



Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru
Older People's Commissioner for Wales

Accommodation and support for older people experiencing abuse

Making the case for change

**An independent voice and champion
for older people**

Introduction

Thousands of older people in Wales are experiencing domestic abuse. During the pandemic and its restrictions on everyday life, the opportunities to identify older people at risk of or experiencing abuse have fallen. At the same time, the restrictions may have exacerbated existing abusive situations or led to new ones.

In order to protect older people and ensure access to the right support services the Commissioner established an Abuse Action Group¹ at the beginning of the pandemic. This group, now numbering over 30 organisations, is working collaboratively and with great commitment to raise awareness of what older people can do to keep themselves safe and protected, promote the importance of the role we can all play in protecting older people, and promote the services and support available to help older people. The core message of the Group to older people is 'you are not alone'.

Through the Action Group's work, the issue of the lack of accommodation and support for those needing to leave abusive relationships became apparent. In order to better understand the current situation and identify ways to improve it, a survey of Directors of Social Services was undertaken, and an online workshop event was held on 4th November to provide an opportunity to share information and discuss the way forward.

The event was chaired by the Older People's Commissioner for Wales, Heléna Herklots, and was held under Chatham House rules (a list of attendees is set out in the appendix). The event was also attended by the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services, Julie Morgan MS, and we are grateful to her for addressing the event and supporting this work.

This report summarises key points from the event, provides additional context and sets out the next steps.

¹ Information about the Abuse Action Group and the Abuse Steering Group can be found at <https://olderpeople-wales.com/en/stopping-abuse/action-group.aspx>

Workshop Event

The purpose of the workshop was to:

- Identify what housing and support options are available/offered to an older person to flee domestic abuse, both in emergency and long-term circumstances
- Identify good practice and how this can be built upon within current accommodation options
- Discuss the provision of the care and support needs of older people who want to leave an abusive relationship
- Identify what options are offered to/explored with an older person to remove an abusive person from their home
- Consider options to raise awareness of current provision of accommodation options available

A survivor's experience

The event opened with a survivor sharing her story.

An older woman powerfully shared her experience of domestic abuse, how it began, the years spent trying to escape, the lack of appropriate options which would resolve her situation, her eventual escape and beginning of rebuilding her life.

Reflections were given on the barriers and complexity in leaving, what would have helped during this time and what was needed:

Property

The survivor explained the difficulty of leaving when you own your own property (in this case the property was jointly owned with the perpetrator). This difficulty was exacerbated by living in a rural area where there are few services.

Why is it the victim who has to leave? The survivor wanted her abuser to be removed and highlighted that in other countries they remove the perpetrator and then protect the survivor.

Being heard, wanting to be taken seriously and listened to

The survivor had to approach many different organisations and individuals many times including the police, referrals to MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference), and Independent Domestic Violence Advisers.

The financial cost

The cost of moving into a refuge was unclear but the survivor was ineligible for housing benefit and did not know how she would meet the cost.

Suitability of accommodation

As an older woman the survivor did not feel that a refuge was suitable for her and it would have also meant moving some distance away as there were no refuges in her rural area.

Older people's experiences

These experiences were echoed by other contributors who shared their knowledge of the experience of older people in abusive relationships.

'It's not a victim's job to navigate through services' – older people are having to try to fit into a system that is not designed for them. If they have care and support needs, or rely on the perpetrator for care and support, it can be particularly difficult to leave and to find suitable accommodation with the necessary support.

Knowing who and what is available to help you and how to access this help is crucial, but many older people struggle to find the information they need. For older people who are not online (41% of people over the age of 75) it is even more difficult to find information.

Older people may not self-identify that they are in abusive relationships: they may have been in abusive relationships for many years; they are less likely to report than younger people; and they may feel that the services are not for them. Examples were given of older victims being reluctant to access refuge space as they feel they would be taking the place of a younger victim.

Domestic abuse may include financial abuse as part of it, meaning that the older person may not feel that they can afford to leave.

Older people in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities may additionally face language barriers, and a lack of appropriate services.

Concerns were also shared that recognition of abuse experienced by older men is low, and that there is a lack of services appropriate for older men.

What is available for older people in Wales now?

There is a lack of evidence about what is currently available so a survey of the 22 local authority Directors of Social Services was undertaken.

Directors of Social Services Survey - Key Findings:

- There is a wide range of emergency accommodation available but it is difficult to ascertain whether there is enough specifically for older people.
- Accommodation to meet the needs of older people with disability/mobility issues seems scarce.
- It can be difficult to help people to move out of emergency provision into alternative accommodation.

(Based on responses from 19/22 local authorities)

Specific issues

Although some support services are free, such as drop ins and Independent Domestic Violence Advisers, the majority of accommodation is chargeable and not everyone is able to access funds to pay for services.

Whilst it is positive that local domestic abuse services are available across Wales, these are 'all age' services and are not always suitable for older people.

There is a lack of consistent data about the experiences of older people, the needs of older people and the accommodation and support services available. There is also no data on the numbers of older people accessing refuges in Wales.

