



## **COSLA Landscape Report Strategic Review of Funding for Specialist Violence Against Women and Girls Services**

### **Foreword**

COSLA is the national membership organisation for Scottish Local Government, comprising all of Scotland's 32 councils. It sets the strategic direction for Local Government's relationship with both the UK and Scottish Governments to best deliver for Scotland's communities. COSLA works to ensure that councils have the powers and resources needed to deliver services that enable everyone to live well locally. [The COSLA Plan 2022 -2027](#) sets out our vision, high-level ambitions, and priorities.

COSLA's Leaders welcomed this [Strategic Review of Funding and Commissioning of Violence Against Women and Girls \(VAWG\) Services](#) "to develop a more consistent, coherent, collective, and stable funding model that will ensure high quality, accessible specialist services across Scotland for women, children and young people experiencing any form of VAWG".

Its recommendations will be made at a time when Local Government and communities face a combination of unprecedented and serious social and financial challenges not seen in recent times. Women comprise 51% of our population yet entrenched gender norms and roles, gender inequality and inequity barriers continue to disproportionately limit women's access to resources, power, security, good health, wellbeing, and safety. The continuing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis will widen and further entrench gender inequalities. As an outcome women and girls are even more vulnerable to the complex harms caused by all forms of VAWG. Therefore, the importance of this Review cannot be understated.

Local authorities are inextricably linked to the communities they serve and play a vital role in preventing VAWG, supporting victim/survivors and holding perpetrators to account. As joint owners of the Equally Safe Strategy with the Scottish Government, our Report offers a snapshot of the local government landscape within which our work continues to:

- address gender-related barriers that impede the realisation of the human rights of women and girls in all their diversity,
- advance gender equality, and
- tackle violence against women and girls.

Our recommendations recognise the public sector financial crisis and offer COSLA's position and perspectives on how the Scottish Government's limited funding of VAWG services and systems in local areas might be improved, empowering local authorities working with strategic community planning partners to achieve positive outcomes more effectively for victims/survivors. As co-Chair of the [Equally Safe](#) Joint Strategic Board and as COSLA's Community Wellbeing Spokesperson I look forward to hearing the Review's final recommendations in June 2023.

**Cllr Maureen Chalmers - COSLA Community Wellbeing Spokesperson**

## Background and Purpose of the Landscape Report

1. The role of Local Government and local authority systems and services in preventing and tackling VAWG is a vital one. No one sector, organisation or service can tackle the prevention and eradication of VAWG alone. It is only by working together through collective leadership and in collaboration with local strategic partners and specialist organisations, that we can drive the system changes needed to realise the human rights of women and girls living in our communities, effectively tackling the continuing prevalence of violence against women and children across our society and communities.
2. COSLA Leaders welcomed the Strategic Review of Funding and Commissioning of Violence Against Women and Girls Services, announced by the Scottish Government in December 2021.
3. The Review aims to 'develop a more consistent, coherent, collective, and stable funding model that will ensure high quality, accessible specialist services across Scotland for women, children and young people experiencing any form of Violence Against Women and Girls'. Services for children and young people in their own right as victims are included together with prevention focussed services. The review will not make recommendations for services provision for perpetrators.
4. The definition of specialist services underpinning considerations is outlined 'as those provided by organisations that take a human-rights approach, have a commitment to gender competence across the workforce and work to a gendered analysis of VAWG'.
5. The review will consider and make recommendations on several areas including developing a framework to define the minimum level of specialist service provision, determined by demographical and geographical needs.
6. Of particular interest is the Review's aim to provide recommendations relating to the role, contribution, and resourcing of local Violence Against Women Partnerships. Furthermore, the ambition of the review is to recommend a funding model that includes:-  
  
*'a Scotland-wide mechanism for the oversight and distribution of funding based on need at national and local levels which will explore how Local Authorities and Health and Social Care Partnerships can be supported to develop a strategic and collaborative commissioning and procurement framework, aligned robustly to the delivery of Equally Safe'.*
7. Recommendations around length of funding periods and the streamlining of funding applications, monitoring and reporting processes are also within scope.
8. Lesley Irving was commissioned by the Scottish Government to Chair the Independent Review. An expert Advisory Board was appointed and tasked to produce a report including the Chair's recommendations to the Scottish Government to inform the potential development of a new funding model focused on specialist services for women, children and young people experiencing any form of VAWG. The Chair has previously confirmed that it is her intention to report her overall

recommendations to the Scottish Government and to COSLA as co-owners of the Equally Safe Strategy, with the revised target being June 2023.

9. COSLA committed to produce a Landscape Report and recommendations to inform the Chair and Advisory Board's overall recommendations.

### **COSLA Engagement**

10. COSLA officers have worked closely with Public Health Scotland, the National Violence Against Women Partnerships Network and relevant professional bodies, including Directors of Finance, Social Work Scotland and ALACHO. Their views and perspectives have been incorporated and inform this report and its recommendations.
11. COSLA's values, principles and priorities underpin this report and its associated recommendations to the Review. These recommendations have been drawn from and reflect the submissions made to the Review's earlier ['Call for Evidence'](#), reflecting the views of Local Authorities, Health and Social Care Partnerships and [Violence Against Women Partnerships](#).
12. Additional expert local knowledge, experience and advice has been drawn from local area Violence Against Women Partnerships, particularly drawing upon particular area based approaches practice to tackle VAWG through local collaborative, multi-agency whole systems approaches and experiences relating to funding and commissioning of expert VAWG services.

