

PLVAW 23

Ymchwiliad ôl-ddeddfwriaethol i Ddeddf Trais yn erbyn Menywod,

Cam-drin Domestig a Thrais Rhywiol (Cymru) 2015

Post legislative inquiry into the Violence against Women,

Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015

Ymateb gan: Cartrefi Cymunedol Cymru

Response from: Community Housing Cymru



CHC's Response

About Us

Community Housing Cymru (CHC) is the representative body for housing associations and community mutuels in Wales, which are all not-for profit organisations. Our members provide over 158,000 homes and related housing services across Wales. In 2014/15, our members directly employed 8,800 people and spent over £2bn (directly and indirectly) in the economy, with 79% of this spend retained in Wales. Our members work closely with local government, third sector organisations and the Welsh Government to provide a range of services in communities across Wales.

Our objectives are to:

- Be the leading voice of the social housing sector.
- Promote the social housing sector in Wales.
- Promote the relief of financial hardship through the sector's provision of low cost social housing.
- Provide services, education, training, information, advice and support to members.
- Encourage and facilitate the provision, construction, improvement and management of low cost social housing by housing associations in Wales.

Our vision is to be:

- A dynamic, action-based advocate for the not-for-profit housing sector.
- A 'member centred' support provider, adding value to our members' activities by delivering the services and advice that they need in order to provide social housing, regeneration and care services.
- A knowledge-based social enterprise.



National Assembly for Wales Post legislative inquiry into the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015

Terms of reference

The Committee will be looking at progress made in the implementation of the Act's provisions and its impact to date. In particular, the Committee will be considering:

- **To what extent the approach to tackling violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence is improving as a result of the obligations in the Act?**

We think that it would be too early for us to comment on whether there has been an improvement in tackling violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence as a result of obligations of the Act. We believe that our members are aware of the Act and its provisions, as CHC has highlighted the Act to members and responded to consultations on the Act including, multi-agency framework requirements, Ask and Act and the provisions of the national training framework within the Act. Responses to these consultations have shown that our members are working towards strategies to improve their responses to tackling violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

One of our main asks on behalf of our members was for the Ask and Act training to be rolled out more widely among partners as RSLs already deal with and manage issues of domestic violence in their properties. Being involved in any training would help increase their ability to act on suspected issues of domestic violence, limiting the possibility of instances escalating and being identified only when they reach escalating points by other agencies.

Housing organisations are listed in the Act as needing to be involved or helping with Ask & Act. It would be helpful if professionals working in the housing field including those working for Registered Social Landlords can receive/benefit from Ask & Act training. At the moment it's being piloted by the 'relevant authorities' and it appears that Registered Social landlords are not going to be able to access it until sometime in 2017.

In terms of multi-agency working we know that our members continue to work in partnership with other organisations to tackle violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence but that this is not without its challenges, especially where there are no formal arrangements in place.



We are aware of a project across Gwent where a number of social landlords have come together to tackle the issues of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. Following the implementation of the Act the *Gwent Social Housing Domestic Abuse Partnership – The Free from Fear project* has identified a number of areas that are important to ensuring that they achieve effective multi-agency working and ensure that social landlords are able to identify and support survivors effectively.

We believe that this sort of multi-agency working which draws on the sharing of resources will have an impact on progressing the Act and tackling violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

We know that our members have challenges for example in assessing some instances of Anti-social behavior (ASB) which may be linked to domestic abuse, and that they continue to work to find ways to work with other agencies to support those affected.

- **What are the most effective methods of capturing the views and experiences of survivors? Are arrangements in place to capture these experiences, and to what extent is this information being used to help inform the implementation of the Act's provisions?**

Our members work with tenants who are vulnerable and make efforts to ensure that their voice is included in tenant forums, but we are aware that this process is not always an easy one. We believe that survivors can be included through creating forums of support where, as survivors they can provide each other with moral support as well as access support and counselling if required.

The report from Welsh Women's Aid shows that there are currently no mechanisms in place to allow engagement with a wide range of survivors about what is important to them, and as a result the process of engagement is currently very ad-hoc and very much concentrated on the same groups.¹

The *Gwent Social Housing Domestic Abuse Partnership- The Free from Fear Project* is currently working on best ways to capture tenant's experiences. We believe that work from this project could be shared not only among social landlords but across other areas to show how affected tenants' voices are being captured and experiences used to create best practice.

¹ Welsh Women's Aid *Are you listening and am I being heard?* March 2016



- **Whether survivors of abuse are beginning to experience better responses from public authorities as a result of the Act, particularly those needing specialist services?**

We are not in a position to address this question fully but we know from our members that there are challenges for survivors of abuse, as provision of services is not necessarily joined up in all areas.

We know through our work lobbying for continued supported funding (SP) that specialist services continue to face challenges with financial cuts and that this area of support may be under threat. CHC is working with partners to advocate the continuation of SP funding as a vital link for those who are vulnerable, including those facing domestic violence, abuse and sexual violence.

This challenge and the introduction of LHA rates on housing benefit is a challenge for specialist providers and one that will require continued focus by all involved so that services are not reduced or totally eliminated.

- **Whether the National Adviser has sufficient power and independence from the Welsh Government to ensure implementation of the Act?**

We believe that the role of the National Adviser can have independence from the Welsh Government and that working in partnership with partners can help the National Adviser in promoting the needs of people facing domestic violence, abuse and sexual violence and tackling these issues across Wales.

- **To what extent the good practice guide to healthy relationships is successfully influencing the development of a whole school approach to challenging violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence?**

We are unable to comment on this.