



National
Violence Against Women
Network

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improvement service

Equally Safe Quality Standards and Performance Framework

Key Learning from 2020/21
Data Returns

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Background

Background

[Equally Safe: Scotland's Strategy for Preventing and Eradicating Violence Against Women and Girls](#) was launched in 2014 and revised in 2016. The strategy sets out the Scottish Government and COSLA's joint vision for a strong and flourishing Scotland where all individuals are equally safe and respected, and where women and girls live free from all forms of violence and abuse – and the attitudes that help perpetuate it.

To support this vision, Equally Safe sets out four key priorities:

1. Scottish society embraces equality and mutual respect, and rejects all forms of violence against women and girls;
2. Women and girls thrive as equal citizens: socially, culturally, economically and political;
3. Interventions are early and effective, preventing violence and maximising the safety and wellbeing of women, children and young people; and
4. Men desist from all forms of violence against women and girls and perpetrators of such violence receive a robust and effective response.

At a local level, Violence Against Women Partnerships (VAWPs) are recognised as the strategic mechanism for progressing these four priorities in a multi-agency and evidence-informed way.

The [Equally Safe Quality Standards and Performance Framework](#) was published by the Scottish Government, COSLA and the Improvement Service in May 2018, in close collaboration with the National VAW Network and other stakeholders, to support VAWPs with this task.

The Equally Safe Quality Standards and Performance Framework

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The Equally Safe Quality Standards and Performance Framework responds to the expectations set out in [Equally Safe: Scotland's Strategy for Preventing and Eradicating Violence Against Women and Girls](#) and in the [Violence Against Women Partnership Guidance](#), in relation to effective performance management.

The Quality Standards aim to raise awareness of the types of services, policies and processes that are most effective in tackling VAWG and capture data on the extent to which they are currently being delivered across Scotland. The Performance Framework aims to measure the impact that these services, policies and processes are having on the lives of people and communities affected by VAWG.

Collectively, the two resources aim to support VAWPs to capture key performance data and facilitate a consistent approach to measuring and reporting on the progress being made to achieve the ambitions set out in Equally Safe at a local level.

This report highlights the key learning from the 22 VAWPs that provided Equally Safe Quality Standard and Performance Framework data returns for 2020/21.

Key Statistics from 2020/21

Key Statistics from 2020/21



Priority 1

100% of local authority areas report that there is guidance in place about the services available to support women and children affected by VAWG in the local community and how people can access these services.



Priority 2

96% of local authority areas report that work is underway to ensure that workplace policies recognise that employees may be affected by VAWG and communicate/support clear paths for women experiencing this.



Priority 3

96% of local authority areas report that the VAW Partnership and relevant partners have coordinated mitigating actions to respond to the challenges brought about by COVID-19.



Priority 4

86% of local authority areas report delivering some level of training for public sector staff who come into contact with members of the public, in addition to enabling them to identify and respond to perpetrators.



Multi Agency Working

Multi-Agency Working: 96% of local authority areas report that the Partnership has a strategic plan in place that outlines how the Partnership will implement Equally Safe at a local level.

Impact of COVID-19

Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic, which brought nation-wide lockdowns to the UK from March 2020, has impacted many local authorities ability to promote work that tackles VAWG. A number of local authority areas have been unable to provide Equally Safe data due to lack of capacity as a result of COVID-19. Of those that were able to provide this information, the impact on Quality Standards has been significantly evident, with both challenges and opportunities being reported:

Challenges

- » Engagement within local communities has generally decreased due to restrictions on in-person events. Closures of schools and colleges during periods of lockdown restrictions particularly impacted engagement with young people.
- » Capacity issues, due to work being more focussed on the pandemic response, has resulted in a lack of data collection and analysis.
- » Ability to provide training was impacted as in-person events were restricted. Additionally, increased focus on responding to COVID-19 became paramount and therefore there was no capacity for training.
- » Development of support services that were underway prior to the pandemic were delayed as a result.
- » Delays within the criminal justice system has increased waiting times for women and children experiencing domestic abuse and impacted the assistance they receive during the court process.
- » Engagement with perpetrators and court-mandated programmes have decreased as a result of the pandemic.

