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John Griffiths AM
Chair
National Assembly for Wales
Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee
National Assembly for Wales
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22 February 2018

Dear John,

Thank you for your letter of 11 January to seek an update on progress in implementing the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and I have provided substantive responses to your questions at doc 1.

Yours sincerely,

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Equality, Local Government and Communities (ELGC) Committee

Implementation of the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act

Much has been achieved since the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act ('the Act') came into force in 2015. This includes:

- **June 2015 - Pilot of "Ask and Act" launched in two early adopter sites:** "Ask and Act" is a process of targeted enquiry to be practised across the public service for forms of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. This pilot will provide a clear model of "Ask and Act" which will be rolled out further in 2017 for further testing.
- **September 2015 - Launch of E-learning on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence:** This e-learning provides basic, free training on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence and is available to everyone across Wales.
- **September 2015 - Youth Participation Project:** Welsh Government funded BAWSO and NSPCC Cymru/Wales to work collaboratively on an innovative youth participation project, tackling the issues of girls' rights and harmful practices, particularly female genital mutilation (FGM).
- **October 2015 - Publication of Good Practice Guide: A Whole Education Approach to Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence in Wales:** This guide recognises the importance of education settings as environments where positive attitudes towards gender equality and healthy respectful relationships can be fostered through a rights based approach.
- **March 2016 - Statutory guidance on the National Training Framework published**
Since publication of the National Training Framework the Welsh Government has:
 - Funded nationwide targeted training for domestic abuse workers, significantly expanding the amount of qualified, specialist professionals across Wales.
 - Offered a bursary to address a training gap for specialist Independent Sexual Violence Advisers.
 - Provided the first Welsh training course for specialist service managers.
 - Created new training courses for sexual violence crisis workers and counsellors.
 - Created a specialist subject syllabus of Agored Cymru accredited units to aid standardisation of VAWDASV training across Wales.
 - Created a suite of films aimed at public service leadership to raise awareness VAWDASV. The films have been viewed over 6,500 times.
- **March 2016 - Awareness raising guidance for school governors published:** The guide contains a number of actions which governors can take to make their school safer.
- **June 2016 - Estyn Review on Healthy Relationships** and Welsh Government response published.
- **January 2018** - We have now published our Annual Report to March 2017 and the report for 2017-18 will be published this summer.

I was delighted to announce in January the appointment of the two new National Advisors, Yasmin Khan and Nazir Afzal, working on a job-share basis. The National Advisors began in post on 15 January and are meeting stakeholders across Wales. They will have an important role to play in advising me and other Ministers, working with officials and helping to shape our future priorities on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV).

ELGC Committee Observation: National Strategy

The National Strategy was published on 4 November 2016 as a high level, strategic document, rather than a detailed action plan. The then Cabinet Secretary told us that a more detailed delivery plan would be published as “a way of getting through the legal challenge of not delivering the strategy at the appropriate time.”

We raised concerns that the delivery plan would not be legally enforceable under the Act, unlike the national strategy. The Welsh Government said that the legal status and timescale for the delivery plan would be determined by a Task and Finish group.

- **When will the delivery plan be published?**
- **What will be the legal status of the plan (for example, will it be published as statutory guidance) be decided? Will it be legally enforceable?**
- **How will the plan be consulted on?**

Response - Officials have drafted the Welsh Government’s Delivery Framework and are drawing on the new National Advisors’ expertise before publishing the framework in the summer. The Delivery Framework is not statutory but will provide outputs, outcomes and timescales against which Welsh Government and partners can be held to account. It sets out how Welsh Government will deliver the actions within the National Strategy, which organisations we will work with and our expectations of Relevant Authorities in contributing to the delivery of our goals.

The Delivery Framework will complement the National Strategy and is the product of cross-government working and extensive engagement with external partner organisations. My officials have consulted with key stakeholders throughout the development of the Framework and stakeholders have been closely involved in its co-production. This has inevitably resulted in extended timeframes.

ELGC Committee Observation: Local Strategies

In October 2016, we heard that local strategies were beginning to be developed in the absence of the delivery plan or commissioning guidance, which ‘could lead to inconsistencies in approaches across Wales’.

The Welsh Government’s response to our report said that “guidance will be published in relation to local strategies in July 2017”. This does not appear to have been published.

The Wales Audit Office published Findings of Call for Evidence on Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 in August 2017, which found that “local strategies are developing but need to be integrated with recent legislation to be truly effective”.

