

PLVAW 28

Ymchwiliad ôl-ddeddfwriaethol i Ddeddf Trais yn erbyn Menywod,
Cam-drin Domestig a Thrais Rhywiol (Cymru) 2015

Post legislative inquiry into the Violence against Women,
Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015

Ymateb gan: Cymorth I Ferched Cymru

Response from: Welsh Women's Aid



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Welsh Assembly Committee on Equality, Local Government and Communities

Post legislative inquiry into the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Act 2015

Consultation Response by Welsh Women's Aid

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1. About Welsh Women's Aid

- 1.1 Welsh Women's Aid is the national charity in Wales working to prevent domestic abuse and all forms of violence against women and ensure high-quality services for survivors that are needs-led, gender-responsive and holistic.
- 1.2 Established in 1978, we are an umbrella organisation that represents and supports a national federation of 23 local independent charities delivering specialist domestic abuse and violence against women prevention services in Wales, as part of a UK network of provision. These specialist services constitute our core membership, and they provide lifesaving refuges, outreach, and community advocacy and support to survivors of violence and abuse - women, men, children, families - and deliver innovative preventative work in local communities. We also deliver direct services including the Welsh Government funded Live Fear Free Helpline; a National Training Service; refuge and advocacy services in Colwyn Bay and Wrexham; and the national Children Matter project which supports local services to help children and young people affected by abuse and to deliver preventative STAR group-work in every local authority in Wales.
- 1.3 We have been at the forefront of shaping coordinated community responses and practice in Wales, by campaigning for change and providing advice, consultancy, support and training to deliver policy and service improvements for survivors, families and communities. As a national federation, our policy work, consultancy, training and advocacy is all grounded in the experience of local specialist services and service users. Our success is founded on making sure the experiences and needs of survivors are central to all we do.



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2. Welsh Women's Aid's Evidence for the Post Legislative Inquiry: Overview of key issues

- 2.1 The Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 (the Act) has been recognised internationally as ground breaking piece of legislation aimed at improving the response of the public sector in the prevention of all forms of violence against women and the protection and support of those that experience it.
- 2.2 The Act, given the legislative duties it introduces for devolved public services, offers an opportunity for Wales to provide leadership and innovation in preventing future violence against women as well as enabling earlier and more effective intervention and support for survivors and their families. This said, there is a need for the duties in the Act to be effectively implemented by public services, with the support of robust, sustainable specialist services in the third sector, and for the efficient monitoring and evaluation of the duties implementation to ensure that aims of the Act are achieved and the results sustainable. Overall there has still been limited statutory guidance published by Welsh Government to provide the strategic leadership for regional and local delivery that the Act requires.
- 2.3 Critically the implementation of the Act and the resultant Strategy needs to ensure that it is based firmly on the understanding that violence against women is a cause and consequence of inequality between women and men and is a violation of women's human rights. The internationally accepted definition of 'Violence Against Women' used by organisations including the United Nations, World Health Organisation, Council of Europe and UK Government, which was included in the first Wales violence against women strategy ("Right to be Safe", 2010-2016) is: "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."¹ While the Welsh Government has made statements in accompanying documents that recognises the evidence that women and girls suffer disproportionately from these types of violence, this was not reflected in the definitions of the Act (which we raised as a problem at the time, but were advised that the internationally accepted definition of violence against women would be addressed in the strategy).
- 2.4 The refreshed National Violence Against Women Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy (2016-2021) must be published by November 2016 in accordance with the Act. However this has yet to be completed, and the draft refreshed national strategy out for consultation does not contain UK and internationally accepted definitions of domestic abuse, sexual violence and violence against women, for monitoring and strategic delivery purposes. It is vital that Welsh Government demonstrates leadership and commitment to the internationally recognised definition of violence against women within its national strategy. Otherwise this puts Wales out of step with the UK and international evidence and will have a detrimental impact on the development of strategic collaborative commissioning, service development and data collection in Wales. Using the term 'Violence against Women' does not

¹ United Nations: 'Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women', General Assembly <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/48/a48r104.htm>



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exclude men and boys but recognises the gendered nature of these types of abuse and the gendered differences in impact of perpetration and victimisation. It is important that the implementation of the Act enables gender responsive models of support to enable the best outcomes for all survivors.