Opportunities

- » Online engagement has increased as social media campaigns and online events were used to replace in-person engagement. There has been an increased frequency of sharing information and contact details for support on social media.
- » Adapting training to be delivered online allowed for increased accessibility and a wider audience.
- » Collaborative working appeared to increase as a response to the pandemic and improved communications across services.
- » Service delivery adapted to the pandemic, which allowed for a greater variety of approaches to reach those impacted by VAWG.
- » COVID-19 recovery funding was able to be used to support VAWG projects, for example, by employing a worker to develop and embed the Safe & Together approach.

Local authorities were asked whether the Partnership and relevant partners coordinated mitigating actions to respond to the challenges brought about by COVID-19. Some examples of actions undertaken by Partnerships include:

- » **Angus VAW Partnership** implemented a weekly risk management meeting to consider the impact of COVID-19 and any associated mitigating action. A COVID-19 dataset was developed, which has evolved to a comparison report that was presented to the Chief Officers Group.
- » **Dundee VAW Partnership** responded to the pandemic by forming a small group of key operational managers during the first week of lockdown. This group has met every week/fortnight since its establishment to ensure the situation was closely monitored. The Partnership also collated both qualitative and quantitative data to present at meetings, and regular reports have been produced to compare data directly with corresponding dates in 2019.
- » **East Ayrshire** established a Multi-Agency Operational Oversight process for Public Protection, with six operational groups set up to support and strengthen multi-agency protection arrangements. One of these groups was a VAWG oversight group, which met weekly and included all key agencies involved in protecting women and girls locally. The oversight groups also worked together on cross-cutting areas of need and risk in order to act to mitigate these in real-time. These groups were coordinated through the Protection & Learning Team and reported directly into the East Ayrshire Chief Officer Group for Public Protection. One of the local initiatives emerging from the work of the VAWG oversight group has been the development of the 'Smile On' service which provides safe spaces within the Public Dental Service for women to access support.
- » **Scottish Borders VAW Partnership** initially completed the COVID-19 Recovery Checklist provided by COSLA and the Improvement Service. Based on this, priorities were agreed for managing during the pandemic. Consequently, excellent joint working was established and there was no break in any specialist service provisions.

Equally Safe Quality Standards - Results and Key Learning

1. Scottish society embraces equality and mutual respect, and rejects all forms of violence against women and girls.

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Overview of percentage of partnerships meeting and partly meeting the quality standards for Priority 1 in 2020-21:



89% of local authority areas in Scotland report meeting or partly meeting the Quality Standards for Equally Safe Priority 1 in 2018/19.



91% of local authority areas report that some level of engagement and communications takes place in the local community to increase people's awareness and understanding of the causes and consequences of VAWG, and the role they can play in tackling it.



96% of local authority areas report that the VAW Partnership has some processes in place to engage with primary and secondary schools across the local community to help ensure they deliver age-appropriate evidence-based interventions to raise children, teachers and parents' understanding and awareness of gender-based violence, positive, healthy relationships and consent, as part of a whole school approach to tackling VAWG.



91% of local authority areas report that some youth work organisations across their local communities deliver interventions to raise young people's understanding and awareness of VAWG and the importance of positive, healthy relationships.



82% of local authority areas report that their local VAW Partnership has processes in place to engage with colleges and universities across the local community and works with them to identify opportunities to partnership working in preventing gender-based violence on campuses.



100% of local authority areas report that there is guidance in place about the services available to support women and children affected by VAWG in the local community and how people can access these services.

Examples of Good Practice

The following examples of good practice identified through the Equally Safe Quality Standards and Performance Framework provide a snapshot of work taking place in local authority areas across Scotland to progress Priority Area 1.

Argyll & Bute – 16 Days of Activism: Awareness raising through a local podcast

A local Argyll & Bute [podcast](#) hosted by the Council's Chief Executive recorded an episode to be released during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign. The issue of VAWG was discussed with Sandra Paton from Argyll & Bute Women's Aid and Shona Williams, the Senior Justice Manager for Argyll & Bute Council. Additionally, contact details for Argyll & Bute Women's Aid and the Scottish Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline were provided alongside information on the podcast.

