

20/11/17

Dear Ministers

RE: Welsh Government's Draft Budget 2018-19 and impact on VAWDASV services

As a local Charity operating in Arfon we provide refuge & community work with women and children as survivors of domestic abuse. We are aware of the current threats to the budget and this is very unsettling with the regionalization agenda in the sector and find this extremely worrying for our client group.

We welcome:

- The proposed increase in 2018-19 to the VAWDASV grant from £4.5 million to £5 million, and the 2018-19 protection of the Supporting People (SP) programme at £124 million.

However, we are extremely concerned that:

- It is proposed that in 2019/20 **the local authority slice of the VAWDASV Services grant (£2.4 million) will be integrated into a new single Early Intervention, Prevention and Support (EIPS) grant**, without any transitional arrangements mentioned or proposals to ring-fence this for VAWDASV;
- In 2019/20 **the SP budget line would also disappear**, to be integrated into the EIPS grant, without any transitional arrangements or proposals to ring-fence this;
- The proposed EIPS grant in 2019-20 will be **£13 million less** than the combined total of the proposed grants that make this up currently, and there is no clarity on which grant streams will be cut to achieve this or how priorities would change.
- Loss of ring-fencing means we will not clearly know how much is being spent on VAWDASV work locally, or on homelessness and housing related support services in Wales in the future. **We need a commitment to ensure measures are introduced to support resource mapping for these priority areas** – across government departments and responsible authorities locally.
- We are also concerned that changes are being 'piloted' within seven 'full flexibility pathfinder areas', without mention of transitional arrangements – and that **Assembly agreement on the budget is being sought before the Welsh Government VAWDASV statutory commissioning guidance** will be



Cymorth i Ferched Bangor a'r Cylch Bangor & District Women's Aid

7 Llys y Fedwen, Parc Menai, Bangor LL57 4BN

Ffôn Swyddfa / Office Tel: 01248 679052 Cymorth / Support: 01248 679077

Ebost / Email: enquiries@bangorwomensaid.org

consulted on and published or can be implemented.¹ We contributed to the consultation on the Act to protect females from domestic abuse and have provided statistics regularly on.

- It is vital the **SP and VAWDASV Services ring-fence of baseline funding is maintained when funding transfers to regions and local areas** (commissioners are welcome to increase or diversify funding but we cannot lose vital funds to this sector; VAWDASV services do not have the resilience to recover from this).²

Context:

- VAWDASV specialist services in the third sector have already experienced a 5% cut in resources this year across the board, compared with 2016/17; the majority of services cannot sustain any further cuts without closure or a significant reduction in their life-saving services.
- In England ring-fencing of SP was lost in 2009. Between 2010 and 2014, accompanied by a period of parallel austerity measures, they lost 17% of specialist refuges and a third of all referrals to refuge were turned away, normally due to a lack of available space.³ Specialist services that support survivors of sexual violence and those led by and for BME women are particularly at risk,⁴ and recent reports suggest council spending on domestic violence refuges across 33 local authorities in one region of England has fallen by up to 75% since 2010⁵. We do not want Wales to have to go down this same path.
- The Violence against Women Bill in Wales was given Royal Assent and the statutory guidance has not yet been published and implemented in Wales and requires a commitment from MP's to ensure vital services are offered to victims' and their families.

The future consequences:

- If these issues are not resolved urgently, survivors of abuse in Wales will at best face a postcode lottery when trying to access safety, support and protection, or alternately, face a stark choice of staying with abusers, destitution or death, if they cannot access specialist services for help and support.
- Currently survivors are being affected by the cuts to the Welfare system and the cuts to Legal Aid and are getting lost in the system with increasing numbers losing their children. This is at an increasing cost to other public services and not preventative.

¹ 'Full Flexibility Pathfinders': Bridgend, Cardiff, Conwy, Newport, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Torfaen.

² Following the Supporting People programme losing its ring-fence in England in 2009, 20% refuges have closed since 2010, and Westminster is now reviewing refuge funding in England with a view to centrally funding this again (as it had already done with rape support funding, due to sexual violence services being lost).

³ <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/campaigning-and-influencing/campaign-with-us/sos/>.

⁴ <https://zine.imkaan.org.uk/new-report-life-saving-black-women-s-groups-in-critical-state-facing-closure-government-must-e3eb904bf8e0>.

⁵ <http://www.islingtongazette.co.uk/news/crime-court/domestic-violence-refuge-funding-cuts-islington-charity-says-women-are-dying-because-they-don-t-get-access-to-safe-beds-1-5252240>.

Rhif y Cwmni 5493819 Company Number

Cofrestrwyd yn Lloegr a Chymru / Registered in England and Wales

Rhif Elusen Gofrestredig 1112572 Registered Charity Number

Swyddfa Gofrestredig / Registered Office: 7 Llys Fedwen, Parc Menai, Bangor LL57 4BN



Cymorth i Ferched Bangor a'r Cylch Bangor & District Women's Aid

7 Llys y Fedwen, Parc Menai, Bangor LL57 4BN

Ffôn Swyddfa / Office Tel: 01248 679052 Cymorth / Support: 01248 679077

Ebost / Email: enquiries@bangorwomensaid.org

We would welcome further discussions with you around the Draft Budget and how to ensure the continuation of vital specialist violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence services in your constituency and across Wales.

Yours Sincerely,

Jamie Crank
Manager