3. Overview of the context for the implementation of the Act

3.1 Scrutiny of the implementation of the Act needs to be situated within a broad context. Violence against women cannot be tackled in isolation and the support and protection of survivors does not occur in silos. Violence against women is a truly cross cutting issue and its prevention and the protection and support of survivors should be considered core business and a priority for all government departments, public services and communities in Wales. While the Act provides a tool for Welsh Government to demonstrate strategic leadership to prevent violence against women, it is also important to recognise that the duties in the Act also intersect with a number of other Welsh, UK and international legislation and policy priorities. Incorporating how Welsh Government embeds violence against women prevention into these other delivery plans and meets UK and international obligations will also be critical to review within the scrutiny process, if the committee is going to be successful in its aim. These include the following:

3.1.1 Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 is a key piece of legislation which is shaping changes to the preventative agendas for health and social care services, and which has the potential to have a positive impact on the prevention of violence against women and maximising support of survivors. However at present there is little evidence of an integrated approach to delivery nationally or locally. In particular, there is scope to align the population needs assessments that local authorities are completing as part of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 with the need for violence against women thematic needs assessments.. There is also scope to coordinate the development of outcomes frameworks and training for public service professionals required by both Acts.

3.2.2 The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 sets out seven wellbeing goals that are relevant to the prevention of violence against women and supporting survivors. This includes an equal Wales, a resilient Wales and a healthy Wales. Public sector bodies have to take action to achieve these goals, yet to do so effectively they need to take action to end violence against women as a cause and consequence of inequality between women and men and which has a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of survivors and their children. Leadership from Welsh Government to ensure public service boards prioritise violence against women prevention within their development and delivery of well-being goals and plans would go some way towards aligning these integrated priorities. For example:

- **A more prosperous Wales:** Well-being plans need to recognise that domestic violence alone costs Wales £303.5m annually: £202.6m in service costs and £100.9m to lost economic output. These figures do not include any element of human and emotional costs, which the research estimates costs Wales an additional £522.9m. In addition, those who experience violence will be adversely affected in both education and work. Each year, one in ten victims of partner abuse takes time off work as a result of the



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abuse. By incorporating approaches to prevent violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, Wales will be more prosperous with regard to public spending, and also in terms of personal ability to earn, learn and succeed.

- **A Wales of cohesive communities:** Violence against women prevention and work to promote cohesive communities are interlinked. Tackling violence against women will lead to safer communities, and reduce further social exclusion of already marginalised groups, for example Black and minority communities, refugees, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+) communities. Tackling violence against women will also challenge social stigma, which will promote inclusiveness and better community ties.
- **A healthier, more equal Wales:** a society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances requires equality between women and men. As such tackling violence against women and its cause and consequence, through funding specialist services that help prevent violence and abuse, will lead to greater equality between men and women in Wales. We cannot achieve the goal for a healthier Wales; a society in which people's physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood, without preventing violence against women. The World Health Organisation has stated that violence against women is a 'global health problem of epidemic proportions'. By funding services that prevent violence against women, Wales will see a positive increase to people's physical and mental health, a reduction in problematic substance use, as well as improved resilience and recovery from trauma associated with violence against women and adverse childhood experiences.

3.3.3 The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 enshrines in legislation duties on local authorities to prevent and alleviate homelessness. It has long been recognised that domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women is a leading cause of homelessness for women. To prevent homelessness it is critical that the duties imposed by the new housing legislation enable survivors to access refuge services and other accommodation options swiftly, or where appropriate and safe to do so, to stay safely within their own homes. Domestic abuse is not always being effectively identified as the cause of homelessness as survivors presenting as homeless often have multiple support needs that could include debt, substance misuse, mental health support needs, as well as needing support to recover from the debilitating impact of domestic abuse. This raises the concern that the full extent of need is not being recorded to inform the evaluation of support provided and the commissioning of relevant provision in a locality. There is a need for the integration of measures and duties between the two Acts so that they are aligned to ensure a strategic and holistic approach to delivery.

