

Wales Without Violence Framework Evaluability Assessment (WAVE)

Executive Summary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW OF THE EVALUABILITY ASSESSMENT

DECIPHer and the Security, Crime and Intelligence Innovation Institute were commissioned by the Violence Prevention Unit (VPU) and funded by the South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner's Office to conduct an Evaluability Assessment of the Wales Without Violence Framework. The Evaluability Assessment sought to understand if, how and by what methods a full-scale evaluation might be able to take place in the future. This included an assessment of the design, development and implementation of the Framework; the availability of (suitable) data; the size of any expected effects and existing professional engagement and use (or lack thereof). This executive summary provides an overview of the key findings from the evaluability assessment, structured under the six research questions below, all of which were designed to inform a future evaluation of the Framework:

1. What are stakeholders' perspectives on the Framework (including their knowledge and how it is currently or should be used)?
2. What are wider contextual factors affecting and influencing the Framework?
3. What are the key measures for understanding the Framework?
4. What measures of whole-population effects and variable effects across population sub-groups are available and what else needs to be measured?
5. What level of evaluation of the Framework is feasible, practicable and desirable in the time available?
6. Can the work associated with the Framework be utilised to inform national policy on violence prevention?

The research questions were addressed using the following methods:

- *Interviews with key stakeholders (N=13)* including professionals from across Wales at the local, regional and national level covering primarily strategic and management roles.
- *Documentary analysis (n=18)*: documentation related to the design, delivery and implementation of the Framework and selected documentation from external sources (Serious Violence Duty Partnerships and Local Authorities).
- *Exploration of Routine Data*: the routine data needed to support a future evaluation was explored through the interviews and document analysis.

An overview of the findings related to each research question will now be presented in turn, followed by the updated Theory of Change, the future evaluation framework and recommendations to further support the delivery and implementation of the Framework.

FINDINGS

RQ 1. STAKEHOLDER'S PERSPECTIVES ON THE FRAMEWORK

Overview of stakeholder's perspectives:

- Broadly, the Framework was acceptable to interviewees, however, there was variation in its perceived value and regarding clarity on what contribution it could make to professional practice. It was described as a useful resource that could serve as a foundation for practice, offering a strategic direction of travel for violence prevention work in Wales. However, some described it as 'another' process or approach to read and engage with in what was already a crowded landscape.

- Some viewed the Framework as a purely strategic approach, focused upon and most relevant for those in strategic roles at the local, regional and national levels with a perceived gap between the Framework and operational practice. Contrastingly, those who had recently transitioned from operational to strategic roles thought it was both relevant and accessible for operational staff and practitioners on the frontline of services (third sector, schools and statutory bodies).
- Views on whether the Framework could be used and engaged with by young people varied in the development team, some believed it was accessible and could be actively used by young people, other members of the development team and wider interviewees viewed it as a professional process and resource rather than something that could be used by young people.
- There was general agreement that the main aim of the Framework was to encourage a public health approach to prevention. Most interviewees considered the principles aligned with existing practice. Some outlined the principles are already part of existing practice and approaches, even if the same language is not used.
- The documents analysed align with aspects of the principles and strategies in the Framework. All documents referenced taking a public health approach and the WHO four stage public health approach.
- Definitions of violence varied, with partnerships adopting the WHO definition. Interviewees considered the Framework's definition of violence important as it was based on the views of young people, however, challenges to its adoption were noted with interviewees stating that they have to align with the definition provided by the Home Office.
- Training and support needs for professionals to effectively engage with and utilise the Framework and its recommended principles and strategies were viewed as varied within and between professionals and settings.

Current use:

- The Framework was directly referenced and embedded in the North Wales Serious Violence Strategy and formed the basis for the Strategy for Cardiff, developed by Cardiff's Community Safety Partnership (CSP). For the Gwent and Dyfed Powys' Strategies, the Framework is not directly referenced however both documents outlined that resources from the VPU were drawn upon.
- The Framework was highlighted as being used to inform a bid for a targeted intervention worker. It was also used as evidence and a rationale to access funding for preventative work with young people in a pupil referral unit.
- Interviewees in the third sector, a Health board, an LA, regional multi-agency partnership and at the national level outlined how they are currently acting as 'champions' of the Framework, raising awareness of the Framework and sharing with colleagues.

