

Proposal – Summary of responses

Proposal – A National Survivor Engagement Framework

8 March 2018 – 3 May 2018

Introduction

The Welsh Government made a commitment in the National Strategy on Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (2016-2021) to the development of a sustainable national survivor engagement framework.

The purpose of a National Survivor Engagement Framework is to ensure that the needs and experiences of survivors of VAWDASV, including the most marginalised survivors, those who face multiple disadvantage in accessing help and support, are understood. It is also important that those for whom policy of made, are able to influence and guide that policy and share what works for them.

Survivor engagement has become a more common Government activity in recent times but is ad-hoc and tends to relate specifically to one policy activity; the development of the National Training Framework, the creation of the National Strategy or media campaigns, for example.

There is currently no sustainable structure for engaging with survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence about what is important to them and ensuring that this engagement influences policy development and the direction of Government work.

Proposal

Our initial aim for a survivor engagement framework is:

- To provide a formal process through which survivors develop, impact and influence Welsh Government policy on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.
- To ensure that survivors are able to advocate and speak for themselves as part of Welsh Government communications activity.

The proposal document therefore focused on:

- Methods through which survivors will influence national policy development
- Methods through which survivors will communicate and raise awareness of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

The consultation process

Direct engagement took place with survivors and stakeholders from November 2017 – January 2018. In total we reached over 60 survivors and fourteen organisations. This engagement focussed on the broad theme of survivor engagement and invited views from survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence as to how they would want to influence and guide Welsh Government policy in the future.

This engagement work led to the development of a proposal document which outlined the themes of the direct survivor engagement work and invited the views of a wide range of organisations, survivors, stakeholders and interest groups on these themes and a series of options through which survivor engagement at a Government level could be taken forward.

The consultation period ran from 8 March to 3 May. On-line versions of the proposal document and a survey link available on Livefearfree were provided. Returns were invited either in hard copy, by email or via the survey.

Overview of responses

We received fourteen responses to the proposal document. The list of respondents is shown at Annex A.

Summary of key themes

The consultation responses received did not provide a clear consensus in terms of preferred options. However, the following key themes did emerge:

Support for the principle of ensuring a sustainable survivor engagement framework.

Respondents were in general supportive of mechanisms to ensure that survivor engagement is formalised to enable survivors to develop, impact and influence Welsh Government policy on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. They spoke of placing the survivor at the centre in the design and delivery of services and of how survivors should be empowered to take an active participation role on an ongoing basis.

Support structures for survivors should be embedded in any model of engagement.

Some respondents felt that support structures should be central to any engagement activity. This could include peer support, and support from specialists offered within an ongoing group setting. The need for counsellors as part of this structure was also highlighted particularly for survivors of sexual violence. Another called for a structured approach and a clear operating framework.

Ensuring the voices of all survivors are included in any agreed approach

Respondents were clear that this should not be a one size fits all approach. Some felt that there needed to be a different approach in terms of engaging with male survivors and with the sexual violence sector. There was also a call to ensure that we reach those more marginalised survivors and that engagement opportunities are diverse, wide reaching and informed by survivors.

Funding to support a sustainable national survivor engagement framework

Respondents felt that meaningful engagement could only be achieved by well resourced and long-term initiatives. One respondent highlighted the fact that most of the work with survivors is either not resourced, under-resourced or has time limited resources. Respondents called for funding for survivors, saying- they should be resourced for their time and expertise; they also called for improved understanding by commissioners on proper resourcing for engagement including areas such as childcare, interpretation and transport.

Clear governance structures are in place

Respondents agreed with the Welsh Government assertion that if there is a genuine commitment to this work, we need to ensure that mechanisms are in place so that we are able to evaluate and implement the views and recommendations of survivors. To ensure this, survivors' views must feed into the formal governance arrangements of the Welsh Government.

Summary of Responses

This document summarises the responses to the consultation questions and has informed proposed models of work to take forward the establishment of a sustainable national survivor engagement framework. There was no clear consensus in terms of preferred options although key themes have been identified. Issues to consider were also raised by respondents which have informed our proposed way forward.

This summary does not aim to capture every point raised by respondents, but to highlight the key themes pertinent to the options presented. In some cases, responses were not provided to the questions contained within the proposal document. In other cases, some respondents raised issues they perceived in relation to the options presented in the consultation document and these have been listed.

Inevitably, points were also raised that fall outside of the scope of this exercise. Although not part of this summary document, these have been noted.

