



Jenny Rathbone MS
Chair, Equality and Social Justice Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1SN

7th May 2024

Dear Jenny

Thank you for your letter of 8 April regarding the recent Equality and Social Justice Committee report into a public health approach to preventing gender-based violence. I have set out below additional information regarding the Welsh Government's commitments to the recommendations highlighted in your letter.

As my predecessor set out in her letter of 26 February, the high-level action plans for the VAWDASV blueprint have already been published. The detailed actions, which would include details of individual leads for specific actions sitting under these plans, will not be published. However, a further update on progress will be published in October. The Terms of Reference, including membership, for the National Partnership Board and each of its workstreams, will be published on the Welsh Government's webpages in May.

Recommendation 3 – National Indicators

Regarding the National Indicators. I wish to reassure members of the Committee, the published indicators do reflect the existing Strategy. The objectives for the 2022-2026 strategy are, almost exactly, the same as the previous Strategy and, therefore, remain relevant. What has particularly changed is the mechanisms by which we intend to implement the Strategy and particularly our greater focus on prevention. As previously stated, the challenge of the published indicators is we were not previously able to develop the data collection and publication mechanisms as intended due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Our working group has been developing methodologies to address this. There are indeed challenges in sourcing accurate Welsh data for some of the indicators.

A substantive update will be published in November, alongside the statutory VAWDASV Annual Report. This will include publication of data for some indicators where data already exists at the Wales level. It will also report on the outcome of the methodological review, outlining how we intend to address gaps for those indicators where it is challenging to source data, or where question development and testing is required. The review will include

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

consideration of timescales for publication for these indicators. In advance of this, my officials will work directly with stakeholders on the data sets over the summer months.

The VAWDASV blueprint workstreams are, of course, also developing actions and initiatives in each of their areas. We have primed the workstreams to consider how the effectiveness of these actions can be measured as part of their work and how any proposed measures relate to the existing indicators. We may add to our indicator set in response to this process. We are also conscious we will need qualitative, as well as quantitative, evidence to provide an accurate picture of how effective we have been at reducing the incidence of VAWDASV and this forms part of the evidence planning we are building into the blueprint process.

Linked to this, the VAWDASV evidence plan for 2024-25 will primarily support research related to the Blueprint workstreams and the delivery on the VAWDASV National Strategy. A consideration will be how the evidence plan can help to address the need for stronger evidence from Wales in relation to some of the indicators.

Recommendation 4 – Specialised therapeutic services for all babies, children and young people who experience or witness gender-based violence

The needs of all children and young people are a priority for me and the whole Cabinet. I would like to reiterate, the Welsh Government funds specialist services to provide invaluable lifesaving support to all victims of VAWDASV, including children and young people. We also fund regional VAWDASV teams, including regional advisors, who have devolved authority to commission services they require based on population needs assessments and in line with the regional VAWDASV strategies.

Within the Transformation of Children's Services Programme, we are utilising part of the Health and Social Care Regional Integration Fund a 5-year fund, of circa £18m per annum to deliver a programme of change until March 2027 in supporting families to stay together safely and to secure therapeutic support for care experienced children of all ages.

Through the RIF, Regional Partnership Boards have implemented a range of services which are supporting babies, children and young people who are in or on the edge of care, many of whom have experienced or witnessed violence in their lives. For example, the MYST service in Gwent provides specialised mental health services to children and young people aged up to 21 in the Gwent / Aneurin Bevan University Health Board area who are looked after, or involved with children's social services and have complex mental health needs arising from early and compounded trauma.

Another example is the MAPPS programme, within the Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board area. This provides 12 sessions of therapy for children and young people looked after, by certified behaviour analysts who can work with them to manage their emotions, behaviour, provide life story work and build relationships, in order to stabilise placements at residential homes or with foster carers. All these assessments and therapeutic support plans are child-centred; firstly meeting with carers, social workers and schools to gather a picture of the child's needs, then designing and planning therapeutic interventions based on those needs

Central to the delivery of the wider Transformation Programme is the development of the National Practice Framework, to help translate policy into practice, improve practice, drive consistency and deliver the first set of national standards for children's services in Wales. This includes '*Eyes on the Child: the Child Safeguarding standard*'.

A period of stakeholder engagement was carried out on the first draft of the Framework, between November 2023 and February 2024. Following the feedback received, work is now underway to develop a revised draft, over the next few months, to share for wider

engagement and feedback. All standards within the Framework are due to be co-produced by the end of 2024.

Recommendation 6 – Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Further to the Committee's report, the Welsh Government has written to schools to remind them of their mandatory duty to report FGM, to reflect the urgency of the Committee's recommendation. Information has also been cascaded in Dysg, the official education and training newsletter from Welsh Government.

Given the importance of this matter, the Welsh Government will be recirculating the relevant guidance and spotlighting it in the School Governors in Wales bulletin. We are currently reviewing the opportunities available to us to enhance enforcement measures.

Action 5 – Higher Education

I have written to my colleague, the new Cabinet Secretary for Education, Lynne Neagle highlighting the issues raised in your report. I have suggested she may wish to write to higher education institutions regarding the Welsh Government's expectations in terms of tackling gender-based violence.

Universities are autonomous bodies and have their own reporting mechanisms and policies on managing reported incidents. There is an established [research network](#) to develop and share good practice and all universities in Wales have previously published statements or commitments with regards to violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. HEFCW have published guidance on tackling VAWDASV, and the new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research will continue the work in this space once operational in the summer.

I look forward to engaging with you further on this matter during the Plenary debate on 8 May.

Kind Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lesley Griffiths". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lesley Griffiths AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Ddiwylliant a Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol
Cabinet Secretary for Culture and Social Justice