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Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru  
Auditor General for Wales

# Findings of our Call for Evidence on Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015



WALES AUDIT OFFICE  
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU



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**Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.**

# Summary report

- 1 The Auditor General for Wales undertakes a programme of local government studies. These studies focus on a single issue or policy area and review performance and use of resources by public bodies across Wales. The Auditor General consulted on his local government studies programme in December 2015 and adopted a three year provisional programme – **Exhibit 1**. The three studies selected for 2018-19 focus on service areas where new legislation has recently been introduced.

## Exhibit 1: Auditor General's programme of local government studies 2016-17 to 2018-19

2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
How local government manages demand: Homelessness services	Integrated Care Fund	Tackling violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence
Strategic commissioning of learning disability services by local authorities	Using data effectively	Value for money of planning services
Improving wellbeing through housing adaptations	How well do public services provide services to rural communities	Social Services and Well Being Act 2014

Source: Wales Audit Office

## Purpose of the call for evidence

- 2 In setting his programme in March 2016 the Auditor General notified local authorities that he intended to undertake a small evidence gathering exercise to determine the focus for his work but also gather evidence that can be used to judge how well public bodies are performing when conducting these reviews in 2018-19. In conducting the call for evidence the Auditor General sought responses on a series of questions focussed on:
  - current approaches;
  - the risks and opportunities presented by the recent changes in legislation and policy; and
  - how these are anticipated to influence and improve service delivery for citizens and service users.
- 3 We will conduct further work to develop ideas and themes for the study during 2018-19. The findings from this report will feed into this process and form part of our evidence base, from which we will produce our project brief outlining the scope and remit of the study. We will test progress by public bodies in addressing issues raised in the call for evidence.

# Detailed report

## Findings of our call for evidence on Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015

- 1.1 The Welsh Government has introduced new legislation, [the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) (the 'Act'). The overarching objective of the 'Act' is to improve the Public Sector response to violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence; provide a strategic focus on these issues; and ensure consistent consideration of preventive, protective and supportive mechanisms in the delivery of services. The 'Act' seeks to improve the arrangements for the prevention of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, improve arrangements for the protection of victims and to improve support for people affected by such abuse and violence. a modernised framework for the delivery of planning services;
- 1.2 Our call for evidence gathered information from relevant parties about the current approaches; the risks and opportunities presented by the recent changes in legislation and policy; and how these are anticipated to influence service delivery and improve outcomes for those covered by the Act. Below we set out the findings of this exercise.

### Local strategies are developing but need to be integrated with recent legislation to be truly effective

- 1.3 The Welsh Government consulted on its first national strategy for tackling [Violence against Women, Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence](#) in the autumn of 2016 and the first national strategy was published in November 2016. At the time of the call for evidence the responsible local delivery organisations, health boards and local authorities were awaiting the publication of the national strategy before developing their local strategies.
- 1.4 Public bodies recognise the importance of developing and communicating their local delivery plans which will clearly identify the contributions of all partner organisations to tackling these issues. Public bodies expect that local strategies will lead to clearer and more measurable outcomes aligned with the indicators in the national strategy. Local strategies also need to take account of policy in both non-devolved areas (criminal justice and policing) and as well as duties under legislation in devolved areas (health, education and social services) contexts. Additionally there will need to be a greater cross public sector response to the needs of victims of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. A number of organisations also highlighted the importance of annual reporting of progress in delivering local strategies.

- 1.5 Respondents highlighted developing regional working in some areas in Wales, for example Gwent and North Wales, where partners are working together to develop their strategies. Whilst regional and local partnership working was identified as crucial to managing and improving public bodies' overall response to domestic violence, respondents also highlighted some key challenges facing partnerships. These include the complexity of co-ordinating work across many organisations which are likely to have different remits and priorities, the need to ensure sound arrangements are established to support joint commissioning activity and the difficulty of ensuring new regional service models are effectively aligned to meet local needs. A number of organisations also recognised the need to focus on preventative services.
- 1.6 Organisations noted that because their existing equality objectives have mostly focussed on domestic abuse and in some cases sexual violence but that they now need to be revisited in light of the broader remits of the Act. There is also a need for organisations to align their work under this Act with provisions of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act<sup>1</sup> and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act<sup>2</sup>. Feedback from organisations such as Welsh Women's Aid note, however, that from their experience there is little evidence of public bodies aligning and integrating their work in respect of this new legislation. The differing timetables for implementation of these acts was recognised in particular as making alignment challenging for public organisations.

## Not all organisations currently have workplace policies that address all aspects of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence

- 1.7 All health boards that responded have existing domestic abuse workplace policies, and organisations plan to update their policies following introduction of the Act. One health board has a Workplace Safeguarding group which helps to implement support for staff who disclose domestic abuse whilst a number of other health boards support managers to implement the organisation's policy for affected staff. Local authorities in comparison are mostly waiting for the Welsh Government to produce their model workplace policy.

1 The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 includes requirements regarding the prevention of abuse and the duties regarding training and needs assessments.

2 The Well-being of Future Generations Act requires public service boards to prepare and publish local wellbeing plans, and these could read across to local violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence strategies.

- 1.8 One health board – Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board (ABMUHB) – is a pilot site for the implementation of ‘Ask and Act’. This is a collaborative work initiative with the Welsh Government and the South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner. ABMUHB has developed an ‘Ask and Act’ Policy to support the pilot. This will be revised following implementation across ABMUHB.
- 1.9 Overall most of the organisations recognised that their current policies focus mainly on domestic violence and do not adequately cover the wider aspects of the Act. A number of organisations considered that there would also be opportunities to address gaps in current service provision and there will need to be a shift from a reactive to a proactive approach.