Developing a sustainable national survivor engagement framework

Question 1
What are your views on the options outlined within this document as methods through which national survivor engagement can be taken forward?
Options
7.1 Survivor-informed research collaboration groups
7.2 Utilising third sector organisations to facilitate the voices of survivors, through an agreed and structured process.
7.3 Development of specific issues groups

7.4 Digital opportunities

7.5 Survivor led community advocacy

Which of the options do you prefer and for what reasons?

How would you combine the options?

Responses

In all there were eight responses to this question.

The majority of respondents identified a preferred option or options. For some respondents, they saw positives in all the options presented.

Which of the options do you prefer and for what reasons?

7.1 Survivor-informed research collaboration groups

Three respondents listed 7.1 as a preferred option although these were not stand alone for two of the respondents who argued for a combined approach with either option 7.2 (utilising third sector organisations to facilitate the voices of survivors) or 7.5 (survivor led community advocacy). One respondent said that this approach (7.1) would “collect the necessary understanding for developing educational and legislative needs” and another felt that this would ensure provision of a voice for of male victims of abuse.

Issues to consider

Issues raised included the need for training, ongoing and follow up support. A respondent highlighted that this option would only be for a small number of people and should never be the only means of engagement. Issues raised also included representation and survivors becoming “professionalised”. This was described as survivors coming to reflect the views of professionals as opposed to their unique insights as a survivor. Significant concerns about this approach were expressed by one respondent were it to be used independently of a support structure such as SEEdS where training and support would be offered to enable survivors to engage meaningfully.

7.2 Utilising third sector organisations to facilitate the voices of survivors, through an agreed and structured process.

Four respondents stated that 7.2 would be their preferred option where some were of the view that survivors are used to engagement through the third sector. A respondent noted that existing groups and fora provide the right conditions for engagement and that the peer support involved in these fora would empower a broader range of survivors to get involved in influencing Welsh Government policy. Another respondent noted that this should be led by paid workers promoting commonly agreed measurable objectives.

Another stated that staff from specialist services would be able to provide support to survivors if the need arose so that no further harm was done. Some respondents felt that this option should be considered within the context of a supportive structure/group. Another called for a long term sustainable project where survivors increase their knowledge and skills to actively participate. Welsh Women's Aid recommended that a sustainable national survivor engagement framework should be taken forward by Welsh Women's Aid. They suggested that this should be structured and resourced through the mechanisms of a large umbrella organisation. They also felt that this approach would be flexible enough to incorporate other options

Issues to consider

One respondent stated that it is important with this option that all have an equal voice. The respondent urged consideration of more marginalised groups whose voices may be weaker to ensure their contribution is equal with other more well known groups. Although utilising third sector organisations was welcomed, it was noted that it can be difficult for survivors to share experiences that may not have been positive if the provider is present. Another cautioned that this had the potential to stifle "innovation" as feedback could be more focused on the service provider rather than issues.

7.3 Development of specific issues groups

Despite this option being popular during the direct survivor engagement process, it was not a preferred option for any of the respondents. However, it was seen to be "a good option" by some, in addition to another preferred option. One respondent felt that this and all other options should be developed with survivors established via Third Sector structures and expertise.

Issues to consider

Specific issues groups would need to be embedded within existing structures and organisations to enable an inclusive representation of survivors. It is vital that engagement mechanisms reach marginalised or discriminated against survivors to ensure that all are aware of opportunities to participate. Any groups would also need careful facilitation to avoid re-traumatisation.

7.4 Digital opportunities

One respondent said that these, in addition to other options, should be available to survivors. Another said that this would be worthy of consideration and would provide survivors who do not have the confidence to participate by other means with an opportunity to have their voices heard.

Issues to consider

One respondent said that access to digital opportunities can be problematic for some such as, e.g. older people and those whose first language is not English. Others mentioned a need for a controlled method of monitoring with measures to ensure anonymity of all involved. Potential issues such as safeguarding, abuse and trolling

should be considered as well as how support could be offered following any disclosure. There was a view that any digital forum should be moderated and supported by specialists with an understanding of VAWDASV.

7.5 Survivor led community advocacy

This was felt to be a good option by some respondents. One respondent said that this could be an effective approach if used in conjunction with option 7.1 and would enable survivors to remain influencers and supporters within their communities. Another said that consideration should be given to a multi level model with community, regional and national provision.

Survivors advised that this option should be at a local community level through the formation of survivor education and empowerment groups. This community-based activity should then feed in to regional panels and then into a national panel with “*a specific task and finish remit, to provide expert input into implementation of the VAWDASV Act*”.

Issues to consider

One respondent raised concerns that some survivors may engage with groups and fora whilst still recovering from their own abuse and trauma. In such cases these survivors will not be in a position to offer advice or support to others.