Suggestions for future use and role:

- To support a cohesive Wales wide approach to the implementation of the serious violence duty and violence prevention practice. Principles and strategies described by some as providing the foundation for practice regarding how professionals should work with young people.
- There was also an aspirational view of the Framework with the hope that the Framework could bring about a cultural shift amongst professional groups regarding their perceptions and beliefs in relation to violence and violence prevention.

Framework specific facilitators:

- Accessible language and terminology for professionals.
- Considered suitable for work with all populations of young people including those considered at risk or most vulnerable to violence.
- The intentions of the Framework were viewed positively and it was referred to as being able to play a role in aligning practice, including acting as an evidence base.
- The Framework was viewed as supporting and informing strategic planning and commissioning as well as funding bids.
- Addressing the perceived gap between support provided by the VPU in South Wales versus other areas in Wales.
- Due to the scale of co-production it was viewed by some as representing the voice of young people and the Welsh perspective.

Framework specific barriers:

- Lack of clarity of what the Framework can offer for some interviewees and how it should or could be used in practice.
- Perceived limited reach amongst some professional groups including those in health and education.
- Professionals who do not believe violence is preventable or that they can have an influence on certain strategies and outcomes (particularly higher level societal outcomes).
- The challenges associated with evidencing change and impact related to the Framework and Frameworks in general.

Unintended consequences:

Potential positive unintended consequences of the Framework:

- The Framework supporting engagement with VPU in general and in some cases viewed as improving the relationship with the VPU and areas outside of South Wales.
- VPU providing long term support as a trusted group; reduced staff concern and burden due to availability of services and catering for needs of professionals.
- (Re)allocation of resources to areas of need.
- Potential evidence of the diffusion of practice across UK with the Framework being shared in England and Scotland.

Potential negative unintended consequences of the Framework:

- Increased staff burden regarding additional processes and practices.
- Staff resisting work as not considered relevant, their priority or interfering with their work.
- Increased burden on other agencies and organisations.
- (Re)allocation of resources away of existing services, programmes or interventions.

Sustainability¹:

- Longer term funding and buy-in from policy and government considered essential.
- Framework should align to legislative and other statutory requirements of target agencies.
- Framework should be continually updated with latest research, statistics and views of children and young people to drive practice and maintain relevance and representation of work.
- Offer of funding and training would support buy-in and ability to use Framework.

¹ Originally part of research question 3.

- Case studies may offer more persuasive evidence of efficacy and support professional buy-in, particularly for operational staff.

RQ 2. CONTEXT

Contextual facilitators:

- Well established existing partnership structures in Wales and agencies willingness to work collaboratively / in partnerships and engage in joint processes / efforts.
- Positive view of the VPU and its role as well as VPU staff.

Contextual barriers:

- Unpredictable and unstable policy and financial climate.
 - Budget restrictions and short term funding.
 - Devolved status and position between UK government and Welsh Government. Changing political focus and expectations. Lack of long term-commitment.
- Limited staff capacity and heavy workload burden on staff across agencies and sectors. Linked to this, the number guidance, frameworks, strategies they are sent or have to engage with as part of their roles.
- Geographic differences and historical relationships between VPU and areas outside of South Wales with the perception that VPU and the Framework are South Wales centric.
- Professionals who do not view violence prevention as relevant to their role.

RQ 3. IMPLEMENTATION OUTCOMES

Key implementation outcomes identified included:

- reference to and use of Framework (concepts, principles, strategies) in strategic documentation, commissioning, funding, multi-agency meetings;
- assessing and understanding presence and influence in existing partnerships;
- ascertaining and assessing what data is already collected and how the Framework links to it;
- multi-agency professionals involved with violence adopting a public health approach;
- increased resourcing of evidence-based primary prevention.

Interviewees also deemed it vital to understand what was viewed as ‘meaningful’ impact on practice; namely how has the presence of the Framework in strategic documents influenced practice and commissioned interventions. This included the exploration of what’s been funded and how and the decision making criteria as well as reference to Framework concepts, principles and strategies.

Uncertainties regarding the delivery mechanisms and mechanisms of change for the Framework were identified by the development team, interviewees and the research team with further clarification needed regarding what is required to bring about change.

Uncertainties also existed regarding the definition and application of the concepts, principles and strategies in the Framework. If professional groups have a different understanding of what the suggested principles and or strategies are and what they are for, there is a chance that this could result in multiple ‘interventions’ in professional practice rather than being evaluable as a single intervention.

