



# Imagine a Scotland where we are Equally Safe: a focus on public protection and violence against women and girls (VAWG)

## Learning Report

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Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
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Public Health  
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# Event overview

[Equally Safe: Scotland's Strategy for Preventing and Eradicating Violence Against Women and Girls](#) was launched in 2014 and refreshed in 2023. 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, abuse and exploitation – and the attitudes that help perpetuate it.

In August 2024, the Scottish Government and COSLA published the [Equally Safe Delivery Plan](#) which, includes a commitment to:

*“Strengthen links between VAWG and other areas of Public Protection to both prioritise actions to prevent and reduce harm and to improve outcomes for adult and child victim-survivors of VAWG.”*

As part of the calendar of events that took place across Scotland to mark 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence 2024, on the 27th of November 2024 the Scottish Government and COSLA hosted a national event bringing together stakeholders working across different areas of public protection. The event aimed to explore where there are opportunities to work together collaboratively to strengthen links in public protection, in order to better support outcomes for women, children and young people who have experienced, or are at risk of experiencing, VAWG.

Around 100 people attended this webinar from a wide range of local and national organisations with a role to play in supporting a public protection approach to be taken to improving outcomes for victims and survivors of VAWG. This included national and local leads with responsibilities for child protection, adult support and protection, alcohol and drugs, VAWG, suicide prevention and MAPPA.

This was intended to be the first in a series of discussions with key stakeholders to collectively design and implement a plan for strengthening links between VAWG and other areas of public protection.

# Presenters

The event was chaired by Cllr Maureen Chalmers, COSLA Spokesperson for Community Wellbeing and Co-Chair of the Equally Safe Joint Strategic Board, and included inputs from representatives from a range of organisations and strategic partnerships across Scotland. Presenters included:

## **Equally Safe: Scotland's Strategy for Preventing and Eradicating VAWG**

- [Cllr Maureen Chalmers](#), Community Wellbeing Spokesperson, COSLA
- [Kaukab Stewart](#), Minister for Equalities, Scottish Government

## **Embedding VAWG into Public Protection Systems: A Local Perspective**

- [Sophie Gwyther](#), Protecting People Lead Officer, Dundee City Council
- [Hamish McGhie](#), Independent Chair of Dumfries & Galloway Public Protection Partnership

## **Strengthen Links Between VAWG and Other Public Protection Priorities: A Panel Discussion**

- [Tam Baillie](#), Chair of Child Protection Committees Scotland
- [Elaine Torrance](#), Chair of Adult Support and Protection National Convenors Group
- [Haylis Smith](#), National Delivery Lead - Suicide Prevention, COSLA
- [Sarah Graham](#), Organisational Lead - Preventing Alcohol Harms, Public Health Scotland
- [Detective Superintendent Stevie Bertram](#), Public Protection Command, Police Scotland

The [full video of speakers](#) is available here and you can select from the list above for specific presentations.

# Key messages

## Opportunities for strengthening links between VAWG and other areas of public protection

This learning note focuses on the key opportunities for strengthening links between VAWG and other areas of public protection that were identified by speakers and attendees during the event. These included:



**Communication, Engagement and Awareness Raising:** Progressing actions to strengthen communication and engagement between partners working across all areas of public protection, including Public Protection Chief Officer Groups (COGs), to help raise awareness of the prevalence and impact of VAWG in Scotland, and the links between improving outcomes for women, children and young people experiencing VAWG and achieving wider public protection ambitions.



**Workforce Support and Development:** Progressing actions to support professionals to take a joined-up approach to identifying and responding to the needs of children and families who come into contact with multiple parts of public protection systems, including victims and survivors of VAWG.



**Data Collection, analysis and Reporting:** Progressing actions to develop a national public protection data set which can enable links across different areas of public protection to be better understood at a national and local level, and support opportunities for joint reporting wherever possible. The opportunity for this data set to be supported by qualitative data that supports increased understanding of children and families' experiences of coming into contact with public protection systems and services, was also highlighted.



**Resourcing:** Progressing actions to ensure that everyone's collective resources are targeted at preventing and reducing harm and improving outcomes for adult and child victim-survivors of VAWG. The opportunity to move towards a more sustainable funding model that better responds to the needs of victims and survivors, and the services that support them, was highlighted.

The important role of the new National Public Protection Leadership Group in supporting actions that strengthen the integration of VAWG in Public Protection structures and plans was highlighted throughout the discussions.

The remainder of this learning report provides more detail on the specific improvement actions identified at the event, along with a summary of the actions that attendees themselves committed to take following these discussions.

# Strengthening links between VAWG and other areas of public protection: improvement actions



## Communication, engagement and awareness raising

Attendees highlighted the importance of raising awareness of the links between VAWG and other areas of public protection at both a local and national level. Looking ahead, attendees identified the following opportunities to help raise awareness of the links between VAWG and other areas of public protection:

- Ensuring that the refreshed guidance for VAW Partnerships which will be developed as part of the new Equally Safe Delivery Plan, clearly highlights links between VAWG and other areas of public protection, and supports a more consistent public protection approach to tackling VAWG across Scotland.
- Developing an ongoing awareness campaign about Equally Safe for public protection strategic groups and wider sectors through which messages around the prevalence and impact of VAWG can be communicated regularly across relevant policy areas, with a focus on reinforcing the key message in the refreshed Equally Strategy that tackling VAWG is everyone's business.
- Using storytelling and learning from lived experience engagement to highlight how experiencing VAWG as a child and/or adult can lead to increased risks of victims and survivors requiring support with issues such as drug and alcohol, suicide, homelessness, mental health etc.
- Prioritising an approach to prevention of VAWG and highlighting ongoing awareness raising and engagement work with young women and girls around specific risks such as online VAWG and misogyny.
- Developing a national Public Protection Strategy for Scotland, with guidance and support for local leads to strengthen joined-up working across all areas of public protection and prioritise actions that will help to improve outcomes for adult and child victim-survivors of VAWG who come into contact with multiple parts of the public protection system.



