

## **COSLA Landscape Report**

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

**April 2023**

#### **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 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 codesign 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