

National Advisers Annual Report 2018-19

Making Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Everybody's Business

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August 2019

Introduction

The Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) Act 2015 (the Act) requires the National Adviser(s) to produce an annual report which the Welsh Ministers must publish.

We, Nazir Afzal, OBE, and Yasmin Khan were appointed to the role of National Advisers on a job-share basis in January 2018. This is our annual report for 2018-19 as required.

We, once again, want to thank the VAWDASV team of the Welsh Government for their continued support and assistance and want to recognise their achievements this past year despite being below optimum staffing levels for most of the year.

We want to pay tribute to the former Leader of the House and Chief Whip, Julie James AM, for her leadership on this issue until the turn of the calendar year and we are delighted that the current Deputy Minister and Chief Whip, Jane Hutt AM, has supported this area of work with immense interest and commitment, which is built on her decades-long involvement in this field.

Most of all, we want to thank the many third sector providers who tirelessly support victims and survivors and work with perpetrators.

The Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 (the Act) remains, in our view, one of the greatest achievements of the Welsh Government and allows us to say, with no qualification, that where Wales leads, the rest of the UK follows. The achievements following enactment are well rehearsed but we list some of them below.

There remain significant challenges and we should never under-estimate them. Victims are still suffering harm, still encountering obstacles to obtaining justice and remedies, and still being re-victimised in many ways. The efforts of the Welsh Government are rightly focussed on dealing with these challenges.

Our annual report outlines our assessment of how Wales is meeting the Welsh Government's commitment to tackling and eradicating all forms of violence against women experiencing, and at risk of domestic and sexual abuse and all forms of gender-based violence. It is fair to say we have been ambitious in setting out our objectives and must consider independent evaluation of progress; for this we will work with victims and survivors to establish where gaps exist and how we can realise key priorities.

Welsh Government Achievements

The National Strategy on Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence 2016-2021 sets out what the Welsh Government and partners will do to contribute to the purpose of the VAWDASV Act. The strategy outlines six objectives which the Welsh Ministers aim to achieve by 2021.

We are pleased to report significant progress for each of the objectives, particularly engagement with survivors and notably reaching out to meet the needs of diverse groups. We do recognise, however, there is still so much to improve for those at risk of harm; this includes better understanding of the risks of vulnerability in rural areas and how to respond to the sensitivities of rural culture and communities.

We must ensure services across Wales are accessible to all; supporting victims and survivors to seek help and ensuring professionals have the tools and knowledge to act; improving awareness of VAWDASV and the support available; and helping children and young people to understand inequality in relationships and that abusive behaviour is always wrong.

Our aim is to ensure VAWDASV remains a cross-cutting area of work which demands commitment across all of Welsh Government departments. We have therefore included Directors General into the Expert Stakeholder Group where specific gaps can be identified in meeting the objectives of the VAWDASV Act 2015. Although we are aware of the duties within the Act for Welsh Government, we are clear in our message; this is not a single authority responsibility. We will therefore continue to work with our stakeholders to ensure the responses from public bodies can be achieved by improving the quality of and access to services, as well as transforming societal attitudes and behaviours, but we acknowledge this will not be easy. We want to build on the foundations which have already been laid so that, collectively, we can protect and support victims and survivors and create a more resilient sector.

Each year the Government must publish its Annual Progress Report updated as necessary. It is a commendable and easy to read document and it was published in June 2019.

We will continue to engage with public services to work together with stakeholders to raise awareness and change culture, protect and support people who experience violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence and work to prevent it in the future. Our periodic updates to the Equality, Local Government and Communities (ELGC) Committee provide our independent assessment on the pace of implementation of the VAWDASV (Wales) Act 2015.

Highlights & Priorities

Within each of the National Strategy's six objectives we have drawn specific areas we consider to be good practice and identified key areas we are keen to see further development.

Objective 1 - Increase awareness and challenge attitudes of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence across the Welsh population

- This is not love. This is control.

