



Live Fear
Free Helpline

Providing confidential support
and information on domestic
abuse, sexual violence and
violence against women in Wales

Llinell Gymorth
Byw Heb Ofn

Darparu gwybodaeth a chefnogaeth
cyfrinachol ynghylch trais domestig,
trais rhywiol a thrais yn erbyn merched
yng Nghymru

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Cymorth i Ferched Cymru
Welsh Women's Aid
Rhoi Merched a Phlant yn Gyntaf
Putting Women & Children First

Wales Audit Office: All Wales local government improvement study: council funding of third sector services

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About Welsh Women's Aid

i. Welsh Women's Aid is the national charity in Wales working to prevent domestic abuse and all forms of violence against women¹ and ensure high-quality services for survivors that are needs-led, gender-responsive and holistic.

ii. 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

¹ Domestic abuse is the exercise of control by one person, over another, within an intimate or close family relationship; the abuse can be sexual, physical, financial, emotional or psychological. Violence against women is violence directed at women because they are women or that affects women disproportionately, and includes domestic abuse, rape and sexual violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, sexual exploitation including through trafficking and the sex-industry, so-called 'honour-based violence' and sexual harassment .



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people affected by abuse and to deliver preventative STAR group-work in every local authority in Wales.

iii. 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.

Our Response

iv. Welsh Women's Aid response provides an overview of the information which has been passed to us from our specialist member services about the way in which funding decisions have been made by local authorities. As there is some disparity between local authorities, we have not completed the 'tick box' answers, we have however provided comments which set out the information which is relevant to each question.

v. Five of our specialist member services have also completed their own questionnaires which are specific to their service; these have been annexed 1-5 and can be found at the end of this document. We have used these responses, as well as conversations we have had with our members, to inform our response.

1. How effective are councils' systems for publicising third sector projects?

Comments:

1.1 Welsh Women's Aid have been told by our member services that there are concerns about the transparency of funding processes including the publicising of funding/tenders by local authorities.

1.2 Local authorities should all consistently be providing sufficient timeframes when publicising funding opportunities for third sector projects to enable smaller organisations to have the capacity to engage. This is particularly important where consortia or partnership is required as this can take significant time and resource to facilitate effectively.

1.3 Buyer events held by local authority commissioners are effective in enabling third sector organisations to engage. Where these are effective, measures that allow smaller and specialist projects involvement are taken, which include one-to-one time with commissioners as well as support workshops in regards to building consortia. However, these practices are not universally used across councils in Wales.

2. How effective are councils' systems for awarding third sector projects?

Comments

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2.1 An issue which has been highlighted to Welsh Women's Aid is a lack of understanding or misunderstanding of the EU Procurement legislation by decision makers. Local authority commissioners are going out for competitive tender when this is not necessary. Procurement teams and commissioners are not taking note of the threshold for the new light touch regime of €750,000 (approximately £560,000), which is higher than previous regulations. This means that contracts under this size do not need to go through a competitive tendering process and commissioners can be creative in their approaches, including using grant funding if they wish. The new directives clearly state that member states are free to secure the types of services outlined above in ways other than contracts. This is not happening in practice with local authorities pushing forward competitive tendering for small contracts. This is not cost effective for either the local authority or third sector as it takes significant resource for both to engage in a competitive tender process.

2.2 There are concerns that commissioning arrangements in Wales often fail to effectively take into account the needs and experiences of survivors, the high-quality provision delivered by specialist services and their impact on violence against women prevention, or the gendered nature of domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women. This is in spite of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015, which will introduce statutory commissioning guidance and a new violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence national strategy in 2016. Additionally, the European Directive on Victims' Rights was introduced in November 2015, which includes obligations for states to ensure the provision of specialist services for victims of domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women.

2.3 Overall there are varying practices across local authorities, some of our specialist member services have reported examples of good practice but many have given examples of problematic practice. These include:

- Failure to effectively carry out Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) on commissioning strategies, needs assessments and decisions. EAI's have been said to be tick-box exercises, rather than a proper assessment of impact on communities of interest and across protected characteristics.
- Varying scoring of tenders on value for money/quality ratio. Some local authorities are prioritising price over quality, for instance Carmarthenshire Supporting People stated they would score bids 60/40 cost/quality in a specific commissioning process.
- There is an understanding the local authorities are driving through cuts via competitive tendering. Many services have faced consecutive years of cuts and are at the point where they cannot face any further cuts and survive.
- Commissioning processes are not recognising the need for specialist services for domestic abuse, often awarding contracts to the cheapest provider (often large, generic providers without any experience in delivering domestic abuse services). Welsh Women's Aid have routinely heard that commissioners lack understanding

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Welsh Government



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about the role of, and need for, specialist services, leading to a risk of generic providers winning contracts for services that require specialist domestic abuse knowledge.

