



STRENGTHENING LOCAL DELIVERY TO PREVENT AND ERADICATE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS



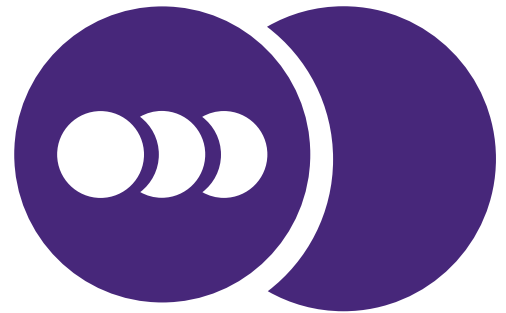
Strong communities start



with Local Government

A Renewed Approach Focused on Five Priority Actions

SUMMARY AND CASE FOR CHANGE



This Paper builds on COSLA's Manifesto commitments and brings together a series of White Papers submitted to the 7th Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government. Across this work, COSLA has set out what is needed to enable Local Government to deliver Scotland's Equally Safe ambitions - preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls, and improving outcomes for women and girls, men and boys, and communities across Scotland.

This is the final contribution to COSLA's White Papers built on our statement of Local Government's priorities outlined in our pre-election Manifesto. Each paper has outlined the conditions required to support public service reform, strengthen prevention, and improve outcomes. Taken together, they point to a system under sustained strain: demand continuing to rise, resources constrained, and the shift towards prevention still not realised at scale.

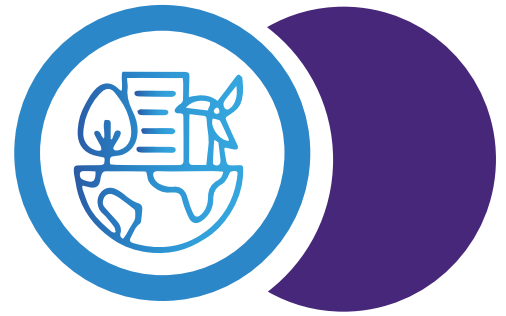
Violence against women and girls brings these pressures into sharp focus. It is

not a standalone policy issue. It reflects and reinforces wider inequality, while intersecting with poverty, housing insecurity and pressure across public services. Demand is driven up, while gaps and misalignment within systems become more visible. For these reasons, it sits at the centre of the changes COSLA has already proposed. Without a clear and effective response, progress on wider national priorities will remain limited.

The actions of the Scottish Parliament and the choices made by the new Scottish Government will determine whether ambitions translate into outcomes at a local level. Local government is central to delivery in communities. To meet Scotland's international obligations, this must be supported by sustained national leadership and a comprehensive approach to resourcing, capacity, and infrastructure, ensuring that local delivery can translate ambition into lasting change.

This paper sets out five priority actions required to enable Local Government to deliver Equally Safe ambitions.

THE SCALE, SEVERITY AND CHANGING NATURE OF VAWG IN SCOTLAND



The scale of the challenge is significant. Violence against women and girls remains widespread and underreported in Scotland. Recorded sexual crime is at one of its highest levels, with 14,892 offences in 2024–25, continuing a sustained upward trend¹. Survey evidence also shows that a significant proportion of women experience sexual violence over their lifetime, highlighting that recorded figures represent only part of the picture².

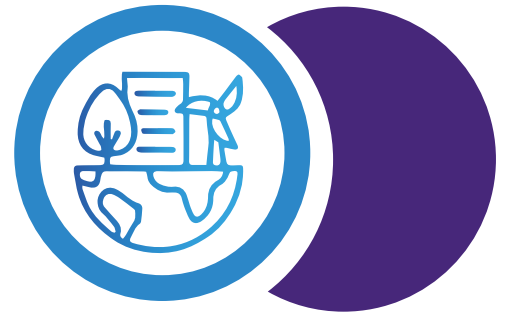
Children and young people are central to this issue. A substantial share of sexual offences recorded by police involve victims under 18, pointing to the extent of harm occurring early in life³. Abuse is also increasingly shaped by digital environments, which are changing both how harm happens and the level of risk faced².