### **COSLA Landscape Report – Overview**

13. The Report considers the impacts of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis on the vulnerabilities of women and children to VAWG. It highlights the current pressures and challenges that Local Authorities, Violence Against Women Partnerships and both universal and specialist services are grappling with locally in their efforts to prevent and respond to all forms of male violence against women and girls, and the attitudes that underpin its prevalence.
14. This Landscape Report serves as COSLA's formal submission to the Strategic Review of Funding and Commissioning of Violence Against Women and Girl's (VAWG) Services.
15. As co-owner of the [Equally Safe Strategy](#) with the Scottish Government, the report affirms COSLA's commitment to the prevention and eradication all forms of VAWG in Scotland.
16. It proposes that a new funding model for specialist VAWG services in Scotland must take into consideration and reflect our broader agreed Equally Safe Policy Framework, with the success of our Equally Safe Strategy overall predicated on the strength of the whole systems [gendered](#) response to preventing and tackling all forms of VAWG.

## **COSLA's views and position/s in response to the remit of the Review**

### **At a strategic level - A Whole System Response**

17. A more consistent, coherent, collective, and stable funding model that will ensure high quality, accessible specialist services across Scotland for women, children and young people experiencing any form of VAWG is fundamental to a whole systems response to tackling VAWG. The effectiveness of every element of such a response, as embedded in Scotland's strategy to prevent and eradicate VAWG, is affected by and is dependent on the health of each part of, and the synchronicity of that approach.
18. In order to be person-centred, systems and services need to be able to adapt to the specific needs and aspirations of the people who come into contact with them. Within the context of Equally Safe, creating person-centred pathways of support aims to ensure that the systems and services that women, children and young people experiencing VAWG come into contact with within their local communities recognise and respond to each victim/ survivors' individual needs and experiences. This includes recognising how a women's experience of VAWG may be impacted by age, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, etc. and how these protected characteristics can intersect and/ or compound experiences of inequality and create additional barriers to accessing support.
19. Adopting a person-centred approach also encourages partners to recognise and take account of the impact that trauma and adversity has on women, children and young people experiencing VAWG, as these experiences may in turn impact if and how that person chooses to engage with services, what support they need to do so and how their experiences of trauma may compound other needs they may be experiencing in their lives.
20. A whole system, gendered response to VAWG can only be achieved if Local Government as a fundamental part of that system has the necessary resources to invest in creating a real shift from crisis management and harm limitation to prevention and early intervention. Only then will pressures faced by specialist VAWG services be alleviated. All parts of the system need adequate and stable resources available to them. Additional pressures created by funding approaches that regularly direct energies, capacities, and available resources away from the provision of much needed support, exhausts further the already depleted specialist workforces, creating more obstacles in the way of achieving much needed investment in prevention and early intervention.
21. Councils are facing an extremely precarious financial position as a result of the Scottish Government's real terms cut to councils' core budgets over the last decade and increasingly directed funding, along with increased demand, soaring inflation, the cost-of-living crisis, and the impact of Covid. Councils are facing increasingly difficult choices and simply do not have adequate flexible funding to invest in all priority systems and services that are 'unprotected' and non-statutory. Local Government requires investment from Scottish Government to support an anchored

whole system, flexible approach to tackling VAWG informed by local needs and providing support to victim/survivors in line with Equally Safe policy commitments.

22. COSLA notes that the Scottish Government's current approach to funding VAWG services for victim/survivors in the context of the delivery of Equally Safe, is primarily through allocating resources through a competitive and time-consuming bidding process to support specialist third sector services nationally and locally.
23. COSLA's acknowledges the vital role of third sector VAWG services as providers of specialist, expert resources, advocacy, and support, while also stating COSLA's position that an effective VAWG funding model must also recognise the need for specialist services to exist and deliver locally as part of a collaborative, multi layered, strategic and person-centred whole system approach.
24. VAWG in all its forms is a serious and deeply rooted problem. The damage it causes creates serious emotional, physical, mental, sexual, and financial harm to women and girls and children/ young people whose lives are impacted by it. Increasingly, local authorities are identifying that the children and families who come into contact with VAWG systems and services are often the same children and families who come into contact with Child Protection Systems, Adult Support and Protection Systems, Alcohol and Drug Support Services, Housing and Homelessness Support Services, Community Justice Services and Mental Health Services. These harms experienced by victims/ survivors of VAWG are often complex and will require a complex mixture of recovery support from across local authority or/and health and social care services - including universal services, along with specialist third sector organisations operating in the local environment and commissioned by local authorities and health and social care partnerships.
25. Downstream early engagement and intervention through universal services can prevent the entrenchment of serious harms which require complex and resource intensive intervention and support investment. Early identification of victims through the universal services women and children use and have access to on a regular basis, enables the early prevention of greater harms mitigating against the need for intensive, more expensive and complex supports later on. Where abusive behaviours are entrenched and established, the range of services that survivors may require if they are to be robustly supported to progress towards recovery, are likely to be needed over a long term rather than a crisis response basis. Therefore, COSLA believes that the continuation of a funding model that supports only VAWG Specialist Services in isolation from the local authority and health and social care services needed by victim/survivors in the round, will continue to undermine whole system effectiveness and capacity.
26. The historical allocation of VAWG funding to local authorities has remained at the same level (£1.083m) since it was baselined into the 2007-08 settlement. This funding is not distributed to all 32 local authorities and bears no relation to the costs of VAWG impacting on council budgets. This highlights that a review of funding requires to consider and respond to the under investment in local government and its role in implementing the ambitions of Equally Safe. COSLA calls for the Scottish Government to now consider and improve investment in local government to enable

