

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: Ffederasiwn Cenedlaethol Sefydliad y Merched–Cymru

Response from: National Federation of Women’s Institutes–Wales

1.0 Background

1.1 The WI is the largest women’s organisation in the UK with some 220,000 members in over 6,300 WIs across England, Wales and the Islands. In Wales, we have about 16,000 members belonging to 600 WIs.

1.2 The WI is an educational, social, non-party political organisation, established to ensure that women are able to take an effective part in their community, make new friends, widen their horizons, and together influence local, national, and international affairs on issues that matter to them.

1.3 Violence Against Women (VAW) is a systematic abuse of women’s essential human rights and a form of discrimination against women. It is both a cause and a consequence of inequality. The NFWI has been campaigning for the elimination of VAW since 2008; raising awareness of the nature, extent and impact of all forms of VAW. NFWI-Wales is a member of the Wales Violence Against Women Action Group.

2.0 Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015

2.1 Impact of the Act

2.1.1 NFWI-Wales welcomes the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015. We believe that this ground breaking legislation has the potential to make a difference to the lives of the women in Wales. For this to be achieved, the delivery of the Act must be supported by strong guidance and a strong National Strategy.

2.1.2 At this stage, it is difficult to evaluate the impact the Act is having in terms of improving the responses of public services in addressing VAW, domestic abuse and sexual violence. Through the Act and the work of the National Adviser, public services are aware of their obligations but the impact of the Act in changing the way that public services work may take time. Integration with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act also needs to be addressed by public services in developing their approaches to tackling VAW.

2.1.3 Issues around the commissioning of VAW support services continue to be a concern in the third sector. Statutory commissioning guidance is expected to come into force next year. The guidance must ensure that services are provided based on the needs of survivors and are gender responsive. Those who experience VAW, domestic abuse and sexual violence should be able to access the services they need wherever they live however at present this is not the case. The importance of the provision of women-only specialist VAW support services must be recognised as highlighted by respondents to the WI research undertaken in 2009 comparing and contrasting VAW in urban and rural areas. Respondents highlighted services which were women-only and specialist when asked to think who they trusted in tackling VAW in their communities.

2.1.4 Realistic, ring-fenced, long-term core funding is vital for service providers. Uncertainty in terms of funding can impact on services and resources through the need to continuously focus on securing funding and can take away their focus on service delivery. NFWI-Wales

hopes that the proposals by the Welsh Government to develop a sustainable funding model would address the issues faced by support services in securing long-term funding.

2.2 Engagement with survivors

2.2.1 NFWI-Wales believes that it is crucial that the views and experiences of survivors help inform the implementation of the Act's provisions and ensure that it meets the needs of those affected by VAW. NFWI-Wales is pleased to note that the draft National Strategy on Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence includes a commitment to develop a sustainable survivor engagement framework.

2.2.2 NFWI-Wales believes that VAW support services have a key role to play as a means of engaging survivors in sharing their experiences and views about what the Act needs to deliver in order to make a difference. The report "*Are you listening and am I being heard?*" was produced by Welsh Women's Aid in March 2016 on behalf of the Welsh Government. Based on focus groups held with survivors, the report presents survivors' experiences of the services they have accessed and their feedback on any improvements and issues which they feel need to be addressed to improve current service delivery and address VAW, domestic abuse and sexual violence. NFWI-Wales would like to see similar focus groups being undertaken on a regular basis.

2.2.3 NFWI-Wales suggests that means of engaging with those who experience VAW, domestic abuse and sexual violence but have not accessed services should be explored.

2.3 National Adviser

2.3.1 The functions of the National Adviser are wide-ranging and we do have concern over the expectations required of the National Adviser in a part-time role and without a team of support staff. Ideally the role should have been set up under a similar structure to the current Commissioners.

2.4 Good practice guide to healthy relationships

2.4.1 The guide is to be welcomed as a step in the right direction. It would be interesting to identify how many schools have used the guide and to gather case studies of whole school approaches to addressing VAW, domestic abuse and sexual violence. NFWI-Wales is concerned that, until further guidance is provided by the Welsh Government to local authorities, the guide could have limited impact in making a difference. We note that the *Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse And Sexual Violence – Guidance For Governors* was published in March. Again, it would be interesting to gather feedback from schools and governors on any action undertaken in response to this guidance.

2.4.2 NFWI-Wales would like to see education on VAWG and healthy relationships included as a mandatory element of the new curriculum being developed.

3.0 Closing comments

3.1 Following the development and publication of guidance to support the implementation of various aspects of the Act and the publication of the National Strategy, NFWI-Wales would expect to see evidence of the difference that the legislation is making at a regional and local level. We believe that members of the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee have an instrumental role in ensuring that the Act is supported by strong guidance and in scrutinising the delivery of the Act.

4.0 Further information

4.1 For further information relating to the above response, please contact the NFWI-Wales Office. Tel: 029 2022 1712 E-mail: walesoffice@nfwl-wales.org.uk