Combining options

One respondent favoured the combination of 7.1 (Survivor-informed research collaboration groups) and 7.5 (Survivor-led community advocacy). For 7.1 in involving survivors in the development of a new approach, it would allow them to not only shape and influence policy, but also to plan and develop the approach itself. Combining this with 7.5, they felt, would enable survivors to remain influencers and supporters within their communities. Engaging in multiple ways including via social media would also ensure that voices and opinions of survivors from a variety of backgrounds and situations could be included.

Another felt that 7.4 (Digital opportunities) and 7.5 should be combined to maximise service user engagement. They suggested the development of survivor informed community groups that adopt a ‘task and finish’ approach with digital opportunities offering an easy way to engage and enable views to be sought quickly when required.

Others highlighted the need to include a range of options e.g. 7.1 and 7.2 and 7.1 and 7.5

Issues to consider: All options

Respondents highlighted a number of more general issues for consideration when taking this work forward. These included the need for long-term and well resourced initiatives. There was strong agreement with the view set out in the consultation

document that survivors should be resourced for their time and expertise and empowered to take an active participation role on an ongoing basis.

For any form of engagement, respondents argued for the need to ensure support structures were in place for those participating.

With the aim of reaching all survivors, one respondent said that all protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act should be considered.

Engagement with children and young people who have survived violence and abuse was seen to be important and there was a call to seek opportunities to hear the voice of the child through mechanisms such as Funky Dragon and the Children's Forum.

One respondent felt that it would be a worthwhile task to identify survivors who are not engaging with services and reasons for this. Another questioned if survivors would actually speak out confidently if involved in some of the options presented.

One felt that there needed to be a consideration of the time aspect for those who work or have other commitments with one stating that there should be awareness of feedback fatigue from survivors.

When taking forward any model, one respondent called for an assurance that systems would be put in place to ensure that feedback and recommendations by survivors will be implemented.

In consideration of all the options presented, there was also a call to ensure a flexible approach which is responsive to lived experiences. It was proposed that this would take the form of a multi-faceted approach allowing a variety of survivors to participate in whatever means most appropriate to them.

This respondent also states that acknowledgement should be given to the fact that effectively engaging with and capturing the views and experiences of survivors, is not an easy task.

Question 2

2. What additional mechanisms would you like to see Welsh Government consider for survivor engagement for the purposes of policy development?

Are there additional models of practice the Welsh Government should consider?

What additional options would you like us to consider?
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Responses

In addition to the options highlighted under question 1, respondents outlined additional options/mechanisms for survivor engagement.

One argued for a SEEdS model on a local or regional basis as a mechanism for consultation and engagement with victims of VAWDASV. Another said that there should be a male survivors group taking an approach similar to a SEEdS model. One respondent called for a separate pathway for men through strategy development, support services and help and advice.

Although not listed under option 7.4, one respondent called for a national survivors' online user group with restricted access and moderator oversight to ensure more voices are heard, including those who have not yet accessed services. National survivor events were seen as a good way to provide an opportunity for victims to participate in consultations and to shape policy and strategy.

Another respondent called for survivor-informed community task and finish groups with the opportunity to further survivors' personal development resulting in formal recognised qualifications. For this, survivors could also be involved in feeding back findings and engaging community groups to seek views.

Training and accreditation of survivors was highlighted as an additional model to consider. This would involve training and support to build the capacity of organisations to engage with their own service users to develop local engagement groups and feed into regional survivor engagement panels. One respondent also suggested that survivors should be involved in the development and delivery of training programmes

Volunteering opportunities and a dedicated survivors' volunteering programme were also suggested as a mechanism to encourage engagement. There was a call to embed survivor engagement into all VAWDASV work streams across regions.

One respondent called for a national network of regional survivor engagement officers. It was recommended that this network should be located in independent third sector umbrella organisations not connected to specialist, statutory services or government. They argued that this would be required to engage a diverse range of survivors and to increase the knowledge skills and confidence of survivors to participate.

There was a call for a dedicated approach aimed at survivors of child sexual abuse. This call included potential engagement through a member organisation as well as consideration of engagement following completion of the Truth project. This would include the establishment of regional survivor forums for victims of sexual violence and sexual abuse that would feed into a Wales national survivor's forum.

The potential of local community organisations or faith groups to provide support and engagement was also raised.

Issues to consider

Some respondents said that there would be a need to consider how funding would be provided for any ongoing survivor engagement. For any national events or groups, regional considerations should be taken into account.

Several respondents advocated for more work and training with employers as well as better practice to support people in their workplace; another called for greater awareness, sensitivity and understanding amongst commissioners, service providers and GPs.

