

## Section 7

### Reporting Form for Focus Group

#### Equality Objectives 2016-2020

We would be very grateful if you can type up your handwritten notes and submit the form electronically to [sepmailbox@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:sepmailbox@wales.gsi.gov.uk)

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Date of Focus Group	18 <sup>th</sup> , 22 <sup>nd</sup> , 23 <sup>rd</sup> , 26 <sup>th</sup> , 29 <sup>th</sup> June & 3 <sup>rd</sup> July
Location of Focus Group	Merthyr Tydfil, Cardiff, Pontypool, Swansea, Abergavenny, Llandudno
Protected Characteristic of Focus Group	Men
Number of Participants	67 across 6 sites
<b>Step 2</b> <b>Discussion on the current Equality Objectives</b>  <b>Please complete for the objectives which your group discussed.</b>	
<b>Objective 1</b> <b><i>Strengthen advice, information and advocacy services to help people with protected characteristics understand and exercise their rights and make informed choices</i></b>	
Do you think this issue should continue to be prioritised in an equality objective for the Welsh Government in 2016-20?	
Yes – very strongly. It was felt that the wording should be changed to ensure that it is better understood by professionals and the public that everyone deserves to be able to access advice, information and advocacy services and that the use of the words 'protected characteristics' included in the existing definition is a barrier to that understanding so should be removed.	
If yes, do you think it needs to be updated and if so, how?	
It was striking that none of the 60+ participants felt that there were any services that supported men as a group with protected characteristics as a priority. This was particularly significant when viewed against the wealth of services targeted at providing advice, information and advocacy for women.	

<p>If you think it is no longer a priority as an equality objective, why is this?</p> <p>No</p>
<p><b>Objective 2</b>  <b><i>Work with partners to identify and address the causes of the gender, ethnicity and disability pay and employment differences</i></b></p>
<p>Do you think this issue should continue to be prioritised in an equality objective for the Welsh Government in 2016-20?</p> <p>None of the focus groups looked at this Objective in detail</p>
<p>If yes, do you think it needs to be updated and if so, how?</p>
<p>If you think it is no longer a priority as an equality objective, why is this?</p>
<p><b>Objective 3</b>  <b><i>Reduce the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)</i></b></p>
<p>Do you think this issue should continue to be prioritised in an equality objective for the Welsh Government in 2016-20?</p> <p>None of the focus groups looked at this Objective in detail</p>
<p>If yes, do you think it needs to be updated and if so, how?</p>
<p>If you think it is no longer a priority as an equality objective, why is this?</p>
<p><b>Objective 4</b>  <b><i>Reduce the incidence of all forms of violence against women, domestic abuse, 'honour' based violence, hate crime, bullying and elder abuse</i></b></p>

<p>Do you think this issue should continue to be prioritised in an equality objective for the Welsh Government in 2016-20?</p> <p>Yes – but with substantial modification</p>
<p>If yes, do you think it needs to be updated and if so, how?</p> <p>It was felt by men that explicitly identifying the ‘victim groups’ had the unintended consequence of making it more difficult for individuals who suffered violence and abuse to receive help and support if they did not fall into one of the named categories. The Cardiff and Llandudno consultations raised concerns that LGBT, disability and racial groups are not expressly stated in the Objective hence may be overlooked. It was proposed that the wording should be altered to remove specific groups and replace that with a wider remit of reducing the incidence of <b>all</b> forms of violence and abuse.</p>
<p>If you think it is no longer a priority as an equality objective, why is this?</p>
<p><b>Objective 5</b>  <b><i>Tackle barriers and support disabled people so that they can live independently and exercise choice and control in their daily lives</i></b></p>
<p>Do you think this issue should continue to be prioritised in an equality objective for the Welsh Government in 2016-20?</p> <p>None of the focus groups looked at this Objective in detail</p>
<p>If yes, do you think it needs to be updated and if so, how?</p>