RQ 4. AVAILABILITY OF WHOLE-POPULATION MEASURES

While numerous national level indicators are available there are significant challenges to accessing these data with the need for data sharing agreements to be established between agencies. Both of which can be a time consuming and resource intensive.

Interviewees and documents indicate that many areas had additional needs regarding both the access and interpretation of data. Further challenges also existed regarding the alignment of different data sets with analysts requiring extensive knowledge of these practices.

Moreover, interviewees noted that while population data can indicate the direction of travel. Due to the number of confounding factors, local level, population specific data is key as well as sector specific case studies.

The need for more robust data at local and regional level related to the delivery of interventions and services was also highlighted. Large amounts of data is collected across statutory bodies and third sector groups. However, there are numerous issues with existing data systems, these included:

- missing populations, data on ethnicity.
- Lack of consistency in approach to data collection and how data is classified, variation between different bodies
- some areas able to access and use multi-system data, build a more comprehensive picture of violence.
- not all bodies share data need for data sharing agreements with GDPR viewed as a significant barrier.

RQ 5. FUTURE EVALUATION FEASIBILITY

From the perspective of the development team, an evaluation focused on population outcomes was considered premature. The desired focus instead was to clarify and support the implementation stage of the Framework. This perspective was supported by the assessment team. Given current focus on professional behaviour change, the long-term nature of any population outcomes associated with the Framework as well as the wide scope and scale across multiple socio-ecological levels, the research team recommended a mixed-methods Process Evaluation focused on:

- acceptability, utilisation, embeddedness, reach, fidelity.
- costs (staff, resources) associated with design, delivery and ongoing attempts to support implementation of the Framework

It was deemed feasible by the development team to estimate costs associated with the development and ongoing implementation of the Framework and all interviewees stated they would be willing to take part in a future evaluation through interviewing and sharing non-confidential documentation.

RQ 6. RELEVANCE TO NATIONAL POLICY

The Framework was considered aligned with a number of policies within Wales and the UK:

- Described as having the capacity to act as a resource for statutory bodies to inform responses to legislative requirements.
- The most referenced and focused upon relevance to policy was the Serious Violence Duty. The Framework was directly referenced in some of the serious violence strategies created by Welsh

regions and local authorities. The Framework was used to inform the strategies and act as a resource to support this relatively new legislative requirement.

