

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and
Education Committee

Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg |
Priorities for the Children, Young People and Education Committee

CYPE 38

Ymateb gan : Cymorth i Ferched Cymru

Response from : Welsh Women's Aid

1. About Welsh Women's Aid

1.1 Welsh Women's Aid is the national charity in Wales working to prevent domestic abuse and all forms of violence against women and ensure high-quality services for survivors that are needs-led, gender-responsive and holistic.

1.2 Established in 1978, we are an umbrella organisation that represents and supports a national federation of 23 local independent charities delivering specialist domestic abuse and violence against women prevention services in Wales, as part of a UK network of provision. These specialist services constitute our core membership, and they provide lifesaving refuges, outreach, and community advocacy and support to survivors of violence and abuse - women, men, children, families - and deliver innovative preventative work in local communities. We also deliver direct services including the Welsh Government funded Live Fear Free Helpline; a National Training Service; refuge and advocacy services in Colwyn Bay and Wrexham; and the national Children Matter project which supports local services to help children and young people affected by abuse and to deliver preventative STAR group-work in every local authority in Wales.

1.3 We have been at the forefront of shaping coordinated community responses and practice in Wales, by campaigning for change and providing advice, consultancy, support and training to deliver policy and service improvements for survivors, families and communities. As a national federation, our policy work, consultancy, training and advocacy is all grounded in the experience of local specialist services and service users. Our success is founded on making sure the experiences and needs of survivors are central to all we do.

2. Consultation questions

Question 1 – Within the remit set out above: what do you consider to be the priorities or issues that the Children, Young People and Education Committee should consider during the Fifth Assembly?

As Welsh Women's Aid, the key focus of our recommendations is the impact of violence and abuse on children and young people. Our priorities reflect recommendations to mitigate the impact on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence on the lives of children and young people as witnesses and within their own relationships. Recent research¹ into adverse childhood experiences highlighted the detrimental impact of domestic abuse on children and young people. The research highlighted the negative impact from school attainment to sexual, physical and mental health.

Welsh Women's Aid suggested priorities take into account the following cross-cutting recommendations including:

- Addressing inequalities and inequities between men and women of all ages is central to ensuring the health and wellbeing of children and young people;
- Recognition of the intersecting identities and needs that impact on children and young people in order to ensure that services are needs-led and appropriate;
- Addressing barriers for children and young people to participate in school life, recreational activities as full citizens is essential to integrating values of health and well-being;
- It is essential to ensure that laws and legislation are aligned to enable agencies and services to work together more effectively. It is necessary, for example, for clear guidance on the alignment between the Social Services and Wellbeing Act, Future Generations Act and the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act;
- Consultation with children and young people is critical to ensure their voices are heard.

Welsh Women's Aid would encourage the committee to include the scrutiny of children and young people's experiences of violence against women and the role of engaging with children and young people in the prevention of future violence against women across all of its forthcoming scrutiny programme. The priority areas that we would recommend reflect those outline within the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Act (Wales) 2015.

Priorities for prevention:

¹ Public Health Wales, Adverse Childhood Experiences:

[http://www2.nphs.wales.nhs.uk:8080/PRIDDocs.nsf/7c21215d6d0c613e80256f490030c05a/00c40b58ce773d5e80257f3700390f65/\\$FILE/ACE%20Infograph%20FINAL%20\(E\).pdf](http://www2.nphs.wales.nhs.uk:8080/PRIDDocs.nsf/7c21215d6d0c613e80256f490030c05a/00c40b58ce773d5e80257f3700390f65/$FILE/ACE%20Infograph%20FINAL%20(E).pdf)

Preventing violence against women and girls is vital in meeting a number of the Welsh Government's objectives across a number of policy areas that are relevant to children and young people including the Future Generation indicators, the national curriculum review as well as a key objective of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Act (Wales) 2015.

Schools and other educational settings play a key role in the prevention of violence against women and girls. This is vital to prevent future domestic and sexual violence as well as tackling the abuse and violence children and young people are currently experiencing. Data published in September 2015 revealed that 5,500 sexual offences were recorded in UK schools over a three year period, including 600 rapes².