3.3.4 The current curriculum review being carried out by Welsh Government aims to support children and young people to be healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society. To achieve this the curriculum will need to include preventative programmes regarding all forms of violence against women based on principles of gender equality and human rights. Work is also ongoing in the development of the



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Wellbeing Area of Learning and Experience under the new curriculum for Wales however it remains unclear as to whether healthy relationship education will be prioritised within this. Healthy relationships education needs to be more than a single lesson about domestic abuse or sexual relationships, it needs to be ongoing age appropriate lessons covering gender stereotyping, sexual consent, sexuality and respect. At present this is not consistently available to children and young people in Wales. As the lead organisation in Wales on ending violence against women we would welcome further consultation on the inclusion of effective healthy relationship education in the new curriculum, because as yet specialist services have not been involved in this review. As is discussed further below we have developed toolkits and guidance that could inform this work as well as having developed our own preventative programme, STAR (Safety, Trust and Respect), for young people.

3.3.5 The Home Office Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy sets out the UK Government plans to address and prevent violence against women and girls until 2020. While some areas are devolved to Wales, significant areas such as criminal, civil and family justice remain non-devolved. It is critical that the implementation of the Act is carried out with the collaboration of those responsible for delivering non-devolved priorities. National and local strategies and delivery plans need to ensure there is join up with the Home Office strategy. Similarly it is vital for survivors that may move between England and Wales that there is a consistency in the quality and accessibility of support and protection.

3.3.6 The EU Victim's Rights Directive establishes a new legal standard for victim services, and obligations include a minimum level of provision of specialist services and support for victims of domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women, regardless of nationality or citizenship status, including support for the children of victims. Support includes information, advice, practical, emotional, and psychological support. At present there still remains a postcode lottery in the provision of specialist services across Wales. Current local and regional commissioning of specialist services are not effectively addressing provision of specialist support in a strategic, evidence-based, joined up and sustainable manner. Feedback from survivors states that there is a need for more timely, accessible and needs-led support services.²

3.3.7 The Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Abuse (the 'Istanbul Convention') sets out clear measures on how to prevent violence against women and support victims. Covered within the scope of the convention is the adequate geographic distribution of short and long-term specialist services that are accessible to all women and their children. Within the draft National Strategy on Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence, Welsh Government has stated that it supports the principles of the convention however it is selective in the articles it links

² Are you listening and am I being heard? Survivor Consultation: A report of the recommendations made by survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, to inform the national strategy in Wales, March 2016



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the strategy too. At present the draft strategy does not reference if or how the Welsh Government will adhere to the minimum level of specialist support outlined within the convention.

- 3.4 All of the above are critical cross cutting priorities and those responsible for the effective implementation of the Act need to deliver on these in order to successfully achieve its aims and obligations. They should also be used by the Committee to inform the post-legislative scrutiny to ensure that the Act is not being treated as an 'add on' to other delivery plans but is embedded across the strategic and delivery functions of Welsh Government and relevant authorities.

4. To what extent is the approach to tackling violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence improving as a result of the obligations in the Act?

- 4.1 The Act has the potential to significantly improve the approach to tackling violence against women by setting out obligations based on improving arrangements for prevention, protection and support. Although all aspects of the Act have been enacted, implementation has been limited. The Welsh Government refreshed National Strategy is out for consultation, and in that it outlines its 'good progress on implementation' which includes "publish[ing] the National Training Framework [and] e-learning package...developing "Ask and Act" ... [and] publish[ing] a Whole Education Approach Good Practice Guide". It also claims "significant steps to reduce the incidence, and to protect victims of Female Genital Mutilation, Forced Marriage and Honour Based Violence" have been made, but it is not clear what these entail.
- 4.2 The obligations within the Act also offer an opportunity for the Welsh Government to provide strategic leadership through the publication of various statutory guidance that should aim to radically improve and change approaches in tackling all forms of violence against women. These included a national training framework, a whole education approach, and statutory guidance on multi-agency working and commissioning of specialist services. At present only one piece of statutory guidance has been published and is in very early stages of implementation, with limited data provided to measure this improvement or establish a clear baseline on which to evaluate the improvements, and the others have yet to be published. So it is not possible to measure improvements at this stage.
- 4.3 Under the Act obligations for prevention, the Welsh Government, in conjunction with Welsh Women's Aid, developed the Whole Education Approach: A Good Practice Guide (<http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/commsafety/151020-whole-education-approach-good-practice-guide-en.pdf>). The document sets out guidance for embedding the prevention of violence against women in educational settings. The guide outlines nine key elements that would ensure a comprehensive and holistic approach to prevention of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. In combination with this, Welsh Women's Aid, in partnership with AVA (Against Violence and Abuse), were also commissioned by Welsh Government to research and compile a package of recommended materials to be utilised as