### The plethora of funding streams and their short-term nature make it challenging for public bodies to develop a longer-term strategic approach to tackle violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence

- 1.10 Responses showed that there are a number of funding streams that help health boards and local authorities to undertake their work on domestic violence. This includes monies from the Home Office, Ministry of Justice, the Welsh Government, Police and Crime Commissioners, Local Community Safety Partnerships and health boards. Welsh Women’s Aid reported that a number of their local member organisations are also seek charity funding – such as the [Big Lottery](#)<sup>3</sup> – to support their work.
- 1.11 Commentators noted that there needs to be a clear drive to ensure as close an alignment as possible between devolved and non-devolved funding decisions to ensure the most co-ordinated and impactful services are developed. Many respondents highlighted that key to this is ensuring devolved and non-devolved funding streams are better aligned to the outcomes of the Act.
- 1.12 Respondents identified some weaknesses with current funding arrangements including annual funding streams which potentially reduce the impact of the funding, require intensive administration to re-bid and manage funding. Commentators identified that the plethora of funding streams and associated conditions make it challenging for public bodies to bring together all public funding into a single fund to tackle these issues on a local basis. Respondents noted that the Act could provide an opportunity to address the current differences in funding of specialist services by public bodies which would improve their commissioning arrangements.

3 The Big Lottery distributes millions of pounds of the National Lottery’s good cause money to community groups and charitable projects around the UK. In 2014-15 more than £1 billion was invested by the Big Lottery in community activities.



1.13 In addition, some organisations noted that they are only able to identify the grant funding that they receive to tackle violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, and other grants that support important associated work are often overlooked and not aligned to maximise their impact. The inability of organisations to be able to clearly attribute all spending reinforces the importance of strategies and delivery plans being clearly aligned to funding for these policy areas, particularly given the disconnect between short-term annual grant funding and longer-term priorities of strategies. Indeed, this point was echoed by several local authorities and health boards which acknowledged that longer-term funding would help them to better plan to achieve the outcomes of the Act. Welsh Women's Aid's State of the Sector survey, published in September 2016 found that 46 per cent of their member organisations had received reductions in funding in 2016-17 with 58 per cent receiving reductions in 2015-16, and only 33 per cent were confident that their funding would continue from April 2017.

## Organisations do not consistently draw on the experiences of service providers and survivors to help plan, design, manage and review services to tackle violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence

- 1.14 Our analysis of responses to the call for evidence highlight that there is an inconsistent approach to drawing on the direct experiences of service users to plan, design, manage and review services. A number of organisations identified that they generally rely on service providers and key partner organisations to provide insight from survivors, rather than engaging directly with survivors, acknowledging that this is a challenging area of work. Some respondents – most notably South Wales Police and the South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner and Welsh Women's Aid – referenced local initiatives which they have developed to engage survivors in designing services.
- 1.15 Welsh Women's Aid reported that effective engagement and consultation of survivors is not embedded within public service approaches and that the implementation of the Act could positively bring about changes in this area. To help support better engagement Welsh Women's Aid recently published a collaborative commissioning toolkit<sup>4</sup> to support co-production of services with survivors. However, implementing such approaches will require resourcing and strategic leadership and a number of respondents stated that they needed to revisit their approach.

4 Lloyds Bank Foundation, *Tackling Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence: A Collaborative Commissioning Toolkit for Services in Wales*, August 2016.



## Whilst health organisations have integrated the national training framework into existing programmes, local authorities have insufficient capacity to deliver this requirement

- 1.16 Health boards have taken a number of steps to link the national training framework into their existing training programmes. In one health board all staff are required to undertake core training and in line with the health board's strategic approach, and specific groups of staff are also identified for higher-level training. ABMUHB noted that it has sought to evaluate the impact of training for some staff and has found that health professionals' level of knowledge and confidence relating to Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence has improved as a result of the training. For example, following training there has been an increase in referrals to specialist providers. However, an increase in referrals has to be tempered by a concern as to the capacity of third-sector specialist services to respond to increasing demand referrals.
- 1.17 Some local authorities raised concerns that training through the Welsh language is limited and a small number raised concerns that there is insufficient capacity to deliver the level of training required. Some third-sector organisations highlighted the challenge of complying with different training requirements where they worked across public sector boundaries, and organisations had set very differing standards and expectations for the third sector. A number of organisations also identified that not all staff who require the training have access to a computer and consequently computer-based training is not appropriate.

## Organisations clearly identified that the Welsh Government has an important role to play in supporting them to implement the Act

- 1.18 The Welsh Government is recognised by respondents as key to providing leadership and direction on training requirements and clarifying how important recent legislation such as the Social Services and Wellbeing Act and the Wellbeing of Future Generations are intended to interact with this Act. In addition, a number of respondents also highlighted the importance of integrating the Act with other policy areas such as Supporting People and Offender Management. The Welsh Government was also identified as a possible conduit for the sharing of effective approaches and practices that address the aims of the Act.



# Appendix 1

## Distribution list

The organisations we invited to contribute to this call for evidence were:

- All 22 local authorities
- All seven Local Health Boards
- Public Health Wales, the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust and Velindre NHS Trust
- Fire and Rescue Authorities
- Police and Crime Commissioners
- Police Forces
- Providers of specialist support services

We received responses from:

- Seven local authorities
- Six Local Health Boards
- Public Health Wales
- One Fire and Rescue Authority
- Two Police and Crime Commissioners
- One representative body

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