and empower local provision of systems and service responses across sectors, in line with needs of survivors at all stages of their experience.

27. Continuing with a fragmented and incomplete response cannot deliver best value for public spend and will only further entrench reactive crisis responses. This itself will further undermine local government / health and social care capacity to invest upstream to reduce demand on services and to prevent VAWG. A re-active approach undermines the drive towards the adoption of a Public Health response to tackling VAWG.
28. COSLA's view is that more work is needed by the Scottish Government to support the capacity of local authorities, Violence Against Women Partnerships and Health and Social Care Partnerships in their work to prevent VAWG and to respond to the needs of victim/survivors of VAWG.

### **The Financial Environment**

29. The real-term funding cuts and pressures that Local Government has borne the brunt of for more than a decade, has seriously undermined the capacity and flexibilities of Local Government budgets. Councils' core funding has remained largely the same since 2013/14 – representing a real-terms cut. This funding is additionally required to deliver more services than it was 10 years ago. Councils are facing increased costs as the population has increased and the number of households has gone up. COVID has left a legacy of support needs for the most vulnerable, and, as people live longer, their care needs have become more complex. Now inflation, energy and wage costs are adding to the pressures that councils face.
30. The funding core has constantly been squeezed. As a result, real terms cuts fall disproportionately on 'unprotected' areas such as waste management, roads, youth work, culture, and leisure. This is also the case for local structures such as VAWPs and other key local authority services which are vital as part of joined up pathways of co-ordinated services support in response to the complex needs of women and children impacted by VAWG. The limited resources are ever more allocated to areas where statutory duties exist rather than ones where we can use discretionary spend. Increasingly directed funding and pressure on core budgets mean that councils have limited flexibility to make decisions about local spend to ensure best use of resources based on local needs and priorities. This reduction in available finance leaves a real risk to the duty for the provision of welfare in the local area (s12) as set out in the Social Work Scotland Act 1968, where the discretionary spend for those experiencing hardship, disadvantage, and need is often met.
31. This pressure on core budgets is becoming increasingly visible and leads to councils making difficult choices, with cuts to statutory services, cessation of other services and job losses all having to be considered. Such instability seriously undermines the efforts of local authorities striving to deliver the services required to consistently meet their duty, under section 12 of The Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. Lack of adequate resource to deliver person centred, trauma informed co-ordinated responses in potentially high harm, high risk circumstances to victims of VAWG not

only risks retraumatising survivors, but also weakens the strength of the protective shield around vulnerable people at a time of stress, anxiety, fear, disruptions, and challenging transitions.

32. COSLA has long called for fair funding for Local Government, with flexibility to allow councils to target spending to respond to local needs, and which recognises the critical role of Local Government in taking a whole systems approach. The reduction in councils' core budgets has eroded the critical role and potential for prevention that Local Government can offer. A further challenge with Local Government funding is that the Scottish Government has not set a multi-year Budget since the three-year spending review period 2011 to 2015. Single year budgets make forward planning difficult as there are many uncertainties over the funding Local Government will receive each year. Equally Safe takes a long-term view and ensuring that long term investment in early intervention and prevention runs alongside adequate and sustainable investment in gendered, trauma and VAWG informed mental health treatment pathways is vital to any hope of success. Long term strategic planning must underpin the shift to prevention and early intervention.
33. The rising costs to councils of responding to and mitigating the damaging and expensive impacts of VAWG behaviours and supporting victim/survivors of VAWG to greater safety and recovery in line with Equally Safe ambitions, cannot continue to be met by Local Government through further efficiencies. Due to the pressures faced over the last decade, there is now no scope for Local Government to pick up additional and rising costs. The recently published [Integration Joint Boards: Financial analysis 2021/22](#) report by Audit Scotland showed how similar challenges are affecting the health and social care sector too. The report is clear that "efficiency and transformational savings alone may be insufficient to meet future financial challenges. Significant transformation is needed to ensure financial sustainability and service improvements".
34. Moreover, the current recruitment and retention crisis in social work and social care will have a significant impact on the delivery of Equally Safe. The picture that emerges from Social Work Scotland's 'Setting the Bar' research is serious and demands attention now. It describes an ageing workforce – some 19% are reaching retirement age – and a staff group who are struggling with administrative burdens, fearful of making mistakes, and living with the moral distress of having to work in a way which doesn't align with their professional values. One in 4 social workers graduating don't make it to 6 years in the job. It is critical for us to remember that sustainable services start with a strong workforce base that is adequately trained, supported, invested in, and empowered to deliver.
35. COSLA's view is that the Scottish Government's centralised decision-making approach to the allocation of limited resources primarily to third sector specialist services through competitive funding programmes needs to change. The central government approach disconnects the investment of public resources from driving improvement locally to meet identified local strategic priorities and needs. Instead, we need an approach that recognises the real cost pressures of VAWG across the system, that supports the principle of subsidiarity and empowers the role and