Domestic abuse remains a high-volume and persistent demand on services, with 63,867 incidents recorded in 2023–24⁴. It is strongly gendered - more than four in five incidents involve a male perpetrator and a female victim and is often characterised by repeat victimisation. The impact on children is significant. Domestic abuse is identified in 45% of child protection cases, and almost half of children on the child protection register live in the most deprived communities, underlining the links with poverty and inequality⁵.

The impact extends far beyond individual cases. The economic cost to Scotland is estimated at around £4 billion each year⁶. Harm is often cumulative and hidden, with long-term effects on health, income and life chances. These impacts can span generations and are increasingly shaped by coercive control, digital abuse, and wider structural inequalities that limit routes to safety.



A WHOLE SYSTEM UNDER STRAIN: THE REALITY OF LOCAL DELIVERY



Local government sits at the centre of delivery of a co-ordinated whole system approach. Only Councils are placed to coordinate the services through which prevention, protection and recovery are realised, working alongside partners in health, justice and the third sector to manage risk and support women and children. This is continuous, systemwide work. It is not, however, reflected in how Equally Safe is funded or structured. There is no funding for VAWG within the Local Government Settlement.

The pressure this creates is felt across the full range of local services, not only within specialist provision. Demand is rising and becoming more complex across housing, social work —

including Children and Families, Adults and Justice Services — education, mental health, and community safety. At the same time, councils continue to support those affected by male violence, sustain specialist services, manage high-risk perpetrators, and respond to rapidly changing and technology-facilitated forms of harm, particularly the growing incidence of online harm and peer-to-peer abuse.

The impact on the workforce is significant. Staff across services are dealing with complexity, trauma, and sustained pressure. Recruitment and retention challenges persist. Capacity is finite. As demand grows, effort is drawn into immediate crisis response. Time and resource for early intervention, redesign and prevention are reduced as a result.



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

PARTNERSHIPS: CORE

INFRASTRUCTURE WITHOUT

CORE INVESTMENT



Violence Against Women Partnerships were established as the core multiagency mechanism for delivering the ambitions of *Equally Safe* at a local level. Identified from the outset as the engine of implementation, their role is to lead local strategy, embed this work across services, coordinate responses, protect victims and survivors, and address perpetrator risk within a framework of shared accountability.

For over a decade, Partnerships have been expected to provide system leadership without the level of national investment required to sustain this role. Delivery depends on stable funding, strong links to public protection, and a clear place within Community Planning.

Without this, progress will remain constrained. Sustained, baseline investment is needed to enable Partnerships to deliver on Scotland's commitment to end violence against women and girls.

This sits within a wider context of sustained pressure on local government finance, with constrained budgets, limited flexibility, and rising demand. COSLA has been consistent in calling for a new settlement based on fair, flexible and multiyear funding, greater local fiscal empowerment, and a shift to place based, preventative investment. Without this, local VAW Partnerships will continue to be asked to deliver national priorities without the resource or flexibility required to do so effectively. COSLA has been clear about this across successive Parliaments and Governments.

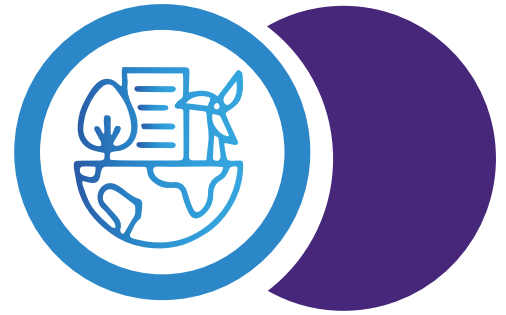


MISALIGNMENT BETWEEN

NEED AND INVESTMENT:

CONSEQUENCES FOR LOCAL

GOVERNMENT



The full scale of demand linked to violence against women and girls is not reflected in national funding approaches. Costs are absorbed locally across multiple services. This creates system-wide pressure that is foreseeable but neither fully recognised nor directly resourced.