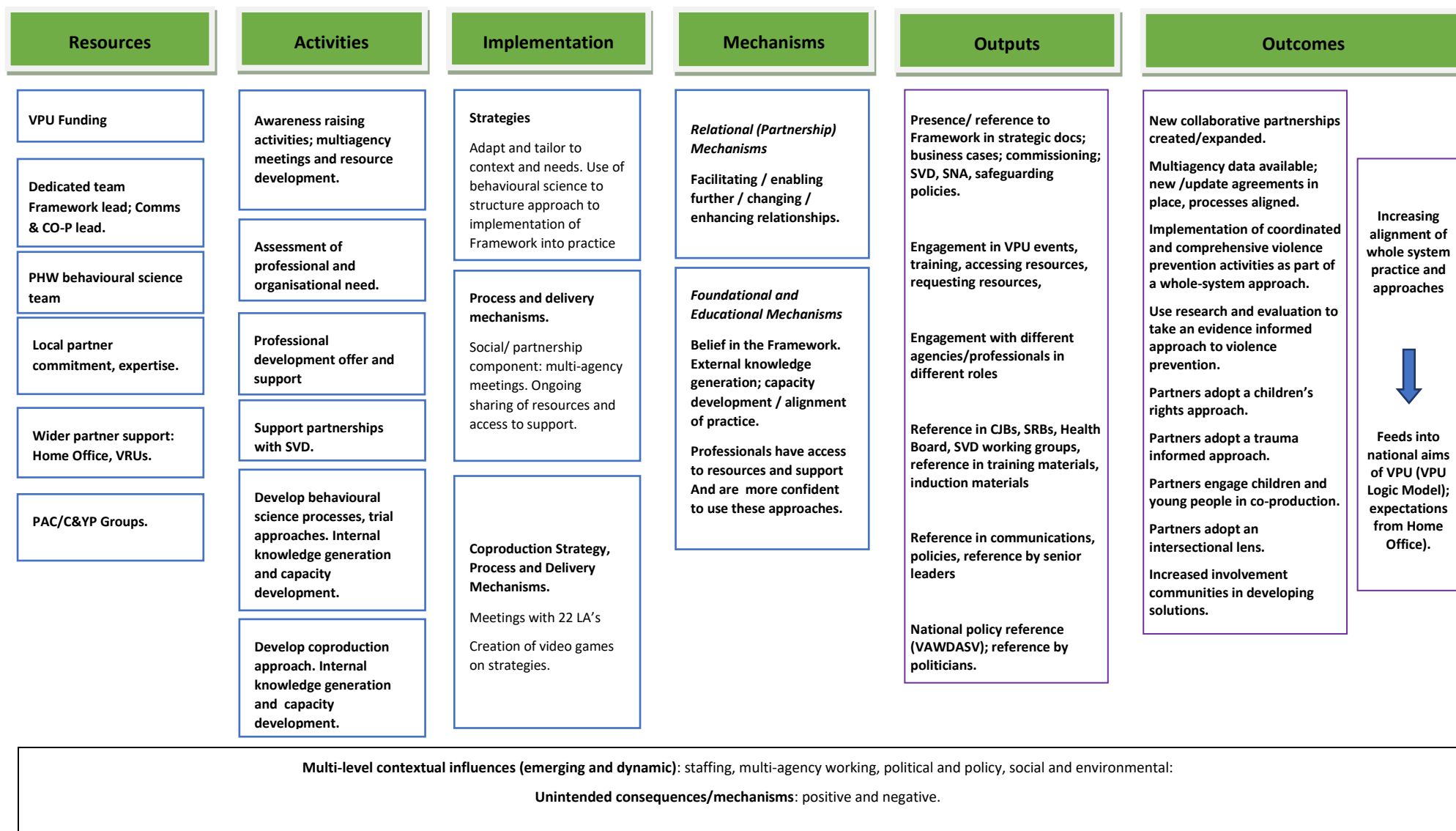
- The Welsh Government's VAWDASV Act 2015 was also referenced with the belief that, aspects of the respective works overlapped and that the Framework could be used to support aspects of the VAWDASV work.
- Local, regional and national safeguarding agendas were also mentioned, with the Framework being seen to align with these agendas.

The relevance of the Framework across numerous other policy and priority areas is seen as a key factor that could facilitate professional buy-in to the Framework, therefore promoting its sustainability.

THEORY OF CHANGE

Based on the findings from the assessment, a new theory of change for the Framework has been created focused upon the implementation of the Framework and specifically the nine principles. As a result, the nine principles of the Framework are now viewed as the long-term outcomes. A shortened version of the theory of change is included below, the full version can be found in the main report.

Figure 2. Theory of Change for the Implementation Phase of the Frameworks Nine Principles.



Remaining Uncertainties:

A number of uncertainties remain related to the theory of change for the Framework, these include:

- **Activities:** Are there/what further activities are planned?
- **Dose:** How much or many workshops, meetings, non-training support (additional reports, guides, website resources etc.) are needed to activate mechanisms and therefore influence and inform professional practice at the strategic and operational level and lead to outputs and outcomes?
- **Mechanisms:** Are there additional or different mechanisms taking place and who (what professional groups) as these relevant or not relevant for?
- **Definitions:** Are agencies using the same definitions of the principles and strategies provided in the Framework? Unclear what is standard practice at times and already embedded and what is being introduced by the Framework, for example multi-agency working clear cut and established even if not always working as desired. This will vary across groups and professionals, vital to understand if leading to new practice or different practice.
- **Further targets:** What other areas, specific documents, strategies would the VPU target?
- **Resources and costs:** Is Framework causing any impact on allocation of resources or re-allocation? What is the cost associated with implementing new practices, if required?
- **Outputs and outcomes:** The long-term outcomes for this stage of the Framework are identified as the nine underlying principles for the Framework. However, more work is needed here to explore the specific processes for each of these principles. Furthermore, relevance will depend on sector and individual professional. Assessment is therefore required of who needs what and in what context. This may require grouping of some principles together or individual principles having dedicated theories of change.