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best practice in relation to these matters for use in primary, secondary and further education settings. This suite of resources is presented as an overarching toolkit which should be used with the accompanying guidance across education settings This work was completed and submitted in early 2016 but has yet to be published. We have recently been advised the toolkit is to be launched in September 2016 and is intended to complement the aforementioned Good Practice Guidance.

- 4.4 The Welsh Government guidance on delivering a whole education approach to preventing violence against women has been recognised as good practice by the Westminster Women and Equalities Committee's inquiry and report into sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools. However we are yet to see a clear plan as to how and when schools and other education establishments will be implementing this guidance, and there is little current evidence of this being implemented consistently across Welsh schools and other educational settings. A thematic review by Estyn is due to be carried out this autumn which should provide a clearer picture of the extent to which action on violence against women prevention has been taken so far. This thematic review should establish a baseline to demonstrate the current position and provide clear recommendations on improving schools' response based on the good practice guidance. The review should also establish a clear set of questions that can be built in to Estyn's regular reviewing of schools to ensure the monitoring of the implementation of the guidance and its effectiveness. Similarly, effective data and monitoring, as is set out in the good practice guidance and Act, needs to be published on a regular basis so that a clear baseline is known from which improvement can be monitor and lessons learnt. The Act allows Welsh Ministers to require local authorities, through regulations, to report on the steps they have taken to address violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence through their education functions however as of yet this information has not been gathered so a clear national picture is still not known on which to base any assessment of improved provision.
- 4.5 The Welsh Government published the National Training Framework (NTF) as a key mechanism for delivering its obligations to improve responsible authorities' responses to violence and abuse within the Act. The National Training Framework should increase earlier intervention and protection of survivors by ensuring high quality and consistent training is available to those across the public and specialist sector. Survivors have clearly stated that there is a need for "improved training for all services on all aspects of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, informed by survivors' experiences."³ Whilst the e-learning training has been developed and is being rolled out, there have been problems with accessing this for all 'Group 1' professionals. Training for Group 2 and Group 3 professionals is being delivered through 'ask and act' training (see below). Specialist sector training for Group 4 professionals has been commissioned to enable Independent Advocates and sexual violence services to access 'free' specialist accredited training, but the largest number of professionals in Group 4 –frontline professionals working within refuge-based services –have not been able to access

³ Are you listening and am I being heard? Survivor Consultation: A report of the recommendations made by survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, to inform the national strategy in Wales, March 2016



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subsidised accredited training due to lack of Government resources.4.6 The “Ask and Act” framework has been developed and draft guidance was issued in 2015 for consultation, but has not since been published. The ‘Ask and Act’ Framework aims to provide training targeted at those professionals within the public sector that are ideally placed to carry out early identification and provide a helpful response to survivors, which should include referring them to specialist services. This approach is being developed in early adopter sites in Gwent and Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board. Welsh Women’s Aid secured the contact to deliver the Ask and Act ‘train the trainer’ contract for Group 2 and Group 3 professionals and its delivery is underway in these sites. The extension of this training programme to other regions across Wales was scheduled from September, but the approach for cascading this statutory training to other areas as originally envisaged is now under review by Welsh Government.

4.7 While the commitment outlined in the ‘Ask and Act’ framework is to increase identification and improve responses by the public sector to violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence is welcome, there are a number of issues that need to be addressed to ensure that it enables an improvement in the response to survivors:

4.7.1 There is a need for alignment of the delivery of the NTF with other legislative training commitments so that public sector training priorities and resources are not competing. Clear communication and leadership is required between Government and the regions to ensure the commitment required under the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 is understood by the relevant stakeholders at a local level and given the priority needed.