- **Has the guidance on local strategies been issued to local authorities and health boards?**

- **Are all local authorities and health boards likely to meet the May 2018 deadline for local strategies?**
- **Without a National Adviser currently in place, what support is available to local authorities and health boards in producing local strategies?**
- **How many local strategies have been consulted upon so far?**
- **How will the content and objectives of all local strategies be evaluated across Wales as a whole?**

Response – The guidance for local strategies has been drafted and is currently being translated for publication. Data on which local authorities and health boards could draw has been available from a wide range of sources, including existing communities-based assessments, such as the local Well-being Assessments required under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and assessments informing the Police and Crime Plan.

Progress is being made to fulfil the obligations in the Act for Local Strategies to be developed by May 2018 and some local authorities and local health boards have already published strategies. I anticipate the remainder will meet the May 2018 deadline.

Yasmin Khan and Nazir Afzal are currently determining their priorities for the coming year. This may include working with local authorities and local health boards to review their strategies to ensure high quality strategic planning, and improve co-ordination and consistency.

A priority for the National Advisors will be to complete work on National Indicators, begun by their predecessor, Rhian Bowen-Davies. The National Indicators will be used to measure the effectiveness of the strategies as well as wider progress under the Act.

ELGC Committee Observation: Education

A key area of focus for us during our scrutiny was the role of education. We made a number of recommendations, including calling for a commitment that healthy relationships should be covered in the new curriculum.

We were therefore pleased that the healthy relationships expert group in March recommended, in December 2017, that Sexuality and Relationships Education (SRE) should be a statutory part of the new curriculum for all schools (age 3-16).

- **(For the Cabinet Secretary for Education) What are the next steps in taking forward the recommendations of the expert group on healthy relationships education?**
- **(For the Cabinet Secretary for Education) Why was the decision made not to bring forward regulations under section 9?**

Higher education

- **(For the Cabinet Secretary for Education) When will guidance be issued to higher education institutions under section 10?**

Response - Education and VAWDASV officials are working together to ensure the government's violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence policy informs and links with education and other policy and delivery. The decision was

taken not to proceed with regulations because of the ongoing work on developing the new curriculum.

I established the Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) Expert Panel in March 2017 to explore how we can improve provision of SRE in schools, both now and in the future.

The expert panel published its report in December. In this, they outline their vision for high quality SRE, emphasising the importance of supporting the profession to develop their knowledge and confidence in this area.

Equipping our practitioners to become confident in their teaching of SRE will enhance their ability to deliver learning regarding important issues, such as domestic abuse and its prevention.

The Panel's recommendations provide the scope to consider how issues regarding violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, such as gender equality and healthy relationships, can be more effectively engaged with by schools. Welsh Government's response to the report will be published in early spring.

We will be reviewing our Statutory guidance *Keeping learners safe* this year to ensure that education practitioners continue to be supported to deliver their safeguarding responsibilities effectively in order to protect young people. Developments in Welsh law, including the coming into force of the VAWDASV (Wales) Act, will feature in the review of this guidance.

A range of resources are in place to support practitioners to report suspected safeguarding issues. For instance, the Welsh Government has published a suite of e-learning safeguarding modules on Hwb to support schools in managing safeguarding issues.

The Welsh Government funds Hafan Cymru's Spectrum project to implement a preventative approach that is designed for children, young people, school staff and governors. The project works in primary and secondary schools across Wales to teach children and young people the importance of healthy relationships, to raise awareness of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence and where to seek help.

Guidance to be issued to higher education institutions under section 10 is the responsibility of HEFCW. We will work with HEFCW to inform this guidance, drawing on projects already in place within Further & Higher Education.

ELGC C Observation: National Indicators

The Welsh Government's response to our report said that the national indicators would be published "not before" October 2017.

- When will the national indicators be consulted upon and published?

Response - Rhian Bowen-Davies, the first National Advisor for Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence led on the development of the National Indicators. Her departure meant there has been a hiatus in taking forward this work so this will be a priority for the new National Advisers. I expect these to be

consulted on later this year, and the National Indicators laid before the Assembly after full consultation.

The National Indicators will align with Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 national indicators and well-being goals.

The Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 sets out seven wellbeing goals which are relevant to prevention of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence and support of survivors, including an equal Wales, a healthy Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities, that public sector bodies have to take action to achieve.