Last year the Welsh Government Good Practice Guidance on Whole School Approaches developed in conjunction with Welsh Women's Aid sets out a practical toolkit for embedding the principles ending violence against women in educational settings. The guide outlines nine key elements that would ensure a comprehensive and holistic approach to prevention of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence;

(<http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/commsafety/151020-whole-education-approach-good-practice-guide-en.pdf>).

Additionally work has been carried out by the third sector to develop tools to develop educational settings where positive attitudes toward gender equality and healthy, respectful relationships can be fostered now and in the future. One such tool Welsh Women's Aid has been working in partnership with Cardiff University and NSPCC Cymru, supported by the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales, to develop is the forthcoming guide 'Agenda: A Young People's Guide to Making Positive Relationships Matter' (see <http://learning.gov.wales/resources/browse-all/keeping-learners-safe-conference-2015/?lang=en>).

Welsh Women's Aid in partnership with AVA (Against Violence and Abuse) were commissioned by Welsh Government to research and compile a package of recommended materials to be utilised as best practice in relation to these matters for use in primary, secondary and further education settings. This suite of resources is presented as an overarching toolkit which should be used with the accompanying information and guidance for each of the aforementioned education settings as appropriate. This is to be launched later this month and is intended to complement, and should be used in conjunction with, the Good Practice Guidance on Whole Education Approach to Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence in Wales.

² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-34138287>

Welsh Women's Aid would suggest that the following areas should form part of the committees scrutiny agenda:

- Scrutiny of the integration, support and monitoring, across all schools in Wales, of the Good Practice Guide: A Whole Education Approach to Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence. This should link to the post legislative scrutiny of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Act (Wales) 2015 being carried out by Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee scheduled for this autumn.
- Explore the possibility of a joint inquiry by the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee and the Children, Young People and Education Committee into the impact of sexual harassment/violence on children and young people in Wales.
- Within the scrutiny of the development of the new curriculum review ensure that it includes gender equality and healthy relationships education.

All of the above should also consider scrutinising how these initiatives ensure the engagement of children and young people in institutions, social care, within the criminal justice system or excluded to access prevention programmes and support on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Priorities for protection:

Agencies working within the children and young people and violence against women areas need to work together more effectively around the impact on violence on children. Statistics highlight the following:

- 19 children and 2 women in 12 families have been killed by perpetrators of domestic abuse in circumstances related to unsafe child contact within a ten year period.³
- Domestic violence is present in two thirds of all serious case reviews into child deaths or serious injury.

Agencies must work in a coordinated way to ensure that agencies working in child protection link with agencies working in the domestic violence sector in order to uphold the wellbeing of the children involved by recognising the impact of their experiences.

Welsh Women's Aid would suggest that the following areas should

³ Women's Aid Federation England's 2016 report, 19 Child Homicides, covering England and Wales between January 2005 to August 2015

form part of the committees scrutiny agenda:

- Scrutiny of child protection legislation and practice to ensure it enables joined up pathways to specialist domestic abuse support for mothers and their children.
- Inquiry into procedures of family courts in Wales and the role of CAFCASS Cymru in ensuring safe child contact decisions and processes in cases where domestic abuse has been disclosed or identified.

Priorities for support:

Specialist support for children and young people are a vital mechanism in reducing the impact of adverse childhood experiences associated with the coexistence of e.g. domestic abuse, mental ill-health, substance abuse and offending, is a policy priority. Research highlights the importance of targeted direct support for children and young people, which should entail a combination of individual and group work, play therapy, recreational and educational activities, support during legal or other proceedings, and age-appropriate advocacy.

A survey of our members highlighted that 45% of those services who had cuts to their funding, these cuts were made to (or included) projects that support children and young people affected by domestic abuse.

- One service, for example, lost £16,480 of Families First funding, which equated to 27.5% of that project.
- Another service noted a 12% cut to their child work project. They noted that any further cuts would force them to withdraw from the delivery of the project.

Funding for children's work is also a concern for services that did not receive funding cuts and it is worth highlighting that there is inconsistency across Wales when it comes to available funding for dedicated domestic abuse support services for children and young people. Alternative funding streams are also difficult to access due to the perception that it is statutory bodies responsibility however they do not provide specialist domestic abuse provision.