Fife – Gender Equal Play Pilot

The Gender Equal Play programme was piloted with Duloch Nursery, supported by Zero Tolerance and Fife VAWP. The project aimed to promote gender equal resources in early years settings. This pilot ended in March 2021, but a further 5 nurseries in Fife had signed up to participate.

Scottish Borders – No Excuses! Consent & Healthy Relationships Workshop

Scottish Borders Rape Crisis Centre and Youth Borders organisations partnered to deliver the 'No Excuses! Consent & Healthy Relationships' workshops. This programme provides opportunities to discuss consent and healthy relationships in an informal setting to enhance young people's understanding.

South Lanarkshire – Mentors in Violence Prevention Programme

The GBV Partnership in South Lanarkshire has processes in place to engage with secondary schools through collaborations with Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) and Lanarkshire Rape Crisis Centre (LRCC) prevention work. GBV prevention has been included as a priority area within Education's Children's Services Plan, and the continued engagement with the MVP programme and increased uptake in GBV training by education staff indicates its successful implementation. Additionally, LRCC has a Sexual Violence Prevention Worker specialising in delivery of educational workshops on topics around consent, healthy relationships, harmful gender stereotypes and support following sexual assault. LRCC also has a programme for schools adopting a whole school approach to tackling VAWG.

Next Steps/Recommendations

- » The COVID-19 pandemic has had severe impact on engagement with local communities, development and roll out of actions, and communication of guidance.
- » Some Partnerships highlighted that data recording and analysis is completed by individual agencies, however, this is not collaborative. A more joined-up approach to data collection and sharing is recommended to improve this in order to inform strategies and service development.
- » Many previously established pathways to engagement with schools and colleges were impacted by the pandemic due to lockdowns and restrictions on in-person meetings. It is considered a priority in many Partnerships to re-establish these connections to increase communications with young people and continue/introduce interventions to raise awareness.
- » It was highlighted that engagement and communications, specifically on social media, appear to focus mainly on domestic abuse. It is recommended that the wider range of VAWG issues should be better represented throughout communications.
- » Development or revision of community communication plans could be considered in order to adapt to the 'new normal' post-pandemic. Partnerships should ensure that events, training and all other engagement can be modified to allow for online communication, if necessary.

2. Women and girls thrive as equal citizens: socially, culturally, economically and politically.

Overview of percentage of partnerships meeting and partly meeting the quality standards for Priority 2 in 2020-21.



92% of local authority areas across Scotland report meeting or partly meeting the Quality Standards for Equally Safe Priority 2 in 2020/21.



95% of local authority areas report that public sector employers in their area publish a gender pay gap and an equal pay statements and use this information to develop equality outcomes on gender and employment.



96% of local authority areas report that work is underway locally to ensure Public Sector workplace policies are gender-sensitive and recognise the barriers to women's workplace equality.



96% of local authority areas report that work in underway to ensure that workplace policies recognise that employees may be affected by VAWG and communicate/support clear paths for women experiencing this.



72% of local authority areas report that VAW Partnerships (and their member organisations) actively engage with Close the Gap's 'Equally Safe at Work' pilot.

Examples of Good Practice

The following examples of good practice identified through the Equally Safe Quality Standards and Performance Framework provide a snapshot of work taking place in local authority areas across Scotland to progress Priority Area 2:

Angus – Workplace Gender-Based Violence Policy

The Angus VAW Partnership has developed a Workplace Gender-Based Violence policy to encourage local businesses and organisations to create a supportive and responsive workplace culture. This allows anyone subject to gender-based violence to feel safe, whilst perpetrators are managed in line with best practice. The policy provides a template for businesses to adapt for their own organisation. There is also a pledge for local businesses to sign up to, which promotes a public commitment to taking action in supporting victim/survivor employees.

Dundee – The Gendered Services Project

The Gendered Services Project works with services in Dundee to support them in taking a gendered approach to their service delivery. The project is focussing on improving services for women with complex needs. Women with lived experience are at the forefront of the project and have been involved in the design of a self-assessment form for services to use to identify gaps within their service delivery. This form is due to be piloted along with associated training.