4.7.2 It also needs to be recognised that the roll out of the NTF will increase the identification of survivors experiencing abuse and will increase referrals to specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence services in the third sector. At present there is an assumption that specialist services will simply accept these referrals without additional resources, and that these services will be available to meet demand from increased referrals. However, there is already high demand for these services, which cannot be met. In 2015/16 in Wales:

- 11,512 women, men, children and young people were provided with refuge and community based advocacy and support by Welsh Women’s Aid member services in Wales;
- At least 388 survivors of abuse in Wales could not be accommodated by refuges because there was no space available in the refuge when they needed help. Many individual services also operate lengthy waiting lists for aspects of their community provision that are in high demand (eg counselling, groupwork, support for children and young people).
- There were 28,392 calls to the Live Fear Free Helpline in Wales, and 14,612 survivors were supported by the service.

4.8 With the introduction of the Act, demand for services is likely to increase. It is critically important that the specialist services that support survivors of abuse have the funding and



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capacity to respond to any increase in demand, to ensure the services being offered are safe and meet needs.

- 4.9 The Welsh Government has still to publish its statutory guidance for multi-agency working (which was out for consultation in 2015), guidance for working with perpetrators (which was consulted on with the Advisory Board in 2015), and guidance for commissioners. These are critical guidance to support the aims of the Act as they should require effective strategic leadership and commissioning of service provision by local service boards.
- 4.10 The delay in publishing commissioning guidance is a concern as commissioning processes, particularly regarding Supporting People funded services like specialist floating support and refuges, are already taking place in a number of local authorities without the strategic guidance from Welsh Government having been published. Without the overarching guidance there are inconsistencies in what is being commissioned and how it is being carried out. There are also inconsistencies in the responsibilities being taken by relevant authorities and limited collaboration between commissioners.
- 4.11 This is impacting on the sustainability of specialist services. The Welsh Women's Aid state of the sector report (published in September, and accompanying this submission) found that:
- 46% of refuge services in Wales have already received cuts to their funding this year, leading to a lack of capacity to meet demand in many areas and inadequate funding for specialist children and young people's services for many organisations.
 - This year's cuts follows funding cuts last year for 58% of refuge services in Wales.
 - 92% of refuge services in Wales identify funding and service continuation as being the main challenge facing their organisation this year.
- 4.12 In the absence of Welsh Government statutory Commissioning Guidance being published, Welsh Women's Aid worked with Lloyds Bank Foundation to produce Tackling Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence: A Collaborative Commissioning Toolkit for Services in Wales (Aug 2016). This toolkit was produced simultaneously with a domestic abuse toolkit for covering non-devolved areas with partners in England. The toolkit has been endorsed as good practice by the National Adviser for Wales and it was developed in consultation with Welsh Government officials. The toolkit provides an expert guide to achieve a whole system approach to commissioning services for violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. Getting the commissioning of services right is vital to making sure they are accessible and available for the people that need them. There now needs to be leadership in promoting this toolkit to enable regional and local areas to achieve collaborative commissioning across Wales.

5. What are the most effective methods of capturing the views and experiences of survivors? Are arrangements in place to capture these experiences, and to what extent is this information being used to help inform the implementation of the Act's provisions?