The consequences are now evident. Councils are making difficult decisions to sustain core provision. Workforces are stretched. Partnership capacity is under strain. In these conditions, effort is drawn towards responding to harm rather than reducing it. The shift to prevention, essential for long-term change is constrained.

This is not inevitable. It reflects current choices about funding and the distribution of responsibility. Different choices would produce a different outcome.

A renewed settlement between national and local government could realign the system around what is needed to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls.



SHARED COMMITMENTS

REQUIRE ALIGNED

ACCOUNTABILITY AND

DELIVERY CONDITIONS



Scotland has already set a clear direction through Equally Safe and through its commitments under the Istanbul Convention. Recent findings from GREVIO, the independent Council of Europe body that assesses how effectively countries implement the Convention, point to the same conclusions: delivery must be consistent, funding must be sustained, and coordination across systems must be strengthened. These are not new requirements. They reflect longstanding evidence and align directly with COSLA's position, the shared approach set out in the Verity House Agreement, and the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which emphasise

democratic accountability, subsidiarity, and the need to align decision-making and resources with communities.

Local Government is clear about its role. Councils will continue to act to prevent VAWG, improve responses, strengthen local services, support survivors, and hold perpetrators to account. That commitment is not in question. What must change is the balance of accountability. Expectations set at national level, including those reflected in Equally Safe and in GREVIO's findings, need to be matched by the conditions required to deliver them.

This requires action now, sustained over the next five years. Alignment between ambition and delivery must be made explicit through investment, through system design, and through the relationship between national policy and local capacity.



A RENEWED APPROACH: FIVE PRIORITIES FOR LOCAL DELIVERY



What needs to change over the next five years

A renewed approach should focus on five priorities:

1

Create the Conditions for Local Delivery to Succeed

Recognise Local Government as a core delivery and coordinating partner by ensuring it has the authority, influence and resources needed to meet its responsibilities, in line with principles of local decision-making and democratic accountability.

2

Reshape Investment to Reflect Demand

Move towards stable, multiyear funding within the Local Government Settlement. Recognise the full system impact of VAWG, across both specialist and mainstream services. Enable flexibility at local level, including investment that reflects the cumulative impact of national policy decisions where these place additional pressure on Local Government services and Violence Against Women Partnerships.

3

Invest in Workforce and System Capacity

Effective prevention and response depend on skilled, supported staff. Current pressures are eroding the capacity for continuous improvement through workforce development. Investment in local authority workforces and system capacity must be prioritised.

4

Recognise Local Partnerships as Core Infrastructure

Violence Against Women Partnerships and multiagency arrangements require sustained resourcing to coordinate delivery and manage risk effectively. As the local drivers of Equally Safe, they must be supported accordingly.

5

Strengthen Alignment Across Government

Engage early with COSLA and local government to understand system impact. Align national policy with delivery capacity across justice, housing, health, education, and social care.



These priorities are interconnected. Together, they support wider public service reform and contribute directly to national goals, including tackling child poverty and reducing inequality. They create the conditions for a shift towards prevention, reduced demand and improved outcomes for women and girls.

Delivering Change Over the Next Five Years

The next five years are critical.

Without change, pressure will continue to build, and systems will remain focused on managing harm.

With the right alignment, Scotland can take a different path - one that delivers on the ambitions already set out.

COSLA stands ready to work in partnership with the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government to make that shift happen. This means shared accountability, clarity about what is required, and a commitment to aligning resources with outcomes.

The ambition is clear. The evidence is clear. The priority now is delivery.

Strong communities start



with Local Government

Endnotes

1. Scottish Government (2025) *Recorded Crime in Scotland 2024–25*.
2. NSPCC Learning (2025) *Child Sexual Abuse Statistics Briefing*.
3. Scottish Government (2025) *Recorded Crime in Scotland: Year Ending September 2025*.
4. Scottish Government (2024) *Domestic Abuse Recorded by the Police in Scotland 2023–24*.
5. Scottish Government (2025) *Children’s Social Work Statistics: Child Protection 2023–24*.
6. Scottish Government and Improvement Service (2023) *The Economic Costs of Violence Against Women and Girls in Scotland*.