

Equally Safe Refreshment of Delivery Plan – Proposed COSLA Deliverable

Summary and Recommendations

This paper updates Members on progress undertaken to scope a COSLA deliverable for inclusion in the refreshed Equally Safe Delivery Plan, due to be published in May 2024.

It outlines a draft proposal for Members consideration.

It is requested that the Board

- i. Consider and offer comments on the proposal outlined at paragraph 11 and potential actions offered.
- ii. If satisfied with the top line deliverable proposed, agree to refer this for Leader's approval if required, prior to its publication as part of the Equally Safe Refreshed Delivery Plan.
- iii. Agree to consultation and engagement, in the first instance, with women in Elected Office on the actions required, including how progress might be measured and lines of accountability
- iv. Direct officers to undertake any further work required to scope potential actions with officers across COSLA, from Councils and, where helpful for advisory purposes, expert stakeholders, potentially including the NACWG, ENGENDER and the National Strategic Network of Violence Against Women Partnerships (VAWPs)

References

Previous reports on the Equally Safe Refreshed Delivery Plan 2014

- CWB Board Item 5.1 Equally Safe – Refreshment of Delivery Plan (February 2024)



Equally Safe Refreshment of Delivery Plan – Proposed COSLA Deliverable

Purpose

1. This paper updates Members on progress undertaken to scope a COSLA deliverable for inclusion in the refreshed Equally Safe Delivery Plan, due to be published in May 2024. It outlines a draft proposal for Members consideration.

Current COSLA Position

2. Equally Safe, originally published in 2014, is the Scottish Government and COSLA's jointly owned Strategy to prevent and eradicate all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls. The Strategy was refreshed in 2023, with the final version published in December 2023 at Verity House. Priorities agreed include an emphasis on primary prevention of VAWG
3. As part of COSLA's joint ownership of the Equally Safe Strategy with the Scottish Government, it is recognised that all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) are connected and rooted in the same causal factors, primarily enduring gender inequality. Preventing and tackling drivers of gender inequality is key to preventing and eradicating VAWG from Scotland.
4. In February 2024 the Board approved that COSLA would continue to demonstrate Local Government's leadership by identifying a key deliverable for inclusion in the Refreshed Equally Safe Delivery Plan, due to be published in May 2024. It was agreed that the deliverable would outline how COSLA will workover the next two years to drive progress towards prevention of VAWG by tackling women and girls' inequality in its approach to policy scrutiny, development and decision making across COSLA activities.
5. It was agreed that that overall, to oversight of an Equally Safe Delivery workstream would sit in the Community Wellbeing Board's workplan, following publication of the ES Delivery Plan in Spring 24. Monitoring reports on planning, cross organisational engagement, activity, progress, and impact being submitted for Community Wellbeing Board Members oversight scrutiny up until Spring 2026.
6. On the 23rd of February 2024 COSLA Leaders accepted all recommendations set out in the report by the Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee. Local Government actions will be progressed via the barriers to elected office special interest group. The report recognises remuneration as one of several key barriers to elected office for women and other underrepresented groups.

What is changing?

7. On the 22nd March COSLA's Community Wellbeing Spokesperson hosted a session in conversation with Talat Yaqoob and Anna Ritchie Allan, Co-Chairs, National Advisory

Council on Women and Girls (NACWG) as part of COSLA' mini Conference, entitled Empowering Local Councils: Advancing Gender Equality. While the work of the NACWG is mandated to advise Scottish Government, COSLA has over time established a formal relationship with the Council.

