

Have your Say

This briefing paper outlines the discussions at Stonewall Cymru's Have Your Say events held in 2014-15, drawing on key themes, priority areas and suggestions for service providers. The events took place in Cardiff on September 16th 2014 and February 19th 2015, in a series of meetings in Wrexham, Rhyl and Llanelwy on December 1st and 2nd 2014, and in Colwyn Bay on March 5th 2015.

Written by Mabli Jones

Welsh language adaptation by Nico



Introduction

Stonewall Cymru's research *Where we are now* revealed that just one in ten (9 per cent) lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Wales have ever been asked by public bodies for their views on their local services as a lesbian, gay or bisexual person. However, more than eight in ten (82 per cent) say that, if asked, they would take the opportunity to feed their views and experiences to local services, such as their council, police force, school or health board, to help them improve their services. The aim of Stonewall Cymru's Have your Say events is to bring together LGBT people and service providers from around Wales and provide a forum for this engagement to take place. Attendees at the events discuss topics ranging from healthcare to housing, youth clubs to library services, and have a chance to share their views and experiences while discussing with service providers what could be done to improve public services in Wales for everyone.

Contents	Hate Crime and Policing	2
	Health and Social Care	3
	Housing	4
	Youth and Education	5
	Culture, Leisure and Sport	5
	Local Government Services	6
	Recommendations for Service Providers	7

Hate Crime and Policing

Community safety is a key concern for LGBT people. In general, attendees felt that responses to homophobic, biphobic and transphobic hate crime and support for victims had improved, noting the increased prioritisation of hate crime by the police and Welsh Government. Although there are better systems in place for reporting, many still feel a lack of confidence. Reasons cited for not reporting incidents included an expectation that it would be 'filed away and forgotten about' with no outcome; that there was no point reporting verbal or lower-level incidents which people felt are often dismissed; a reluctance not to waste police time and resources when there is a perception that forces are overstretched as it is; and worries that reporting made it look like you were overreacting. Attendees highlighted that disabled LGBT people face a higher risk of being victims of hate crime, and face more barriers to accessing criminal justice and victim support services.

Many attendees noted positive experiences with the police and criminal justice system. They thought that the police's community engagement work was good, and that the police have improved in how seriously they take hate crime and are much more supportive of victims. Attendees also praised victim support services and community officers, who improve trust in the police.

However, attendees also cited negative experiences with the police, and felt that increased training for officers was not always translated into action. After reporting hate crime, some said that the police had been disrespectful or dismissive, there had been no follow-up after the report and that communication with victims was poor. When cases were taken forward, some felt that evidence-gathering took too long, and that the lengthy process of going to trial was one that could have a demoralising effect on victims and make them feel as if they couldn't move on with their lives. Those who had participated in community engagement work such as PACT (Police and Communities Together) meetings felt that meetings were often 'all talk and no action', and that the police were not responsive; that despite saying that they want to hear from communities, they fail to act on feedback and do not communicate about their own work in return. There was recognition of the pressures that the police themselves were under, with budget cuts having an effect on staff and resources, and attendees were concerned that this could have a negative impact on services in the future.

In order to improve services, attendees agreed that the relationship between the police and LGBT communities must be active and meaningful, and the police should publicise actions they as a result of community engagement work. Training on LGBT issues and hate crime should be ongoing and involve all staff, not just LGBT liaison officers and PCSOs. Police forces should communicate clear zero tolerance policies towards homophobia, biphobia and transphobia, both internally and externally. Attendees agreed that all agencies should continue to raise awareness and improve understanding of hate crime among the public.

