

GBV 28

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales)

Bill: Stage 1

Response from: Wrexham County Borough Council

Response to the Call for Evidence Regarding the Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Bill from Wrexham County Borough Council

1. The general principles of the Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Bill and the need for legislation to improve the Public Sector response in Wales to domestic abuse, gender-based violence and sexual violence, including:

The publication of national and local strategies

- The general principle of national and local strategies is welcomed to aid consistency of approach across Wales.
- Consideration should be given to who will determine the content of these strategies and who the lead agency will be.
- The writing of local strategies jointly may well have considerable resource implications due to reductions in funding and staff in both Local Authorities and Health.
- The minister may wish to consider if other statutory agencies e.g. police, CPS should be involved in the writing of these local strategies.
- There appears to be no requirement for either local or national strategies to include education around DA&SV in school or college settings. It would be helpful to have clear direction that is consistent across all age groups as a preventative and awareness raising measure, but must also ensure that school and college staff are adequately trained to both deliver information and respond to any disclosures.

The appointment of a Ministerial Adviser on Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence.

- Although there are merits in having an Adviser who takes on this role and its associated functions, there is a risk that progress would be slow in introducing change. Due to the size of the remit, local issues might be lost in the bigger strategic issues and the appointment of an Advisor and support team seem costly. There could well be merit in the Adviser working closely with existing Domestic Abuse Co-ordinators, who have considerable expertise and local knowledge and could potentially act as an advisory team. This would ensure local focus is not lost. Local Authorities would be clear about where and what they should contribute and ensure that the excellent partnership working that exists in Wrexham with regard to DA&SV is not lost. This approach would also ensure that timely interventions for victims, perpetrators and children are provided and would provide clarity as to where WG and Central Government should be expected to contribute.
- If this post is introduced we feel strongly that it MUST cover the whole of Wales, with an expectation that the post will be bi-lingual to assist with

cultural/language issues and that the Adviser will spend an appropriate proportion of their time in North Wales.

- We would like to suggest that there should be a clear and consistent flow of information from Welsh Government, not just a call for information from local forums, along with a mechanism for the sharing of good practice.

2. any potential barriers to the implementation of these provisions and whether the Bill takes account of them

- Some of the recommendations contained in the recent Public Services Commission and the Devolution, Democracy and Delivery White Paper and any subsequent decisions taken may have implications on the implementation of the provisions outlined in this Bill. Wrexham and Flintshire, for example, are adjoining counties, but are demographically very different and currently vary greatly in the way that services are delivered. Issues stemming from any merger could well impinge on the implementation of some areas of this Bill.
- There will be resource implications following from a number of significant budget cuts across all sectors that could act as barriers to the implementation of these provisions, along with the issues rising from external Grant funding as outlined in Section 4.
- Engagement from partners may also be an issue. For example in North Wales the Police and Health Board have a North Wales geography and would be expected to engage with 6 local authorities on their strategies and balance local need with consistency across their organisations.
- Information sharing between agencies is a barrier that has in the main been addressed with regard to high risk cases of DA&SV via the MARAC information Sharing Protocols. This is, however, an area of work that requires further work and investigation with regard to medium and low risk cases and could be key to ensuring that some of these cases at least do not progress to the high risk category, thus ensuring better outcomes for individuals and cost efficiencies for agencies.

3. whether there are any unintended consequences arising from the Bill,

- There does not appear to be any reference to “neglect” resulting from domestic abuse issues in the Bill. This could be an issue that fails to be adequately recognised.
- With regard to “Right to Ask” and “Ask and Act” there appears to be no reference to risk assessment and information sharing. This could result in inadequate responses to high risk cases.
- Annex 3 lists “Child Protection Social Workers” as Relevant Professionals” to be trained in “Ask and Act”. The minister may wish to consider whether this should this be ALL Social Workers. Listing organisations and professionals is too prescriptive and does not take into account the key responsibilities and different roles within professions. GP’s, for example, have time constraints on the length of time that can be spent with patients.
- No reference is made to the Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub pilot project currently being undertaken in Wrexham and the learning that will come from this pilot which could link with a number of the strands included in this Bill.

- Much work has been and is being done to work more closely with the police and criminal justice agencies. There is very little reference made to criminal justice systems in the Bill which could undermine this important work.
- Any regional approach that is taken must never be at the expense of local service delivery.
- If a regional approach is adopted consideration may like to be given to North Wales having two sub regions, East and West, to help mitigate against local issues being overlooked as a result of the size of each Local Authority, variations in demographics, rurality etc. across the area.
- Elements of the Bill focus very much on raising awareness and not enough on improving sufficient high quality support services for women and children which could be detrimental to ensuring their safety.
- Consideration may like to be given to including recommendations to strengthen services for perpetrators. Without interventions to assist perpetrators to change their attitudes and behaviour much of the valuable work being done with victims may well be undermined as perpetrators often move on to a succession of new victims.

4. the financial implications of the Bill (as set out in Part 2 of the Explanatory Memorandum

- The minister may wish to consider if the introduction of the Ministerial Adviser will impact on the funding for existing Domestic Abuse Co-ordinators who play a vital role in ensuring a co-ordinated response to domestic abuse issues locally and could act as an advisory team as referred to above..
- All sectors are facing reductions in funding – some of the requirements of this Bill may be difficult to achieve and impact on the already limited funding/resources available to provide services for vulnerable people, especially given that many services operate with external Grant funding, none of which is currently either secure or sustainable. There needs to be a corresponding funding injection to ensure that both statutory and Voluntary Sector support services can cope with increased demand.
- We would support a consistent approach to the training of professionals across Wales via a National Training Framework, but would ask that a centralised funding resource is tailored to take into account of local needs and ensure that ALL relevant staff are able to be released to attend this training. There can be significant resource issues in schools, for example, where cover is required for teachers to be released to attend training. Due to the current inconsistent approach to provision of services, a one-size-fits-all approach will not work initially but is something to aspire to within the strategy and across Wales. Much of the high quality training already in existence is delivered locally by the Domestic Abuse Co-ordinators as an integral part of their role at no cost to attendees. Consideration could be given to expanding this remit as a potential option to help keep costs down.
- Potential increase in reporting via “Ask and Act” could place more demand on services that are already reduced and financially stretched as outlined above.
- With regard to “Ask and Act”, apart from the capital costs, intensive training and support will be required to build the confidence of staff and also to ensure that the infrastructure is in place to support staff dealing with disclosures.

5. the appropriateness of the powers in the Bill for Welsh Ministers to make subordinate legislation (as set out in Chapter 5 of Part 1 of the Explanatory Memorandum).

These powers appear to be reasonable.

If you wish to submit evidence, please send an electronic copy of your submission to: CELG.Committee@wales.gov.uk

Alternatively, you can write to:

Committee Clerk

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

National Assembly for Wales

Cardiff Bay, CF99 1NA.

Submissions should arrive by 5 September 2014. It may not be possible to take into account responses received after this date.