<p>If you think it is no longer a priority as an equality objective, why is this?</p>
<p><b>Objective 6</b>  <i>Put the needs of service users at the heart of delivery in key public services, in particular health, housing and social services, so that they are responsive to the needs of people with protected characteristics</i></p>
<p>Do you think this issue should continue to be prioritised in an equality objective for the Welsh Government in 2016-20?</p> <p>Yes – very strongly</p>
<p>If yes, do you think it needs to be updated and if so, how?</p> <p>Many men reported feeling that their voices are the least heard of any group with protected characteristics in relation to key public services.</p> <p>It was also felt that singling out some services for mention has the unintended consequence of reducing the visibility of those not mentioned.</p> <p><b>Housing</b> – men are overwhelmingly the largest group affected by homelessness yet very few initiatives or services are designed with the needs of men at heart. Men are often seen to be the lowest priority as children are assumed to be with the mother if the parents are separated.</p> <p><b>Mental Health &amp; wellbeing</b> – men reported great difficulty in accessing support from statutory services for their mental health. One respondent spoke of his experience of asking for bereavement counselling following the removal of his children into care by the local authority. He said that his GP said there was nothing for men – but there were many options to support women’s mental well-being. It was also noted that suicide victims were overwhelmingly male (more than 80% in 2013) yet the Welsh Government strategy did not focus on men’s needs choosing instead a talking strategy more appropriate to women –possibly justified by including suicide with the self harm agenda (which affects more women). This strategy flies in the face of the needs of men and of the corresponding strategies in England and Scotland.</p> <p><b>Domestic Abuse</b> – the Welsh Government support for Safe Wales’ Dyn Project was also singled out for criticism. The service provides help and support for male victims of domestic abuse. The way the service is delivered was felt to be deeply discriminatory by individuals who had accessed it because service users are not informed that they are being ‘screened’ to determine that whether they are ‘perpetrators’ masquerading as ‘victims’. Individuals are also not told that the service reserves the right to pass on their details to other domestic abuse agencies to ensure that women and children are protected.</p>

<p>Several individuals commented that they felt that organisations whose history and heritage were strongly from a feminist perspective were fundamentally unsuited to represent the needs and issues of men.</p>
<p>If you think it is no longer a priority as an equality objective, why is this?</p>
<p><b>Objective 7</b> <b><i>Improve the engagement and participation of under represented groups in public appointments</i></b></p>
<p>Do you think this issue should continue to be prioritised in an equality objective for the Welsh Government in 2016-20?</p> <p>None of the focus groups looked at this Objective in detail</p>
<p>If yes, do you think it needs to be updated and if so, how?</p>
<p>If you think it is no longer a priority as an equality objective, why is this?</p>
<p><b>Step 3</b> <b>Discussion on difficulties / issues encountered</b></p>
<p>What difficulties/barriers have you faced because of your protected characteristic?</p> <p>The greatest barrier that was identified by men across Wales was the fact that most services didn't see them as having a protected characteristic at all. This fact has led to the unintended consequence of men being seen as the 'benchmark' against which all other groups measure their disadvantage. The result of this perception is that where men are disadvantaged – eg health / mental health / housing / social services / domestic abuse etc – most services are either disinterested in supporting them or actively oppose men's equality.</p> <p>Most attendees confirmed that they had personally faced discrimination against them by public (or publically funded) services because of their protected characteristic eg men felt they were low priority for housing as it was assumed that they were 'single' and children were assumed to be with the mother who received high priority as a result. When the group was asked whether there were any services they knew about that were specifically targeted at support for men no-one could think of any (with the exception of the Dyn Project from Safer Wales *see below)</p> <p>Significant gaps in the provision of support for men were identified in the following key areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child contact disputes – including benefits claims as a result of not having 'primary carer' status</li> <li>• DV support services – where organisations with a female centric ethos have changed their names and claim to have embraced a gender neutral approach</li> <li>• Engaging with Children's Services – where social workers regard men as a danger until proven otherwise and then as an irrelevance</li> </ul>

- Dealing with the Police – particularly in relation to child contact related problems eg harassment etc
- Mental Health support – where women seem to be prioritised for support

### **DOMESTIC ABUSE – DV services / MARAC / Police**

Many men had experience of being abused – verbally, physically, emotionally and financially by female partners or ex-partners. They found that Police and domestic abuse agencies were overwhelmingly focussed on the male perpetrator / female victim paradigm and were often hostile or dismissive of the needs of men. An example that was shared was that the first thing male victims read on the All Wales Domestic Abuse Helpline website is **‘While the majority of people who experience abuse are women, men also experience abuse and need support in the same way’**. Men expressed a view that being told that most victims are women doesn’t feel like it is a response focussed on the specific needs of men.