Health and Social Care

Despite an appreciation that awareness of sexual orientation and gender identity issues in the health and social care sector has improved, LGBT patients in Wales report significant barriers to health and social care services. Attendees noted that health services do not outwardly indicate that they are LGBT-inclusive or aware of LGBT issues in their visual displays or other materials in waiting rooms and patient areas, for example. This has a clear effect on LGBT people's confidence in the type of service they will receive, and is reflected in some of the negative experiences they report with healthcare professionals. Service providers often use inappropriate language when dealing with LGBT patients, and make assumptions about patients' sexual orientation or gender identity. Examples reported by attendees included health and social care professionals assuming that patients' partners were of the opposite gender or asking children about their 'mum and dad', difficulties in getting providers to acknowledge a same-sex partner or next of kin and hearing discriminatory comments from staff and other patients. This makes LGBT people feel anxious about accessing health or social care and creates barriers to honest discussions about their health needs. Moreover, it can lead to serious health risks. For example, when healthcare providers assume that a patient is cisgender, they could overlook the need for a trans woman to be included in a screening programme for prostate cancer, or a trans man to be included in a screening programme for breast cancer. It is felt that these issues come down to a lack of awareness and training for staff around LGBT health needs. Particular areas highlighted by attendees were insufficient understanding in sexual health clinics of the experiences of LGBT people, poor treatment of LGBT people in care homes, and a lack of consistent support for trans people and young trans people in particular.

Attendees who had worked in healthcare discussed the difficulties of working in a culture where homophobic language is normalised and staff feel uncomfortable challenging discriminatory attitudes. They reported that it was now much easier to be 'out' at work, but there were still doubts about being open with colleagues and unease about how religious differences are managed. However, work by healthcare employers around setting-up LGBT staff networks, putting zero-tolerance policies in place towards discrimination, and taking a more active approach to LGBT community engagement was commended as having improved the experiences of staff and their patients.

Looking specifically at social care, attendees discussed anxieties for older LGBT people, many of whom do not have strong support networks, about having to 'go back into the closet' when entering social care, a lack of confidence that social care providers understand the needs and concerns of older LGBT people and a concern that although the majority of care workers want to provide the best care possible, they do not receive sufficient training on LGBT issues.

Suggestions for how health and social care providers could improve services included better monitoring practices around sexual orientation and gender identity, training for all staff on LGBT issues and health needs, visible zero tolerance policies towards homophobia, biphobia and transphobia, supporting active LGBT staff networks and continuing to engage with LGBT communities across Wales on their experiences and needs in health and social care.

Housing

Attendees discussed the multiple issues LGBT people face in housing, foremost among which was the vulnerability of LGBT people – especially young LGBT people – to homelessness due to family relationship breakdown and domestic abuse. The difficulties faced in presenting as homeless, such as a lack of understanding among hostel or emergency housing staff and the fear of outing oneself when having to report homelessness, can make LGBT people feel as if they have ‘nowhere to turn’. There was concern about the proposed removal of housing benefit for under-25s, and the impact this could have on young LGBT people in precarious or abusive situations.

Attendees reported difficulties in finding private rented accommodation. For example, it can be hard to find welcoming shared housing if a same gender couple wants to live together, and that for single people, coming out to housemates in shared accommodation can be a negative experience. Considerations around which areas are seen as ‘safe’ to live in mean that options for private rented accommodation are more limited for LGBT people, which compounds general problems in the private rented sector around the high cost, insecurity and quality of accommodation.

Experiences with mortgage providers were mixed, with some reporting positive and inclusive services, but there was awareness that mortgage providers often make assumptions about clients’ marital status, gender identity and the gender of their partners that can be uncomfortable for LGBT clients.

Housing associations were praised for good practice in engaging residents and working co-operatively, for example through tenant panels, to make services inclusive and accommodation safer. Housing providers who were known to be part of Stonewall Cymru’s Diversity Champions programme were highlighted for their visible commitment to equality, and how this provided a reassuring expectation of the quality of their service. University residences were mentioned as another good practice example of providing inclusive services, and some local authorities were praised for their work to engage with diverse communities and keep track of any problems in different areas.

Attendees agreed that all agencies involved in providing housing services should ensure that they are aware of all their duties under the Equality Act, and embrace the very real business case for providing an inclusive service and communicate clearly their work around equality and diversity. All housing providers should be sensitive to the possibility that LGBT tenants may be vulnerable, and work closely with residents and other agencies (such as the police) to ensure that services are inclusive and communities are safe.