ELGC Committee Observation: Statutory Guidance

The Welsh Government told us in 2016 that the statutory commissioning guidance “will be consulted on by July 2017”. This has not yet been consulted upon or published.

A consultation on Ask and Act ended in January 2016. Pilot projects are currently underway in Abertawe Bro Morgannwg health board area and in Gwent. The Welsh Government’s recent letter to us said that a phased rollout of Ask and Act is taking place, rather than a full national rollout.

Multi-agency collaboration guidance was consulted on in 2015. The Welsh Government response to our report stated that the multi-agency guidance “will be considered in light of the local government White Paper”. It has not yet been published.

According to the written evidence we received to our inquiry, guidance on working with perpetrators was consulted on with the Advisory Board in 2015, but has not been published.

- **When will the statutory commissioning guidance be published?**
- **What is the current status of the rollout of Ask and Act programme, and what is the future rollout schedule? When will the rollout be complete?**
- **When will the multi-agency collaboration guidance be published?**
- **When will the guidance on working with perpetrators be published?**

Response - Commissioning guidance has been the main focus for the Sustainable Funding Task and Finish Group, made up of key stakeholders from across the sector. Stakeholders have been closely involved in the development of the guidance and drafts have been shared for comment and amendment. Draft guidance will be available by the end of March for regions to use, implement and test. This will be a transition year to test the guidance and ensure it is fit for purpose. The guidance will be consulted on in the spring and summer, and it will be laid before the Assembly, following statutory consultation during 2018.

Statutory guidance on the National Training Framework is in force. This was published in March 2016. My Officials have been working hard to implement the Framework across Wales, activity to date has included:

- Funding nationwide targeted training for domestic abuse and sexual violence workers, expanding the amount of qualified, specialist professionals across Wales.
- Providing the first Welsh training course for specialist domestic abuse and sexual violence service managers.
- Creating a specialist subject syllabus of Agored Cymru accredited units to aid standardisation of training across Wales. This includes new training courses for sexual violence crisis workers and counsellors.
- Creating 11 films within the Strengthening Leadership Series: aimed at public service leadership to raise awareness of the subject. The films have been viewed over 6,500 times.
- launching an e-learning programme to provide basic, free training on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, which is available to everyone across Wales. This e-learning programme has now been adopted by most of the relevant authorities.

At least 70,000 people were trained in group 1 by the end of 2017. New data will be available at the end of the financial year and we understand that all relevant authorities are working hard to expand the reach of this training. Initial evaluation of the e-learning programme is extremely positive. 97% of those who completed the programme agree or agree strongly that they are confident to signpost colleagues and friends to specialist's services, 93% feel confident to recognise the signs of abuse and 97% are more knowledgeable about what violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence is.

Ask and Act

The rollout of Ask and Act is well under way. Five sites are currently engaged in the programme and a further three will join the programme in financial year 2018-2019. This will leave one region in Wales to join the programme in 2019-2020. Whilst we expect to have some "mop up" work to do at this point we are on course for national rollout of "Ask and Act" by 2020. 1000 practitioners have already been trained to "Ask and Act". We expect that number to have grown significantly when we next collect data at the end of the March 2018.

A series of guidance documents on "Ask and Act" were published in November 2017. These documents include comprehensive strategic guidance for leadership and practical guidance for those at the frontline, delivering "Ask and Act" with clients.

Following close consultation with the "Ask and Act" implementation board (and unanimous agreement) this guidance was published in draft form. The purpose of this was to ensure that the relevant authorities have time to implement and embed "Ask and Act" before we focus on compliance. This approach has been welcomed by our stakeholders and I am really pleased with the partnership model of implementation we currently have underway. The relevant authorities are enthusiastic about "Ask and Act" and want to deliver an excellent service. This approach supports them to do that.

Multi-Agency collaboration guidance

The Statutory commissioning guidance addresses the need to plan and deliver services through multi-agency collaboration, negating the need for separate guidance on this.

Guidance on working with perpetrators

Dr Cerys Miles, a Forensic Psychologist with Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service has been seconded to work with Welsh Government to develop approaches to working with perpetrators. She is undertaking work with Cardiff University on what works with VAWDASV perpetrators to inform the commissioning of effective and sustainable VAWDASV perpetrator services. This work will include the development of prevention and early intervention approaches, and aims to improve service links, communication and effective practice and develop a skilled and resilient workforce. The framework and work stream will be launched in March.