In relation to Police many stated that their reporting of abuse was dismissed with comments such as ‘Hey mate, grow a pair’ or ‘We’re not going to record the incident because we don’t believe you or we think that you’re only complaining to score points against your ex’. Many others said that Police refused to record their complaints of abuse or perhaps more worryingly sought to put pressure on the complainant to drop their complaint because of the impact it might have on the their children if the female perpetrator was arrested.

One such incident was shared in the Merthyr consultation where a man had his tyres slashed with his two small children in the car by his mother-in-law yet the Police urged him not to make a complaint because the only witness was his 7 year old son and the children would be very upset to see their grandmother arrested. The same man then reported a separate incident where a female Police officer harassed him by aggressively instructing him to ‘take the children back to their mother’ during a dispute over child arrangements.

Many men raised issues around domestic violence support where Police, Housing and specialist DV support services were felt to be deliberately discriminatory. Several individuals (mostly in Cardiff) had experience of engaging with the Dyn Project (\*) They stated that they had felt discriminated against by this service in the way that individual callers are ‘screened’ to determine whether they are perpetrators of DV when they present to the service as victims.

### **CHILDREN’S SERVICES**

Those men who had contacted with Children’s services reported it to be universally negative and discriminatory. They felt that they were treated as second class parents and were not involved or consulted even when they had PR. Men reported that social workers would marginalise them and seek to exclude them from decisions about the care and best interests of their children. It was also noted by many that a range of funded services were available for women in dealing with children’s services eg various Women’s Aid groups such as BAWSO etc while other services conjoined the child with mothers as an automatic default such as Llamau. When dealing with statutory services the 97% female workforce in Early Years settings was felt to be a barrier to inclusion by men who often faced attending meetings with more than a dozen agencies present where none of them were interested in engaging with men. Many examples of poor practice were shared by individuals who expressed a strongly held view that Children’s Services are ‘institutionally sexist’ in their experience.

Men also reported their experience of being told by social workers that they were not

allowed to see their children despite the fact that there were no Court Orders in place. These were clear examples of social workers '*making it up as they go along*' as one respondent put it. Advice on how to engage successfully with Children's Services was therefore seen as a priority

## **MENTAL HEALTH / SUICIDE PREVENTION**

Men attending the focus groups expressed a strong view that they faced discrimination from services primarily designed with a female perspective – even when the overwhelming majority of service users were male.

Are there areas of inequality or barriers to equality which fall outside the current equality objectives and are of particular importance to the group?

No areas of inequality were identified by attendees that could not be accommodated within the existing Objectives. This flowed from the more 'inclusive' approach proposed through removing words and sentences from the existing Objectives that tend to focus attention on some of the services or areas of inequality.

What are they and why?

### **Step 4**

#### **Final Reflections**

Additional comments

It is sad to report that the overwhelming response from men to the experience of being consulted about equalities issues for the first time as part of a Welsh Government process was one of resignation to the fact that nothing will change.

The experiences shared across all 6 focus groups in Merthyr Tydfil, Cardiff, Pontypool, Swansea, Abergavenny and Llandudno were broadly similar and pointed to a consistent wide ranging problem.

Many of the problems identified earlier were felt to be as a result of the overwhelmingly female workforce in Children's Services and Family support, and in a strong feminist agenda that has rightly drawn attention to the difficulties faced by women in a number of areas. The unintended consequence of this has been that men are seen as being somehow less deserving, more capable of helping themselves and less troubled by issues of disadvantage and discrimination. Statistics however do not back those views up around homelessness, suicide, mental health difficulties, engagement with children's services & family support and even in terms of domestic abuse where proportionate services are not in place.