effectiveness of multi-agency Violence Against Women Partnerships as the strategic engine driver of Equally Safe delivery in line with local area needs and priorities, enabling targeted action that effectively deliver results through local improvement strategies.

36. Therefore, COSLA calls the Scottish Government to establish the means for it to directly invest in Local Government to support an anchored whole system, flexible approach to tackling VAWG informed by local needs and providing support to victim/survivors in line with Equally Safe policy commitments.

### **Additional Financial and Capacity Pressures - Scottish Government policy**

37. Awareness and understanding of the causes of VAWG and the complexity of the impacts of its harms on women and children are becoming better understood and considered by the Scottish Government in design and development of a broad and growing range of policy areas. This is to be welcomed; however, the Scottish Government must consider and cost any potential VAWG related financial burdens for and capacity impacts on local government as part of broader policy developments.
38. The current policy environment driving the intensity of responsive pressures on local authorities and health and social care partnerships in the context of VAWG includes, but is not limited to:



<b>Area</b>	<b>Policy</b>
Housing	Ending Homeless Together Action Plan, Ending Destitution Together Homelessness Prevention Duties 'Ask and Act'
Justice	The Vision for Justice in Scotland The Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015 Elish Angiolini Review
Economy, Poverty and Skills	Fairer Scotland Action Plan No One Left Behind The Scottish Welfare Fund
Health (and Social Care)	Creating Hope Together: suicide prevention strategy 2022 to 2032, Women's Health Plan, Learning Disability and Autism – Towards transformation Plan', Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007 and Code of Practice Mental Health (Care and Treatment Act) (Scotland) Act 2003
Education, Children and Families	Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) Universal Health Visiting Pathway in Scotland: pre-birth to pre-school Keeping The Promise Early Years Framework, National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland Scottish Child Interview Model for joint investigative interviewing Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-26 UNCRC
Equalities and Human Rights	New Scots: refugee integration strategy 2018 to 2022 A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People Delivery Plan Human Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy

39. In addition, there are emerging workstreams and legislative developments being driven by the Scottish Government or the UK Government that may have further financial implications for and impact on Local Government capacity in the context of the provision of services for women and children experiencing VAWG, that are to date unlikely to have been costed or identified. These include:-

<b>Area</b>	<b>Policy</b>
Housing	Improving Housing Outcomes for Women and Children Experiencing Domestic Abuse – Recommendations and workstreams
Justice	The Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Bill A Model for Scotland – tackling men's demand for prostitution. Community Justice Strategy and Delivery Plan (includes Restorative Justice Action Plan) Report by Women's Leadership Justice Panel, Prevent (development of Scottish Prevent guidance)

Economy, Poverty and Skills	Ask For Ani/Safe Spaces – Pharmacy and Bank based local programmes and pilot programme in Job Centre Plus
Health (and Social Care)	National Care Service Bill Proposed Learning Disability, Autism and Neurodiversity Bill Sexual assault referral centres and services (SARCS) and associated lifelong pathway of support for victims. New Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy Suicide Prevention Strategy – ‘Creating Hope Together’ adult secondary mental health services - national standards Scottish Mental Health Law Review Trauma Informed Practice
Education, Children and Families	Bairns’ Hoose Age of Criminal Responsibility Scotland Act 2019
Equalities and Human Rights	Review of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation strategy

40. COSLA recommends that the Scottish Government invites COSLA and relevant local strategic partnership lead officers to participate in any cross-policy work undertaken by the Scottish Government where VAWG is being or requires to be considered.
41. Strengthening COSLA’s capacity to support the Scottish Government to co-design VAWG related or VAWG impacting policy and to work with local authorities and health and social care partnerships to cost additional burdens, should be considered as one outcome of a review of funding/support.
42. Additional burdens impacting on local authorities identified will require to be included in direct Local Government settlements, following consideration at the joint Settlement and Distribution Group and agreement by COSLA Leaders.

### **Multi - Year Settlements**

43. Local VAWG facing services and systems also require to be appropriately and flexibly funded as part of a Local Government multi-year settlement. This will enable councils to ensure that their services can intervene and provide support at the earliest possible stage. This is the only rational way to prevent women and children from experiencing further harm and to mitigate against the need for crisis services and long term support for recovery. Prevention and early intervention are also at the heart of the Christie Commission recommendations. The 2011 report is clear that public service organisations need to prioritise prevention to reduce inequalities, tackle the deep-rooted social problems that persist in communities across the country and maximise scarce resources.

