



Violence Against Women and Girls National Summit 2022

Tackling Ongoing and Emerging Challenges through Collective Leadership and Collaborative Action Learning Report



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Overview

As part of the calendar of events taking place across Scotland to mark [16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence](#), the Scottish Government and COSLA co-chaired a national summit on 8th December 2022 to identify actions that can be taken locally and nationally to help tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG) and gender inequality in Scotland.

The summit aimed to build on the learning from the [Collective Leadership Conference](#) in 2020 and the [Collective Action Summit](#) in 2021, while recognising that stakeholders across Scotland are currently operating in a policy and delivery landscape changed by the impacts of COVID-19, the cost of living crisis, a challenging recruitment and retention environment and an increasingly digital world providing new spaces for abuse to take place.

Key aims of the event

- Sharing and amplifying learning on women, children and young people's experiences of gender inequality and violence against women and girls (VAWG) as we work to tackle ongoing and emerging challenges;
- Raising awareness of innovative work taking place across the country to ensure that the needs of survivors, and the workforces that support them, are recognised and prioritised in local and national planning processes;
- Identifying and agreeing tangible actions that Scotland's leaders can take individually and collectively to ensure that the rights of women and girls to live safe lives, free from all forms of violence and abuse are promoted locally and nationally, and that a decisive shift is made towards preventing violence and abuse and holding perpetrators to account for their behaviours wherever possible; and
- Providing meaningful opportunities for senior leaders and decision-makers across a wider range of policy areas to shape the development of the next phase of [Equally Safe](#) and re-affirm our collective commitment to ensuring that a joined-up, whole systems approach is taken to preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls in Scotland.

Attendees

The event was attended by 90 senior third sector and public sector stakeholders from a wide range of local and national organisations across Scotland. Attendees included Local Authority Chief Executives and Council Leaders, VAW Partnership Lead Officers and Chairs, Chief Social Work Officers, Public Health Leads, Third Sector Chief Executives, elected members and policy leads across a wide range of areas including Equalities, Justice, Health, Child Poverty and Employability.

The event was co-chaired by [Christina McKelvie \(Minister for Equalities and Older People\)](#) and [Cllr Maureen Chalmers \(COSLA Spokesperson for Community Wellbeing\)](#).

We were delighted to have inputs from representatives from a range of organisations and strategic partnerships across Scotland, including:

- [Nick Bland, Scottish Government](#)
- [Fiona Drouet, Emily's Test](#)
- [Catherine Murphy, Engender](#)
- [Marsha Scott, Scottish Women's Aid](#)
- [Linda Thompson, Women's Support Project](#)
- [Sarah Axford, Scottish Borders Violence Against Women Partnership](#)
- [Kirsti Hay, Glasgow Violence Against Women Partnership](#)
- [Sophie Gwyther, Dundee Violence Against Women Partnership](#)
- [DCC Malcolm Graham, Police Scotland](#)

[Videos from all of the inputs](#) at the Summit are available to view.

At the event, partners were encouraged to consider:

- What will you commit to doing in your leadership role to help strengthen collaborative efforts to tackle VAWG?
- What action will you take within your own organisation/ policy area to prioritise the needs of women, children and young people affected by VAWG as you tackle the ongoing and emerging challenges posed by the pandemic and cost of living crisis?
- What would you like to see being prioritised in the next phase of Equally Safe? What actions will you take to support its development and implementation?

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



VAWG damages health and wellbeing, limits freedom and potential, and is a fundamental violation of human rights. Too many women, children and young people living in local communities across Scotland continue to have their lives adversely affected by men's violence and abuse. There is an urgent need for senior leaders and decision-makers across all policy areas to work together to prevent VAWG and ensure that women, children and young people affected by these issues receive the support they need, at the time they need it.



The compounding impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the cost of living crisis, a challenging recruitment and retention environment and ongoing pressures on public sector budgets have created an environment whereby both women, children and young people experiencing VAWG, and the workforces that support them, are currently facing heightened risks and challenges. Senior leaders and decision-makers have a key role to play in ensuring these risks and challenges are recognised and responded to in local and national planning.