Youth and Education

Many attendees, and young people in particular, spoke personally of their own negative experiences with education services. It was agreed that homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying are still widespread, and that teachers often ignore or overlook this type of bullying, perhaps due to lack of confidence or awareness. Homophobic, biphobic and transphobic language is also seen to be part of the culture in schools, with staff failing to challenge it and pupils feeling a pressure to join in or keep quiet in order to 'fit-in'. Victims of bullying are not given adequate support and often have lower attendance at school as a result. There was particular concern around the experiences of young LGBT people in rural areas, and the lack of support and resources for them. It is also felt that schools' teaching fails to fully include young LGBT people or those with same-sex parents, although it was noted that this situation has improved. This can be in the way that teaching or play activities reinforce gender stereotypes, but also in the absence of LGBT issues in the curriculum. A key priority for attendees was the need to tackle what they saw as a chronic lack of LGBT-inclusive sex and relationships education in schools.

Attendees believed that schools and parents need to work together to tackle homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying and language in their schools, and make schools more welcoming for LGBT young people and same-sex parent families. Schools should draw on the expertise and resources of outside agencies to provide support and information for young LGBT people, including LGBT youth groups across Wales, who were praised by attendees for offering crucial support and social opportunities for young LGBT people.

Culture, Leisure and Sport

There was a clear recognition among attendees that experiences of LGBT community life and culture are vastly different in rural and urban areas, and that the difference can also be significant between cities and smaller towns on their outskirts. LGBT people living outside of major cities have less access to a local LGBT scene of bars, clubs and diverse cultural events, and so are more dependent on initiatives such as community groups. However, community groups in all areas struggle with costs and funding, which limits opportunities. Those who live in towns near Cardiff said they often travel into the city, and that this is not only a question of finding cultural and social opportunities, but also of feeling safe and able to be yourself. However, attendees living in Cardiff felt that cultural and community provision for LGBT people could still be improved, with community groups facing the same pressures of funding and resources, and a sense that LGBT events or culture are still very much marginalised, even in the capital.

Museums and libraries were praised for their recognition of diverse communities and cultures, for example, National Museum Wales's celebrations of LGBT history month, and libraries providing free access to information and LGBT literature. Yet attendees expressed the desire to see LGBT history and culture 'mainstreamed' in the cultural and heritage sector, and not only recognised at certain points during the year. Libraries' provision of LGBT literature could also be improved, in particular through children's books which represent diverse families. There are concerns about local authority internet filters which often block access to LGBT websites, meaning that young people cannot safely and anonymously access information they need on library or school computers.

It is felt that the media in Wales has improved in its coverage of LGBT issues, and that the film and TV industry contains many more positive and realistic portrayals of LGBT people, supported by arts centres around the country which showcase LGBT films and productions. However, as attendees discussed, films such as *Pride* are still in the minority, and we should push for more diverse filmmaking and productions generally so that LGBT stories aren't an exception on our screens.

There is a clear desire among LGBT people for more inclusive sports provision across Wales. The continued prevalence of gender stereotypes, the lasting effect of negative school experiences of P.E. and a sense that local and grassroots teams aren't inclusive all contribute to making LGBT people feel shut out of sports. LGBT people can also experience barriers to enjoying outdoor activities, with concerns around safety in isolated areas. Local authorities' sports centres were criticised for not considering the barriers LGBT people can face to accessing facilities, and doing little to indicate that they are inclusive and welcoming spaces, especially for trans people. One attendee highlighted best practice at a private gym, which has gender-neutral changing rooms and includes diverse images in their promotional literature, but acknowledged that they paid a premium to use the facilities and these weren't accessible to everyone. However, it was agreed that becoming LGBT-inclusive by modifying literature, facilities and activities didn't necessarily involve a huge cost for local authority leisure centres. Attendees also noted that there are barriers to getting involved with grassroots sports, with worries about whether clubs will be welcoming. Attendees would like to see more LGBT teams, but more importantly, would like to see all grassroots clubs make a visible commitment to welcoming LGBT people and tackling homophobic, biphobic and transphobic abuse on the sports field.