### **Distribution of Funding**

44. VAWG facing allocations of funding to local authorities to support the implementation of Equally Safe policy and all new policy developments with clear correlation to tackling/responding to VAWG across local authority areas should be distributed via

the Local Government Settlement following the joint process agreed between Scottish Government and Local Government, including consideration at the Settlement and Distribution Group and agreement at COSLA Leaders. This should include, but not be limited to allocation of resources for required levels of local specialist provision.

45. Distribution is largely based on the principle of using needs based indicators, such as, but not limited to population, to allocate the Local Government settlement between the 32 local authorities.
46. Therefore, the Scottish Government should work with COSLA to consider which, if any, needs based indicators might be used to distribute VAWG facing funding streams to Local Authorities from 2024.

### **Community Planning**

47. Linked to this, COSLA also would like the visibility of VAWG in the context of Community Planning strengthened, thereby raising awareness, and understanding of the impacts of and related costs of VAWG, including prevention, early intervention, provision of a range of complex services in response to harms, costs of protection, and recovery and reestablishment of victim's stability over time.
48. Greater visibility and understanding of the impacts and costs of VAWG across strategic community planning partnership priorities will underpin the importance of preventing VAWG from occurring by tackling gender inequalities collaboratively in national, regional, and local community planning processes and plans.
49. Embedding VAWG will in community planning will tackle cross cutting issues and those key links between gender, poverty, inequality, and all forms of violence against women and girls.
50. Tackling the causes of and harms created by all forms of VAWG requires that both area strategic community plans and local improvement planning considers the implementation of Equally Safe – including specialist service provision – as a priority. This will improve resources sharing across public sector organisations and joint community planning partner commitment to preventing and tackling VAWG, supporting the strategic work being undertaken with local partners by Violence Against Women Partnerships.

### **Perpetrators**

51. While recognising that the scope of the Strategic Review does not include services for perpetrators, COSLA wants to see robust and sustainable investment in safe, locally embedded perpetrator services in tandem with robust and sustainable services for victim/survivors of VAWG. Perpetrator beliefs and behaviours can only be meaningfully and effectively tackled, prevented, and managed by holding perpetrators to account. Without suitable services, both specialist and those delivered by local authority services, embedded across all 32 local authority areas, 'whole system' response cannot be achieved, nor women and girls' safety better

assured. It is also critical that we go upstream and stop male violence, abuse, and harassment from happening in the first place by shifting societal and judicial attitudes.

## **Funding models**

52. Local Government has worked hard to deliver COSLA's and the Scottish Government's shared ambitions since implementation of the Strategy began. However, since the Equally Safe Strategy was first published in 2014, the available resources as outlined, and capacity to deliver systems and services to tackle VAWG and support victim/survivors through our agreed whole systems responses, has become ever more stretched and challenging. Pressures have accelerated further through the pandemic and in the current economic 'cost of living' climate. Any alternative funding model that takes account of and responds to the costs to and financial pressures on local authorities and health and social care partnerships in the following areas will be extremely helpful, if not transformational:

- i. Greater local authority and health and social care capacity to commission sustainable, specialist VAWG services for women and children in line with local strategic priorities, through which victim/survivors of all forms of VAWG can receive vital and timely expert advice and support locally, relevant to their specific needs at points of crisis.
- ii. Sustainable funding support for local authorities commissioning of evidence based programmes and of operating multi-agency mechanisms that co-ordinate cross sector and multi-agency responses, building pathways of joined up support that: prevent harm; support early intervention; assure ongoing protections for and recovery of victim/survivors over the longer term; and hold perpetrators to account for their behaviours, supporting change where possible and robust management where not.
- iii. As a priority, COSLA would welcome any future funding model recognising and supporting the real costs across the local authority and health and social care system to ensure that local health, housing, and social work services that may be required from early intervention to crisis points and over the longer term, to respond to victim/survivors needs and to support their autonomy and recovery, are resourced to meet the real pressures and demand.
- iv. In addition, more investment in critical universal services (e.g., housing and homelessness support and services, schools-based support, mental health services for women and for children and young people, addictions services, money advice and support, employability services among others.)
- v. Recognition that in some instances survivors (and some perpetrators) may require councils' long term and, in some cases, life-long engagement and provision of support.
- vi. Local universal services supported through enhanced funding capacity to respond to the needs of victims/survivors through sustainable investment in

gender competent and trauma informed organisational and professional development, embedding VAWG aware workforces and practices in local services infrastructure.

### **Violence Against Women Multi-Agency Partnerships (VAWPs)**

53. COSLA calls for a Scottish Government funding model that recognises and meets the necessary Local Government investment in the critical work of Violence Against Women Strategic Partnerships. This would recognise the VAWP's key named role as 'engine drivers of the multi-agency mechanism to deliver on Equally Safe at a local strategic level'. It is through VAWPs that local authorities seek to assess need and plan for the delivery of co-ordinated pathways of local support for victim/survivors across the local public services environment.

