

First Minister takes steps to transform refuge provision and sexual violence services in Wales

The review, led by the Wales Centre for Public Policy, will examine some of the best international examples of services and support, and engage with people who have experience of refuge and sexual abuse services, to develop a made-in-Wales model that provides a world-leading standard of support to victims of sexual violence.

Earlier this year, the First Minister made a commitment to make Wales a world-leader in women's rights and gender equality, and make Wales the safest country in Europe for women.

Today, the First Minister and the Welsh Government's national advisor for violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, Yasmin Khan, will visit New Pathways in Cardiff, where they will meet staff and survivors.

New Pathways, which receives support from the Welsh Government, is the largest provider of sexual violence services in Wales.

Speaking ahead of the visit, the First Minister said:

"It is unfathomable that, in the UK today we call ourselves civilised, yet 1 woman in 5 has experienced sexual violence, and 1 in 4 experienced domestic abuse. This cannot continue.

"Change must happen if Wales is going to become a world leader in women's rights and gender equality and improve the lives of women and girls. Today, I'm setting out my intentions to conduct an expert-led review to make improvements to the services we provide to women affected by sexual violence, and a second review into refuge provision.

"As a society we have shied away from talking about domestic abuse, rape and sexual violence, but this only contributes to myths and misinformation which can make survivors worried about speaking up. It's time to change. The more we talk about what is happening, the more we spread messages of support and awareness, and the more we fight against this."

The First Minister also reiterated his calls to the Prime Minister to urgently proceed with measures that will ratify the Istanbul Convention and make Wales, and the UK as a whole, the safest place for women in Europe.

By agreeing to ratify the Istanbul Convention, the UK government would be required to protect funding for domestic violence shelters, rape crisis

centres, helplines and offer counselling for domestic abuse survivors. It would also ensure education on healthy relationships is consistently provided in schools.

The First Minister added:

“In Wales, we have already met all the obligations of the Istanbul Convention within our powers. I have written to the Prime Minister urging her to set a timetable for implementing legislation that will allow ratification of the Istanbul Convention to happen. The UK has signed up, now it is time for the Prime Minister to step up to this gesture and place in law commitments to better protect women and girls.

“Until then, I am determined to do all I can to make sure every person in Wales who experiences any form of domestic abuse or sexual violence can receive the services they need at the time they need it.

“I am so grateful to the survivors who have agreed to meet me today and to those who will contribute to our reviews. I know it’s not easy to speak about their experiences, but their voices will be heard and are crucial in changing things for the better.”