

# Summary

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The Department for Social Justice and Local Government commissioned an independent evaluation of Welsh Women's Aid (WWA). The evaluation forms part of a body of work to ensure the domestic abuse projects are delivering against the aims outlined in the *'Tackling Domestic Abuse: The All Wales National Strategy'* and to ensure the projects are delivering value for money.

Specifically the overall aims of the governments strategy are:

- *"To facilitate the development and implementation of a quality co-ordinated joint-agency response;*
- *To improve the current service provision for all victims and to particularly increase the safe choices for women and children/young people who experience domestic abuse;*
- *To hold abusers accountable for their behaviour;*
- *To increase public awareness as to the issues surrounding domestic abuse;*
- *To challenge the notion that domestic abuse is acceptable;*
- *To protect children and young people in Wales from the negative impact of domestic abuse;*
- *To educate and inform children/young people to enable them to make informed choices."* (Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), 2005)

Over a period of six months the evaluation involved a:

- Thorough examination of documentary evidence including internal and external reports, publications, monitoring information (where available) and a literature review;
- Programme of interviews with individuals closely engaged with the organisation including WWA staff, trustees, and external board members.
- Programme of interviews with a sample of national stakeholders including Assembly officials and partner organisations.
- Web-based survey to enable stakeholders more widely to input their views to the evaluation and comments on WWA structure, processes, practices and objectives;
- Series of case studies based around local WA member groups to amplify and develop the key points arising from previous stages of the research programme.

Specifically the evaluation considered:

- the organisations relationship with local Women's Aid groups (Chapter 3);
- the relationship between WWA and the Assembly (Chapter 4);
- the effectiveness of governance arrangements (Chapter 5);
- the appropriateness of the organisation's structure, process, practices (Chapter 6);
- added value brought by the organisation at a national level (Chapter 7); and,
- value for money (Chapter 8).

### ***Relationship between WWA and local WA member groups***

It seems fair to say that relationships between WWA and local WA groups are complex – often harmonious and effective, sometimes less so. WWA is meeting the needs of many local member groups who welcome their support in terms of advice, guidance, training, campaigning and help provided by Regional Children’s Workers. However, the lack of engagement by some local member groups and indications of ineffective and malpractice creates serious concerns and is limiting the capability of WWA as a national body. Operating in an increasingly cut-throat field the ability for WWA to lead local WA groups to become competitive and to become the provider of choice will be vital to the success of the movement. Furthermore, to make WWA voice powerful as a representative body it needs to have one voice. Assurance of quality and consistency of practice is wanted, particularly by funders. It is too soon to comment on how WWA role as an Accredited Support Provider (ASP) has impacted on their relationship with member groups, but this will inevitably change the nature of engagement with members who have chosen them as their ASP, at least.

### ***Relationship between WWA and WAG***

The fragmentation of funding streams for domestic abuse related services has led to lower accountability procedures for organisations including WWA. Plans to improve the accountability of WWA are in progress.

WAG funds WWA to help the Assembly achieve its domestic abuse strategic objectives. WAG hopes to influence WWA to develop in a way which the WAG believe will best enable WWA to do this. Although WWA is willing to make the required changes (e.g. provide one voice for the movement, introduce minimum standards across local WA groups) its ability to do so is limited by their lack of influence over local WA groups.

### ***Governance***

Historically, the governance of WWA has been extremely challenging. Over recent years executive arrangements have improved gradually. Key drivers for the improvement are changes to WWA management structure which has led to greater clarity between the roles of WWA staff and the Executive Board and the inclusion of external members in meetings. Obtaining a strong mix of skills and experience on the Executive Board remains limited by the Constitution, given the barriers to local WA staff coming forward to stand for election to the Board. WWAs role as an ASP will bring new challenges to the governance of WWA. Changes to the composition and functioning of the Board are likely subject to the approval of a number of proposals at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in September.

### ***Management***

The management of WWA has historically been plagued with staffing issues. Today problems still remain evidenced by high turnover, high staff sickness absence and allegations against members of staff. The introduction of a hierarchy has clearly brought improvement resulting in greater clarity of roles and responsibilities. Funding for core staff and the national office is limited. It is hoped the ASP role will be a key area of capacity building but initial indications show this is likely to swallow already scarce staff resource given the organisations wide remit. Again, improvements are planned and the appointment of a new Director renews optimism for some.

### ***Added value at national level***

The potential for a centralised body for domestic abuse services to add value at a national level is huge. Two or more individuals are widely noted as delivering in several key areas (e.g. legal advice, accreditation of skills), but as an organisation WWA does not command the desired respect internally or external to the movement. The quality of work in some areas has markedly increased in the last twelve months, but it will take time for trust and respect for WWA to be rebuilt. The breadth of activities WWA seeks to undertake has arguably left the organisation under capacity and under performing. The organisation would benefit from a renewed focus.

### ***Value for money***

In principle, as a central coordinating body there is huge scope for WWA to provide value for money by ensuring there is no duplication of effort at a local level, representing the movement at a national level, levying funds on behalf of the movement, etc. At present WWA does not demonstrate value for money.

WWA is not naturally accessible to standard value for money measures given the unique role it fulfils - it is neither a deliverer nor a coordinator - but there needs to be some sort of accountability when spending public funds. As a result, the lack of key performance indicators and outcome indicators needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency and before the next spending period.

### **Overall Conclusion**

The status quo is not acceptable. The context in which Women's Aid operates has moved on in terms of competition, the requirement for standards and accountability. A step change is needed in respect of WWA management, governance, and their relationship with the WAG, their partners and local member groups.

### **Recommendations include**

The WAG should look at accountability for domestic abuse services as a whole given the sizeable amount of public funding going into the service. The Department for Social Justice and Local Government and the Housing Directorate in partnership with WWA should jointly develop a clearer contractual basis for their work which contains objectively quantifiable outcomes as clearly measurable indicators of progress by WWA towards a set of WAG strategic goals.

WWA valued work (including legal advice and the accreditation project) should continue and the organisation should take forward plans existing plans to improve, (e.g. the development of a business plan, a skills analysis of the Board, the revision of internal policies, etc). WWA should also consider their activities in light of their resource capacity and a clear statement of what they do should be communicated to their partners and members. Most importantly, a membership agreement between local WA member groups and WWA should be implemented at the earliest opportunity. Those unwilling to sign or adhere by the agreement should be disaffiliated.

Local WA member groups should remain mindful of the changing context in which they operate and should work with WWA to demonstrate their hard and soft outcomes.