

GBV 27

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales)

Bill: Stage 1

Response from: North Wales Domestic Abuse and Sexual
Violence Co-ordinators

**Response to the Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual
Violence (Wales) Bill from North Wales Domestic Abuse and Sexual
Violence Co-ordinators**

1. The general principles of the Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Bill and the need for legislation to improve the Public Sector response in Wales to domestic abuse, gender-based violence and sexual violence, including:

The publication of national and local strategies

- The general principle of national and local strategies is welcomed to aid consistency of approach across Wales.
- Consideration should be given to who will determine the content of these strategies and who the lead agency will be, especially around ensuring that any National Indicators. Currently much of this work is carried out by existing DA Co-ordinators. Continuing to work in this way would be cost effective and would avoid the need for recruitment of new/additional staff.
- The writing of local strategies jointly may well have considerable resource implications due to reductions in funding and staff in both Local Authorities and Health.
- The minister may wish to consider if other statutory agencies e.g. police, CPS be involved in the writing of these local strategies.
- There appears to be no requirement for either local or national strategies to include education around DA&SV in school or college settings. It would be helpful to have clear direction that is consistent across all age groups as a preventative and awareness raising measure, but must also ensure that school and college staff are adequately trained to both deliver information and respond to any disclosures.
- Consideration may like to be given to including an emphasis on all strategic assessments, including direction to record and collate data around DA/SV.

The appointment of a Ministerial Adviser on Gender-based Violence,
Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence.

- Although there are merits in having an Adviser who takes on this role and its associated functions, there is a risk that progress would be slow in introducing change. Due to the size of the remit, local issues might be lost in the bigger strategic issues and the appointment of an Advisor and support team seem costly.
- There could well be merit in the Adviser working closely with existing Domestic Abuse Co-ordinators, who have considerable expertise and local

knowledge and could potentially act as an advisory team. This would ensure local focus is not lost, Local Authorities would be clear about where and what they should contribute and ensure that the excellent partnership working that exists with regard to DA&SV is not lost. This approach would also ensure that timely interventions for victims, perpetrators and children are provided and would provide clarity as to where WG and Central Government should be expected to contribute.

- If this post is introduced we feel strongly that it MUST cover the whole of Wales, with an expectation that the post will be bi-lingual to assist with cultural/language issues and that the Adviser will spend an appropriate proportion of their time in North Wales.
- We would like to suggest that there should be a clear and consistent flow of information from Welsh Government, not just a call for information from local co-ordinators, along with a mechanism for the sharing of good practice.

2. any potential barriers to the implementation of these provisions and whether the Bill takes account of them

- Some of the recommendations contained in the recent Public Services Commission and the Devolution, Democracy and Delivery White Paper and any subsequent decisions taken may have implications on the implementation of the provisions outlined in this Bill. Wrexham and Flintshire, for example, are adjoining counties, but are demographically very different and currently vary greatly in the way that services are delivered. Issues stemming from any merger could well impinge on the implementation of some areas of this Bill.
- There will be resource implications following from a number of significant budget cuts across all sectors that could act as barriers, along with the issues rising from external Grant funding as outlined in Section 4.
- Engagement from partners may also be an issue. For example in North Wales the Police and Health Board have a North Wales geography and would be expected to engage with 6 local authorities on their strategies and balance local need with consistency across their organisations.
- Information sharing between agencies is a barrier that has in the main been addressed with regard to high risk cases of DA&SV via the MARAC information Sharing Protocols. This is, however, an area of work that requires further investigation with regard to medium and low risk cases and could be key to ensuring that some of these cases at least do not progress to the high risk category, thus ensuring better outcomes for individuals and cost efficiencies for agencies.

3. whether there are any unintended consequences arising from the Bill,

- There does not appear to be any reference to “neglect” resulting from domestic abuse issues in the Bill. It is possible that this could be an issue that fails to be adequately recognised.
- With regard to “Right to Ask” and “Ask and Act” there appears to be no reference to risk assessment and information sharing. This could result in inadequate responses to high risk cases, potentially putting victims at risk of serious harm.
- Annex 3 lists “Child Protection Social Workers” as “Relevant Professionals” to be trained in “Ask and Act”. The minister may wish to consider whether this should this be ALL Social Workers? Listing organisations and professionals is

too prescriptive and does not take into account the key responsibilities and different roles within professions. GP's, for example, have time constraints on the length of time that can be spent with patients.

- Much work has been and is being done to work more closely with the police and criminal justice agencies. There is very little reference made to criminal justice systems in the Bill which could undermine this work.
- Any regional approach that is taken must never be at the expense of local service delivery.
- Elements of the Bill focus very much on raising awareness and not enough on improving sufficient high quality support services for women and children which could be detrimental to ensuring their safety.

4. the financial implications of the Bill (as set out in Part 2 of the Explanatory Memorandum

- The minister may wish to consider if the introduction of the Ministerial Adviser will impact on the funding for existing Domestic Abuse Co-ordinators who play a vital role in ensuring a co-ordinated response to domestic abuse issues locally.
- All sectors are facing reductions in funding – some of the requirements of this Bill may be difficult to achieve and impact on funding/resources available to provide services for vulnerable people, especially given that many services operate with external Grant funding, none of which is currently either secure or sustainable. There needs to be a corresponding funding injection to ensure the support services can cope with increased demand.
- We would support a consistent approach to the training of professionals across Wales via a National Training Framework, but would ask that a centralised funding resource is tailored to take into account of local needs and ensure that ALL relevant staff are able to be released to attend this training. There can be significant resource issues in schools, for example, where cover is required for teachers to be released to attend training. Due to the current inconsistent approach to provision of services, a one-size-fits-all approach will not work initially but is something to aspire to within the strategy and across Wales. Much of the training already in existence is delivered locally by the Domestic Abuse Co-ordinators as an integral part of their role at no cost to attendees. Consideration could be given to expanding this remit as a potential option to help keep costs down.
- Potential increase in reporting via “Ask and Act” could place more demand on services that are already reduced and financially stretched as outlined above.
- With regard to “Ask and Act”, apart from the capital costs, intensive training and support will be required to build the confidence of staff and also to ensure that the infrastructure is in place to support staff to deal appropriately with disclosures.

5. the appropriateness of the powers in the Bill for Welsh Ministers to make subordinate legislation (as set out in Chapter 5 of Part 1 of the Explanatory Memorandum).

These powers appear to be reasonable.