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- 5.1 Welsh Women's Aid advocates that understanding how survivors use and experience services (or don't use them) is key to improving the effectiveness of services and systems aimed at prevention, protection and support. We have obtained external Trust funding to develop a national survivor participation framework for Wales using Survivors Empowering and Educating Domestic Abuse Services (SEEDS) model which enables survivors to engage in local and national decision making regarding services. The SEEDS model aims to provide a voice for survivors, increasing understanding about the experience of domestic abuse amongst those working in the statutory sector. The aim is to use a model that works with survivors to obtain their views about the effectiveness and value of local services; to raise awareness of other relevant issues; and to empower survivors to move forward in their lives by making positive use of their experiences.
- 5.2 The SEEDS model can provide a consultation service to enable agencies to understand survivors' perspective; contribute to training events and the production of training materials; give presentations to increase staff awareness and understanding of incidents and the impact of domestic abuse.
- 5.3 Further to this Welsh Women's Aid and our members carry out engagement with survivors to make sure the experiences and needs of survivors are central to all we do. In Spring 2016, Welsh Women's Aid worked with the National Adviser and an independent facilitator to run a series of focus groups with survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence across Wales. This offered an opportunity for a broad spectrum of survivors to voice their experiences about using services and explain what improvements might be made to inform recommendations. The findings set out clear priorities for action that will inform the national strategy as well as being shared with relevant authorities to inform needs assessments and other local decision making. A copy of this report is provided as an attachment, which includes the top priorities survivors felt Welsh Government should address, following enactment of provisions within the Act. These are:
- 5.4 It is vital that survivors are kept at the heart of all discussions about them in the implementation of the Act. Our work on developing a national survivor participation framework for Wales over the next two years should assist and support the delivery of the Act at a national and local level.

6. Whether survivors of abuse are beginning to experience better responses from public authorities as a result of the Act, particularly those needing specialist services?

- 6.1 Welsh Women's Aid has been resourced by Welsh Government to deliver a national accreditation framework for specialist services, by working with a team of independent quality assessors to roll out National Quality Service Standards. Specialist domestic abuse services that are working towards or have attained the quality standards can evidence their effective response to survivors of violence and abuse across a range of measures. Survivors who need to access specialist services can either self refer, be referred via the Live Fear Free Helpline,



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or referred by public or other third sector services. Provisions in the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 places increasing responsibility on public authorities to identify and refer survivors to specialist services. The national training framework and a whole education approach, if implemented correctly, will also encourage local public services, schools and youth services to refer survivors, including children and young people, to specialist services in local communities.

- 6.2 At present no National Indicators have been published as set out in the Act, because there are no national violence against women outcomes developed to align with the National Strategy, to measure progress (the strategy is due to be published by November). So there is a limited baseline from which to measure the improvement of responses. While the Act does set out an ambition to improve responses, measurement of this is limited.
- 6.3 Welsh Women's Aid survivor consultation report - *Are you listening and am I being heard? Survivor Consultation: A report of the recommendations made by survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, to inform the national strategy in Wales, (March 2016)* - provides feedback from survivors of their experiences of responses by public authorities and the improvements they would like to see that should inform the delivery of the Act. In the consultation carried out with survivors, they spoke about the need for improved responses by public services in identifying and enabling disclosures of abuse and enabling them to access the support they needed. One of the key concerns of survivors was knowing about availability of specialist services and being able to access them when and where they needed them. ***Please see the attached report that provides feedback on the problems survivors continue to experience with seeking help and support from public services.***
- 6.4 Survivors in rural areas raised particular concern about the accessibility of services and the need to know that they can trust local professionals in the public sector due to the small communities they lived in. Welsh Women's Aid is working with partners in Powys to pilot a community engagement scheme to improve awareness of domestic abuse and the help available amongst professionals working in local community services (Ask Me scheme). This aims to create safe disclosure points for survivors in their local communities beyond public sector and specialist services where it is safe for survivors to disclose the abuse they are experiencing and get the right signposting so that they can access the right support when they need it. It will equip members of the local community such as hairdressers or local shop assistants with the basic knowledge, skills and tools to have a supportive conversation and provide an initial safe response. It builds on the Ask and Act framework and creates a holistic community response to violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.
- 6.5 The implementation of the obligations of the Act should reflect the need to fundamentally review and change systems and processes. As a means of achieving a better response to survivors Welsh Women's Aid recommends that the evidence-based principles and approach outlined in our 'Change that Lasts' service model be adopted across Wales. This model, developed with resources from Welsh Government, provides a framework that facilitates the shortest and most effective route to safety, freedom and independence for each survivor based on their individual situation and the resources available to them. As part of this model



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it is important that support services are needs-led and survivor centred, and adhere to national accreditation and quality frameworks e.g. the Welsh Government supported National Quality Service Standards being delivered by Welsh Women's Aid. If changes were made to meet survivors' needs from the outset (as is designed to do through our 'Change that Lasts' model), then resources would be saved and survivors of abuse would achieve a much greater positive benefit from their interaction with public authorities.