Are changes needed to policy and legislation?

Positive progress has been made in Wales in recent years with the **Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014** and the **Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015**. However, there is less that is specifically for older people and a risk that older people are not well served by all age approaches.

The Domestic Abuse Bill is currently going through the UK Parliament and includes Domestic Abuse Protection Orders which aim to provide flexible, longer-term protection for victims. However, there will need to be changes to the provisions in the Bill to address the abuse that can occur after a relationship has ended. The passage of the Bill also presents an opportunity to remove the age cap on the collection of data on abuse in the England and Wales crime survey.

What needs to be done now and in the longer term?

Improve awareness

Improving awareness of the abuse of older people was seen as a fundamental building block to making progress. Measures suggested included:

- Communications that specifically target older people and do not rely solely on online channels, in order to help older people to recognise if they are in an abusive relationship and how they can get help.
- Organisations need to be proactive in reaching out to older people because they will miss many older people who need help if they rely on being approached.
- Organisations that are for all ages need to demonstrate that this includes older people through the language and imagery that they use.
- All of society has a role in promoting awareness; the important role of community pharmacists was highlighted.
- The importance of the first point of contact and first response for an older person reporting abuse was highlighted.
- Clear information about costs of services is needed.

Build the evidence

The lack of data on older people’s experiences can render these invisible. Action needs to be taken in Wales to change this.

Data collected by public bodies and Welsh Government needs to be broken down by age and analysed to identify issues and trends to feed into policy making and practice.

The Domestic Abuse Bill currently going through the UK Parliament must remove the age cap of 74 on data collection on abuse in the England and Wales Crime Survey.

Further research is needed to map the services and support available to older people in Wales, to identify gaps that need to be filled as well as good practice.

Further work also needs to be undertaken to enable older people to share their experiences and contribute to building evidence and policy.

Develop housing and support options

Experiencing domestic abuse can mean that you have a number of housing needs.

You may need emergency accommodation to be able to flee an abusive relationship and have a safe space to make decisions; appropriate housing for the longer term; the provision of accessible accommodation with support if you have a disability.

The location of the housing matters, particularly if the older person needs to be able to maintain support networks close to where they live currently. Dispersed self-contained housing units available in more areas could give older people better options.

For older people experiencing abuse, access to after-care support is important to address the impact of the abuse and there is a role for social services and health bodies in providing this.

Improve access to existing services and develop more specialist services for older people

The discussions at the event indicated that there is a need both to improve access to all age services and to develop and provide more services specifically for older people.

All age services need to examine whether they are meeting older people’s needs and doing enough to proactively reach out to older people. Training on the abuse of older people is needed, together with sharing good practice on working with older people and support for reviewing policies and procedures to ensure that they are inclusive of the diversity of the older population.

The commissioning of services needs to make sure that the needs of older people will be met, and this needs to be evidenced through data collection and monitoring.

Further work is needed on how to support older people experiencing abuse so that it is the perpetrator that has to leave, rather than the person being abused.

The policy of charging abuse victims for refuge accommodation should be reviewed and consideration given to making this free for at least a time limited period.

Improving access to justice

A number of contributors highlighted the difficulty of accessing legal aid and support.

This is a reserved matter and there are opportunities to progress this with the Designate Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales.

Working together

Making progress to deliver the required action - building on the interest generated and commitments made during the workshop event - will be made by working collaboratively and sharing learning within Wales and beyond. The Action Group on Abuse working with the Older People's Commissioner for Wales, provides a good mechanism for this, together with the groups and networks led by the Welsh Government, the Independent National Safeguarding Board, the Regional Safeguarding Boards and others.

Next steps

This report is being shared with everyone who participated in the event and is available on the Older People's Commissioner for Wales website for wider access.

Feedback and suggestions for action are welcomed and should be emailed to commissionerevents@olderpeoplewales.com by 8 January 2021.

These will be shared with the Abuse Action Group and Steering Group who will identify actions to take forward. Progress will be shared on the Older People's Commissioner for Wales website at: <https://olderpeoplewales.com/en/stopping-abuse/action-group.aspx>.

Thanks and Acknowledgements

Thank you to all who participated in the event and particularly the speakers:

- Judie, an abuse survivor
- Julie Morgan, MS Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services
- Julie Boothroyd, Chief Officer Social Care Safeguarding and Health Monmouthshire County Council
- Nicole Jacobs, Designate Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales
- Nicola Fitzpatrick, Head of Domestic Abuse and Gender Specific Services Llamau
- David Cowsill, Research Assistant and Choice Support Worker, DEWIS Choice
- Yasmin Khan, National Adviser for Violence against Women, Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence

Appendix: List of registered delegates

Heléna Herklots, Older People's Commissioner for Wales.
Amy Beasant-Simpson, Senior Practitioner, Community Initial Assessment Team. Swansea Council.
Ann Williams, Live Fear Free Helpline Manager, Welsh Women's Aid.
Anne Hopkins, Refuge Manager, West Wales Domestic Abuse Services.
Anne O'Regan, Vice Chair and Trustee, Both Parents Matter.
Anthony Hearn, Director of Housing and Communities, Merthyr Valley Homes.
Barry Stephens, Chair, Active Wales.
Beverly Allen, Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.
Bryony Parry, Communications Officer, All Wales Violence Prevention Unit.
Carol Wardman, Church in Wales.
Domestic Abuse and Gender Specific Services. Llamau.
Dr Jack Price, Research Officer, Wales centre for Public Policy.
Elizabeth Willington, Valleys to Coast.
Emily McCarron, Policy Manager – Equality and Human Rights
George Jones, Community Services and Inclusion Lead, Older People's Commissioner for Wales.
Huw Charles, Housing Management Branch, Welsh Government.
Jane Randall, Chair National Independent Safeguarding Board.
Janice Dent. Regional Lead Advisor Gwent VAWDASV, Newport City Council.
Jenifer French, Mental Health and Learning Disability Advisor, RCN.
Joanne Hopkins, Cymru Well Wales Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Support Hub Director.
Julie Boothroyd, Chief Officer Social Care Safeguarding and Health, Monmouthshire County Council.
Julie Morgan MS, Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services
Kay Hennessy, Work Programme Assistant, Older People's Commissioner for Wales.
Lana Snowden. All Wales Violence Prevention Unit
Leigh Holborn, Detective Inspector Public Protection, Gwent Police.
Louise Hughes, Head of Safeguarding and Advocacy, HOPE Project.
Lynda Wallis, Chair Welsh Senate for Older People.
Lynn Finn, Trustee and Events Co-ordinator, Cymru Older People's Alliance.
Mark Saunders, Senior Social Work Practitioner, Swansea Council.
Mary Ryan, Head of Corporate Safeguarding, Newport City Council.
Megan Stevens, VAWDASV Partnership Development Practice Lead,
Meryl Williams, Registered Social Worker; Professional Officer, BASW.
Michelle Chaplin, Detective Inspector Public Protection, Gwent Police
Michelle Lewis, Age Discrimination Lead, Older People's Commissioner for Wales.
Natalie Hancock, Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Regional Adviser Mid and West Wales.
Nicola Davis-Job, Acute Care and Leadership Adviser, RCN.
Nicola Evans, Rights and Equality Lead. Older People's Commissioner for Wales.
Nicola Fitzpatrick, - Head of Service delivery and quality assurance –

Nicola Stubbins, Corporate Director: Communities, Denbighshire County.
Nicole Jacobs, Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales.
Nikki Harvey, Head of Safeguarding, WAST.
Nikki Trimble, OWLS co-ordinator, West Wales Domestic Abuse Services.
Norma Barry, Managing Director, Inside Out.
Philip Mulraney, Health and Social Services Group, Welsh Government.
Rachael Nicholson, Director of Hourglass Cymru.
Rhian Bowen-Davies, Associate, Inside Out.
Rhys Jackson, Policy Officer, Older People's Commissioner for Wales.
Richard Sheahan, Independent Living Manager, EROSH.
Ruth Parness, Private Secretary to Julie Morgan MS.
Sally Rees, National third Sector Health & Social Care Facilitator, WCVA
Sara Evans, Detective Inspector. Protecting Vulnerable people Unit, North Wales Police.
Sarah Cooper, Head of Safeguarding and Advocacy, Welsh Government.
Sarah Kanyeihamba, Policy Manager VAWDASV, Welsh Government.
Sarah Sawrey-Cookson, Director of Communications, get-safe online.
Sharon Smith, Regional Director of Operations (North), Hafan Cymru.
Steph Healey, Coastal Housing.
Steve Bartley, Safeguarding & Access to Justice Lead, Older People's Commissioner for Wales.
Verity Hayes, Operations Manager Swansea, Neath & Port Talbot, Hafan Cymru.
Yasmin Khan, National Adviser for Violence against Women, Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence.
Zaira Munsif, Locality Manager (Cardiff). BAWSO.

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales protects and promotes the rights of older people throughout Wales, scrutinising and influencing a wide range of policy and practice to improve their lives. She provides help and support directly to older people through her casework team and works to empower older people and ensure that their voices are heard and acted upon. The Commissioner's role is underpinned by a set of unique legal powers to support her in reviewing the work of public bodies and holding them to account when necessary.

The Commissioner is taking action to end ageism and age discrimination, stop the abuse of older people and enable everyone to age well.

The Commissioner wants Wales to be the best place in the world to grow older.

How to contact the Commissioner:

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales
Cambrian Buildings
Mount Stuart Square
Cardiff
CF10 5FL

Phone: 03442 640 670
Email: ask@olderpeoplewales.com
Website: www.olderpeoplewales.com
Twitter: [@talkolderpeople](https://twitter.com/talkolderpeople)

Accessible Formats

If you would like this publication in an alternative format and/or language, please contact us. All publications are also available to download and order in a variety of formats from our website.

Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg // This document is available in Welsh

