicly report statistics on the participation of staff in training programmes;*
- *collate and publish statistics on the timeliness of response times (between disclosure and being seen by a specialist) to Ask and Act referrals;*
- *clearly outline the methodology for measuring the impact of training initiatives.*

*This work should be completed by March 2025.*

The [NHS Women's Health Plan for Wales](#) published on 10 December 2024 sets out the NHS Wales approach to improving healthcare services for women. The plan focuses on clinical areas that are a priority in Wales, one of which being VAWDASV. This priority includes actions aligned in principle to the recommendations of the Committee, with a short term time-frame of under two years for health boards to ensure that there are trained staff to support data collection, training, implementation of policy including the VAWDASV Act and the Serious Violence Duty and to provide education on VAWDASV to all healthcare professionals to build confidence and competence to ask about violence.

Further progress on this recommendation will be reported through the NHS Wales Executive reporting mechanisms on the Women's Health Plan.

**Recommendation 9.** *The Welsh Government should establish a seventh workstream within the VAWDASV Blueprint whose mission will be to make ambitious recommendations on how businesses and organisations can create safer and more equal workplaces. The workstream should cover practical information on the policies, procedures and training necessary to support this aim. The group should operate in a spirit of social partnership with representation from employers and trade unions.*

An update on the progress of the Blueprint Workplace Harassment workstream for 2023-24 is set out in the [Blueprint Progress report](#) published in November 2024.

**Recommendation 10.** *The Welsh Government should consider funding a nation-wide public awareness campaign with a top male, sporting role model who can inspire other men and boys to take a stand against violence and promote positive values and behaviours. It is important this person is well-informed about the issue and receives appropriate training to effectively communicate and advocate for change. An evaluation of impact should be undertaken at the end of the campaign.*

Over the past 18 months, the Welsh Government has funded an award-winning early intervention and prevention campaign called Sound. It focuses on engaging men and boys across Wales to play a role in tackling VAWDASV. The campaign uses Welsh celebrities and influencers, as well as cohorts of men and boys across Wales, including apprentices from a local college and boxers from a gym in Newport. In the summer of 2024, it launched its documentary named 'Sound Lad' which has now reached over 95% of men and boys across Wales in the target audience group of 18-35 years.

In just over twelve months, Sound has shifted attitudes, creating opportunities for men to educate themselves and have meaningful conversations about positive behaviour patterns. As the campaign continues to build on its first-year foundations, Sound will continue to develop content for the audience. Targeted visible support for young men, through education resources, video-led influencer engagement and focused discussion with bilingual Welsh communities. Though a rolling campaign, we have undertaken an evaluation of the impact that the campaign has had so far and identified next steps. The next phase of this campaign will focus on gender-based harassment in public spaces and is due to launch at the end of February.

**Recommendation 11.** *The Welsh Government perpetrator workstream should undertake a rapid review of perpetrator programmes designed to prevent GBV that are available across Wales. The review should seek to provide assurance that each programme considers the safety of survivors and can evidence effective rehabilitation. It should also consider different cultural and contextual factors that can influence the effectiveness of perpetrator programmes and be completed by June 2024.*

In December 2023, through the Blueprint's Tackling Perpetration Workstream, a Wales wide survey was launched to gather information across the whole sector about what perpetrator interventions were available. There were 55 responses in total which were mainly Criminal Justice statutory interventions. The intended purpose of the survey was multi-functional, including creating a directory of services for practitioners, establishing gaps across Wales in terms of service delivery, and to enable regions to reflect on existing services and to make more informed commissioning decisions. A report of its findings was delivered to the National Partnership Board in July and this report is due to be published shortly setting out the themes drawn from the results of the survey. I will share a copy of this report when published.

The survey results evidenced that efficacy or effectiveness is difficult to measure given the current tools available. There is an inference that only those interventions that are accredited are effective, however this is not the case. Around half of the responses were from accredited programmes or interventions, and of those accredited, only a handful are up to date with their evaluation processes. Given the complex landscape surrounding 'efficacy', Welsh Government have commissioned the University of South Wales to undertake a project establishing what 'efficacy' means when referring specifically to perpetrator interventions across the whole sector, and what commissioners may wish to take into account when considering the most effective interventions to implement. This efficacy position statement is due to be completed by April 2025.

**Recommendation 12, Action 7.** *The Welsh Government should report back on its work with Public Health Wales to consider whether a specific approach to alcohol abuse is necessary, and whether they intend to commission any research or data collection to better understand the relationship between alcohol and GBV given the gap in the evidence base. An update should be provided to the Senedd in the autumn term of 2024.*

The VAWDASV team sought input from the specialist sector on this recommendation. No issues have been raised in regards to the existing "[Good Practice Framework for Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse, Sexual Violence and Substance Misuse](#)" published in 2018.

**Recommendation 12, Action 8.** *The Welsh Government should work with local authorities and/or the Welsh Local Government Association to ensure that local councillors have access to similar training and resources aimed at tackling GBV and report back by the end of 2024.*

The Welsh Government's VAWDASV e-learning module has been provided to the WLGA to be used on an e-learning portal and implemented by a consortia of local authorities. Local authorities and local councillors are also able to access the module on other e-learning platforms including the NHS Learning website. We will continue to promote this resource and take steps to ensure councillors are aware of the resource

In 2023 I attended the Joint Council for Wales on VAWDASV, and I am aware that VAWDASV is regularly discussed at this forum. These meetings are attended by cabinet members for workforce, human resource directors network and the trade unions. VAWDASV has also featured on the Workforce Partnership Council agenda as awareness raising items, and to ensure it is appropriately reflected in organisational policies and procedures.

**Recommendation 12, Action 6.** The Welsh Government should publish the results of its bystander intervention initiative as soon as possible after completion.

As set out in the VAWDASV Annual Report 2023-24, the Lead the Change: Bystander Intervention training completed the initiation phase of the pilot, including recruitment and training of trainers and began the early phases of delivering training in different formats to different cohorts. This is a three-year pilot funded by Welsh Government to run until March 2026. An evaluation of the pilot will be produced as part of this project at its completion in 2026.