

PLVAW 07

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: Trais yn Erbyn Menywod gwent, Cam-drin Domestig a Thîm
Rhanbarthol Trais Rhywiol

Response from: Gwent Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual
Violence Regional Team

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

There are many aspirations of the approach to tackling violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence seeks to improve as a result of the obligations in the Act however, it is still the early stages of post legislation and therefore improved results will evolve over time.

The Act seeks an improved collective public sector response, stronger leadership and a more consistent focus on the way we tackle these issues in Wales, but more importantly it seeks to stop the abuse happening in the first place.

The Gwent VAWDASV Regional Team are working with partners to ensure a shared, collective strategic vision, with the development of a Regional Strategy. The Regional Team will raise awareness of Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence with our most senior leadership, and place a responsibility on them to drive forward changes which improve the safety of victims and their children.

Under the Act, Local Authorities will be required to report how they are tackling these issues in the schools in their area , for example through lessons on Healthy Relationships.

The approach to tackling violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence will hold senior leaderships accountable for these issues. There will be requirements on Local Authorities to produce data on how Education settings tackle violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence through a preventative approach of Healthy Relationship sessions.

Ask and Act, a key component of the National Training Framework will bring an innovative approach to identifying those affected by violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Despite the obligations on partners under the Act, there is lack of clarity around long term funding. Whilst partners accept that there are obligations of the Act, Welsh Government should be realistic around expectations of what can be delivered and what can be achieved. Funding is a clear issue, and additional funds have not been given to meet the obligations of the Act. The uncertainty of year on year funding is indicative for all specialist services across the Region, a clear example of this would be sourcing funding for a Regional IDVA service. The expectations are that these funding sources should be mainstream but, organisations are not able to provide this funding, and in terms of long-term sustainability, it would leave organisations in jeopardy.

The Regional Model in Gwent and the previous work of the Pathfinder project 2014 has been a learning curve and a shift in culture in addressing violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence issues. The Gwent violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence Board brings partners across the region together to tackle the issues and support the strategic objectives set out in the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 to ensure that services are working together to support and protect victims and to prevent violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence across the region as well as to inform and shape learning across Wales.

Gwent are in a unique position in that as a pilot region there have been opportunities to embed some of the violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence approaches earlier than other regions across Wales and over the last year Gwent have been at the forefront of the obligations ahead. However, there is still much to do in raising awareness of the Act and key stakeholders understanding the requirements upon them.

It is hoped that the National Strategy will bring the framework for strong strategic delivery for best practice in Wales to fulfil preventative, protective and supportive mechanisms.

Organisations will require guidance to tackle issues of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence to ensure successful outcomes are achieved in terms of consistency and working in partnership. The Gwent Regional team consulted on a multi-agency consultation document last year, but there has been no direction as to what the next steps are. Guidance is needed in order to understand what we are working towards.

There is confidence that the new legislation and its approach will tackle the issues of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence across Wales, albeit in due course and perhaps not at the same pace for all regions.

2. 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?

Understanding how survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence and other forms of violence against women use and experience public services is key to improving the effectiveness of prevention, protection and support services and systems in Wales.

Survivors' voices and experiences must also be central to informing the development and delivery of legislation, policy and strategy in order to ensure systems and services best meet survivors' needs and action is taken to prevent violence and abuse in the short and longer term.

All specialist areas engage with survivors in a safe and meaningful way to capture their views and experiences and most effective methods can be through research based guidance on engaging with victims. We must also be mindful it is equally important how we engage with male victims, young people and children, those who are not engaging with services and perpetrators. These views and information also help to inform the implementations of the Act's provisions.

One of the main objectives of the South East Wales violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence regional action plan is to develop a structure for service user/survivor by April 2017. We will consult with existing survivor groups, map current engagement mechanisms across the region and establish a service user/survivor groups and incorporate this with the SEEDS steering group.