We are also developing Welsh Government standards to provide the minimum requirements for all VAWDASV perpetrator programmes. These standards will be a collaborative process, drawing on VAWDASV perpetrator service expertise in Wales from both statutory and non-statutory sectors.

We will deliver a workshop in April where the draft standards will be finalised based on contributions and feedback.

ELGC Committee Observation: Other Developments

In a consultation document about funding for supported housing published in October 2017, the UK Government proposed to remove refuges and other forms of short-term supported housing from the welfare system, meaning that people will not be able pay for supported housing with their housing benefit. Instead, it proposes that English local authorities and devolved administrations in Wales and Scotland are given a ring-fenced grant for short-term supported housing.

- What discussions has the Welsh Government had with the UK Government about the proposals to remove refuges from the welfare system?**
- How will funding be allocated to refuges in the future in Wales?**

Response - There has been extensive official and Ministerial engagement and correspondence with UK colleagues over the Supported Accommodation Review over a period of time. Whilst Welsh Government did not seek to remove supported accommodation from the housing benefit system, we welcomed the October announcement which clarified the future of this funding for short term accommodation and the extension of the implementation date to April 2020. The transfer to Wales is expected to the Welsh Block at the equivalent of the Housing Benefit spend. This means Wales will then control all of the public funding spent on refuges and other short term provision.

This transfer requires Welsh Government to develop a detailed policy and funding framework for the 'Supported Accommodation Fund' to address the risks and opportunities resulting from these changes. In view of the importance of the provision to our agenda, we have chosen to approach this through extensive collaboration with stakeholders. This collaborative approach has been welcomed by stakeholders. To date we have established our case for change and a detailed understanding of the risks, issues and measure of success for the new system. Informal consultation on

options will begin shortly and formal consultation on a preferred option will begin in this autumn. The proposed transfer of funding will allow Welsh Government greater control over funding options for VAWDASV service delivery.

ELGC Committee Observation: The Welsh Government's response to our report in 2016 said that "development of a sustainable funding model is a priority to deliver the National Strategy. This work will include a review of existing Welsh Government funding that contributes to VAWDASV to ensure making the best use of the resources available[...] Progress will be reported to [the then Cabinet Secretary] at the Advisory Group in July 2017." No announcement or publication has yet been made.

- When will the review of funding for VAWDASV services be completed and published?

Response – A Task and Finish Group of key stakeholders was set up to develop a sustainable funding model. The work of this group has focussed on developing joint commissioning guidance, adopting a multi-agency, needs-based approach and supporting the move to regionalisation of planning and commissioning. This should facilitate joint planning pooling resources and more effective delivery. The move to a regional approach encompasses the funding for local authorities and third sector organisations. Regionalisation will start from April 2018 and local authorities' budgets will be allocated to regions from that date. 2018-19 will be a transitional year, where Welsh Government officials and the National Advisors work with regions to respond effectively. Third sector organisations will continue to be funded directly through the Welsh Government VAWDASV grant during 2018-2019 to ensure continuity. Officials will support third sector organisations throughout the transition year to ensure operational readiness for the roll out of the full regional commissioning approach from 2019-20.

Most recently, on the 29th January I launched the THIS IS ME campaign. This is a campaign that challenges the gender stereotypes that contribute to gender inequality; a cause and consequence of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

The campaign was developed with survivors of abuse and with experts in the field. It has been warmly welcomed by our stakeholders and marks a new approach to campaign development in this area. Early indications suggest that, in terms of reaching a new audience, this campaign is the most successful VAWDASV campaign in recent history.

I am really looking forward to launching our next campaign (on Bystanders) later this Spring. This will share the direct stories of those who have experienced abuse and state clearly that Wales is not a bystander to any form of abuse. My officials are also in discussions with survivors about future campaigns and I will announce plans in due course.

Going forward, I want survivors' voices and experiences to be central to informing the continued development and delivery of legislation, policy and strategy related to violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. In order to ensure this is the case I will launch an informal consultation exercise later this Spring on plans to create a sustainable, national, formal survivor engagement framework which

will ensure that survivors, witnesses and affected others inform and influence Government work related to this policy area in Wales. Again, these plans have been developed with survivors, stakeholders and are based on evidence and good practice. Following the consultation, I will launch activity to ensure national survivor engagement within 2018-2019.