

SP 16

Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb,
Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau
Priorities for the Equality,
Local Government and Communities Committee
Ymateb gan: Y Rhwydwaith Cydraddoldeb i Fenywod (WEN)
Response from: The Women's Equality Network (WEN)

25th August 2016

The Women's Equality Network (WEN) Wales is a membership organisation that aims to support the women's sector and advance equality for women in Wales. We would like to submit the following comments in response to the National Assembly's consultation on the Priorities for the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee.

1. General Comments

- 1.1. We would ask the Committee to clarify how the work on each of the priority areas will be scrutinized in relation to UK and international equality and human rights legislation.
- 1.2. WEN Wales is promoting the use of Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) to ensure the fair allocation of resources between men and women. At a time of reducing budgets, it's more important than ever that resources are targeted to maximum effect. We believe that understanding gender, gender inequalities and taking a gender budgeted approach can greatly assist the Welsh Government in achieving this. We have produced a training package and briefing paper on the topic and would be delighted to assist in any further evidence gathering exercises conducted by the Committee and to provide expertise in this area.

2. EU Funding of Tackling Poverty Programmes

- 2.1. We agree that this an important area to prioritise. We have produced an organisational response to the outcome of the EU referendum asking the Welsh Government to consider how EU projects that currently benefit women in Wales will be sustained under new arrangements with the EU. A number of our member organisations receive funding from the EU for projects specifically aimed at women (e.g., Chwarae Teg, North Wales Women's Centre, Career Women Wales). We are concerned about the impact that leaving the EU could have both on the capacity of these organisations and the individual women who benefit from their work. Further reading: [WEN Wales: EU Referendum Response](#)

3. In-Work Poverty

- 3.1. We welcome in-work poverty as a priority area for the Committee as this is an issue that affects many women in Wales. We would strongly recommend that the Committee include a consideration of how the unpaid care economy interacts with the paid economy in creating in-work poverty and would welcome an inquiry or debate on this issue in the Assembly. It is well understood that women and men do not respond in the same way to economic incentives and sanctions and it is particularly important therefore that this understanding is integrated into the approach to 'Growth and Jobs'.
- 3.2. According to the Bevan Foundation women are among the groups most at risk of receiving low pay. On average, women earn less than men no matter how poorly or well they are paid and the majority of working women earn less than their partner, e.g., in the UK 69% of mothers in couples with dependent children earn less than their partner. As a result, women's economic status is highly sensitive to their relationship status (see also point 4.2. below)
- 3.3. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recently found that the UK's austerity policies are having a disproportionate impact on women due to the high incidence of part-time work, precarious self-employment, temporary employment and the use of "zero hour contracts" in the UK which particularly affects women. The Committee expressed concern about the high number of low-paid jobs in sectors which are mainly staffed by women (e.g, cleaning, home care)

4. Poverty and Welfare Reform

- 4.1. We agree that Poverty and Welfare reform should be prioritised by the Committee. We are concerned about the impact of austerity and welfare reform on women in Wales.
- 4.2. We would encourage the Committee to look into how the Welsh Government can improve understanding of the impact of austerity and welfare reform through adopting gender budgeting techniques. For example:
 - The tax-credit reversal will have positive impacts on women, particularly those on low incomes and single parents who would have been hardest-hit by those changes but universal credit changes are to go ahead so effectively families and women in poverty will still lose out when those changes are implemented.
 - Child tax credits will be restricted to the first two children, with a negative impact on larger families and those in poverty. We know that a larger proportion of women's income whether from benefits or paid employment goes towards lifting children and families out of poverty

- Understanding the extra conditionality for job-centre where there is a risk that women with caring responsibilities will be disproportionately affected.
- 4.3. Our research on Economic Violence (2015) outlines a number of the key issues. About one in five women in the UK (and more in Wales) lives in poverty and women are at greater risk of poverty than men. Women's poverty can be hidden by official statistics' focus on household income. Becoming a lone parent is one of the main routes into poverty, while forming a new partnership is one of the main routes out. Many women therefore rely on relationships to protect them from poverty. Some women have no income of their own at all. In Wales in 2012 more than a quarter (27.5%) of women in couples with dependent children did not have a paid job. The figure is even higher for mothers of young children (aged 0-3) in couples, more than a third of whom (35.4%) did not have a paid job in the UK in 2013. Unless they have private means, these women are *entirely* dependent on their partner's earnings or benefits. Women's poverty significantly increases the risk of experiencing domestic abuse. Nearly three times as many women on the lowest incomes (less than £10,000 a year) had experienced domestic abuse.
- 4.4. When Universal Credit is rolled out, it is expected that male family members will make most of the claims on behalf of households. This policy has disempowering implications for women. There is little data available on the single Welsh Universal Credit pilot scheme in Torfaen, except for the widely reported increase in rent arrears. This increase suggests that many women could find themselves in financial difficulties, and when you add financial abuse into the picture, there are further serious concerns to be considered.
- Further Reading [Women's Equality Now: The Position in Wales Today on Economic Violence](#) and [Women and Multiple Disadvantage in Wales \(2014 – 15\): Summary of Key Findings](#)

5. The effectiveness of Communities First

- 5.1. We would be interested to know if there is any data available on how the Communities First programmes have benefited women and men in Wales.

6. Post-legislative scrutiny of the new homelessness duties imposed by the Housing (Wales) Act 2014

- 6.1. We would like to know how the new homelessness duties are impacting on women. Is there any disaggregated data on the number of women who are requesting and

receiving assistance with homelessness in Wales? We know that domestic abuse puts women and children at risk of homelessness. According to Welsh Women's Aid 284 women were turned away from refuge services in Wales last year because of lack of space. We have heard anecdotal reports of increased homelessness among women and we are concerned that there may be a link between these reports and cuts to refuge services.

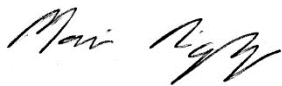
7. Housing Supply

- 7.1. Our research briefing on housing and accommodation for vulnerable women identified a number of issues in relation to housing and we would like the Committee to consider our recommendations in any work on this area. Our recommendations include the disaggregation of housing data should be disaggregated by gender, sustainable funding for specialist refuge provision, that Welsh Government consider ways to mitigate the negative impact of welfare reform in relation to housing; the appointment of more women into decision-making roles in housing policy, design and planning, including older women and survivors of domestic abuse, more research and a representative body for women living in the private rented sector to ensure that their needs and concerns are heard by policy and decision makers. Further Reading: [Women's Equality Now, The Position in Wales Today on Housing and Accommodation for Vulnerable Women \(2016\)](#)
- 7.2. Housing supply is another area that could benefit from a gender budgeting analysis.

8. Local Government reorganization and reform

- 8.1 We would ask that plans for local government reorganisation and reform be subjected to thorough Equality Impact Assessments to identify any potentially negative impact on women and other groups with protected characteristics.

Yours sincerely



Mair Rigby and Melissa Wood
Co-Directors
The Women's Equality Network (WEN) Wales