### Violence Against Women Partnership Guidance

54. [Violence Against Women Partnership Guidance \(VAWP Guidance\)](#) is co-authored by Scottish Government and COSLA and creates an expectation that all local authorities across Scotland will have a VAW Partnership in place. VAWP Guidance recognises that membership and governance arrangements will vary but should have common themes, minimum standards and a focus on prevention and early intervention. The Guidance effectively builds on existing statutory duties already placed on local authorities, such as the duties to provide for the welfare in the local area (Social Work Scotland Act 1968), to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (Children Scotland Act 1995) and to promote wellbeing and social development (Mental Health Care and Treatment Scotland Act 2003)

55. VAWP Guidance also suggests that effective partnership working between VAW Partnerships, Community Planning Partnerships and other local strategic partnerships is essential to deliver a programme of work that improves outcomes for women, girls and children affected by VAW.

56. Key partnerships for VAW Partnerships include, but are not limited, to:

- Health and Social Care Integration Joint Boards
- Community Planning Partnerships
- Public Protection Committees (i.e., Adult/Child Protection/Offender Management Committee)
- Housing Partnerships
- Community Safety Partnerships
- Community Justice Partnerships
- Alcohol and Drug Partnerships.

57. VAW Partnerships have a role and/or links with:

- Multi-Agency Tasking and Co-ordination (MATAC)
- Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)
- Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA).

58. VAWP Guidance sets out 'Minimum Standards' for VAW Partnerships and it is useful to note the breadth of work expected, particularly relating to Standards 2, 4 and 6 which outline the key public and third sector partners, the necessity of a strategic plan that outlines the implementation of Equally Safe and the need for a designated co-ordinator.
59. The Guidance expects VAW Partnerships to take responsibility for the use of resources by the following mechanisms:
- Ensure they are **aware of all the resources** (financial, staff, assets) that are being invested locally to achieve the Partnership's agreed outcomes
  - Undertake an **analysis of what is spent locally** to tackle violence against women and girls and the impact that these funded services/ activities are having towards achieving the Partnership's agreed outcomes
  - **Realign resources**, where required, in order to better deliver early intervention and prevention approaches
  - Identify opportunities for **partner organisations to pool budgets**, training, and other resources to help deliver the Partnership's agreed outcomes for tackling violence against women.
60. VAW Partnerships are not constituted, or statutory partnerships. Therefore, they do not have the ability to directly receive funding. Instead, it is expected that all partner agencies within VAW Partnerships pool collective resources to deliver outcomes and commitments. It is noted within the Guidance that VAW Partnerships do not, ordinarily, commission services but that other Community Planning partners will.
61. Given the intensity of budget pressures across local government and its' public sector partners, contributions to shared spend have been eroded and re-prioritised elsewhere impacting on resources available to deliver VAW activity.
62. Additionally, the Guidance recognises that partner resources may take the format of staff time or other non-financial contributions. Current public spending pressures are also impacting on 'in-kind' resource investment.
63. Lack of Scottish Government targeted investment leaves has impacted on and limited some local authorities' capacity to resource the co-ordination of their Violence Against Women multi agency Partnerships on a full-time basis, reducing effectiveness and impact. COSLA recommends that a funding model for VAWG services in Scotland should recognise the fundamental importance of a sustainably funded Violence Against Women Partnership in every local authority area, with full time, senior co-ordination, inked to local public protection and community planning systems.
64. There are working examples of Scottish Government funded strategic partnerships across 32 local authorities, coordinating strategic action in different areas of policy, that provide models for that can inform improved Scottish Government approaches to VAWP funding. These offer learning opportunities and include Community Justice Partnerships, Employability Partnerships and Alcohol and Drug Partnerships.

## Commissioning VAWG Services

65. In 2017 COSLA supported the development of Scottish Women's Aid's good practice guidance for those involved in the commissioning of domestic abuse services. COSLA continues to work with the Improvement Service and Violence Against Women Strategic Partnerships to promote this guidance to local authorities and to multi agency partners where relevant. COSLA is content that the commissioning principles therein are sound and in line with local authorities' obligations under Equalities duties and national procurement legislation.
66. In recognition of the duties on and accountabilities of local authorities in the context of the commissioning and procurement environment, COSLA recommends that learning from ongoing developments of refreshed approaches to commissioning processes elsewhere - for example, Health and Social Care, broad employability work, and The Promise, as examples, inform a national programme of work to refresh the commissioning framework, informed by Equally Safe, to support local Commissioners of VAWG Services.
67. We further recommend that this should be taken forward by the Scottish Government through joint engagement with local authorities and health and social care partnerships. This should also engage with specialist services, the Improvement Service, Public Health Scotland, Violence Against Women Partnerships, the Society of Local Authority Lawyers & Administrators in Scotland (SOLAR) and Excel Scotland.
68. A linked, funded test of change programme would support local authorities/Health and Social Care Partnerships/ VAWP Partnerships to explore approaches and share good practice, strengthening innovative, ethical, VAWG informed commissioning models of practice across different local authority areas.
69. This work should inform the review and refreshment of Scottish Women's Aid's existing Guidance, but in addition broader guidance should be developed with appropriately specialist organisations and services that is inclusive of all forms of VAWG.
70. [An overview of East Ayrshire's innovative approach to the local funding of VAWG services](#), is being offered to the Review Board as only one example of existing local authority good practice in a Commissioning/VAWG context. A short film highlighting the development and depth of this approach is embedded at the link. The principles underpinning this work ongoing in East Ayrshire are in line with currently approved Scottish Women's Aid guidance for local authorities. This example highlights the importance of VAWG and trauma informed leadership working together across areas of policy and professional practice in a complex local environment, to explore and establish person centred solutions to problems through which victim/survivors of VAWG may continue to be limited or harmed.
71. COSLA would welcome an outcome of the review being the establishment of a significant programme of work as part of Equally Safe's next substantive phase, to develop and embed a VAWG and Trauma informed, multiyear commissioning