There are numerous examples of good practice taking place in local communities across Scotland that show public sector and third sector organisations working together to ensure that person-centred, holistic and trauma-informed systems and services are in place that better meet the needs of women, children and young people affected by VAWG. Senior leaders and decision-makers have a key role to play in championing these approaches, ensuring they have adequate resources and buy-in and identifying opportunities to embed good practice in their own local area where areas for improvement are identified.



The upcoming refresh of the Equally Safe strategy provides a valuable opportunity to ensure that a multi-agency, cross-policy approach to tackling VAWG and women's inequality is promoted locally and nationally. This requires joined-up working and collective leadership across key policy agendas including equalities, public protection, education, employment, housing, health and justice.



Tackling VAWG is everyone's business and everyone has a role to play in ensuring that the rights of women and girls to live safe lives, free from all forms of violence and abuse are realised. There is a need for awareness raising which reaches senior leaders and decision-makers who are not currently engaged in this agenda and supports them to understand the vital role they can play in tackling VAWG and gender inequality. This includes ensuring more men in leadership positions commit to taking action to support the next phase of Equally Safe, and that they are held accountable for doing so.



What next? Tackling ongoing and emerging challenges through collective leadership and collaborative action

The Summit had a strong focus on identifying tangible actions that Scotland's leaders can take individually and collectively to ensure that the rights of women and girls to live safe lives, free from all forms of violence and abuse are promoted locally and nationally, and that a decisive shift is made towards preventing violence and abuse and holding perpetrators to account for their behaviours wherever possible.

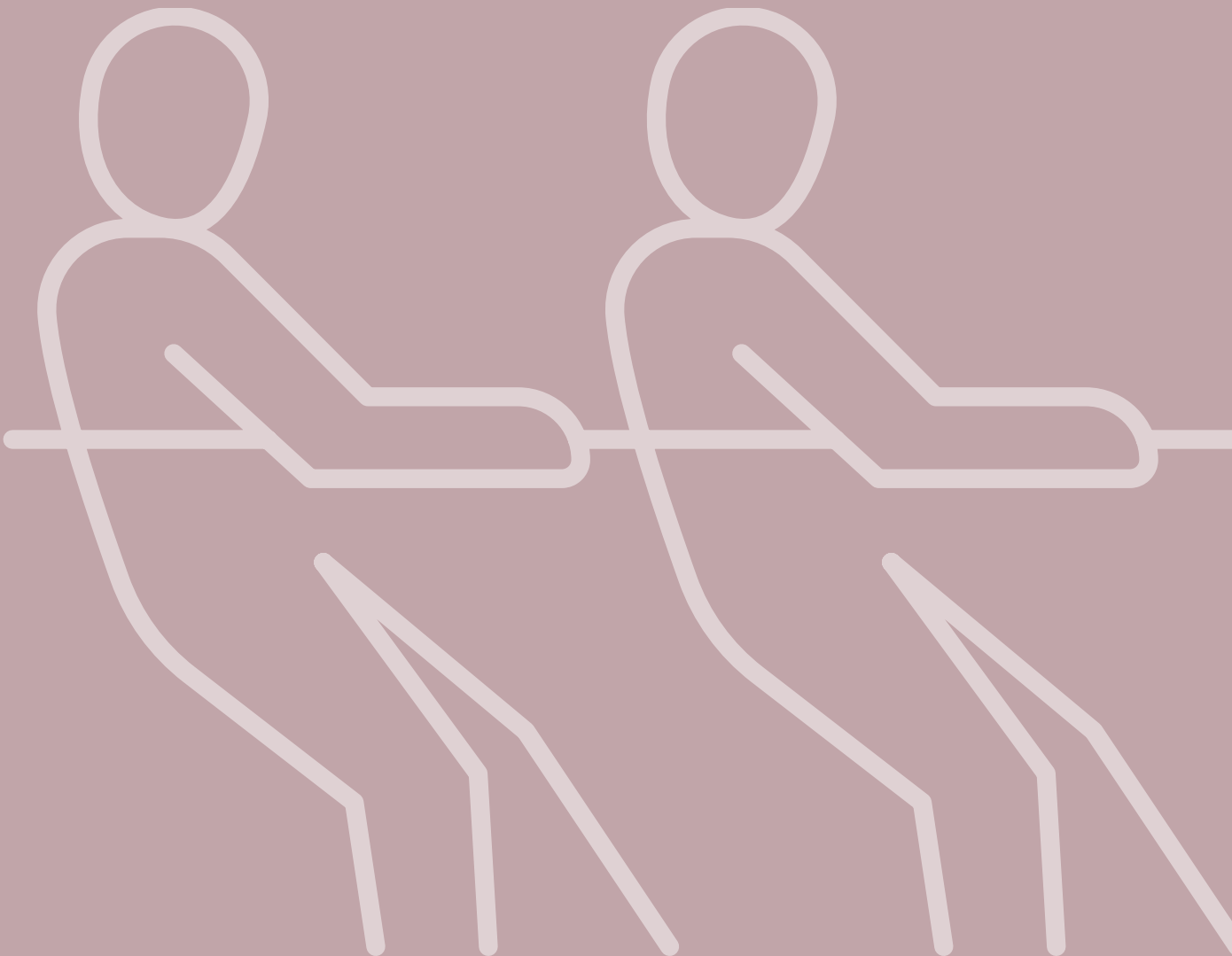
To help identify these actions, attendees were encouraged to reflect on the issues highlighted through the introductory presentations as well as the key messages that emerged through the series of thematic spotlight events that took place during 16 Days. These messages included the need to:

- Increase awareness of the range of systems and services available to women, children and young people affected by VAWG in local communities across Scotland to help ensure victims/ survivors can access the support they need, at the time they need it;
- Ensure there is sustainable investment in evidence-based interventions that are shown to improve outcomes for women, children and young people affected by VAWG, with local investment in both services and systems. It was noted that there is a need to deliver consistency in positive outcomes for women and children no matter where they live in Scotland, through delivering systems and services that are tailored to the needs and priorities of women, children and young people in local communities;
- Ensure that the lived experience of women, children and young people is at the heart of system and service responses and that meaningful opportunities are available at a local and national level for victims/ survivors to shape future responses to tackling VAWG;
- Promote a whole system approach to meeting the needs of women, children and young people affected by VAWG that helps breakdown the siloes that many policy agendas/ service areas currently operate in and recognises that victims/ survivors of VAWG will benefit from person-centred support from multiple areas of community planning; and
- Support a decisive shift towards prevention and early intervention in all of our work to help realise the right of every women, child and young person in Scotland to live a life free of violence and abuse where they can achieve their full potential.

Collective leadership in a time of crisis

Reflecting on the challenges currently facing women, children and young people experiencing VAWG in local communities across Scotland, attendees identified a number of actions they would commit to undertake to help ensure that their needs are prioritised moving forward. These included:

- Raising awareness of the prevalence and impact of VAWG and ensure that professionals across a wide range of workforces have access to training and other learning resources at a level appropriate to their job to enable them to better recognise and respond to women, children and young people experiencing violence and abuse;
- Supporting closer partnership working between universal services and specialist services to ensure that women, children and young people experiencing VAWG benefit from joined-up pathways of support across all policy areas;
- Ensuring that women, children and young people with lived experience of VAWG have meaningful opportunities to shape local systems and services to ensure they meet their needs;
- Highlighting the valuable work undertaken by local specialist services and ensure that local funding for these services is protected, despite the challenging funding environment Councils are currently operating in;
- Promoting a gendered approach to designing, delivering and commissioning systems and services for women, children and young people and ensure that equality assessments are routinely used to identify opportunities to better support to the safety and wellbeing of women;
- Continuing to take a robust approach to the prosecution of violence against women and girls in all its forms, and to work with partners to support survivors, and vulnerable witnesses, in a trauma-informed way;
- Bringing the work of our local multi-agency Violence Against Women Partnership to the attention of other senior leads across the local authority;
- Raise awareness of the examples of good practice highlighted within the Summit with local decision-makers and explore opportunities to adopt initiatives such as Emily Test, the Safe & Together model and Dundee's Gendered Services project;
- Encouraging more men to engage with these discussions, including those in senior leadership positions; and
- Continuing to ask myself, and other senior leaders, 'what will you do?' to help improve outcomes for women, children and young people and hold people to account for implementing change.



What would you like to see being prioritised in the next phase of Equally Safe?

Attendees were asked to identify the key actions they would like to see prioritised in the next phase of Equally Safe, with the new strategy due to be published in the coming year. Key recommendations included:

- Ensuring that the outstanding actions that have been made to date to tackle VAWG are fully implemented. These include implementing the actions set out in the Domestic Abuse Protection (Scotland) Act 2021 and the Children (Scotland) Act 2020, strengthening MARACs across Scotland and rolling out the Caledonian model and Safe & Together model.
- Ensuring that the refreshed Equally Safe strategy has a greater focus on prevention and early intervention, with increased resources made available to progress activities that will reduce the numbers of women, children and young people requiring crisis support in the longer term;
- Highlighting the critical role of mainstream/ universal services in identifying and responding to women, children and young people experiencing VAWG and ensuring actions are place to enable professionals working within these services to better meet the needs of victims/ survivors of VAWG and ensure they are held to account for doing so;
- Encourage an increased focus on engaging with children and young people to raise awareness from an early age about what positive healthy relationships looks like, tackle trends in harmful behaviours and attitudes amongst young men and ensure children and young people know how to identify signs of VAWG within relationships and access support at the earliest possible stage;
- Promote an increased focus on holding perpetrators to account for their behaviours in order to reduce the number of future victims of VAWG. This should include ensuring that perpetrator programmes are available in all local authority areas across Scotland;
- Ensuring the refreshed strategy has a greater focus on intersectionality and commits to addressing the additional barriers that some women may face in accessing support as a result of their race, age, sexuality and/ or disability. The need for the refreshed strategy to recognise and respond to challenges faced by victims/ survivors with multiple and/ or complex needs was also highlighted, as was the importance of ensuring the refreshed strategy has an increased recognition of the importance of tackling all forms VAWG (including Commercial Sexual Exploitation) and how different forms of abuse can intersect.

- Ensuring that the refreshed strategy is informed by people with lived experience of VAWG was also highlighted and that there is a commitment in the strategy to ensure processes are in place for victims/ survivors of VAWG to shape policy and practice on an ongoing basis in a meaningful, trauma-informed and empowering way; and
- Raising the profile of Equally Safe across all other policy agendas and ensure that the refreshed strategy acts as a strong driver for change in improving the lives of women, children and young people across Scotland. Specifically, it was noted that it would be useful if the refreshed strategy could help identify and strengthen links to other policy priorities that stakeholders may be working to such as the implementation of UNCRC, the Promise, Child Poverty Action Plans and Trauma-Informed practice. The need for accountability measures to be put in place to hold people responsible for implementing the ambitions set out in the refreshed strategy was also highlighted.

What next? What actions will you take to help support the development and implementation of the next phase of the Equally Safe strategy?

Looking ahead, attendees were asked to reflect on the leadership role they can play in supporting the development and implementation of the next phase of the Equally Safe strategy. Key actions included:

- Promoting the need for intersectionality and accountability in the refreshed strategy;
- Making sure robust mechanisms are in place for people with lived experience to help shape pathways of support and service delivery;
- Providing political leadership at a national level through COSLA and a local level as the Council Leader;
- Building capacity of multi-agency Violence Against Women Partnerships so that they are able to implement the refreshed strategy locally;
- Ensuring there is a robust strategy and action plan in place to implement the next phase of Equally Safe in my own local authority area;
- Ensuring that local Chief Officer Groups are aware of the refreshed strategy, its importance and the role they can play in supporting its aims;
- Reflecting the principles and recommendations of the refreshed strategy in the approach our organisation takes to service design to ensure addressing barriers and collective change can happen in practice;
- Work closely with partners across the third sector and public sector and drive tasks forward ensuring we are all held accountable and thereby achieve our aims;
- Ensuring the strategy and accountability for delivery are embedded within the local outcome improvement plan; and
- Promoting opportunities for cross-policy working and sharing of resources to help ensure an adequate allocation of capacity/ resources within a challenging financial climate.



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