One respondent suggested that a mapping exercise was required to determine what mechanisms were already in place within VAWDASV specialist services to support survivor engagement. This supported another's call for the need to avoid overlap and work collaboratively.

Question 3

3. How would you like to see survivors taking forward communications, advocacy and education activity within regions or local authorities?

Are there additional models of practice the Welsh Government should consider?

What additional options would you like us to consider?

In considering this, one respondent felt that this would need to be a "like for like" approach with, for example, an older person talking to an older persons group about domestic abuse which would be likely to resonate more with the audience. The respondent also felt that digital, audio or visual recordings as educational engagement activities would be useful

Another argued for a different approach in respect of male victims which could be to engage men in talks about being victims of violence generally and link this to being victims of domestic and sexual violence.

One respondent called for the establishment of a specific project where a team of workers are allocated survivors to ensure continuity and build a working alliance.

Another said that survivors should be involved in educating local authorities and organisations about how real the issues are.

A respondent said that survivors should take a public facing role (for those who wish to do so) and that more "back stage" opportunities should also be made available.

There was call for survivors to be included on the agenda for local authorities where budgeting and finance are concerned to ensure the true cost of VAWDASV is understood.

Another said that survivors would be best placed to deliver training with another saying that this could take place within education as part of the provision of Healthy Relationships in schools.

One respondent outlined a regional and national model for engagement. This would involve survivors invited to attend regional survivor participation panels led by regional survivor engagement officers who would feed into a national survivor participation panel. This national panel would provide a forum offering an expert advisory group formed of survivors of VAWDASV with the primary aim to provide advice and inform delivery of the objectives within the national strategy and implementation of the VAWDASV Act. Welsh Women's Aid recommended that this model should be co-produced with them.

Another respondent called for survivor involvement in a pan-Wales awareness raising campaign highlighting the effects of child sexual abuse.

Issues to consider

In line with the call from other respondents, there was a plea to ensure that funding was considered at the outset incorporating a range of options for getting involved.

One respondent argued for specific resources to increase the capacity of the men's sector organisations to enable them to engage.

Another said that survivors should receive opportunities to develop further so they have the confidence to engage with Welsh Government and provide views to help shape policy.

Aligned with other responses, there was a further call to highlight the need to ensure a diversity of background, experience etc. in establishing any group/panel

Conclusion

Although only a small number of responses were received, fourteen in total, some clear themes emerged. It should be noted that the proposals in the consultation document were developed in close collaboration with survivors, sixty in total and with fourteen organisations. Nevertheless, the low number of responses to the consultation should be noted and we recognise the need to test the conclusions.

It was clear through the responses received that there is support for the Welsh Government commitment to ensure that survivor engagement informs and shapes policy and related work and that ad hoc tokenistic interventions should be avoided.

Respondents highlighted positives with all of the options presented and raised issues to consider in taking this work forward. Some preferred options were also identified which were consistent with the findings of the engagement events which took place between November 2017-January 2018.

The need to ensure existing good practice approaches were recognised and built on in taking this work forward were also reinforced, with a call to ensure that support mechanisms and appropriate engagement methods are considered for all groups of survivors.

Next Steps

The number of responses to the consultation was disappointing and raised issues which require further consideration. Although a diverse range of survivors from across Wales have been engaged with this work to date, we continue to see gaps in terms of those we have been unable to reach. We are also aware that some more hidden groups of survivors, those not accessing services or not part of any formal structured engagement are not being heard. These include men, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller and, LGBT communities.

Our proposed next steps set out an approach which will increase our understanding of how best to work with different groups of survivors to enable their participation in a national survivor engagement panel. This will deliver two main activities:

- improving representation of future survivor engagement by undertaking primary research with those survivor groups who are under-represented in the findings from previous survivor engagement work ; and
- a small scale pilot for a national survivor engagement panel.

This will ensure that we have the best possible processes in place for hearing a diverse range of voices through a national framework.

While this pilot work takes place the ongoing survivor engagement work, established as key practice for VAWDASV policy development, will continue. The campaigns and communications work for 2018-2019 will be developed with survivors and the fieldwork to support this pilot will involve direct engagement and involve a broader group of survivors than our current approach.

Thank you

We would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to respond to the consultation. Your views have been important in informing the decision-making process. We are very grateful to everyone for their contributions.

Annex A List of Respondents

Responses were received from:

Anonymous via Smart Survey
Anonymous via Live Fear Free feedback
Cardiff Council and Bridgend Council
Families Need Fathers/Both Parents Matter Cymru
Gwent Partnership
Hywel Dda University Health Board
The Survivors Trust Cymru
Welsh Women's Aid