

**National Assembly for Wales  
Finance Committee  
FIN(4)-WG15-04**

**Inquiry into Welsh Government Draft Budget Proposals 2014-2015  
Evidence from the Women's Equality Network Wales**



**Welsh Government Draft Budget 2014-2015  
Response from WEN Wales**

**September 2013**

## Introduction

WEN Wales is a community of organisations and individuals working to advance the rights of women in all spheres of Welsh life. In partnership with our 500 members, we aim to create a fairer society in which women enjoy equality in all aspects of their daily lives and live free from sexism and gender discrimination.

We welcome the opportunity to provide information to the Finance Committee to support their scrutiny of the Welsh Government's draft budget proposals for 2014-15. Women have been and will continue to be disproportionately impacted by budget cuts and we strongly advise that thorough Equality Impact Assessments are carried out before any decisions are taken forward. WEN Wales is currently working with the Welsh Government through the Budget Advisory Group for Equalities.

### **Key points**

- 1) Women have been and will continue to be disproportionately impacted by cuts to jobs and services.**
- 2) Many organisations that support women in Wales are under threat of closure in the light of reduced support from the public sector.**
- 3) Equality Impact Assessments should inform spending decisions, making sure that women's services are not cut disproportionately.**

## Our response:

### **1. What, in your opinion has been the impact of the Welsh Government's 2013-14 budget?**

Cuts to public services have had a disproportionate impact on women in Wales as they account for the majority of public sector workers and public service users. In particular, feedback from our members is that the cuts in resources to the providers of supporting people and domestic abuse services has meant that although the need for the services has increased because of Welfare Reform, financial pressures and housing issues, organisations are struggling to meet that demand. WEN Wales asks that the Welsh Government commits to protecting women's services in Wales.

We have also heard many stories from individuals about how cuts are impacting them. Women are reporting difficulties encountered as a result of cuts to care services and infrastructure. For example, one woman with learning difficulties had her benefits withdrawn. She appealed had it reinstated and has been asked to complete the assessment form again. This lady relies on her case worker for support with this kind of task. However, her caseworker is no longer in post and she is worried she won't be replaced because of cuts in the local authority. Another woman was having difficulty in getting to see her husband who has dementia and is in a nursing home 20 miles away due to cuts in the bus service. These impacts are causing a great deal of distress for many women in Wales. Equality Impact Assessments can go a long way towards making sure that women do not suffer from cuts disproportionately.

### **2. Looking at the indicative budget allocations for 2014-15, do you have any concerns from a strategic, overarching perspective, or about any specific areas?**

We have heard from one of our members that their organisation is expecting a 10% cut in funding which will threaten service delivery, probably making it unviable. This organisation is currently considering their options for the future, one of these being closure. This is just one example. Many organisations are under severe financial pressure and if they close, crucial services accessed by the most vulnerable women in our society will be lost.

WEN Wales welcomes the Welsh Government's commitment to the Equality Impact Assessment process and hope that the findings will influence budget decisions. In particular, we welcome the impact assessment of the Welfare Reform Bill and

recommend that this work informs spending decisions for 2014-15. Support for women directly impacted by cuts to jobs and services should be prioritised.

**3. What expectations do you have of the 2014-15 draft budget proposals? How financially prepared is your organisation for the 2014-15 financial year, and how robust is your ability to plan for future years?**

We are reassured to know that the 2014-15 budget proposals will be assessed for equality impacts and expect that the findings will inform decisions. In particular, we would expect that steps are taken to ensure women are not disproportionately impacted by cuts and ask that women's services are protected. WEN Wales recommends that a process of gender budgeting is adopted in Wales to ensure fair access to funding support for women.

WEN Wales is currently looking to develop sustainable funding mechanisms and accessing alternative funding streams where possible. Many of our member organisations are looking at different models of service delivery in the light of reduced funding from the public sector. We are aware of a number of women's organisations seriously considering closure if alternative funding arrangements cannot be secured.

**4. What are your views to the Welsh Government's approach to preventative spending and how is this represented in your resource allocation (if appropriate)?**

Equality impact assessment of budget proposals and departmental programmes should inform spending plans so that interventions are targeted at those most in need..

## **Conclusion**

Women's organisations are under threat and at risk of closure. This would mean a significant reduction in services and support for women across Wales. WEN Wales is working closely with the Welsh Government through the Budget Advisory Group on Equalities (BAGE) to ensure that women's needs are considered in financial decision making. We welcome this inquiry and ask that the committee recommends a commitment from the Welsh Government to protect women's support services in Wales.

For further information, please email: [admin@wenwales.org](mailto:admin@wenwales.org)