Welsh Government launched the “This is not love. This is control” campaign between January 14th 2019 and 31 March 2019.

The campaign is designed to show the insidious, cumulative nature of control; to raise awareness of control as a form of domestic abuse; and to encourage people in Wales to contact the Live Fear Free helpline for advice and support. Phase one of the “This is not love. This is control” campaign included national television, digital, social media, poster and leaflet advertising.

Early data from the Live Fear Free helpline suggests a significant increase in the number of calls received about coercive control compared with the same period last year.

Digital results show the campaign films have been viewed more than 120,000 times on Facebook, Twitter and You Tube. 56,000 users have visited the website during the reporting year and The Live Fear Free social media channels now have more than 4600 followers.

Objective 2 - Increased awareness in children and young people of the importance of safe, equal and healthy relationships and that abusive behaviour is always wrong.

2,529 sessions were delivered through Hafan Cymru’s Spectrum programme during 2018-19. A total of 31,761 beneficiaries have been supported through the 2018-19 financial year.

We are keen to establish how we can embed the learning of this work, particularly the peer-to-peer work with young people.

- The Curriculum & Assessment White Paper was published on 28 January 2019 for consultation which closed on 25 March 2019.

We have established links with the Children’s Commissioner with a view to maintaining consistent data collection on child sexual exploitation across Wales. We have provided evidence to the Child Sexual Exploitation Round Table to ensure we can act on the challenges and gaps identified.

Welsh National Curriculum: We are engaging with the Minister for Education and officials from her department on how the new curriculum can best address the issues of VAWDASV so as to prepare children for life. Prevention remains the key to eliminating VAWDASV and education is at its heart.

We are drawing on expertise to engage women and families to provide a counter-narrative to ensure there is no miscommunication or misunderstandings around the

proposed Relationship and Sexuality Education element of the Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning Experience within the new curriculum. So called community leaders have previously been the main conduit but this has often proved futile. Engaging with grassroots organisations including NGOs who work with women and families has always proved to be more successful. We need to embed this thinking in all parts of Government.

Objective 3 – to increase focus on holding perpetrators to account and to provide opportunities to change their behaviour based around victim safety.

VAWDASV Perpetrator Service Standards were prepared by Welsh Government in partnership with key stakeholders and launched in December 2018.

Through our involvement in workshops, led by Welsh Government officials, we have supported the work around perpetrator programmes. We recognise that a number of groups working with survivors prefer efforts to be focussed on survivors, but we are clear that this work has significant potential to prevent reoffending and protect victims from repeated abuse. Nevertheless, evidence shows that some programmes are more effective than others.

Objective 4 – make early intervention and prevention a priority.

Ask and Act continues to be delivered to the five early adopter / pilot sites and is now being rolled out in priority areas, Mid and West Wales and North Wales. Over 1,500 professionals have been trained to Ask and Act during 2018-2019. This means that over 3,300 workers have been trained so far.

Welsh Government jointly chairs the leadership group on female genital mutilation (FGM), honour- based violence (HBV) and forced marriage with Bawso and the Crown Prosecution Service.

Protecting women and girls from violence and supporting victims and survivors of harmful cultural practices remains a key priority for the Welsh Government. We welcome the creation of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Protection Orders and the criminalisation of the breach of Forced Marriage Protection Orders, the introduction of anonymity for victims of FGM and forced marriage, the creation of a new offence of failing to protect a girl from FGM, the extended extra-territorial jurisdiction over FGM offences committed abroad, and a new FGM mandatory reporting duty.

We must ensure those at risk are supported and will continue to address the issue of under-reporting of all illegal cultural harms by working with specialist agencies and highlighting the barriers they face.

Objective 5 – relevant professionals are trained to provide effective, timely and appropriate responses to victims and survivors.

Over 158,500 professionals in Wales have accessed training through the National Training Framework to date. This is an increase of over 23,000 for this period.

