

Don't be a Bystander: new campaign launches

Leader of the House and Chief Whip Julie James will meet survivors to talk about their experiences and how the actions of those people around them can make a difference.

Julie James said:

"We want to encourage everyone to act, to do something, however small or simple when they are worried that someone they know is, or may be experiencing violence, abuse or sexual violence.

"Just the very act of asking someone "are you ok?" can have a huge impact.

"We do not advocate stepping in and intervening in a potentially dangerous situation or where people could get hurt – please call the police in this situation.

"We want to create a culture where people feel empowered to help prevent violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence and to make Wales the safest place to be a woman."

The campaign film encourages everyone to support someone they are worried about and signposts them to the Live Fear Free helpline and website. The campaign also includes a short film which explains what happens when you call the helpline as a concerned person.

Mary* is a survivor of domestic abuse; her colleagues had noticed her behaviour change and one sat her down to say "that's one bruise too many". Mary's neighbours had suspicions and became involved when her daughter went to them for help.

They brought Mary into their home and she accepted their offer to ring the police. Only then did she realise that a number of her neighbours had suspected something was wrong. Her partner was arrested that night and her life changed.

Mary said:

"Suddenly I didn't feel alone. People asked "are you ok?" and "how can we help?" and I felt that I could answer. I'm not sure I would have felt safe enough to answer before but hope that I would have at some point.

"I know I had been relieved when my colleague had asked, even

though I didn't feel able to speak to them about what was happening.

"What I would say to people who suspect things are not right with a family member, friend, colleague or neighbour, is trust your instinct, ask them if they're ok and keep asking, it may not be the right time for them to speak to you when you ask that first time, but your words could be the glimmer of hope that leads to a life being saved."

Sarah* grew up in Nigeria, where Female Genital Mutilation is common in her community. The traditional beliefs and practices were so instilled that it was something that every girl endured. Crucially, Sarah did not know that the practice was called FGM.

When her midwife asked her if she had been subjected to it, she said:

"I was confused and got upset and angry, it wasn't what I was expecting, in our culture women who are not cut are seen as unclean. I tried to walk away and as I did I was asked by the receptionist, "are you ok?". Thankfully she helped me to calm down as I realised that I wanted to talk to my midwife. Even though it must have been difficult for her too, she was understanding and helped me."

She brought her daughter to Wales so that she would not be cut after she came to realise what had been done to her. She said:

"I wish the people who helped me could see the impact on mine and my family's lives, I wish they could see the confidence they have given me. I would like them to see how happy I am day to day, my children are not going to go through this, I am a survivor."

Find out how to support someone today to live fear free. Visit www.livefearfree.gov.wales or call 0808 8010800 for 24 hour confidential advice and support.

[Welfare reforms 'punish the most vulnerable'](#)

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) recently published its findings on the potential cumulative impact of proposed and implemented UK

Government tax and welfare reforms on people sharing different protected characteristics.

The report analyses policy changes made between May 2010 and January 2018, which will have been implemented by the financial year 2021-22. It finds nearly half of all households in Wales will lose out from the reforms, and that the largest impact will be felt by people on the lowest incomes.

There is also a disproportionately negative impact on the incomes of several protected groups, including disabled people, certain ethnic groups, and women.

Specifically, the report finds that across Great Britain:

- households with at least one disabled adult and a disabled child will lose over £6,500 a year, over 13% of their annual income;
- lone parents will lose an average of £5,250 a year, almost one-fifth of their annual income;
- women will lose approximately £400 per year on average, while men will only lose £30.

In a joint letter to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with the Minister for Children and Social Care, Huw Irranca-Davies, Rebecca Evans and Julie James, who has Cabinet responsibility for Equalities, have called on the UK Government to reconsider its tax and welfare reform policies, because of the negative financial impacts they will have on the most disadvantaged.

Julie James said:

“It cannot be right for the incomes of protected groups to be impacted in such a disproportionate way.

“We have demanded urgent action in relation to these harmful changes. It is essential that considerable work is now carried out to ensure that equality considerations are fully incorporated into all decision-making by HM Treasury, and more broadly across the UK Government. It is completely unacceptable for the UK Government to continue to ignore the impacts of these reforms on equality of opportunity.”