- Service specifications are often developed without consultation of specialist knowledge of the sector meaning that they don't meet demand or need.

3. How effective are councils' systems for managing third sector projects?

Comments:

3.1 Again practice is varied and often dependent on individual relationships rather than overall council systems. Some of our member services report poor management of contracts with commissioners who often do not have the understanding of the project areas they are managing.

3.2 Lack of communication on funding decisions has been a particular issue with some of the sector not being informed of funding for services until weeks before the next financial year. This uncertainty means that services place survivors at risk by having to instigate exit strategies within services, and cannot properly plan for the year ahead, let alone innovate and develop new projects to support women and children who have experienced abuse. It is also hard to retain staff leading to a loss of knowledge and skills in the sector.

4. How effective are councils' systems for reviewing third sector projects?

Comments:

4.1 Welsh Women's Aid's services have reported often been forced to review projects to facilitate cuts rather than to improve outcomes. They are being asked to restructure services to provide more for less.

4.2 Many commissioners fail to understand outcomes-based commissioning and processes for strategic commissioning, fail to understand or facilitate co-production arrangements when developing or reviewing services and fail to understand how best to meet service users' needs. Outcome measures are often generic or not meaningful for survivors of abuse. Concentration is on outputs rather than medium to longer term outcomes for service users and for local communities. Multiple outcome measures are used by different commissioning teams leading to additional work for service providers when they are only funded for service user contact time.

4.3 Needs assessment processes vary; some local authorities have not included specialist services in their needs assessments. In many areas service users have not been meaningfully engaged with across services to inform reviews or needs assessments.





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5. How effective is current partnership working between councils and third sector organisations?

Comments:

5.1 There is still a significant need for greater transparency in how partnership relations are developed and how subsequent funding decisions are made. We have examples of lack of clarity and transparency about how services and providers access public sector funds. There appears to be little consideration of needs assessments or evidence of what works or of best practice across the UK, which leads to duplication and 'reinvention' of service models without regards for learning from other areas. This is not an approach that demonstrates value for money.

5.2 There is a lack of resources provided to small organisations to enable them to engage with partnership work.

5.3 Equality of relationships in partnerships can be problematic with the power being concentrated with the local authorities as the funding organisation, without sufficient attention being given to consider ways of sharing power and decision making.

5.4 In some areas, not all third sector organisations are effectively represented on relevant partnerships; this can be problematic for reasons of transparency and fairness.

6. How has the move away from grant funding to greater payment for services under contract affected your organisation?

Comments:

6.1 Competitiveness of contract based funding has greatly impacted on smaller specialist services. Some have merged with larger organisations in order to be able to be partake in the process. Other services have restructured and remodelled in an attempt to absorb funding cuts that have come alongside the move to contracts based funding.

6.2 Funding to services via contracts has also meant that they are less able to be responsive and needs-led as they do not have the flexibility to act independently as grant funding allowed them to. This means that though they may be best placed to identify changes in demand or need they do not have the flexibility in their contracts from funders to be responsive to this.

6.3 Delivering a project can be resource intensive in back office work, however this is not always included in the funding offered by local authorities. Services tell us they are only funded by Supporting People for the direct contact-time with a client, which limits the time they can spend with survivors and the length of support they can offer. This means their management and governance, supervision and support, administration and monitoring, and other vital back-office functions go unfunded.



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7. To what extent does council funding of third sector services deliver the intended benefits and outcomes?

Comments:

7.1 As mentioned above in 4.1, services are being forced to review projects to facilitate cuts rather than to improve outcomes. They are being asked to restructure services to provide more for less. This essentially means that the benefits to service users are sometimes being reduced. A key example is that there is a shortage of children’s workers across the country, and those in post are over-stretched.

7.2 As set out in 4.2 above, outcome measures are often generic or not meaningful. Concentration is on outputs rather than longer term outcomes for service users. Despite this service users repeatedly tell us that third sector domestic abuse and sexual violence services are the best at meeting their diverse and complex needs and in helping them achieve positive change in their lives.

7.3 Nationally, outcomes frameworks for Supporting People, Social Services, the Well-Being of Future Generations, and Violence against Women are not aligned and this risks creating further confusion at a local level when it comes to considering what outcomes should inform commissioning practice.