framework, co-designed with local authorities and health and social care partnerships and drawing from the leadership, innovation, and experience of local areas.



## **Summary of COSLA's recommendations for consideration**

### **COSLA's Position**

Councils are facing an extremely precarious financial position as a result of the Scottish Government's real terms cut to councils' core budgets over the last decade and increasingly directed funding, along with increased demand, soaring inflation, recruitment challenges, the cost of living crisis and the impact of Covid. Councils are facing increasingly difficult choices and simply do not have adequate flexible funding to invest in all priority systems and services that are 'unprotected' and non-statutory. Local Government requires investment from Scottish Government to support an embedded, whole system, flexible approach to tackling VAWG informed by local needs and providing support to victim/survivors in line with Equally Safe policy commitments.

COSLA calls for a new funding model for specialist VAWG services in Scotland that considers and reflects our agreed Equally Safe Policy Framework, with the success of our Equally Safe Strategy overall predicated on the strength of the whole systems response to preventing and tackling all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG).

It is COSLA's position that an effective VAWG funding model must recognise the need for specialist services to exist in and be delivered locally as part of a collaborative, multi layered, strategic and person centred whole system approach. Therefore, COSLA's recommendations are predicated on the understanding that the whole systems response outlined in our jointly owned Equally Safe Strategy cannot be achieved while Local Government as a fundamental part of that system does not have the necessary resource to invest in creating a real shift from crisis management and harm limitation to prevention.

It is COSLA's position that all parts of the system need adequate resources available to them to meet the ambitions that have been agreed in Equally Safe. COSLA understands Equally Safe as being as strategically crucial to the realisation of women and girls' human rights as any other Scottish Government flagship Strategy, with associated whole system commitment and agreed resourcing across its parts.

### **At a strategic level**

1. COSLA calls for the Scottish Government to improve investment in local government to enable and empower local provision of VAWG facing systems and services responses, in line with needs of survivors at all stages of their experience, including both finance and staff resource.
2. A new funding model must consider and reflect our agreed Equally Safe Policy Framework, with the success of our Equally Safe Strategy overall predicated on the strength of the whole systems response to preventing and tackling all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG), as well as to deliver legal duties set out around welfare provision and the early intervention and prevention aspirations set out in policy by the Scottish Government.

3. The Scottish Government should establish the means for it to directly invest in Local Government to support an anchored whole system, flexible approach to tackling VAWG informed by local needs, including workforce, and providing support to victim/survivors in line with Equally Safe policy commitments.
4. A new funding model should enhance local government / health and social care capacity to invest upstream to reduce demand on services and to prevent VAWG through a Public Health response to tackling VAWG.
5. The Scottish Government's centralised decision-making approach to the allocation of resources through competitive funding programmes needs to change. A new approach should be established that supports the principle of subsidiarity and empowers the role and effectiveness of VAWP multi agency partnerships as the engine driver of Equally Safe delivery in local areas.
6. The Scottish Government must routinely consider any additional VAWG related financial burdens on local government as part of its broader national policy development and design process. Tokenistic support for councils' must be avoided by robustly costed planning across spheres of government and COSLA, working closely with local authorities. Any heightening of burdens identified will require to be included in direct Local Government settlements, following consideration at the joint Settlement and Distribution Group and agreement by COSLA Leaders.
7. COSLA recommends that the Scottish Government invites COSLA and relevant local strategic partnership lead officers to participate in any cross policy work undertaken by the Scottish Government where VAWG is being considered.
8. A new funding model should be developed in tandem with the visibility of VAWG in the context of Community Planning being strengthened.
9. In addition to a new model of funding that will provide robust support for sustainable services for women's and children's victim/survivors of VAWG, COSLA calls for robust and sustainable investment in safe, locally embedded perpetrator services.
10. COSLA recommends that a new funding model ensures additional, fair, and flexible Scottish Government investment in Local Government. Funding should be available to alleviate the unsustainable pressures on local budgets created by the prevalence and complexity of VAWG, enabling and empowering all thirty-two local authority areas to ensure specialist VAWG services can operate as part of VAWG informed/gendered whole system.
11. Locally embedded multi agency systems including VAWPs, and MARACs require investment to enable them to provide rigorous support to victim/survivors of all ages to
  - access the broad range of services they require, at the earliest opportunity.
  - to manage risk and prevent harm,
  - to enable the establishment of safe and secure lives
  - to access justice

- to recover from the trauma and harms caused by the violence perpetrated against them.

