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## *Welsh Women's Aid Briefing, May 2016*

# Wales elections and the new legislative programme: What it means for the Violence Against Women Sector

Following an exciting start to the new Welsh Government, with the entry of UKIP to the Assembly and a tied vote for First Minister, the leader, cabinet and initial legislative programme for Welsh Labour's new minority Government has now been announced. Across the UK, new Police and Crime Commissioners were also elected on May the 5th, and on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May the new legislative programme for the UK Government was announced during the Queen's Speech.

This briefing will provide an overview of these new developments, focusing on areas which will impact those working to prevent violence against women in Wales.

### **National Assembly for Wales elections May 2016: Overview**

Welsh Labour now has a total of 29 seats in the Senedd, one less than in the fourth Assembly with the loss of former Minister for Public Services Leighton Andrews' Rhondda seat to Leanne Wood, and two less than the required 31 for a majority. As such, although they are still the largest party in the Assembly by some margin, Welsh Labour will now be forced to work closely with other parties to gain consensus throughout this term. The main opposition party is now Plaid Cymru with 12 seats (up one), replacing the Welsh Conservatives as the second largest party in Wales, who have now dropped to third place with 11 seats (down three). UKIP have also entered the Assembly for the first time with seven new AMs, while the Welsh Liberal Democrats lost four seats, leaving only their former leader as the sole representative of the party.

After an unprecedented tied vote between the Labour and Plaid Cymru leaders on the 11<sup>th</sup> of May,<sup>1</sup> Carwyn Jones AM has now been re-elected as the First Minister and has appointed his cabinet, which, in another unprecedented move, includes the Liberal Democrat Kirsty Williams. The appointments are as follows:

Carl Sargent AM

#### **Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children**

*(including Anti-slavery, domestic abuse, gender based violence and sexual violence)*

Mark Drakeford AM

#### **Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government**

Kirsty Williams AM<sup>2</sup>

#### **Cabinet Secretary for Education**

Lesley Griffiths AM

#### **Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs**

Ken Skates AM

#### **Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure**

Vaughan Gething AM

#### **Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport**

Jane Hutt AM

#### **Leader of the House and Chief Whip**

Julie James

#### **Minister for Skills and Science**

Alun Davies AM

#### **Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language**

Rebecca Evans AM

#### **Minister for Social Services and Public Health**

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-politics-36269820>

<sup>2</sup> Liberal Democrat





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Although there is gender parity in this current cabinet line-up, this fifth Assembly now has a total of 25 female AMs (42% the same as in the fourth Assembly), six fewer than in 2005-7 when the Assembly achieved gender parity. There are also a large number of new faces in the Siambr, with a total of 22 new Assembly Members having been elected.

### The First 100 Days

The First Minister has now outlined his plans for the first 100 days of the new Welsh Government (until the end of August 2016). The plan was agreed with the main opposition party, Plaid Cymru, but does not constitute a formal coalition or a confidence and supply agreement. No new legislation will be brought in during this period. The areas outlined in this plan are:

- Securing the future of the Welsh steel industry
- Campaigning to remain in the European Union (E.U.)
- Working with the UK Government on the Wales Bill
- Establishing a "*new way of doing law-making...better suited to the parliamentary responsibilities*" of the Welsh Assembly.
- Establishing a new Cabinet Officer to work on the six principle pledges in Welsh Labour's manifesto
- Three liaison committees to be formed with Plaid Cymru to work on Finance, Legislation and the Constitution.

After this initial 100 days, the first Minister outlined that some Bills would be laid, including legislation to remove the defense of 'reasonable chastisement' of children (sometimes referred to as smacking). Welsh Women's Aid have campaigned for this change over a number of years and support the introduction of this legislation.

Other priorities which are likely to be agreed following the 100 initial period have also been outlined. These priorities include:

- Extending free childcare to 30 hours per week, and ensuring this is covered equally geographically and cross language provision; and
- Conducting a review of Social and Health Care services.