8. How effectively do councils fund third sector services?

Comments:

9. Do you have any other comments that you would like to make?

Comments:

9.1 Welsh Women’s Aid do not have any additional comments.



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Annex 1

All Wales local government improvement study: council funding of third sector services

1. How effective are councils' systems for publicising third sector projects?

Very effective		Effective		Not very effective	x	Don't know	
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Comments:

2. How effective are councils' systems for awarding third sector projects?

Very effective		Effective		Not very effective	x	Don't know	
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Comments: No consistent approach and varies between departments

3. How effective are councils' systems for managing third sector projects?

Very effective		Effective		Not very effective		Don't know	x
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Comments:

4. How effective are councils' systems for reviewing third sector projects?

Very effective		Effective		Not very effective	x	Don't know	
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Comments: Not coherent and no standard system. Can be very piecemeal and sporadic or rather onerous with a lack of recognition of pressures placed on third sector project

5. How effective is current partnership working between councils and third sector organisations?

Very effective		Effective		Not very effective	x	Don't know	
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Comments: Again this will vary depending on department. It can be very good with two-way communication and an appreciation of work undertaken, pressures faced



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etc. On the other hand, decisions can be made with no consultation and with very little notice.

6. How has the move away from grant funding to greater payment for services under contract affected your organisation?

Very effective		Effective		Not very effective		Don't know	
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Comments: Do not affect us

7. To what extent does council funding of third sector services deliver the intended benefits and outcomes?

Very effective		Effective	x	Not very effective		Don't know	
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Comments:

8. How effectively do councils fund third sector services?

Very effective		Effective		Not very effective	x	Don't know	
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Comments:

9. Do you have any other comments that you would like to make?



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Annex 2

All Wales local government improvement study: council funding of third sector services

1. How effective are councils' systems for publicising third sector projects?

Table with 8 columns: Very effective, Effective (x), Not very effective, Don't know

Comments:

2. How effective are councils' systems for awarding third sector projects?

Table with 8 columns: Very effective, Effective (x), Not very effective, Don't know

Comments:

3. How effective are councils' systems for managing third sector projects?

Table with 8 columns: Very effective, Effective (x), Not very effective, Don't know

Comments:

4. How effective are councils' systems for reviewing third sector projects?

Table with 8 columns: Very effective, Effective (x), Not very effective, Don't know

Comments:

5. How effective is current partnership working between councils and third sector organisations?

Table with 8 columns: Very effective, Effective (x), Not very effective, Don't know

Comments:

6. How has the move away from grant funding to greater payment for services under contract affected your organisation?



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Very effective		Effective	x	Not very effective		Don't know	
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Comments:

7. To what extent does council funding of third sector services deliver the intended benefits and outcomes?

Very effective		Effective	x	Not very effective		Don't know	
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Comments:

8. How effectively do councils fund third sector services?

Very effective		Effective	x	Not very effective		Don't know	
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Comments:

9. Do you have any other comments that you would like to make?



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Annex 3

All Wales local government improvement study: council funding of third sector services

1. How effective are councils' systems for publicising third sector projects?

Very effective		Effective		Not very effective	✓	Don't know	
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Comments:

2. How effective are councils' systems for awarding third sector projects?

Very effective		Effective		Not very effective	✓	Don't know	
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Comments: The intention to have unified systems across councils for awarding contracts has not materialised. Each council has different systems and a lack of understanding of procuring services from the third sector which often leads to opportunities for contracts being withdrawn after a lot of time, effort and money have been incurred by the third sector.

3. How effective are councils' systems for managing third sector projects?

Very effective		Effective		Not very effective	✓	Don't know	
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Comments: Overly bureaucratic

4. How effective are councils' systems for reviewing third sector projects?

Very effective		Effective		Not very effective	✓	Don't know	
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Comments: There does not appear to be a standardised approach to reviewing contracts in the third sector. For example, contracts that have been successfully reviewed and receive positive comments about the effectiveness of the service would still not be considered for a repeat contract, whereas most of the Council's Standing Orders allows them to award continuation funding if the service is deemed as a quality provision meeting a local need.



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5. How effective is current partnership working between councils and third sector organisations?

Very effective		Effective		Not very effective	✓	Don't know	
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Comments: Very patchy, some councils are being pro-active and engaging the third sector, but the majority are still adopting the approach that they will dictate to the third sector about how we work.

6. How has the move away from grant funding to greater payment for services under contract affected your organisation?

Very effective		Effective		Not very effective	✓	Don't know	
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Comments: Not made any impact at all.