### **The Financial Environment**

12. The Scottish Government's centralised decision making approach to the allocation of limited resources primarily to third sector specialist services through competitive funding programmes disconnects the investment of public resources from driving improvement locally to meet identified local strategic priorities and needs. COSLA calls for the Scottish Government to establish an approach that recognises the real cost pressures of VAWG across the system, including local government, that supports the principle of subsidiarity and empowers the role and effectiveness of VAWP multi agency partnerships as the strategic engine driver of Equally Safe delivery in line with local area needs and priorities.

### **Additional Financial and Capacity Pressures - Scottish Government policy**

13. COSLA recommends that the Scottish Government invites COSLA and relevant local strategic partnership lead officers to participate in any cross policy work undertaken by the Scottish Government where VAWG is being or requires to be considered.
14. Strengthening COSLA's capacity to support the Scottish Government to co-design VAWG related or VAWG impacting policy and to work with local authorities and health and social care partnerships to cost additional burdens, should be considered as one outcome of a review of funding/support.
15. Additional burdens impacting on local authorities identified will require to be included in direct Local Government settlements, following consideration at the joint Settlement and Distribution Group and agreement by COSLA Leaders

### **Multi-Year Settlements**

16. Local VAWG facing services and systems require to be appropriately and flexibly funded as part of a Local Government multi-year settlement, with consideration of the workforce needed to deliver this.

### **Distribution of Funding**

17. VAWG facing allocations of funding to local authorities to support the implementation of Equally Safe policy and all new policy developments with clear correlation to tackling/responding to VAWG across local authority areas should be distributed via the Local Government Settlement following the joint process agreed between Scottish Government and Local Government, including consideration at the Settlement and Distribution Group and agreement at COSLA Leaders. This should include, but not be limited to allocation of resources for required levels of local specialist provision.

18. The Scottish Government should work with COSLA to consider which, if any, needs based indicators might be used to distribute VAWG facing funding streams to Local Authorities from 2024.

### **Community Planning**

19. COSLA recommends that the visibility of VAWG in the context of Community Planning be strengthened.

### **Perpetrators**

20. While recognising that the scope of the Strategic Review does not include services for perpetrators, COSLA calls for the Scottish Government to provide additional robust and sustainable investment in safe, locally embedded perpetrator services in tandem with robust and sustainable services for victim/survivors of VAWG, and the workforce necessary to deliver both.

### **Violence Against Women Multi-Agency Partnerships (VAWPs)**

21. COSLA calls for a Scottish Government funding model that recognises and meets the necessary investment in the critical work of Violence Against Women Strategic Partnerships in their work to deliver co-ordinated pathways of local support for victim/survivors across the local public services environment.

### **Commissioning VAWG Services**

22. Learning from ongoing developments of refreshed approaches to commissioning processes, for example, ethical commissioning in social care, broad employability work, and The Promise, as examples, should inform a national programme of work to refresh the commissioning framework, informed by Equally Safe, to support local Commissioners of VAWG Services.
23. COSLA recommends that the Scottish Government supports a review and refreshment of Scottish Women's Aid's existing Good Practice Commissioning Guidance and National Service Standards for Local Authorities, originally developed with the support of COSLA in 2017.
24. Additional national guidance, including service standards and measures, should be developed with COSLA, the Improvement Service, VAWPS, Excel Scotland, SOLAR and all appropriately specialist organisations and services. This should be inclusive of all forms of VAWG.

### **In Summary**

25. The delivery of a more consistent, coherent, collective, and stable funding model ensuring high quality, accessible specialist services across Scotland for women, children and young people experiencing any form of Violence Against Women and Girls, requires that these critical services and the workforce required to

deliver them are understood to be one of the key elements of a whole systems response to tackling VAWG.

26. COSLA calls for the Scottish Government to deliver a new funding model that provides additional investment to local government to mitigate the rising costs to and financial pressures on local authorities and health and social care partnerships in the following areas:

- capacity to commission locally relevant sustainable, specialist VAWG services for women and children
- capacity to commission vital evidence-based programmes and to operate multi-agency mechanisms that prevent harm, support early intervention, and assure ongoing protections for and recovery of victim/survivors over the longer term.
- capacity to deliver additional core funding capacity for social work, housing and homelessness, children and families and young people's services for victim/survivors, commensurate with the response required for services to meet the local needs of victims/survivors. In addition, to recognise that councils may require to offer long term and, in some cases, life-long engagement and provision to affected women and girls, and so ensure long term sustainable support. Lastly, current recruitment and retention challenges will also need to be urgently addressed as they risk seriously undermining local authorities' ability to deliver these critical services.
- capacity to invest in gender competent and trauma informed organisational and professional development, embedding VAWG aware workforces and practices in universal local services
- capacity to ensure that there is a Violence Against Women Partnership (VAWP) in every local authority area, with secure and sustainable funding supporting full time, senior co-ordination, linked to local public protection and community planning systems.