8. Along with 'tackling women and girls' inequality in Local Government's and COSLA's approach to policy scrutiny, development and decision making' the NACWG co-Chairs highlighted several other potential areas that they felt would be effective to progress COSLA's promotion of gender equality, and prevention of VAWG.
9. These included suggesting that Members consider embedding areas of COSLA current development activity linked to deepening women's access to power and resources by undertaking or consolidating further work to:
 - Support women in the distinct challenges they experience taking on public office and of particular importance, remaining in the role for subsequent terms. This work at COSLA takes an intersectional approach and is progressed within the Barriers to Elected Office Special Interest Group with recent topics including; remuneration, childcare, proxy voting and safety.
 - Building on the work of COSLA's commitment to participatory budgeting, to further explore and develop gender budgeting, including gendered participatory budgeting, ensuring the experiences and voices of women and girls are directly informing decision making
10. While there was not a formal COSLA response at the time, it is also helpful to note that The NACWG, in its 2019 report, had previously recommended that COSLA mirror the actions recommended to the Scottish Government to:
 - create a senior official and leaders' group with the express purpose of ensuring intersectional gender competent policy coherence across policy development and have a role in ensuring the consistent application of EQIAs across policy-making.
 - create quality standards and accountability on intersectional gender competence in policy-making
 - support the development of a level of knowledge and skill that will enable officers to carry out intersectional gender analysis as part of policy development
 - integrate gender competence into COSLA's performance management framework
 - delivery of continuing professional development in this area to enable sustainable design of policy (regardless of the policy portfolio being worked on) which improves the lives of women and girls; in particular those women and girls furthest away from access to opportunity and influence.
11. While such activity across Local Government and COSLA would require significant resourcing, the steps outlined are helpful to inform how gender competence might be meaningfully embedded to support policy coherence and the cultural shift required to achieve the aims of Equally Safe
12. It may also be helpful to Members to highlight that Scottish Government Equally Safe governance oversight now includes a Ministerial Advisory Group, engaging Ministers holding a broad range of portfolios, to advise the Minister for Victims and Community Safety in her leadership of Equally Safe with her co-Chair, COSLA's Community wellbeing

Spokesperson. It has been agreed that the development of a regular, annual Summit between this Ministerial group and COSLA's office holders, as co-owners of Equally Safe, will be explored this year.

Proposed COSLA Position

13. Considering all of these areas as potentially helpful to inform a COSLA Deliverable for the Equally Safe refreshed Delivery Plan it is proposed that COSLA reflects its commitment to the primary prevention of VAWG through a COSLA Deliverable to *'seek to improve women's access to power and resources, as key to achieving gender equality and the prevention and eradication of VAWG'*.

14. A two-year workstream to support this aim could be built on a range of actions that might reflect some of the highlighted areas outlined in this paper. Areas for consideration could include:

- Adding value to work undertaken to date through the activity of COSLA's Special Interest Group on Barriers Elected Officer, to consider additional action being developed beyond the scope of the current GOBEO workplan linked to sustaining women in elected office
- Exploring with member authorities how women's access to local decision-making power through gendered approaches to participatory gendered budgeting might be widened, ensuring that the experiences and voices of women and girls are directly informing allocation of resources
- Working with our Members to reflect Councils' innovations in developing intersectional gender competent policy coherence, to explore these in the context of across COSLA policy developments
- Developing opportunities across portfolios to deepen 'across' COSLA understanding of women's experiences regarding access to power and resources
- Ensuring COSLA office holders, including the co-Chair of the Equally Safe Joint Strategic Board, COSLA's Community Wellbeing Spokesperson, have direct engagement annually with the Ministers engaged in advising the Minister for Victims and Community Safety, thereby ensuring joint and equal political oversight of the progression of the Equally Safe Strategy

14. It is therefore requested that, pending any issues raised or further work requested by Members, that the Board

- i. Consider and offer comments on the proposal outlined at paragraph 12 and potential actions offered.
- ii. If satisfied with the top line deliverable proposed, agree to refer this for Leader's approval if required, prior to its publication as part of the Equally Safe Refreshed Delivery Plan.
- iii. Agree to consultation and engagement, in the first instance, in conference with women in positions of elected office in Local Government on the actions suggested (outlined above) to further COSLA's action towards this aim, including how progress might be measured and lines of accountability.
- iv. Direct officers to undertake any further work required to scope potential actions with officers across COSLA, from Councils and, where helpful for advisory purposes, expert

stakeholders, potentially including the NACWG, Elect Her, ENGENDER and the National Strategic Network of Violence Against Women Partnerships (VAWPs)

Next Steps

15 Pending Members directions officers will undertake a further work required to scope potential actions with Members and officers, including seeking Leaders views and agreement if required

April 2024

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	√