FUTURE EVALUATION

Building on the research teams recommendation for mixed-methods process evaluation of the Framework, a series of potential research questions have been drafted:

1. What are professionals and young people's perceptions of the relevance and fit of the Framework for professionals and for target populations?
2. Are the key concepts, principles and strategies defined and applied consistently or differently among target groups and what is the evidence base for these?
3. Is there intention, application and integration of the Framework within violence prevention systems and settings? What impact if any, is this having on violence prevention practice?
4. What is the reach of the Framework? How many people have received it?
5. Is the Framework being delivered and implemented as intended?
6. What are the costs associated with the development costs and implementation of the Framework (those incurred by the VPU and external stakeholders)?
7. What contextual factors are impacting upon the Framework?

The following table outlines some of the key evaluation concepts, indicators and methods of measurement in order to address the research questions. Concepts and definitions are informed by Allen et al's systematic review of health policy implementation determinants [1], MRC Process Evaluation Guidance [2] and Gold et al's paper on cost data in implementation science [3].

Evaluation concept (Implementation Outcomes)	Definition	Indicator and key questions	Measurement
Acceptability (inc. appropriateness)	Stakeholders perceptions of relevance, fit of the Framework for professionals and for target populations.	Stakeholder (professionals and young people) views	Interview; survey; focus groups;
Adoption, Embeddedness, Utilisation.	Intention, application and integration of the Framework within violence prevention systems and settings.	Presence in strategic documents, policies, meeting documentation. Is the Framework causing any impact on Allocation of resources or re-allocation?	Document Analysis; survey Interviews
Reach	What is the reach of the intervention? how many people have received it?	Attending sessions, accessing resources, seeking help / support, offered support / help	Interview; survey; focus groups. Document Analysis
Fidelity	Degree to which it is being implemented as intended.	adherence, dosage, quality of intervention delivery, participant responsiveness, and program differentiation (Is the intervention distinguishable from usual practice?)	Observations; Interview; survey; focus groups. Document Analysis
Cost	Development costs. Cost of an implementation effort; cost associated with implementing new practices.	Staff time associated pay grades. Staff time associated pay grades. Allocation of resources.	Top down and bottom up costings.

Table 1. A Mixed-Methods Process Evaluation of the Wales Without Violence Framework.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this evaluability assessment, the following additional recommendations have been compiled:

Building on the theory of change to support a future evaluation

- **PLACE:** Alignment and place within the VPU in light of new UK Government directives and funding.
- **SUCCESS:** Clarification on what success for the Framework looks like at different timepoints; for example, is a Wales without Violence a measurable target?
- **MECHANISMS OF CHANGE:** ongoing need to focus on mechanisms i.e. identify what it is that is leading to change.
- **DELIVERY MECHANISMS:** What are the delivery mechanism for these (e.g. the document, website, roundtables).
- **RELEVANCE:** To maintain its relevance updated research, evidence and perspectives of young people and professionals should be gathered and disseminated to partners.

Targeting Buy-in (reach, engagement and utilisation):

- **COMMUNICATION & SUPPORT:** Communication on how the Framework can support agencies with strategic direction and legislative requirements. Key to communicate ability to reduce or not cause additional burden.
- **WEBSITE:** a one-stop-shop for resources and case studies relevant for the Framework (applied examples from range of agencies/sectors across Wales on how they have used Framework) and a simplified guide for how the Framework can be used by operational staff.
- **IMPACT:** Gather info from strategic and operational staff on use, for example, in commissioning, and/or multi-agency meetings.
- **ENGAGEMENT:** VPU staff attendance at local, regional national violence prevention, community safety meetings providing a live opportunity to outline how the Framework and associated practice can support ongoing practice.
- **CHAMPIONS:** Champions (someone who will advocate for and share the Framework) at multiple-levels across different sectors/agencies.

NEXT STEPS

The primary output from this project is this report. The research team will also look to publish an academic paper later in 2025 as well as targeting national and international conferences. Drafts of any further outputs will be shared with the VPU ahead of any submissions. Members of the assessment team are eager to continue the collaboration with the VPU and partners through exploring opportunities for evaluation of the Framework and associated work as well as new opportunities for collaboration.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

Although we were unable to reach current operational staff, certain specified authorities and young people, given limited scale and scope of assessment, a broad range of stakeholders from across sectors and different parts of Wales were reached. Further, the provision of an updated Theory of Change for the implementation stage, a future evaluation design and recommendations provide the foundation to support the ongoing development and delivery of the Framework and the work of the VPU.

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