In October 2018, Welsh Government awarded a contract to Safelives and Hafan Cymru to deliver training for specialist providers, front line staff and their managers. 24 learners completed the Independent Domestic Violence Adviser course and a further 24 service managers in 2018-19.

Evaluation of the impact of this training is in initial stages, but anecdotally thousands of professionals and others have indicated that their understanding has increased. They evidence this by earlier identification of cases and a subsequent minimising of risk. We would like to see more formal evaluation as the training continues to be delivered and more recipients utilise it in their day-to-day work

Objective 6 – provide victims with equal access to appropriately resourced high quality, needs led, strength based, gender responsive services across Wales.

Over £1million was awarded through the VAWDASV Capital Grant Programme in 2018-19. The main purpose of this programme is to acquire or maintain and upgrade fixed assets such as buildings and equipment for those organisations working within the VAWDASV sector.

Almost £155,000 additional revenue funding was allocated in November 2018 to assist in dealing with waiting lists for specialist sexual violence services. Over 2,000 beneficiaries across Wales were supported to access sexual violence services through this funding. This funding enabled the sexual violence organisations in Wales to trial other means to support the waiting lists such as sessional counselling, solution-focused brief therapy, recovery tool kit group work training, and other therapies such as cookery classes and theatre group work to improve clients well-being and promote inclusion.

Local Strategies

We are pleased to report receipt of all requested local strategies. Currently we are identifying areas of improvement and sharing good practice drawn from a review of all the local strategies and our feedback from key stakeholders, some of whom have raised separate issues regarding their own internal review. We remain concerned that strategies must be seen as more than a “tick-box” and be embedded in core business.

Sustainable Funding Group

The purpose of this group, chaired by National Adviser Yasmin Khan, is to consider options to move to a more regionalised approach which encourages and facilitates greater collaboration between relevant partners and provides the opportunity for future funding to identify gaps in service provision and be more responsive to local needs.

A key area of work for the group is to develop the principles and framework for a model of sustainable funding of VAWDASV specialist services which takes account of the regionalisation agenda.

One of the key challenges is how we can move towards a sustainable funding model for VAWDASV provision. Statutory guidance on regional commissioning was consulted upon. Its primary aim is to promote high quality collaborative

commissioning which in turn will deliver more effective and consistent services in preventing violence against women, domestic and sexual abuse.

The challenge remains to see how this may be implemented and we are in the process of identifying areas where this is being achieved and will be working with Cardiff and The Vale Regional Commissioning Partnership and share learning across Wales.

Wales Centre for Public Policy Reviews

The previous First Minister, Carwyn Jones commissioned the Wales Centre for Public Policy to carry out a review of the capacity and capability of current refuge and accommodation-based provision for victims. This has, at the time of writing, not reported. We share the Government's view that refuge should be the emergency provision and in most cases the best outcome is to maintain victims safely in their own home with the perpetrator excluded.

The former First Minister similarly commissioned a review of provision for sexual violence services. Work has not commenced at the time of writing and will follow the review of accommodation-based services. We reported last year that we were concerned at the inconsistent service and varying standards of service which, in our view, had not kept up with the extraordinary increase in reporting. We will work with the Welsh Government to ensure that wherever you are, the service is of the highest standard possible.

National Indicators

Welsh Government officials worked with social researchers, cross-government policy leads and other key internal and external stakeholders to develop a set of VAWDASV National VAWDASV Indicators, which will be measures of progress against the purposes of the Act. The National Indicators went out to public consultation which ended on 29 March 2019. Officials will work with stakeholders to further develop the indicators, measures and data sources during 2019-20. The National Advisers support the important work being carried out.

Government Updates

This very busy Welsh Government has also commissioned a Gender Equality Review with experts in this field. We have been part of this and welcomed the first stage published late last year and look forward to its completion soon.

