

Independent Review of Funding for Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Services – Response to Recommendations and Next Steps

Summary and Recommendations

This paper updates Members on progress made towards the establishment of a Project Board to oversee responses to the recommendations from the Scottish Government commissioned Independent Review of Funding and Commissioning for Violence Against Women Services. It outlines what has been proposed regarding COSLA's role, membership of the Board, governance arrangements and initial focus for the Board's work.

Pending any issues raised or further work requested, this paper invites the Board:

- i. to approve the proposed approach including COSLA's co-chairing of the Board, the breadth of membership invited to participate from across the Local Government family, the proposed initial tasks, the frequency of meetings and the governance of the progress of its work via the Equally Safe Joint Strategic Board.

References

Previous reports on the Review of Funding for VAWG Services:

- Item 5.2 CWB Board Feb 2023 COSLA Landscape Report approach – Strategic Review of Funding and Commissioning of Violence Against Women and Girls Services
- Item 3.1 CWB Board April 2023 COSLA Response to the Independent Strategic Review of Funding for Specialist Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Services
- Item 2.3 CWB Board June 2023 The independent strategic review of funding and commissioning of violence against women and girls services - Report and Recommendations
- Item 3.2 CWB Board October 2023 COSLA and Scottish Government Joint Response (VAWG) Funding Review Recommendations

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Purpose

1. This paper updates Members on progress made towards the establishment of a Project Board to oversee responses to the recommendations from the Scottish Government commissioned Independent Review of Funding and Commissioning for Violence Against Women Services. It outlines what has been proposed regarding COSLA's role, membership of the Board, governance arrangements and initial focus for the Board's work.

Current COSLA Position

2. [The Independent Strategic Review of Funding and Commissioning of Violence Against Women and Girls \(VAWG\) Services](#) was commissioned by the Scottish Government to provide recommendations on the funding and procurement of VAWG services. The purpose of the review was to enable development of a consistent, coherent, and stable funding model focusing on prevention and high-quality specialist services for women, children and young people experiencing VAWG in Scotland.
3. COSLA's Leaders welcomed this Strategic Review while recognising that its recommendations would be made at a time when Local Government and communities continue to face a combination of unprecedented and serious social and financial challenges. 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 has and continues to 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.
4. Local authorities play a vital role in promoting gender equality, preventing VAWG, supporting victim/survivors and holding perpetrators to account. As joint owners of the Equally Safe Strategy with the Scottish Government, [COSLA's Landscape Report](#) offered the Review a snapshot of the local government landscape within which our work to address gender-related barriers that impede the realisation of the human rights of women and girls in all their diversity, to advance gender equality, and to effectively prevent and tackle violence against women and girls, is planned, designed and delivered.
5. COSLA's recommendations to the Review recognised the ongoing and deepening public sector financial crisis and offered 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.
6. As co-owners of the Equally Safe Strategy, [The Scottish Government and COSLA issued a joint statement](#) in response to the publication of the Review's full recommendations in June 2023. Published in November 2023 it set out agreed joint next steps, acknowledged the immediate priorities identified and outlined that we would together begin work by concentrating on the funding and procurement recommendations identified as a priority. The statement highlighted that we would do this with the [Verity House Agreement](#) providing a framework for us to work within.

What is changing?

7. The establishment of a VAWG Sustainable Funding Project Board with key officials from COSLA and the Scottish Government, along with public sector and specialist stakeholders, has been agreed as central to our joint approach to considering the recommendations. The Sustainable Funding Project Board will report to the Equally Safe Joint Strategic Board, co-chaired by the Minister for Victims and Community Safety and COSLA's Spokesperson on Community Wellbeing.
8. The remit of the Project Board will be agreed with partners. However, from early discussions this is expected to include:
 - Overseeing the development of research specification and commissioning required to produce an accurate assessment of the current costs and spend of Violence Against Women and children and young people, to the public purse nationally and locally
 - Provide expert and local knowledge in funding and delivering VAWG services to support the assessment of other funding and procurement recommendations made by the Independent Review; and
 - Support the development of a longer-term action plan to support the development of a sustainable funding model for VAWG Services.
9. The Funding Project Board will meet approximately every two months, beginning in March 2024, and co-chaired by the Scottish Government and COSLA. Membership of the Project Board is being invited from key organisations and bodies with expertise relevant to its remit, and is likely to include:
 - Scottish Government
 - COSLA (Communities and Finance)
 - Local Government Family including LA Directors of Finance; ALACHO, SOLACE, Social Work Scotland; LA representation (commissioning); VAWPs (ensuring rural and islands perspectives) and the National VAWP Network; Community Planning representation;
 - Health and Social Care/IJB's
 - Local VAWG Services
 - Rape Crisis Centres
 - Women's Aid Organisations
 - Zero Tolerance
 - Public Health Scotland
 - Health Board GBV Representative
 - Improvement Service
 - Inspiring Scotland
 - Funding organisations (tbc)


Proposed COSLA Position

10. Pending any issues raised or further work requested by Members, that the Board
 - i. approves the proposed approach including COSLA's co-chairing of the Board, the breadth of membership invited to participate from across the Local Government family, the proposed initial tasks, the frequency of meetings and the governance of the progress of its work via the Equally Safe Joint Strategic Board

Next Steps

11. Officers will work to ensure robust engagement of Local Government advisory bodies as outlined and will report on the progress and outcomes of this work as it proceeds, ensuring that the Verity House Agreement will provide a framework for us to work within.

Contribution to COSLA Priory Areas and the Verity House Agreement:

COSLA Plan 22-27	Priority Area's	
	Strengthen Local Democracy	
	Secure Sustainable Funding	√
	Improve the Wellbeing of Individuals, Families and Communities	√
	Enhance Education and Support for our Children and Young People	√
	Deliver a Just Transition to a Net Zero Economy	
	Support the Most Vulnerable in our Communities	√
Verity House Agreement	Shared Priorities	
	Tackling Poverty	√
	Just transition to net zero	
	Sustainable Public Services	√