A 'progressive agreement' was also made with Kirsty Williams AM (Welsh Liberal Democrats). This agreement included the following relevant areas for the sector:

- Health: Ending Mental Health Discrimination
- Housing: 20,000 extra affordable homes and a new 'Rent to Own' model
- Finance: A funding floor for Local Government Settlements

### Queen's Speech

The Queen's Speech is the mark of the State Opening of Parliament. The speech outlines the legislation the UK Government hope to enact over the coming year. The legislation outlined in this year's Queen's Speech which is of relevance to Wales and the violence against women sector was as follows:

- Digital Economy Bill, will restrict access to pornographic websites.
- Prison and Courts Reform Bill, giving greater freedom to Prison Governors, improving educational and mental health provision in prisons, and modernising the courts through use of digital technology
- British Bill of Rights. The UK Government has said it will consult with the Welsh Government and the public before introducing the measure, which will be based on the

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European convention on Human Rights and the "common law" of England and Wales and replace the Human Rights Act 1998.

## European Union Referendum

Much of what has been outlined in both the legislative programmes will depend on the results of the European Union (E.U.) referendum, voting for which will be held on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2016. If the UK vote to leave the E.U. it is likely that the priorities outlined will be affected. The Welsh Government have committed to campaign for a 'remain' vote.

## Police and Crime Commissioners

It is the role of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) to oversee how crime is tackled in their force areas across England and Wales, and are responsible for holding the police force to account. PCCs engage with the public and victims of crimes to help set police and crime plans, and ensure that the police force budget is spent appropriately.

The following Police and Crime Commissioners were elected in Wales:

Dyfed-Powys	Dafydd Llywelyn (Plaid)
South Wales:	Alun Michael (returning - Labour) <sup>3</sup>
North Wales:	Arfon Jones (Plaid)
Gwent:	Jeff Cuthbert (Labour)

Below are the key areas relevant to the violence against women sector, as outlined in each of the PCC's manifestos:

Dyfed-Powys' **Dafydd Llywelyn** outlined that he would:

- Hold public meetings across the Force – open to everyone;
- Not appoint an unelected Deputy Commissioner and I will reduce external consultant costs;
- Increase the use of volunteers and keep local stations and offices open;
- Not privatise core police support functions that will fragment the delivery of services.
- Ensure that front line policing is supported and resourced in line with the needs of the public;
- Support and fund services for our youth and vulnerable groups;
- Work with local authority departments, charities and communities;
- Resource specialist units to deal with serious, organised and on-line crime;

South Wales' **Alun Michael**, who prioritised violence against women during his past term in office, set out six priority areas:

- To make the community safer by keeping policing local
- To cut crime & disorder in co-operation with all public agencies
- To protect the most vulnerable in communities
- To spend money wisely to protect local police team
- To challenge the criminal justice system to meet the needs of victims
- To play a part nationally and in tackling online threats

<sup>3</sup> Re-elected





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North Wales' **Arfon Jones** pledged to:

- Carry out a review of core policing in North Wales.
- Savings to be made by targeting resources more effectively
- Better partnership working to support the vulnerable.
- Provide all frontline officers with 'Body Worn Videos' which would "improve evidence gathering and secure more convictions, especially in 'domestic violence' cases".
- Not to outsource police services and ensure that tendering for services benefits the economy of North Wales as far as is practicable.
- Liaise closely and seek to negotiate with the National Offender Management Service regarding policing issues around the new prison in Wrexham.

Gwent's **Jeff Cuthbert**, a former Assembly Member, outlined his priorities as follows:

- A visible presence on streets and communities.
- Ensuring that crimes such as domestic abuse, hate crime, child exploitation, and modern slavery are given the attention that they deserve.
- Developing and maintaining good community cohesion.
- Working with the Voluntary Sector so that their expertise in a range of areas (e.g. mental health and homelessness) can help inform on-going policies and practices.
- Working with the Chief Constable so that principles of social justice become the cornerstone of police practice.
- Working with the Welsh Government and the devolved public services and on practical issues of support such as the provision of the additional Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) for Gwent.

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*Welsh Women's Aid will continue to monitor the impact of any political changes on survivors, children and young people, families and specialist services in Wales. If you have any feedback for us about how these new arrangements affect you, or if you have any comments or questions about this briefing, please don't hesitate to get in touch with:*

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