## Workforce support and development

Attendees highlighted the importance of ensuring workforces are supported to take a joined-up approach to identifying and responding to the needs of children and families who come into contact with multiple parts of public protection systems, including victims and survivors of VAWG. Looking ahead, attendees identified the following opportunities to help ensure workforces are supported with this task:

- Developing a national Public Protection Learning and Development Framework to support professionals working with children and families who come into contact with multiple parts of public protection systems to take a joined-up approach to identifying and responding to the specific needs of adult and child victims and survivors of VAWG. It was noted that the plans in the Equally Safe Delivery Plan to develop a Scottish approach to embedding the Safe and Together model should be incorporated into this framework.
- Developing key learning materials which could clarify what it would look and feel like for victims and survivors, as well as the workforces who support them, if their needs were fully embedded within public protection systems. It was noted that this would also support a trauma informed approach to be promoted across all areas of public protection.



## Data collection, analysis and reporting

Data was a key point raised in many of the inputs as a key component of improving a joined-up approach across public protection both locally and nationally. Looking ahead, attendees identified the following opportunities to help strengthen data collection, analysis and reporting:

- Ensuring the upcoming development of the National Equally Safe Measurement Framework includes indicators that will support joint reporting at a local level, to enable improved information on victims' and survivors' experiences of engaging with different parts of the public protection system, with a focus on identifying any areas for improvement.
- Co-developing a national public protection data set which can support links across different areas of public protection to be better understood, and support opportunities for joint reporting at a local and national level wherever possible. It was suggested that learning could be taken from the minimum data sets for child protection and adult protection that have already been developed.
- Ensuring that local areas have effective support to gather qualitative data from women, children and young people with lived experience of VAWG through safe, meaningful and trauma-informed engagement, and to embed this learning into local system and service design processes.



## Funding and capacity

Attendees highlighted the importance of ensuring that both operational and strategic activities that aim to improve outcomes for victims and survivors of VAWG are adequately resourced. Throughout all of the discussions, participants highlighted concerns around the impact that the uncertain and unstable nature of current VAWG funding arrangements are having on the ability of partners to strengthen links between VAWG and other areas of public protection. Looking ahead, attendees identified the following opportunities to help strengthen funding and capacity:

- Strengthening the role of multi-agency VAW Partnerships and ensuring they have the capacity to support the implementation of Equally Safe across different public protection structures.
- Developing a sustainable funding model for VAWG, that better meets the need of frontline, specialist VAWG services and responds to the specific needs and priorities being identified in each local authority area.



# Opportunities to support actions: strengthening links across public protection

While recognising the challenging environment that local and national government is currently operating in, stakeholders noted that there are opportunities to make links with VAWG in upcoming work and strategic developments that could improve joined-up working across public protection. These included:

- The development of the next suicide prevention action plan taking place in 2025.
- The refreshed guidance for VAW Partnerships (which is being developed as part of the Equally Safe Delivery Plan).
- The ongoing national Adult Support and Protection improvement workstream on chronologies, which now includes child protection and justice.
- Opportunities for the Public Protection Leadership Group could link with the Community Planning Improvement Board to ensure that VAWG is included in discussions around improvements to national and local community planning.
- Regular opportunities to attend joint events with the National VAW Network and PHS, and the development of joint events with local VAWG, adult protection and child protection.
- Ensuring that VAWG is acknowledged in other strategic partnerships and policy areas outside of public protection, and making clear links with the increasing national focus around child poverty.



## Local Whole System Working

Participants were also asked about individual actions they would commit to taking following the day's discussions, and there were many suggestions around aligning local work with national support and activity. Participants highlighted that based on the panel discussion in particular, there are key opportunities to improve whole system working between colleagues across public protection areas on a practical basis, such as:

- Looking for opportunities to embed VAWG into local strategic reviews/upcoming work to refresh strategies.
- Reviewing local or organisational policies and practice with a gendered lens.
- Continuing to identify crossover issues across Public Protection throughout meetings and discussions.

- Developing clear and concise communication to make links across all services.
- Continuing to support the VAW Partnership chairs group to raise the profile of VAWG within public protection frameworks locally and nationally.
- Ensuring that Public Protection Chiefs Officer Groups (COG) have a clear reporting line with VAWG.
- Developing a local MARAC dataset to ensure COGs are fully sighted on trends and resourcing demands for keeping high risk victims/survivors and their children safe.
- Prioritising person-centred, holistic approaches to our responses and delivery of VAWG services, ensuring people receive the right services at the right time.
- Improving engagement around staff with lived experience of VAWG/trauma within services to support a trauma-informed approach.
- Strengthening systems to monitor and measure the effectiveness of interventions to maintain momentum and accountability.
- Developing training to support practitioners confidence in engaging with perpetrators.
- Raising awareness of the need to address key resource gaps around perpetrator interventions (non-court mandated service) and support for victims (domestic abuse courts).
- Engaging with local education colleagues around delivery of prevention and awareness raising work in schools.



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