



# 16 Days Spotlight Events

## Learning Report



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Violence Against Women  
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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 Improvement Service worked in partnership with a range of stakeholders to coordinate a series of Spotlight Events between 25 November and 10 December 2022.

## Spotlight Themes

The thematic priority areas for the Spotlight Events were identified by the National Violence Against Women Network as the key issues currently affecting the lives of women, children and young people experiencing violence against women and girls (VAWG) in Scotland. These included:



Responding to the mental health and wellbeing needs of victims/survivors of VAWG



Promoting the rights and wellbeing of children experiencing domestic abuse



Creating domestic abuse-informed systems, services and workforces



Responding to the needs of women engaged in selling or exchanging sex



Strengthening links between community safety and VAWG

# Key Messages

Participants identified a number of shared messages across all the Spotlight events. These include 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 **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. Delivering consistency in positive outcomes for women and children no matter where they live in Scotland, through services relevant to the needs and priorities of 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.



**Support a decisive shift towards prevention and early intervention** in all of our work to help realise the right of every woman, child and young person in Scotland to live a life free of violence and abuse where they can achieve their full potential.

# Responding to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Needs of Victims/Survivors of VAWG

This spotlight event was organised by the Scottish Government, COSLA, Public Health Scotland and the Improvement Service and explored how stakeholders can work together to improve outcomes for victims/survivors of VAWG with mental health needs. Specifically, the event aimed to:

- Raise awareness of relevant national policy developments, identify where the gaps are and discuss how current responses could be strengthened;
- Explore and discuss key issues emerging from the Delivering Equally Safe Mental Health sub report and what more we could collectively be doing to improve access and experience of services and support in the short and medium term; and
- Agree a set of actions and recommendations to be considered in the context of the refresh of the Mental Health and Equally Safe Strategies.

## Attendees

The event was attended by a wide range of third sector and public sector stakeholders from local authority areas across Scotland. Attendees included VAW Partnership Lead Officers, Health and Social Care Team Managers, Public Health leads, Women's Aid leads and Social Workers.

The event was chaired by the Scottish Government. We were also delighted to be joined on the day by a number of keynote speakers who highlighted the importance of understanding the link between VAWG and mental health. These included:

- [Cllr Paul Kelly, COSLA Health and Social Care Spokesperson](#)
- [Samantha Keogh, Improvement Service](#)
- [Authentic Voice Panel members, SafeLives](#)
- [Kirstin McPhee and Nadia Abu Hussain, The Scottish Government](#)
- [Hugh McAloon, Director for Mental Health from The Scottish Government](#)

Access the [speaker playlist](#) here.

## Key Messages



**It is important that the connection between mental health, trauma and VAWG is understood by professionals working across specialist and universal services.**

Currently, access to mental health support services is not routinely offered when a victim/ survivor discloses an experience of VAWG and women, children and young people experiencing VAWG report experiencing significant barriers in accessing support with their mental health and wellbeing needs.

**There is a need for effective communication and collaboration across universal and specialist services to ensure that victims/survivors of all forms of VAWG receive support for their mental health at the earliest possible stage.**

Routine enquiry and effective referral pathways are necessary to overcome this gap and ensure all victims/ survivors are provided the support they need, at the time they need it.

**Everyone has a role to play in improving outcomes for victims/survivors of VAWG with mental health needs.**

Professionals need to be supported to ask the right questions and respond in a way that ensures victims/ survivors of VAWG feel listened to, believed and supported.

## Opportunities

Attendees discussed the key opportunities that could encourage services to provide victims/survivors of VAWG with the mental health and wellbeing support they need at the time they need it. Key messages included:

- There is an opportunity to join-up working across the wide range of specialist and universal services available to victims/survivors of VAWG within local communities to help ensure that women, children and young people with mental health support needs benefit from holistic pathways of support. To support this ambition, there is a need to ensure that all professionals have a robust understanding of what support is available for victims/survivors in their local authority in order to be able to build relationships and person-centred pathways.

- Workers in frontline services need to be supported to ask victims/survivors about their mental health and wellbeing needs and respond to disclosures in a way that makes victims/survivors feel listened to, believed and supported. This is especially important for GPs and other frontline healthcare providers who may be the first point of contact for many women, children or young people.
- Specialist VAWG Services have extensive knowledge and expertise in identifying and responding to the needs of women, children and young people experiencing VAWG within local communities. They have a key role to play in ensuring that mental health professionals are also able to identify and respond to the needs of victims/survivors of VAWG and to identify practical ways they can better respond to the mental health needs of victim/ survivors of VAWG.
- Local and national policy makers should engage with frontline workers when developing strategies to respond to the mental health and wellbeing needs of women, children and young people experiencing VAWG. There is also an opportunity to ensure that women, children and young people with lived experience of VAWG and mental health issues have meaningful opportunities to inform mental health system and service design to help ensure they meet their needs.

## Improving Referral Pathways

Attendees discussed the importance of improving referral pathways for victims/survivors of VAWG with mental health support needs. Key messages included:

- Routine enquiry of mental health should be adopted in situations where experiences of VAWG are disclosed, and routine enquiry of experiences of VAWG should be adopted in situations where mental health issues are disclosed.
- Options for receiving mental health support should be offered to victims/survivors at their initial contact with frontline services. This should involve all frontline workers having the knowledge required to signpost and refer to the necessary mental health support services.
- All services should be taking a trauma-informed approach to their work, which requires trauma-informed training to be undertaken by all professionals. This is particularly important for levels of engagement with a service once a referral is made as it may take a few attempts to actively engage with a victim/ survivor.
- Specialist services and universal services need to be supported to move away from siloed working in recognition of the multiple issues can affect mental health, including poverty, housing, VAWG, and addictions. These issues can be

complex and cross-cutting, and therefore staff across specialist services and universal services should be supported to work together to ensure women, children and young people experiencing VAWG receive the most appropriate support for their mental health and wellbeing needs.

- Referrals need to be made to the right service from the first point of enquiry. This will streamline the process and reduce the chance of a victim/survivor being bounced around services without receiving appropriate support.

## What Next?

Attendees were asked to identify the key actions that would ensure that systems and services better meet the mental health needs of victims/ survivors of VAWG. Key actions included:

- Training on both VAWG and mental health is needed across all sectors, which highlights how experiences of VAWG can impact mental health and wellbeing and supports professionals to identify practical actions that they can take to identify and respond to victims/survivors' support needs.
- Closer links between specialist VAWG services and universal services should be promoted to encourage active referrals and easier access. Key contacts should be identified and shared across all services to enable these links to be made.
- Awareness of the range of specialist and universal services available in each local authority area, and the support they offer, should be promoted to help ensure that both professionals and victims/survivors know where they can go to access support with their mental health needs.
- Appropriate, long-term funding is needed, particularly for specialist VAWG services, to enable joined-up pathways of support to be established locally for victims/survivors with mental health and wellbeing needs and to develop mental health and wellbeing services that specifically meet the needs of women, children and young people.
- A holistic approach needs to be taken to ensure the whole workforce is able to respond appropriately to requests of mental health support. Baseline standards should be developed to ensure there is a trauma-informed response to disclosures of VAWG across all healthcare services.



# Promoting the Rights and Wellbeing of Children Experiencing Domestic Abuse

This spotlight event was organised by the Improvement Service, COSLA and Public Health Scotland and explored the importance of adopting a children's rights-based approach to tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG). Specifically, the event aimed to:

- Raise awareness and understanding of VAWG as a children's rights issue and the importance of taking a rights-based approach to policy and practice;
- Spotlight examples of good practice in responding to the needs of children and young people who are affected by domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG in Scotland;
- Explore the shared outcomes and opportunities for joined-up working across the Equally Safe and United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) agendas at strategic level; and
- Agree actions and support needed to ensure a joined-up, person-centred approach is taken to improving outcomes for children and young people who experience domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG.

## Attendees

The event was attended by a broad range of professionals from across Scotland working within local authority children and family support services, policy and development, education, health and specialist third sector organisations.

The event was chaired by the Improvement Service. We were also delighted to be joined on the day by a number of keynote speakers who highlighted the importance of promoting the rights of children and young people who have experienced VAWG. These included:

- [Cllr Tony Buchanan, COSLA Children and Young People Spokesperson](#)
- [Rebecca Spillane, Improvement Service](#)
- [Claire Houghton, University of Edinburgh](#)
- [Nichola Combe, Children's Parliament](#)
- [Dominique Haggerty, Cedar West Dunbartonshire](#)

Access the [speaker playlist](#) here.

## Key Messages

**Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children and young people experiencing domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG is everyone's business.**



Experiencing domestic abuse as a child can negatively impact on future life experiences, opportunities and outcomes across a wide range of areas, if high-quality, trauma-informed support is not provided to children and young people at the times they need it.

**There is a need to adopt a children's rights-based approach to tackling domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG.**

This includes recognising that VAWG is a fundamental breach of children's rights and supporting a trauma and domestic abuse-informed approach to working with children and young people that promotes their rights, strengthens their voices and supports recovery.

**There are clear links between tackling domestic abuse and achieving other key policy priorities such as keeping the Promise; tackling child poverty; promoting children's rights and wellbeing and adopting trauma-informed practice.**

Joining-up work across these agendas will help to improve outcomes for children and young people experiencing VAWG and ensure best use is made of available resources.

## Opportunities

Attendees discussed the key opportunities to work together to adopt a children's rights-based approach to tackling VAWG and to embed this approach into policy and practice. Key messages included:

- Ensure public bodies are aware of the UNCRC Incorporation (Scotland) Bill and their obligations as a duty bearer to respect and protect children's rights in all the services they provide. Raise awareness and understanding of what it means to take a child's rights approach to decision making across key community planning partners, and what this looks and feels like within areas such as child protection, justice, housing and homelessness, mental health and wellbeing and education.

- Embed UNCRC principles in risk assessment and safety planning processes when working with children and families experiencing domestic abuse.
- Promote and embed models and frameworks that have a strong evidence-base of improving outcomes for children and young people experiencing domestic abuse, including the Children Experiencing Domestic Abuse Recovery (CEDAR)<sup>1</sup> project and the Safe & Together Model.
- Support professionals working within Educational settings to understand the role they can play in both promoting messages that prevent VAWG and ensuring that children and young people experiencing these issues are identified at an early stage and are able to access appropriate support.

## Protecting the Rights of Children and Young People

Attendees discussed the importance of prioritising activities that protect and respect the rights and wellbeing of children and young people experiencing domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG. Key messages included:

- There is a need to create meaningful and trauma-informed opportunities for children and young people experiencing domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG to actively shape the systems and services they engage with to ensure they meet their specific needs and aspirations.
- Ensure sustainable funding is available for specialist services that work to develop strong relationships of trust with children and young people experiencing domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG, and help to support and empower children and young people to recover from their experiences and feel in control of their lives and futures.
- There is a need to raise awareness of the range of services, support and opportunities that are available for children and young people within local communities who have experienced domestic abuse and ensure that children and young people can access information about local services in child friendly and age appropriate language.

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<sup>1</sup> CEDAR provides the only recovery programme in Scotland designed especially for children and young people that have experienced domestic abuse taking a rights-based approach and considering the specific impact of abuse on the child or young person.

## What Next?

Attendees were asked to identify the key actions that would help to ensure that systems and services better meet the needs of children and young people affected by domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG. Key actions included:

- More awareness raising about the prevalence of domestic abuse amongst children and young people, the impact that this can have on a range of areas in their lives and the realisation of their rights e.g. right to education, to shelter and protection from harm. Partners across a wide range of services and policy areas need to work together to ensure that the rights of children and young people are upheld and children and young people received the support they need at the time they need it;
- Address the lack of mental health and wellbeing support services available for children and young people in local authority areas across Scotland, as well as the significant waiting lists in place for those services which are available;
- Ensuring that prevention and early intervention activities for children and young people affected by domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG is prioritised on equal footing with crisis services;
- Ensuring children and young people experiencing domestic abuse are able to receive high quality support from systems and services in all local authority areas across Scotland. It was noted that a national approach to implementing evidence-based programmes and frameworks such as CEDAR and Safe & Together should be adopted if possible;
- Ensure children and young people are not seen as a homogenous group within VAWG services and ensure that services recognise the specific needs of each individual child and take a proactive approach to ensuring they are able to meaningfully shape service development and delivery;
- Strengthen links and support joined up working at a local and national level of key agendas that can contribute to improved outcomes for children and young people experiencing domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG including Equally Safe, the Promise, the National Trauma Training Programme, UNCRC and the Child Poverty agenda.



# Creating Domestic Abuse-Informed Systems, Services and Workforces

This spotlight event was organised by the Improvement Service and the Safe & Together Institute and aimed to highlight work taking place across Scotland to embed domestic abuse-informed workforces, services and systems to help to improve the outcomes for women, children and families affected by domestic abuse. The event aimed to:

- Raise awareness and understanding of the Safe & Together Model in Scotland and what local authorities and organisations are doing to embed it;
- Highlight good practice, emerging learning and challenges from local authorities across Scotland working to create domestic abuse-informed systems, services and workforces; and
- Agree actions that partners can take to embed domestic abuse-informed principles within their areas of work and explore ideas about 'what's next' for embedding Safe & Together in Scotland.

## Attendees

The event was attended by a broad range of professionals from across Scotland working within local authority children and family support services, policy and development, education, health and specialist third sector organisations.

The event was co-chaired by the Safe & Together Institute and the Improvement Service. We were delighted to be joined on the day by a number of keynote speakers who highlighted the importance of developing domestic abuse informed systems, services and workforces. These included:

- [Cllr Maureen Chalmers, Community Wellbeing Spokesperson, COSLA](#)
- [Anna Mitchell, Safe & Together Institute](#)
- [Aileen Murphy and Anne Trevorrow, North Lanarkshire Council](#)
- [Mike Mawby, Highland VAW Partnership](#)
- [Sheila Hagney, Pan Ayrshire Safe & Together](#)
- [Joanna McLaughlin, the Improvement Service](#)

Access the [speaker playlist](#) here.

## Key Messages

**The impacts of domestic abuse are wide-ranging and can have a long-term impact on the lives of the children and families affected.**



Public protection systems have traditionally held mothers responsible for the impact that the domestic abuse is having on the child, rather than focussing on the actions of the father who is perpetrating this abuse. Engagement with these systems can be traumatising for the mother and can lead to poorer outcomes for both the mother and child, such as the child being taken in to care.

**Across Scotland, almost all local authorities are now exploring how they can use the Safe & Together Model to help ensure their systems, services and workforces are working in a way that helps increase accountability for perpetrators as parents, reduces victim-blaming and improves outcomes for children and families affected by domestic abuse.**

Recent investment through the Scottish Government's Delivering Equally Safe (DES) Fund has helped to support this shift.

**While an investment in training is crucial in creating meaningful change in how workforces respond to children and families experiencing domestic abuse, broader system change is also required.**

This includes buy-in from senior leaders to create culture change within organisations; enabling environments for practitioners to put learning into practice and a greater focus on cross-policy working across all areas of public protection.

## Opportunities

Attendees discussed the key opportunities to work together to create domestic abuse-informed systems, services and workforces locally and nationally. Key messages included:

- Engaging with senior leaders and decision makers to ensure they understand the importance of creating domestic abuse-informed systems, services and workforces, the positive impact it will have for children and families and actions that they can take to ensure their workforces feel supported to work in this way.

- Connecting to Safe & Together leads across the country to share emerging learning and explore opportunities to work together to overcome shared challenges.
- Providing opportunities for professionals who have received Safe & Together training to come together on a regular basis to share learning about how they are applying this learning when they are working with children and families experiencing domestic abuse, and receive support from their peers with any challenges being identified.
- Making the best use of the knowledge, skills and expertise that exists within local specialist VAWG services to improve knowledge and understanding of the support needs of women, children and young people experiencing domestic abuse and ensure referral pathways of support are in place between local authorities and specialist services;
- Strengthen engagement with professionals engaging with perpetrators to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to work in a domestic abuse-informed way. This includes services delivering specialist perpetrator interventions as well as key professionals within the Police and Justice System.

## Ensuring Systems, Services and Workforces Respond to the Needs of Women and Children Experiencing Domestic Abuse

Attendees discussed the importance of ensuring local systems, services and workforces respond to the needs of women and children experiencing domestic abuse. Key messages included:

- Given the significant pressures and competing priorities that all workforces are currently managing, there is a need to clearly communicate why creating domestic abuse-informed systems, services and workforces is important and the positive impact that it will have both for children and families experiencing domestic abuse and the workforces that support them.
- There is a need to create more opportunities to bring together practitioners from across different agencies to help ensure there is a shared understanding and appreciation for different roles and remits and help to establish connections between different workstreams and policy agendas. The role of local champions and lead officers in supporting these connections to be made is critical.

- A joined up, multi-agency approach should be promoted in which all supporting services, systems and partner organisations that interact with child and adult victims/survivors of domestic abuse throughout the local community have access to information, training programmes and development opportunities to help them develop and deliver consistent domestic abuse-informed services. This will be supported by extending training and information to key child welfare and protection agencies (e.g. Children’s Panel, Children’s Reporter) and housing, criminal justice, health, education and third sector organisations amongst others.
- Partners should explore opportunities to review and strengthen relevant risk assessment processes to ensure they are promoting Safe & Together principles. E.g. MARAC

## What Next?

Attendees were asked to identify the key actions that would help to embed domestic abuse informed systems, services and workforces in all local authorities across Scotland. Key messages included:

- Long term, sustainable funding to fully implement the Safe & Together model across Scotland. In addition to funding to allow professionals to undertake training, attendees also noted the need for investment to support wider implementation of the model.
- Explore opportunities for domestic abuse training to be made mandatory for all social workers at both pre and post qualification stages. It was noted that this would help to ensure that all social work professionals feel supported to work with children and families affected by domestic abuse.
- Identify opportunities for families with lived experience of domestic abuse to help shape the systems and services they come into contact with. This may include creating meaningful and trauma-informed opportunities for families who can come into contact with social work services to share any learning about how their needs could have been better supported.
- Continue to provide opportunities for organisations working to implement the Safe & Together model to come together regularly to learn from and support each other, and identify future areas for improvement.



# Responding to the Needs of Women Engaged in Selling or Exchanging Sex

This spotlight event was organised by the Improvement Service and the Women's Support Project and brought together stakeholders from across relevant organisations and local authorities for a deep dive discussion on commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) and the experiences of women selling or exchanging sex. This workshop explored how stakeholders can work to embed women and girls' experiences of CSE into policy and practice at a local and national level, aiming to:

- Highlight the key strategic developments which impact the response to women selling or exchanging sex in Scotland;
- Explore what support is available for stakeholders working across different policy areas to adopt a joined-up approach to responding to complex needs for women selling or exchanging sex; and
- Identify actions and resources needed to respond to women's needs and how these can be incorporated into the next phase of Equally Safe in Scotland.

## Attendees

The event was attended by a broad range of professionals from across Scotland working within local authority violence against women and girls support services, policy and development, health and specialist third sector organisations.

The event was chaired by Cllr Maureen Chalmers, COSLA's Spokesperson for Community Wellbeing. We were delighted to be joined on the day by a number of keynote speakers who highlighted the importance of responding to the needs of women involved in selling or exchanging sex. These included:

- [Cllr Maureen Chalmers – COSLA Community Wellbeing Spokesperson](#)
- [Dr Laura Jones – University of Dundee](#)
- [Linda Thompson – Women's Support Project](#)
- [Elena Whitham – Minister for Community Safety, Scottish Government](#)

Access the [speaker playlist](#) here.

## Key Messages

**Women engaged in selling or exchanging sex in Scotland have a wide range of support needs that are not currently being met by the systems and services they come into contact with.**



Many women who seek support with issues such as mental health, housing and addictions report feeling judged, stigmatised and blamed for the issues they are facing. Women's experiences and support needs cut across a range of systems and services, therefore responses need to take a multi-agency, whole-system approach to ensure there are appropriate pathways of support for women.

**Future approaches to meeting the needs of women engaged in selling or exchanging sex need to be trauma-informed and flexible to support the wide range of needs women may have.**

Women involved in selling or exchanging sex often have multiple traumatic experiences, and require support services that understand how trauma can play out and continue to be re-lived when they have been involved in the sex trade.

**The refresh of the Equally Safe strategy provides an opportunity to promote a cross-policy approach to meeting women's needs.**

Strategic responses at local and national level need to be directly informed by women with lived experience of selling or exchanging sex, through engagement and participation work which is safe and empowering for victims/survivors of VAWG.

## Opportunities

Attendees were asked to consider where the key opportunities are for partners to work together to address the challenges that women involved in selling or exchanging sex face in Scotland. Key messages included:

- There is an opportunity to strengthen the links between trauma-informed practice and tackling CSE to improve the response for women. Services need to understand that women involved in CSE in particular often have to tell their story to many different services/people, and are likely to have complex needs which are not currently understood by systems. There is an opportunity to use the trauma principles and National Trauma Training Programme resources to clearly demonstrate this.

- There is an opportunity to undertake awareness raising activities with professionals who may come into contact with women involved in selling or exchanging sex to help ensure they have a robust understanding of women's experiences and level of stigma and risk that women can face. Ensuring that health and wellbeing settings receive appropriate training to be able to support women who disclose was noted as essential.
- There is an opportunity to raise awareness of the barriers that women currently face in accessing services – such as time constraints, service availability, and a lack of trauma-informed support in universal services – at a local and national level, and support this to be used to inform the development of pathways of support for women engaged in selling or exchanging sex.
- There is an opportunity to strengthen links to public protection at a local and national level and raise the profile of CSE as a public protection issue, as well as encouraging strong local links between police and VAW Partnerships.

## Improving Outcomes for Women Involved in Selling or Exchanging Sex

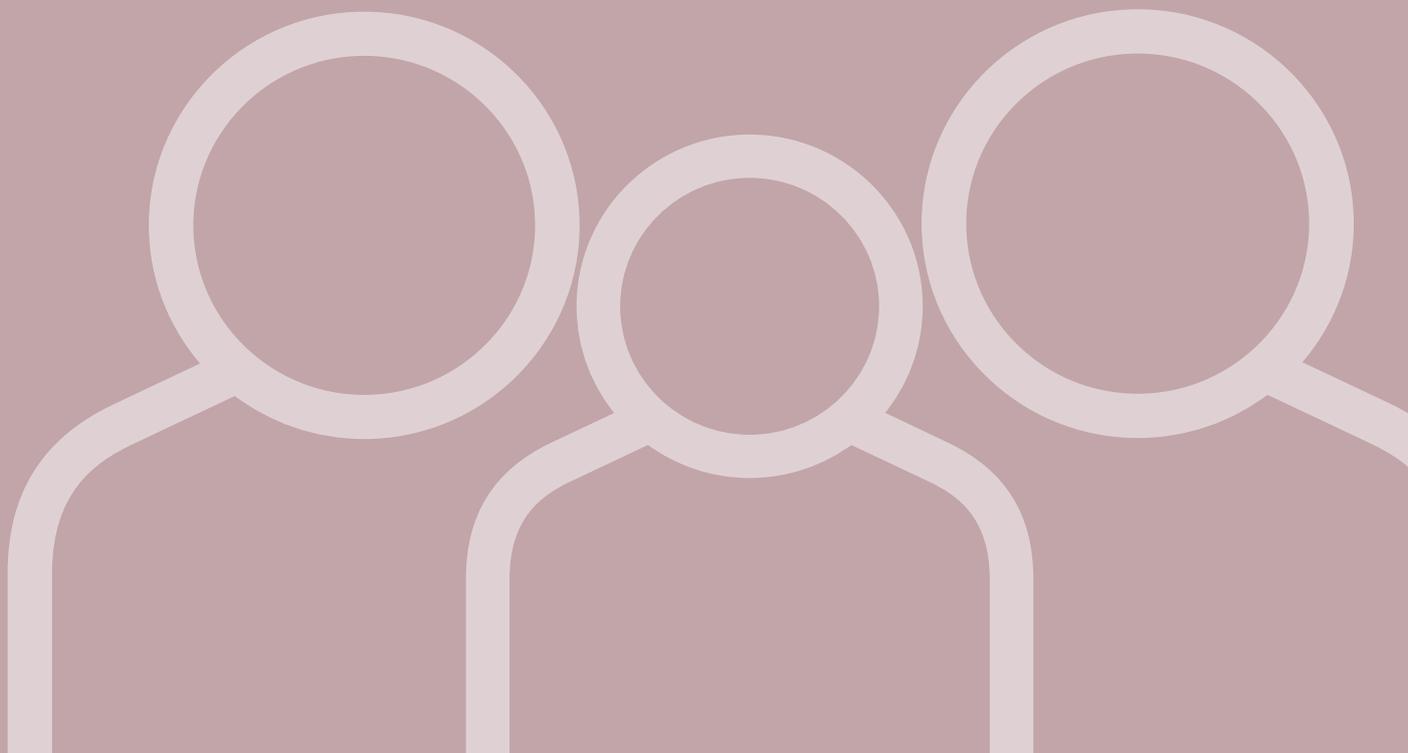
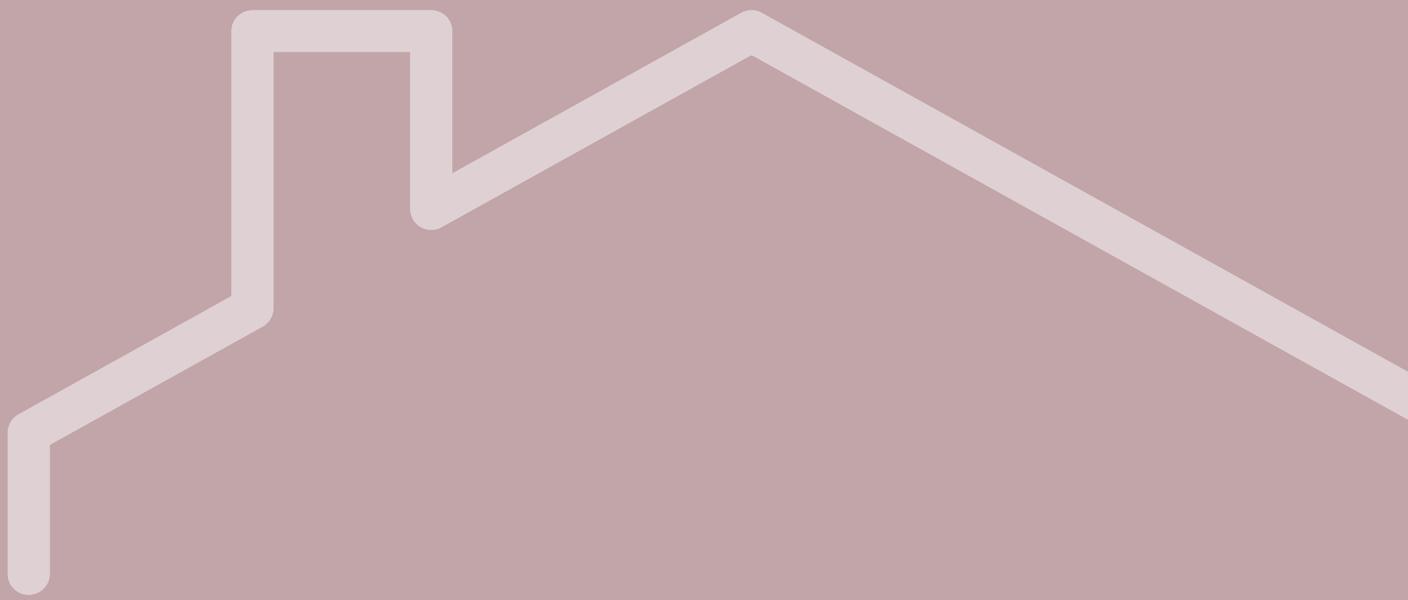
Attendees were asked to consider what would help ensure that a collective and collaborative approach is taken to improving outcomes for women involved in selling or exchanging sex. Key messages included:

- Ensure a whole systems approach is developed to meet the needs of people involved in CSE, whilst raising awareness across all agencies in respect of how their role is interlinked with other supporting organisations.
- Ensure training on VAWG that is delivered locally and nationally includes a focus on meeting the needs of women engaged in selling or exchanging sex. This training should help to raise awareness that CSE is a form of VAWG, support professionals to understand the range of support needs that women may have and upskill them in identifying and responding to CSE in a trauma-informed way.
- There is a need to raise the profile of tackling CSE in the refresh of Equally Safe, and ensure that improving outcomes for women engaged in selling and exchanging sex isn't just seen as a justice issue but rather one that requires joined up working and resourcing across a wide range of policy agendas.
- Ensure there is a commitment to developing a prevention strategy nationally that focuses on actions that can be taken to the disruption of profits being made from the commodification of women/purchase of sex.

## What Next?

Attendees were asked to identify the key actions that would help ensure that systems and services better meet the needs of women involved in selling or exchanging sex. Responses included:

- Creating support/resources to implement the new [National Principles to Challenge Men's Demand for Prostitution and Support for those with Experience of it](#) locally to make sure they make a difference to women on the ground.
- Develop guidance on how to address CSE at local level, such as what can local VAW Partnerships, and other strategic partnerships, do both individually and collectively to improve outcomes for women involved in selling or exchanging sex.
- Fund Pathfinders Programmes in a small number of local authority areas across Scotland to explore the opportunities to build on the principles through test of change projects across different policy areas. It was noted that these pathfinders should be supported by local VAW Partnerships to ensure a multi-agency approach is adopted.
- Promote a co-ordinated response from leaders across key organisations (e.g. police, NHS, local authorities) to tackle stigma and improve responses to support women experiencing CSE.
- Ensure that preventing CSE has a stronger focus in the refresh of Equally Safe and that this is linked to tackling women's poverty and inequality.



# Community Safety and VAWG

This spotlight event was organised by the Improvement Service, the Scottish Community Safety Network and Public Health Scotland and explored how stakeholders can work to embed women and girls' experiences and risk of VAWG into community safety policy and practice at a local and national level. The workshop aimed to:

- Raise awareness of the links across VAWG and Community Safety, and spotlight examples of good practice responding to the needs of women and children who are affected by violence and abuse in Scotland's public spaces and communities;
- Explore the shared outcomes that Community Safety Partnerships and Violence Against Women Partnerships are working to at a local strategic level; and
- Agree actions and support needed to ensure a joined-up, person-centred approach is taken to improving outcomes for women who experience VAWG, and the considerations for Community Safety.

## Attendees

The workshop was attended by a broad range of professionals from across Scotland working within VAWG, Community Safety, and other relevant sectors.

The event was chaired by the Improvement Service. We were delighted to be joined on the day by a number of keynote speakers who highlighted the importance of meeting the safety needs of women, children and young people in our local communities. These included:

- [Cllr Gail Macgregor - COSLA Environment and Economy Spokesperson](#)
- [Dawn Exley – Scottish Community Safety Network](#)
- [Emma Kennedy – Public Health Scotland](#)
- [Angela Voulgari – Equally Safe Edinburgh Committee](#)
- [Dawn Fyfe – Wise Women](#)
- [Laura Pearson – Fife VAW Partnership](#)

Access the [speaker playlist](#) here.

## Key Messages

**In order to achieve Scotland's Public Health Priority of creating safe environments and neighbourhoods for everyone, we must tackle VAWG and work to ensure women and girls feel safe within their communities.**



Community planning partners should take a gendered lens when considering local plans to increase safety and empower women to participate fully in their communities and public places.

**There is an opportunity to strengthen links between strategies working to tackle VAWG, promote community safety and support place-based planning.**

At a local level, there is an opportunity for Community Safety Partnerships and VAW Partnerships to work more closely together to ensure the safety needs of women are met within community planning.

**There are several examples of good practice across Scotland of work taking place to ensure women and girls safety needs are recognised and promoted in community settings.**

Learning from the activities taking place in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Fife (as well as other local authorities across Scotland) can be used to inform future policy and strategic developments within this agenda.

## Opportunities

Attendees were asked to consider where the key opportunities are for partners to work together in order to better address the barriers that women and girls face to feeling safe in communities in Scotland. Key messages included:

- Promoting a public health approach to improving women's experiences of using public places and spaces creates an opportunity to strengthen partnership working between VAWG, Community Safety and Place-Based Planning agendas. It was noted that all local authorities have a place standard officer, and this could provide an opportunity to facilitate more connections between Community Safety Partnership leads, Public Health leads and VAW Partnership leads at a local level.

- There is a key opportunity for stakeholders working with young people to focus on gender inequality, relationships and VAWG, gathering understanding of what harmful behaviours look like and using this to inform awareness raising. It was highlighted that the [Don't Be That Guy](#) campaign was successful in speaking to men, and particularly young men, and suggested that this type of campaign could be replicated for different purposes.
- There are opportunities to make better use of national networks, planning partnership and local forums community councils to highlight links between VAWG, Community Safety and Public Health and raise awareness of examples of effective partnership initiatives happening in local authorities across Scotland that are working to ensure women's public safety concerns are better understood and addressed.

## Improving Community Safety Outcomes for Women and Girls

Attendees were asked to consider what would help ensure that a collective and collaborative approach is taken to improving community safety outcomes for women and girls. Key messages included:

- Use the refresh of the Equally Safe Strategy to increase its profile across different policy agendas, including community safety, public health and place-based planning. It was noted that it would be beneficial to promote the refreshed strategy in all key settings locally and nationally, such as within community planning, community councils, third sector, etc. and support a wider range of stakeholders to identify actions that they can take to support the successful implementation of the strategy.
- Strengthen links between Equally Safe and other national drivers and strategies that stakeholders are currently working to that impact on whether someone feels safe within their community.
- Promote increased partnership working between VAWG leads and Community Safety leads at a local and national level, and support stakeholders working across these agendas to come together on a regular basis to identify actions that they can take to ensure women and girls feel safe, and are safe, in their local communities.

## What Next?

Attendees were asked to identify the key actions that would help ensure that women's safety needs are recognised and prioritised in community planning systems. Responses included:

- Creating opportunities for leads across community safety, VAWG and planning to come together locally and nationally to support further collaboration.
- A national awareness campaign building on the learning from local areas and organisations. It was noted that this should emphasise women's right to public safety as a human rights issue and engage men and boys in the conversation in a positive way (e.g. Don't Be That Guy).
- Stakeholders working together to make best use of the social media platforms that the stakeholders we want to target are most likely to use and develop strategies for responding to negative comments and empowering allies.
- Developing good practice case studies/ positive stories to show men as role models for addressing harmful behaviours.
- Embedding a gendered lens in public health/health improvement policy and practice through consultation and training.
- Incorporating gender equality/gender sensitive policies as standard practice across all planning and policy development.

# Next Steps

The Scottish Government, COSLA, Public Health Scotland and the Improvement Service are committed to working with strategic partners to ensure that the issues and actions highlighted in this report are considered as part of the upcoming refresh of Equally Safe: Scotland's Strategy for Preventing and Eradicating Violence Against Women and Girls.



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