Inverclyde – Internal VAWG Training

Inverclyde's Women's Forum identified a budget to develop Equally Safe at Work. This funding was used to offer 16 online training sessions to council employees and partners across Inverclyde to raise awareness and address VAWG. SafeLives delivered training to 280 participants during March and April 2021.

North Lanarkshire – Gender-Based Violence Support Officers

In addition to workplace Gender-Based Violence policy and guidance, North Lanarkshire has Gender-Based Violence support officers throughout services within the Council. This was developed as part of the work of NLC to secure the Bronze Award for the Equally Safe at Work employer accreditation. These officers provide support and guidance for employees who are affected by gender-based violence.

South Ayrshire – Integrated Impact Assessment Process and Toolkit

South Ayrshire Council are currently developing a new Integrated Impact Assessment Process and Toolkit to ensure that Equality Impact Assessments are routinely undertaken in partnerships with Equality Groups. This will incorporate Fairer Scotland Duty and Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Next Steps/Recommendations

- » It has been acknowledged by some Partnerships that Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) are not always undertaken in relevant contexts. This is recognised as an area for improvement in developing new policies, processes and services at a local level.

- Workplace policies could be further developed in order to include all barriers to women's workplace equality, as some Partnerships recognised that this was only partly addressed.
- Regular engagement with local equality groups is noted as an aim for several areas as currently this is done on an ad hoc basis, or with only a select number of equality groups.

3. Interventions are early and effective, preventing violence and maximising the safety and wellbeing of women, children and young people.

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Overview of percentage of partnerships meeting and partly meeting the quality standards for Priority 3 in 2020-21:



94% of local authority areas across Scotland report meeting or partly meeting the Quality Standards for Equally Safe Priority 3 in 2020/21.



95% of local authority areas report that a proportion of public sector staff who come into contact with members of the public have received basic training in how to identify and respond to women and children affected by VAWG in an appropriate way.



90% of local authority areas report that Routine Enquiry is regularly undertaken within many key priority settings such as maternity, mental health, substance misuse, A&E, community nursing and sexual health services.



91% of local authority areas report that regular Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) take place in their areas.



100% of local authority areas report that many Public Sector partners have policies in place to strengthen approaches to tackling VAWG.



96% of local authority areas report that the VAW Partnership and relevant partners have coordinated mitigating actions to respond to the challenges brought about by COVID-19.

Examples of Good Practice

The following examples of good practice identified through the Equally Safe Quality Standards and Performance Framework provide a snapshot of work taking place in local authority areas across Scotland to progress Priority Area 3:

East Ayrshire – ASSIST

East Ayrshire has employed the service ASSIST, a Specialist Independent Domestic Abuse Advocacy and Support Service that covers 12 local authorities in the West of Scotland and focusses on reducing the risk to and improving the safety of victims of domestic abuse. It aims to ensure that all victims are safe, informed and supported throughout their involvement with the criminal justice system. ASSIST provides both an individual and institutional advocacy service, thereby ensuring that all victims of domestic abuse benefit from the service, whether they are an ASSIST client or not.

North Ayrshire – Safe Contact Initiative

North Ayrshire Women's Aid (NAWA), in conjunction with the VAW Partnership, have developed the Safe Contact Initiative. This involves discreet wallet-size contact cards in envelopes that are stored in a small basket at the reception/till area of a service. These are advertised by a small leaflet attached to the basket, or on posters in women's toilet facilities. Cards can be completed and handed back to the service with details of contact number and when it is a safe time for NAWA to make contact. Services already involved include opticians, dental practices, hairdressing salons and coffee shops.

Renfrewshire – Pathways for Women with Mental Health Needs

Renfrewshire VAW Partnership has worked with Safe Lives on the Whole Lives Scotland project to focus on domestic abuse and mental health service provision. Strong pathways have been developed for women with complex needs relating to mental health and trauma. The introduction of Community Safety Nurse posts who provide a link between VAWG and mental health services has supported this pathway. This has included providing advice and support to staff in how to best support women who have experience VAWG. The initial review of this service was very positive and, as a result, several additional Community Safety Nurse posts have been agreed and advertised.

Shetland – Specialist Support Services for Children Affected by VAWG

Shetland Women's Aid has appointed an Education and Prevention worker to provide outreach work in local Secondary schools across Shetland. The post is responsible for delivering educational materials around domestic abuse and healthy relationships and facilitating workshops where pupils are invited to engage in thoughtful reflections and exercises around the material. Shetland Council's

Education Outreach Services also provide opportunities for children and young people who are experiencing domestic abuse to access the Shetland Women's Aid service, should they need. Additionally, there is a Play therapist who works from a specially adapted playroom in Lerwick and support workers who can visit children and young people in their schools, health centres and anywhere that is safe to meet in the community.

Next Steps/Recommendations

- Routine Enquiry continues to have uncertainties surrounding the compliance of certain services, such as A&E, mental health and addictions. Some Partnerships do not have appropriate methods of data collection in place to provide accurate details on all services.
- Ensuring attendance of all key partners at MARACs is listed as a priority for some Partnerships, which should assist in improving coordination and strategic support.
- Accommodation is a concern for many areas as demand ultimately outweighs capacity. In addition, accessibility for women with specific requirements is limited and therefore reviewing these needs and how to provide appropriate refuge is necessary.

4. Men desist from all forms of violence against women and girls, and perpetrators of such violence receive a robust and effective response.

4. Men desist from all forms of violence against women and girls, and perpetrators of such violence receive a robust and effective response.

Overview of percentage of partnerships meeting and partly meeting the quality standards for Priority 4 in 2020-21:



78% of local authority areas across Scotland report meeting or partly meeting the Quality Standards for Equally Safe Priority 4 in 2020-21.



86% of local authority areas report delivering some level of training for public sector staff who come into contact with members of the public, in addition to enabling them to identify and respond to perpetrators.



100% of local authority areas report that Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination (MATAC) groups are in place locally to support a multi-agency approach to be taken to identifying high risk perpetrators of domestic abuse and ensure they are held to account for their behaviours.



91% of local authority areas report that measures are in place, such as specialist domestic abuse courts, to ensure women and children who experience domestic abuse receive an appropriate response from the criminal justice system.



77% of local authority areas report that court-mandated programmes are in place at a local level that work with perpetrators of VAWG to hold them to account for, and support them to change, their behaviours.

Examples of Good Practice

The following examples of good practice identified through the Equally Safe Quality Standards and Performance Framework provide a snapshot of work taking place in local authority areas across Scotland to progress Priority Area 4:

Aberdeen City – Caledonian ‘Light’ Programme

Justice Social Work are planning the development of a Caledonian ‘Light’ programme, along with other Local Authorities. This is designed to provide a programme for those convicted of domestic abuse offences that are not given a court-mandated programme to participate in.

Highland – Specialist VAWG Perpetrator Services

Criminal Justice Social Work (CJSW) provides a variety of court-mandated programmes in the Highland area, typically for people that have been issued a Community Payback Order (CPO). Moving Forward: Making Changes is available for sex offenders, whilst The Caledonian System is available for domestic abuse perpetrators. Additionally, the Preventing Abuse in Relationships (PAR) programme is available for CJSW clients on CPOs for lower-level situational couple-type interventions. This is delivered by Action for Children to CJSW clients.

Orkney – ‘Vulnerable Witnesses’ Approach

All survivors of domestic abuse are automatically classed as ‘vulnerable witnesses’ by the courts in Orkney. These vulnerable witnesses are provided a variety of measures to protect them throughout the court procedure. This includes providing their evidence through in-house video-link, on-the-day support and information on the process from Victim Support Scotland, and court-familiarisation visits to referred witnesses.

Stirling – Public Protection E-Module

Stirling have included an ‘Introduction to Gender-Based Violence’ section within the Public Protection E-Module. This e-module is mandated for all Stirling Council staff and therefore increases awareness throughout the organisation.