Local Government Services

When considering local government service provision in general, there was agreement among attendees that local authorities increasingly recognise the need to consider LGBT-inclusion in service provision, but that this was not always reflected in people's day to day experiences. Councils do not always communicate clearly whether and how services are inclusive, and attendees described negative experiences with council staff such as being misgendered as a trans person. Councils' forms and questionnaires were criticised for not being trans-inclusive, as they often fail to provide options for non-binary gender identities. There are also concerns that councils themselves may have LGBT-inclusive practices, but that this can be undermined in the outsourcing process, with some attendees having had negative experiences of services provided by contractors. Local authorities were praised for continuing to consider ways in which public spaces can be made to feel safe and welcoming for LGBT people, for example, the increased availability of gender-neutral public toilets was noted as best practice, but it was agreed that they should continue to tackle anti-social behaviour and hate crime in public spaces.

There was general concern about the scale of local government reorganisation and cuts to local authority budgets in Wales, and the cumulative effect that this could have on LGBT people. It was anticipated that in a time of tighter budgets, equalities agendas could be side-lined with less funding available for inclusion projects and posts with a specific equalities brief. However, attendees discussed how equality could be safeguarded in local government services through strengthening co-operation between local authorities, Welsh Government and diverse communities across Wales.

Recommendations for service providers

Moving forward, the issues presented in this report will help to inform Stonewall Cymru's work with schools, workplaces, services and communities across Wales. However, a clear theme which arose during the discussions was the need for service providers to engage with LGBT communities so that their experiences and expectations can be taken into account in the design and delivery of public services. Here are some ways that service providers can put that into action:

- **Continue to engage with LGBT communities across Wales**, working with local LGBT groups and staff networks to build relationships. Stonewall Cymru's Have Your Say events are a great way to ensure that you are hearing from a diverse range of stakeholders.
- **Encourage LGBT people to take part in public consultations**, including by publicising them through LGBT venues and networks.
- **Review external communications** such as promotional literature to ensure that these reflect the diversity of service users in their language and imagery. A clear and visible commitment to equality can go a long way towards improving LGBT people's confidence in services.
- **Review monitoring processes** to ensure that forms and questionnaires are inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity. Explain to service users that monitoring is aimed at improving services and publicise any action taken following analysis of data. Ensure that it is clear that data is treated with strict confidentiality in order to encourage those who feel least comfortable with monitoring to participate.
- **Support LGBT staff** and ask for their views, as many will use your services too, and will have a clear idea of how internal and external practices can be improved.
- **Work with other service providers** to share best practice. Stonewall Cymru's Diversity Champions programme provides a forum for organisations to benchmark their progress on LGBT equality and learn from other organisations across Wales.
- **Celebrate success** in improving services, and communicate clearly with communities about the work you are doing to ensure equality and inclusion across all service provision.

To find out more about how Stonewall Cymru can help you improve experiences for LGBT service users, or for copies of any of our resources, contact us on 08000 50 20 20 or through email at cymru@stonewallcymru.org.uk

We would like to thank everyone who took part in one of the events, including 65 individuals and representatives from the following organisations:

A Brighter Future Altogether, Benefiting Bridgend (ABFABB)

Aneurin Bevan University Health Board

Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board

Carmarthenshire County Council

Crown Prosecution Service Wales

Flintshire County Council

Healthcare Inspectorate Wales

Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service

National Assembly for Wales

Natural Resources Wales

North Wales Advice and Advocacy Association

North Wales Fire and Rescue

North Wales Police

Safer Merthyr Tydfil

South Wales Fire and Rescue Service

Unique Transgender Network

Victim Support

Viva (West Rhyl Young People's Project)

Wales Community Rehabilitation Company

The Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust