

Supporting a Collective Leadership Approach to Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls

Learning Report

March 2021



Overview

As part of the calendar of events taking place across Scotland to mark 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, COSLA and the Improvement Service hosted an online event on the 10th December 2020 to explore the collective leadership that is needed at a local and national level to tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG) and gender inequality.

Equally Safe: Scotland's Strategy to Eradicate Violence Against Women and Girls highlights the importance of ensuring a joined-up, multi-agency approach is taken to tackling VAWG and gender inequality. The COVID-19 pandemic, and the restrictions put in place to contain the virus, have significantly increased the risks to women and children affected by violence and abuse. Ensuring that there is strong, collective leadership around this agenda at a local and national level is now, more than ever, an urgent priority.



The event aimed to:

- Raise awareness of the range of work that has happened across Scotland to date to implement Equally Safe and the priorities moving forward;
- Explore the key leadership role that different stakeholders can play in ensuring that tackling VAWG and gender inequality is recognised as a strategic priority, and is embedded as part of wider COVID-19 recovery, renewal and transformation planning; and
- Identify the critical components required to ensure that a joined-up, multi-agency, whole system approach can be promoted to improving outcomes for women and children affected by violence and abuse across different policy agendas.

Attendees

The event was attended by a wide range of senior third sector and public sector stakeholders from local authority areas across Scotland. Attendees included VAW Partnership Lead Officers and Chairs, Adult Protection and Child Protection Lead Officers, Equalities Officers, Criminal Justice Managers, Children's Services Managers, Health and Social Care Team Managers, Women's Aid Managers, Police Inspectors and Public Health leads.

The event was chaired by Cllr Jim McMahon, a White Ribbon Scotland Ambassador and Cabinet Spokesperson for Older People and Community Safety at East Ayrshire Council. We were also delighted to be joined on the day by a number of keynote speakers who highlighted the importance of supporting a collective leadership approach to tackling violence against women and girls at a local and national level. These included:

- Cllr Alison Evison, COSLA President
- Christina McKelvie MSP, Minister for Older People and Equalities
- Katie Cosgrove, Public Health Scotland
- Lucy McDonald, SafeLives
- Anna Mitchell, Safe & Together Institute
- Sophie Gwyther, Dundee City Council
- Janice Thomson, East Renfrewshire Council; and
- Heather Williams, Women's Aid South Lanarkshire and East Renfrewshire (WASLER)

[**View the full speaker video playlist.**](#)

[**View the event highlights video.**](#)

[**Download all the speaker slides.**](#)

At the event, partners were encouraged to consider:

- How we can ensure collective leadership is informed by the lived experience of women and children experiencing VAWG;
- What would a whole-systems, person-centred approach to tackling VAWG and gender inequality look like and what impact will this have on women and children's lives; and
- What actions can partners take within their own organisation/ strategic partnership to support this shift and what support do they need from local and national government to do so.

A summary of the key messages from the event are outlined below, with more detail on the discussion questions included in the remainder of the report.

Key messages from the event



While the COVID-19 pandemic has increased risks to women and children experiencing all forms of VAWG, it has also helped to raise awareness of the urgent need to ensure the safety and wellbeing needs of people experiencing VAWG are prioritised in both local and national decision making.



It is vital that the systems and services in place within local communities across Scotland meet the needs of, and are shaped by, the women and children with lived experience of VAW. Resources are needed to support women and children to do this in a safe, meaningful and trauma-informed way.



A joined-up approach across all areas of community planning is needed to improve outcomes for women and children. Preventing and tackling VAWG must be recognised as a priority across a wide range of policy areas including public protection, community justice, health and social care, housing and poverty and inequality. At local level, strategic partnerships need to work more closely together to ensure the safety and wellbeing of women and children experiencing VAWG and more resources are needed to support this shift.



Inadequate and insecure funding for both third sector and public sector partners has created barriers to VAWG and gender inequality being tackled in an effective and systematic way within and across local authority areas. The current postcode lottery of support available to women and children experiencing VAWG across Scotland is unacceptable and a more consistent approach to embedding Equally Safe at both a strategic and operational level is needed, while allowing for flexibility in response to local needs and priorities.



A joined-up approach from both Scottish Government and Local Government is needed, with a clear purpose and commitment to tackling VAWG and gender inequality. The expectation that tackling VAWG is everyone's business has to be clearly communicated to professionals working across all policy agendas at both a local and national level and support needs to be put in place to enable professionals to meet this expectation.

Collective leadership and lived experience

Partners highlighted that in order to improve outcomes for women and children with local communities across Scotland, it is critical that collective leadership is informed by the lived experience of women and children who have experienced VAWG and the broader impacts of gender inequality. For this to happen, partners noted that there is a need to:

- Create opportunities for women and children with lived experience of VAWG to work collaboratively with local policy-makers and practitioners to co-design the systems, services and pathways in place in local communities to ensure they meet their needs and aspirations. It was highlighted that these opportunities need to be safe, meaningful and trauma-informed and resources are needed to enable this to happen.
- Ensure that specialist services have the capacity and resource to amplify the voices of survivors, including the lived experience of frontline workers
- Support meaningful collaboration and shared use of resources between VAWPs and other key strategic partnerships with a role to play in improving outcomes for women and children including Adult and Child Protection Committees, Alcohol and Drug Partnerships, Health and Social Care Partnerships and Community Justice Partnerships.
- Support more meaningful use of Equality Impact Assessments in all decision-making processes to ensure that the inequalities that people and communities may experience as a result of gender, race, disability and/ or sexuality are fully considered and addressed when designing systems and services.
- Ensure that policy and practice is informed by existing data, evidence and research
- Ensure there is a robust understanding of gendered analysis across all areas of community planning.

Developing a whole-systems, partnership approach to tackling VAWG

Partners highlighted the urgent need to adopt a whole-systems, partnership approach to tackling VAWG in local communities across Scotland. It was noted that the pandemic has exposed the risks of partners continuing to work in siloes and the importance of ensuring that person-centred (rather than policy or service-centred) pathways of support are in place for women and children experiencing VAWG. It was noted that this is particularly important in ensuring the needs of women and children with multiple and/ or complex needs are met including women experiencing problem alcohol and drug use, offending behaviour and physical or mental health issues, including severe trauma.

For this to happen, partners noted that:

- Both national and local decision-makers need to commit to actions to address VAWG and gender inequality within all key policy agendas and strategic plans, including as part of COVID-19 recovery and transformation planning
- Partners need to ensure a whole-systems, domestic abuse-informed approach is taken to working with families experiencing violence and abuse that holds the perpetrator to account for their behaviours and puts actions in place to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the mother and child. Partners noted that providing local authorities with resources to embed Safe & Together or other evidence-based frameworks in a high-quality and sustainable way is key to supporting this shift.
- High quality, gender-informed training and wider workforce development opportunities are needed to ensure local decision-makers, practitioners and other key professionals have a robust understanding of the causes and consequences of VAWG. This must inform the tangible actions that they can take in their area of work to improve outcome outcomes for women and children experiencing all forms of VAWG and wider inequalities. This should include work with senior leaders to increase understanding and confidence of actions they can take with leadership roles.
- A gendered analysis of all budgeting decisions should be taken along with more meaningful use of Equality Impact Assessments, to ensure a better understanding of the impact that decisions have on women's lives
- Dedicated funding is required to support local multi-agency partnership working to tackle VAWG and gender inequality. This resourcing is required to support both VAWG agencies and wider stakeholders to identify and progress actions to support a more joined-up, person-centred approach to working with women and children experiencing VAWG, reduce siloed working that currently exists within and across organisations.
- Long-term, sustainable funding is needed for specialist VAWG services to enable them both to deliver high quality support to women and children within local communities and to engage with wider strategic work. It was noted that the postcode lottery of support that is currently available to women and children across Scotland is unacceptable and that a minimum level of specialist provision should be available in all local authority areas for women and children experiencing domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG. Competitive funding models undermines partnership working and puts additional pressure on specialist services at a time when capacity is already limited.

- Support and resources are required to undertake meaningful engagement with women and children with lived experience of VAWG within local communities. It was noted that this could include developing local 'expert group' listeners and creating VAWG champions to inform and support local policy and practice.
- Support should be provided locally to ensure data is collected and analysed by gender and other protected characteristics, to increase understanding of women's experiences and outcomes and raise awareness of the need for gendered approaches
- Senior leaders need to be supported to champion culture change within their organisations and ensure that tackling VAWG is given equal footing to other community planning priorities and that there is a clear expectation across all policy areas that tackling VAWG is understood as everyone's business.



Summary and next steps

Looking ahead, stakeholders identified the need for:

- Strong commitment to collaborative leadership from all areas of local and national government to tackle VAWG and gender inequality;
- Joined-up working which recognises that VAWG is everyone's business. A joined-up approach is required across all strategic partnerships at local level, and between National and Local Government;
- Long-term, sustainable funding, and capacity building which ensures that lived experience informs the design of systems and services;
- Robust and meaningful evidence gathering and information sharing which informs decision making; and
- Leadership championing a gendered approach and breaking down myths/stigma relating to cultural attitudes to VAWG and gender inequality.