The UK Government finally published its Domestic Abuse bill 2019 which is now, as we write in August, making its way through parliament. The Welsh Government provided significant comments on an earlier draft and one of the National Advisers was invited to give oral evidence to the joint parliamentary select committee which recommended many more amendments. Most of these comments and amendments have been accepted in the bill.

National Advisers' Annual Plan 2019-20

Our Annual Plan was published at the beginning of the calendar year and was a very ambitious programme of objectives which we sincerely believe will transform the VAWDASV landscape.

We, however, misjudged the resource available for such an ambitious programme, we set a few timelines which have proved to be more than challenging and many of the objectives require work from other bodies which have timescales that do not permit us to meet our own. For example, we committed to responding to the previous First Minister's commissioned reviews of refuge provision and Sexual Violence services, but those reviews are not taking place simultaneously so we cannot respond at the same time.

Whilst significant progress is being made on some objectives, there is a clear lesson for us to manage expectations. That said, most objectives will be met within the year of the Plan.

Challenges

1. Third sector organisations are still feeling funding pressures whilst dealing with increased referrals. Collaboration could be significantly improved to make better use of finite resources.
2. Third sector organisations are still heavily reliant on government funding as other sources of funds are either unavailable or difficult to access.
3. Victims and Survivors, particularly in rural areas, are seeing inconsistent services being delivered.
4. Sexual Violence services remain the poor cousin of the VAWDASV family and have seen a massive increase in referrals without a commensurate growth in their resources.
5. Victims and survivors from black and minority ethnic groups are particularly impacted by the current provision of services.
6. Prevention remains a lower priority than protection.
7. Local Authority Strategic Plans vary tremendously in their response to these issues, as sharing of best practice could be coordinated better.
8. The impact on children, both as victims and witnesses impacted by VAWDASV could be significantly improved.

Responses

1. The Welsh Government has created a sustainable funding group chaired by a National Adviser which is looking at how to put in place a long-term solution to funding of services involving all commissioners of such services
2. We will be scrutinising local strategy implementation plans to identify both good and poor practice and sharing accordingly
3. The Welsh Government has re-commenced -at our request- the All Wales Learning Group made up of key stakeholders to examine specific issues and identify actions that will address a variety of challenges. The first of these that will be explored will be harmful practices that impact disproportionately on black and minority ethnic communities.

4. We are working closely with the Welsh Government lead on Perpetrator Programmes to reduce reoffending.
5. We are engaged with the Children's Commissioner to look specifically at impact on children.
6. We have met with the Minister for Education and are assisting with the development of the new curriculum particularly the relationship education element.
7. We want to explore synergies with the work being conducted by the Future Generations Commissioner.
8. We need to consider how the Welsh Government's guidance on domestic abuse for safeguarding older people in Wales 2017 is being implemented at a local level.

Conclusion

The implications of VAWDASV are serious. Historically, victims and survivors were being let down and lacked support which could mean the difference between life and death. Prevention needs to be integrated into safeguarding, there is an urgent need for change. We still do not have accurate figures for those individuals and families who live in fear, are impacted by trauma and see no way out.

We will work with commissioners, policy makers and specialist services to ensure victim needs are considered seriously by policymakers and commissioners, and by frontline agencies and services. Our focus for the remaining time of our three -year term will concentrate on creating a culture of change so victims can access help and support irrespective of where they live and who they are.

The Welsh Government should be rightly proud of its achievements thus far since the enactment of the VAWDASV Act 2015 but the time has come to take stock of what has been done and what needs to be done.

Third sector organisations must never be underestimated. They deliver services that nobody else can, and do so often on a shoestring budget. We will work with them to create a landscape that means that no victim is denied help.

Education and awareness is how we will eventually eliminate VAWDASV and the acceleration of effort here is both welcome and necessary. We need this time to galvanize action to end violence against women and girls around the world.

Nazir Afzal OBE and Yasmin Khan
National Advisers
August 2019