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

This question is difficult to answer in a meaningful way at this stage. The training within Groups 2 and 3 of the National Training Framework – ‘Ask and Act’ are still in pilot stages with Gwent imminently launching the pilot training for Local Authority Staff. With this pilot not yet in full flow and only one other pilot site in Wales under taking training which is designed specifically to ensure better responses to survivors, it is not possible to measure this as yet.

While this is in the early stages of development there is ongoing work developing full and detailed survivor engagement work, which will provide the basis and platform to analysis ‘ask and act’s effectiveness and impact on survivors experiences. Within Gwent this is being done via a sub group of the South East Wales – Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Board where ongoing engagement, consultation and contact with survivors will help inform the wider agenda of the board moving forward. We are also undertaking work with Welsh Women’s Aid in a pilot of the SEED’s Project across Gwent.

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

The National Adviser for violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence is independent from Welsh Government. This allows for an informed perspective on work to develop, shape and implement policy and legislation in Wales and drive forward improvements in the responses of public bodies and the voluntary sector to all forms of Violence against Women, other forms of Gender Based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence. There is clear independence in the work of the Adviser and the role is influential in implementing this ground breaking piece of Legislation.

The National Adviser has limited recourse from the Welsh Government to fully ensure implementation of the Act. The National Adviser is the voice of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence issues in Wales, however, the Adviser’s role is on a part time basis and there is no Commissioner for the violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence agenda. There is scope for further resources for the National Adviser from Welsh Government which would bring greater consistency to the violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence agenda. It is also recognised that the National Adviser should be able to replicate all work relating to violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence nationally, however, the capacity to enable this to happen is limited due to the resources that have come with the passing of this Act.

It is also important to be mindful of other recent legislations that have been passed by Welsh Government during the same time period as the violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (Wales) Act 2015. The Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014 and the Future Generations Act 2015 are two major pieces of legislation to be passed in Wales and although these legislations complement one another, the passing of these Acts has been a challenge for the violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (Wales) Act 2015 to contend with and raising the profile of this agenda.

5. 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?

At present, the development of the whole school approach is still in its infancy. The good practice guide is a useful starting document in giving schools direction and inspiration to start considering a shift to a whole school approach however, more resources like the good practice guide will be needed by education settings to fully establish a whole school model.

The whole school approach is a new challenge for schools and a transformation for many in how they deliver healthy relationship education. The shift to a whole school approach will be a lengthy process that will take time to develop and schools will need to be supported in the development of the model. It is acknowledged that schools settings across Wales will vary in their landscape and in needs and it is imperative that time and understanding is given to schools to allow them to develop a whole school approach that meets the needs of their setting and meets the obligations of the violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (Wales) Act 2015.

Recognition must be given to Welsh Government for working in conjunction with Welsh Women's Aid in producing the good practice guidance. Working collaboratively with the specialist sector allows for innovative and contemporary work that is required to adopt a new model and where possible the opportunity to work in partnership with specialist sectors should be taken when producing guidance documents.

Whilst the good practice guide has been welcomed by educational settings, successfully developing the whole school approach is far greater and goes beyond good practice guidance. There must be considerable attention given to the duties on the Local Authorities and ensure that the requirements upon them are followed through. To develop a whole school approach, Local Authorities must be held accountable for producing information and data on how and what schools are doing to tackle issues of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. Although guidance documents will be imperative for a successful whole school model, we must not lose sight of all obligations of the Act on Education, which will be the success of a whole school approach.

There is still considerable work to engage schools in the understanding and the concept behind the whole school approach. Education settings still need to grasp the idea of having a whole school approach and the obligations of them under the Act. It is important that schools are fully informed of the violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (Wales) Act 2015 in order to successfully influence a whole school approach. Welsh Government will need to invest in schools and resources and further guidance will be required for schools to meet their requirements.

Some schools are currently receiving Healthy Relationship session through Welsh Governments' Spectrum project however, this is sporadic and relevant education inspections need to be carried out to assess where schools are at to move forward successfully now that the Act is one year post legislation.

Welsh Ministers will need to utilise their powers in developing guidance for schools in order for all schools in Wales to reach a consistent whole school model.