7. Whether the National Adviser has sufficient power and independence from the Welsh Government to ensure implementation of the Act?

- 7.1 Welsh Women's Aid welcomes the creation of the independent Ministerial Adviser role. The role is an opportunity to provide leadership and accountability for the violence against women agenda in Wales. The role offers a unique opportunity to provide the necessary machinery for ensuring strong leadership and to introduce processes for scrutinising delivery, monitoring and evaluating progress made.
- 7.2 Whilst we recognise this, we do not think that the role currently has sufficient power, resources and independence in terms of holding Welsh Government and other public bodies accountable to their obligations within the Act. At present the role is part time and has no budget so it is limited in the leadership and action it can take. Without sufficient resource and capacity, the National Adviser's role is not able to have the impact or importance of that of a commissioner (compare, for example, with the roles of the Well-being of Future Generations Commissioner, Children's Commissioner and Older People's Commissioner).
- 7.3 We recognise the role's function in providing guidance and monitoring activities however it remains unclear what the remit is if the role needs to advise Ministers or challenge Welsh Government or other public bodies about not fulfilling their statutory duties. It is unclear what sanctions will take place if these legal duties are broken, and how these sanctions will be imposed. Sanctions are absolutely vital if the legislation is to 'have teeth' therefore clarity is needed on whether imposing sanctions on non-compliant organisations is a statutory function to be fulfilled by the Adviser or another body.

8. To what extent the good practice guide to healthy relationships is successfully influencing the development of a whole school approach to challenging violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence?

- 8.1 The UN Rapporteur on Violence against Women recommended in her UK report in 2014 that action was taken to ensure a holistic approach to prevention of violence against women and girls by including appropriate and comprehensive sex and relationship education in schools as a compulsory subject; providing adequate training to teachers and other school staff; and developing gender-specific prevention policies.
- 8.2 Schools and other educational settings play a key role in the prevention of violence against women and girls. This is vital to prevent future domestic and sexual violence as well as tackling the abuse and violence children and young people are currently experiencing. Data published



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in September 2015 revealed that 5,500 sexual offences were recorded in UK schools over a three year period, including 600 rapes⁴.

- 8.3 As stated above the Welsh Government Good Practice Guidance on Whole Education Approaches developed in conjunction with Welsh Women's Aid along with the suite of resources in the accompanying toolkit (forthcoming) provide an effective mechanism for embedding a preventative approach within education settings in Wales. Additionally work has been carried out to support young people to develop tools for educational settings where positive attitudes toward gender equality and healthy, respectful relationships can be fostered by young people now and in the future. Welsh Women's Aid has been working in partnership with Cardiff University and NSPCC Cymru, supported by the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales, to support young people to develop the forthcoming guide 'Agenda: A Young People's Guide to Making Positive Relationships Matter' (see <http://learning.gov.wales/resources/browse-all/keeping-learners-safe-conference-2015/?lang=en>).
- 8.4 All of these are effective in establishing a best practice basis on which to embed a whole education approach in Wales, however there is currently little evidence of this being consistently rolled out across Welsh schools and other educational settings. Additionally clarity is needed about how healthy relationship education will be included within the new curriculum review. The development of the new curriculum and the process of national and local implementation of provisions contained in the Act offers an opportunity to ensure all children and young people have access to effective gender equality and healthy relationship education as well as support in their own right as survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 While the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 along with other related legislation sets out the principles of prevention, earlier intervention and collaborative working the act needs leadership, resources and effective integration of this being core business into and across all Government departments and public service boards, to achieve effective implementation and in turn to make a real difference to the lives of women and children in Wales.
- 9.2 Welsh Women's Aid welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to the committee on the post-legislative implementation of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015. In particular, **we would welcome the opportunity to provide oral submission to the Committee, on behalf of specialist domestic abuse/violence against women services in Wales.**

⁴ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-34138287>



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Welsh Women's Aid would like to thank the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee for the opportunity to comment on this important consultation and we look forward to working together in the future.

Any comments or questions regarding our response can be directed to:

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