Research shows that domestic abuse has a long lasting impact on children, including a significant risk of harm to the child's physical, emotional and social development. Without secure funding, the specialist services that are best placed to understand the impact of domestic abuse on children, and how to effectively and appropriately support children to recover, will be unable to deliver their critically important support.

Welsh Women's Aid would suggest that the following areas should

form part of the committees scrutiny agenda:

- Inquiry into the funding of specialist services for Children and Young People in Wales.

Question 2 - From the list of priorities or issues you have identified, what do you consider to be the key areas that should be considered during the next 12 months (please identify up to three areas or issues)? Please outline why these should be considered as key priorities.

Within the next 12 months Welsh Women's Aid would propose the following areas for the committee to consider to form part of the scrutiny agenda:

1. Scrutiny of the Welsh Governments curriculum review to ensure it includes adequate provision for gender equality and healthy relationship education

Schools and other educational settings are vital sites for preventing violence against women and girls before it starts - both through specific education to challenge attitudes, encourage healthy relationships and promote respect for women and girls, and through supporting pupils who are affected by such violence, whether at home or within their own burgeoning relationships. This would result in significant cost savings to the state, in addition to significant social and equality gains. As such, it is vital that the curriculum in Wales includes a much stronger focus on prevention, particularly education, than previous approaches in this area.

Welsh Women's Aid would encourage the committee to utilise its scrutiny role to ensure gender equality and healthy relationship education form a critical part of the current development of the new curriculum for Wales so as effective preventative education tools form part of its aim to support our children and young people to be healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

2. Joint inquiry into the impact of sexual harassment/violence on children and young people in Wales

In conjunction with NSPCC Cymru, Welsh Women's Aid believes there is a case for an inquiry into the impact of sexual violence on children and young people in Wales, that could be a joint inquiry into carried out by the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee and the Children, Young People and Education Committee.

The development of the new curriculum and the process of national and local implementation of provisions contained in the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act suggest that our proposed inquiry for Wales would be extremely timely.

The scope of the inquiry could be as follows and gather evidence on:

- The scale of sexual harassment/violence in primary, secondary schools communities in Wales, we would recommend taking an age-based rather than context-based approach
- Both the offline and online aspects of these issues and explore how they interact;
- Children and young people's experiences of sexual harassment/violence and gathering their views about the solutions needed;
- Exploring what is needed to support and resource the successful and effective implementation of recent legislative, policy and guidance developments in Wales and how to embed approaches to reduce the levels of sexual harassment/violence experienced by children and young people in Wales.

3. Inquiry into the funding of specialist services for Children and Young People in Wales.

Consultation with our members has highlighted significant inconsistency in the funding of specialist children and young people's support. This is resulting in a postcode lottery for child or young person witness or experience violence and abuse in the available specialist support for them.

Many of our members have had their funding for specialist children and young people's work reduced, cut or the funding streams have come to an end meaning that there is minimal or no support available in many areas of Wales. Where there is provision it is often a single refuge worker which means the resource is often over stretched and children and young people not in refuge support are unable to access the support due to funding restrictions.

The provision of specialist domestic abuse services for children and young people should be accessible to all children that need it and delivered by skilled professionals in specialist services with the experience to offer a range of specialist support to children and young people that reflect their diverse spectrum of needs. At present this is not consistently being provided in Wales due to the lack of strategic leadership in the funding and commissioning of this provision.

Welsh Women's Aid would also welcome the committee to scrutinise the Welsh Governments and local authority's strategic leadership roles in ensuring the provision of this vital support for children and young people is adequately resourced.

Conclusion

Welsh Women's Aid is keen to support the priorities where there is relevance to violence against women and children. In particular, we would recommend that the above areas are considered when the committee considers the terms of reference for the inquiries and their calls for evidence. Welsh Women's Aid would welcome the opportunity to provide evidence to the committee on these areas outlined above. We would be able to consult with children and young people and specialist service providers to provide quantitative and qualitative evidence to the impact of the policies being scrutinised. We look forward to supporting the committee in these inquiries.

Welsh Women's Aid would like to thank the Children, Young People and Education Committee for the opportunity to comment on this important consultation and we look forward to working together in the future.