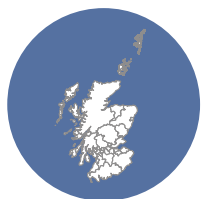
Next Steps/Recommendations

- Certain areas that currently do not have domestic abuse courts in place have identified that this is part of their strategic plan for future improvement.
- Non-court mandated pilots are being explored in areas that currently do not have these implemented. However, not all local authority areas have the resources and/or funding to do this.
- As COVID-19 delayed the introduction and delivery of certain programmes/training, the affected local authorities need to ensure that they continue to implement these in accordance with previous plans.
- Partnerships in areas where Caledonian is running report this working well, and a few have mentioned that they have undertaken the court-mandated UP2U programme for perpetrators of domestic abuse. However, this has not been implemented extensively in some areas due to lack of funding and adequate resources.

5. Multi-agency partnership working.

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Overview of percentage of partnerships meeting and partly meeting the quality standards for 'Multi-agency partnership working' in 2020-21:



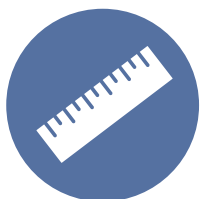
94% of local authority areas across Scotland report meeting or partly meeting the Quality Standards for Multi-agency partnership working in 2020-21.



100% of local authority areas report that the VAW Partnership brings together representatives from the key Public Sector and Third Sector organisations working to prevent and eradicate VAWG within the local area.



96% of local authority areas report that the Partnership has a strategic plan in place that outlines how the Partnership will implement Equally Safe at a local level.



95% of local authority areas report that the Partnership has a framework in place for measuring its performance and progress towards achieving its agreed outcomes.



100% of local authority areas report that the Partnership has clear strategic links with other relevant thematic partnerships/groups within the Community Planning Partnership who are working towards shared outcomes.

Examples of Good Practice

The following examples of good practice identified through the Equally Safe Quality Standards and Performance Framework provide a snapshot of work taking place in local authority areas across Scotland to progress multi-agency partnership working:

Dumfries & Galloway – VAWG Sub-Committee

In Dumfries & Galloway, there is a VAWG sub-committee that forms part of the local Public Protection Partnership structure. This Sub-Committee reports to the Public Protection Committee (PPC), ensuring that the VAWG agenda is considered. The PPC has five further formal sub-groups that are responsible for taking forward actions on behalf of the PPC, allowing for the VAWG agenda to be taken forward.

East Renfrewshire – Improving the Domestic Abuse Pathway: Adult Services

A multi-agency approach was taken in East Renfrewshire to reviewing the Adult Support and Protection Local Operating Procedures in relation to the VAWP. The review was open to all HSCP staff and partners, and a working group was created comprised of members of the Adult Protection Committee (APC), Public Protection Sub-committee and the Business Support team. A report conducted on the outcomes of this review indicated that there had been significant change in procedures as greater consideration of domestic abuse was incorporated.

Edinburgh – Equally Safe Edinburgh Committee

Edinburgh rebranded its VAWP in 2020 with a new name, now known as the Equally Safe Edinburgh Committee (ESEC). This has allowed for an expansion in membership, including representation from other public protection committees. The ESEC has an extensive 3-year improvement plan which incorporates many key issues. This shift in focus towards the Equally Safe agenda has provided the partners with a clear indication of the aims and direction of the ESEC. There has been more connection to the intersectionality of other public protection committees and their shared agendas, as well as within Council committees and other areas of public sector governance.

Next Steps/Recommendations

- A number of Partnerships have recognised that they have not undertaken a self-assessment within the last 3 years and are planning to schedule this when possible. Of those that had completed a self-assessment, some Partnerships noted that progression of identified improvement actions had been limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Strategic links with other relevant Partnerships appear to have been improved, but some Partnerships have noted that links with certain areas, such as Community Justice Partnerships and Alcohol and Drugs Partnerships, need to be strengthened.
- Most Partnerships appear to have representatives from key Public Sector and Third Sector organisations, however, attendance and engagement can be inconsistent in some areas.
- Development and renewal of strategic plans was impacted by COVID-19 and therefore, in Partnerships that were affected, updating this should be a priority.

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