Rebecca Evans said:

“I have been pressing these issues with my UK counterparts for many months now and have made it perfectly clear on a number of occasions that these reforms will result in profound hardship for many of our most vulnerable citizens. I echo the concerns of the EHRC who are calling on the UK Government to reconsider their policies and review the level of welfare benefits to ensure they provide an adequate standard of living for those in receipt.”

These negative impacts are for the most part a result of changes to the benefit system, in particular the freeze in working-age benefit rates, changes to disability benefits and reductions in Universal Credit rates.

Welsh Government support following snow storms

The extreme weather conditions resulted in additional capital and revenue costs for local authorities. Today's announcement will see funding directed to offset a major part of these costs including those incurred for highway authorities' gritting and snow clearance operations and salt purchasing.

Whilst local authorities are responsible for planning for significant weather events and are expected to budget accordingly, the Welsh Government is providing additional investment in recognition of the significant costs incurred.

Economy and Transport Secretary, Ken Skates said:

"As much of the country was blanketed with snow recently, authority staff and contractors worked tirelessly in supporting the travelling public and ensuring our road network remained open as much as possible. Their professionalism and commitment was evident as ever and I would like to thank them once again for their efforts.

"The extreme weather did have an impact however and with that came inevitable financial consequences. I am pleased therefore the funding I am announcing today will be a boost in helping offset the considerable costs incurred by local authorities as a result of the conditions."

Councillor Andrew Morgan (Rhondda Cynon Taf), WLGA Spokesperson for Transport, the Environment and Sustainability said:

"I welcome this funding by Welsh Government in recognition of the significant costs incurred by authorities in responding to the recent extreme weather event. Although all councils will have planned well in advance for such a weather event, the sheer intensity of the weather meant that additional costs were unavoidable."

"I am incredibly proud of the response efforts of councils across Wales, with council staff going above and beyond to help residents

in their communities. Our staff members' efforts highlighted public service at its finest, and demonstrated the true value of local government."

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Welsh Government agrees deal on Brexit Bill that respects devolution

Welsh Ministers have come to an agreement with the UK Government on their proposed EU (Withdrawal) Bill that mean areas already devolved remain devolved.

The Bill, as originally drafted, would have allowed the UK Government to take control of devolved policy areas, such as farming and fishing, after Brexit.

After months of intensive talks, a compromise agreement has now been reached, meaning that the Welsh Government will be able to recommend that the National Assembly gives its consent to the Bill.

Changes to the Bill will be brought forward in the House of Lords tomorrow.

The agreement includes:

- Devolved areas remain devolved, but there are some limited areas where there is a need to agree UK wide rules to replace the current EU wide rules.
- All devolved powers and policy areas rest in Cardiff and Edinburgh, unless specified to be temporarily held by the UK Government. These will be areas where there is a need for common, UK-wide rules.
- The UK Government will seek the consent of the devolved legislatures as to which areas of current EU law will be 'frozen' while common UK-wide rules - known as frameworks – are agreed.
- The new amendments to the Bill include 'sunset' clauses that now guarantee the 'freezing' of these powers will be temporary, while the power to put things 'in the freezer' is also limited.
- Any such regulations made by the UK Government on policy areas they temporarily hold would expire after five years, after which the Assembly and the Welsh Ministers would be free to legislate.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance said:

"This is a deal we can work with which has required compromise on both sides. Our aim throughout these talks has been to protect devolution and make sure laws and policy in areas which are

currently devolved remain devolved and this we have achieved.

“We have always recognised the need for UK-wide frameworks where the EU rule book will no longer apply.

“The original draft Bill meant powers already devolved would have been clawed back by the UK Government post-Brexit and only Ministers in London would have had the right to decide if and when they were passed back to the devolved parliaments. This was totally unacceptable and went against the will of the people of Wales who voted for devolution in two referendums.

“We are now in a different place. London has changed its position so that all powers and policy areas rest in Cardiff and Edinburgh, unless specified to be temporarily held by the UK Government. These will be areas where we all agree common, UK-wide rules are needed for a functioning UK internal market.

“London’s willingness to listen to our concerns and enter serious negotiations has been welcome. In a devolved UK the respective governments need to deal with each other as equals and this agreement is a step in the right direction. This approach must now continue as we prepare for leaving the EU and the next phase of talks with Brussels.

“Make no mistake; the Welsh Government will continue to make sure Wales’ voice is heard loud and clear so we can secure a Brexit that protects devolution, jobs and our economy.”