7. To what extent does council funding of third sector services deliver the intended benefits and outcomes?

Very effective		Effective		Not very effective	✓	Don't know	
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Comments: Because of short term contracts and no guarantee of repeat funding benefits and outcomes are not always deliverable. The majority of projects in the third sector look at early prevention, holistic approaches where the benefits are not measurable immediately, there is a need for more long term planning.

8. How effectively do councils fund third sector services?

Very effective		Effective		Not very effective	✓	Don't know	
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Comments: As number 7



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9. Do you have any other comments that you would like to make?

Comments: There is a disparity in the Councils manner of working. The third sector is being asked to work in collaboration to reduce costs, eliminate duplication and improve service efficiency for the end user. The third sector has taken this on board and now there are well established multi-agency working practices across the sector. For example, the drive to introduce One Stop Shops to 'house' organisations working with vulnerable people has seen a significant improvement in services. Yet, councils still work in departments, each with a separate budget, all of which work independently to reduce costs. If, like the third sector, councils worked more collaboratively within their own departments and with other councils to pool their resources and think more strategically this would result in a better service, and reduce the need to cut funding for front line services.





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Annex 4

All Wales local government improvement study: council funding of third sector services

1. How effective are councils' systems for publicising third sector projects?

Very effective		Effective	x	Not very effective		Don't know	
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Comments: By and large it is effective when it is topical

2. How effective are councils' systems for awarding third sector projects?

Very effective		Effective	x	Not very effective		Don't know	
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Comments: Commissioning processes are rigorous but sometimes other systems are not so fair as opportunities are not always publicised widely

3. How effective are councils' systems for managing third sector projects?

Very effective		Effective		Not very effective		Don't know	x
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Comments:

4. How effective are councils' systems for reviewing third sector projects?

Very effective	x	Effective		Not very effective		Don't know	
----------------	---	-----------	--	--------------------	--	------------	--

Comments: Third Sector projects are rigorously audited and monitored

5. How effective is current partnership working between councils and third sector organisations?

Very effective		Effective		Not very effective	x	Don't know	
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Comments: Their expectations of Third Sector as a partner are disproportionate in that there will be many hoops to clear and vast amounts of information required for not a lot of funding support

6. How has the move away from grant funding to greater payment for services under contract affected your organisation?

Very effective		Effective	x	Not very effective		Don't know	
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Comments: As far as Supporting People is concerned it is good but in terms of other services, it is difficult in terms of getting the Council to recognise the need to contract other services that were previously grant funded

7. To what extent does council funding of third sector services deliver the intended benefits and outcomes?

Very effective		Effective	x	Not very effective		Don't know	
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Comments: In my experience, the Third Sector delivery is high quality, best value, which is what Council's want

8. How effectively do councils fund third sector services?

Very effective		Effective		Not very effective	x	Don't know	
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Comments: As previously stated, their expectations of Third Sector service delivery are high and not necessarily realistic for the amount of funding or in some cases the lack of funding input by them

9. Do you have any other comments that you would like to make?

Comments: It would be good to have some standards/requirements for local authorities to properly support and fund their Third Sector service providers.



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Annex 5

All Wales local government improvement study: council funding of third sector services

1. How effective are councils' systems for publicising third sector projects?

Table with 8 columns: Very effective, Effective, Not very effective, Don't know. Includes a checkmark in the 'Not very effective' column.

Comments:

2. How effective are councils' systems for awarding third sector projects?

Table with 8 columns: Very effective, Effective, Not very effective, Don't know. Includes a checkmark in the 'Not very effective' column.

Comments:

3. How effective are councils' systems for managing third sector projects?

Table with 8 columns: Very effective, Effective, Not very effective, Don't know. Includes a checkmark in the 'Not very effective' column.

Comments:

4. How effective are councils' systems for reviewing third sector projects?

Table with 8 columns: Very effective, Effective, Not very effective, Don't know. Includes a checkmark in the 'Not very effective' column.

Comments:

5. How effective is current partnership working between councils and third sector organisations?

Table with 8 columns: Very effective, Effective, Not very effective, Don't know. Includes a checkmark in the 'Not very effective' column.

Comments: SP team very good but others not



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6. How has the move away from grant funding to greater payment for services under contract affected your organisation?

Very effective		Effective	✓	Not very effective		Don't know	
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Comments:

7. To what extent does council funding of third sector services deliver the intended benefits and outcomes?

Very effective		Effective	✓	Not very effective		Don't know	
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Comments:

8. How effectively do councils fund third sector services?

Very effective		Effective		Not very effective	✓	Don't know	
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Comments:

9. Do you have any other comments that you would like to make?