



PRIMARY PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SCOTLAND

A research report by Kathryn Ramsay, independent research consultant, commissioned by Engender as part of work on their Delivering Equally Safe project.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CEDAW	UN Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CPP	Community Planning Partnership
DES	Delivering Equally Safe
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
ESAS	Equally Safe at School
ESiP	Equally Safe in Practice
EQIA	Equality Impact Assessment
LOIP	Local Outcomes Improvement Plan
MVP	Mentors in Violence Prevention
NACWG	National Advisory Council on Women and Girls
PSED	Public Sector Equality Duty
SCJS	Scottish Crime and Justice Survey
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
VAWP	Violence Against Women Partnership

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Primary prevention means preventing violence against women and girls (VAWG) before it occurs. This requires understanding and addressing the root causes: gender inequality. Scotland's strategy for tackling VAWG – Equally Safe – recognises that VAWG is a cause and consequence of women's inequality and commits to making the shift to a prevention approach. This report is based on interviews with 51 people working across 30 out of 32 local authority areas across Scotland. It outlines good and promising practices, missed opportunities, and identifies a number of problems that are undermining efforts to prevent VAWG.

There was unanimous agreement among people interviewed for this report that work on primary prevention is crucial, and they would like to be doing more of it. However, Violence Against Women Partnerships (VAWP) – the multi-agency structures with responsibility for implementing Equally Safe locally – do not have the authority or resources required to drive the widespread changes to policy and practice that are needed in order to systematically address gender inequality across all local authority work and embed a primary prevention approach.

Good Practice and Missed Opportunity

The prevention work most frequently discussed by interviewees were the three Equally Safe programmes developed by third-sector women's organisations: Equally Safe at School, Equally Safe at Work, and Equally Safe in Practice. These programmes have been carefully developed and piloted in selected areas before being rolled out more widely. Equally Safe at School is running in at least some schools in almost every local authority area. Interviewees whose local authority had participated in Equally Safe at Work and/or Equally Safe in Practice spoke positively about the programmes but expressed some frustration that the good work could not always be sustained. Interviewees also described a range of activities to promote attitudinal change that were happening, mostly during specific campaign periods, such as the 16 Days of Activism and International Women's Day. Beyond that, there was huge variation across local authorities in the extent to which specific primary prevention initiatives were being undertaken and in the success of gender mainstreaming efforts across council work.

Community planning is an area that, on paper, should help to integrate a gender analysis across policy areas, thereby contributing to preventing VAWG; however, it is not happening in practice. Local authorities are required to have a Community Planning

Partnership (CPP) to work with the local community to prepare a Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP), which sets out priority actions to deliver improved services. CPPs have a statutory duty to address inequalities. The Equally Safe Strategy and associated guidance commit VAWPs to work with CPPs; however, there is a power imbalance. CPPs have a statutory list of organisations which are members – none are gender specialists – and there is no duty on CPPs to engage with VAWPs. This research found that contacts between VAWPs and CPPs are, at best, sporadic, and many VAWPs have no contact with, or input into the work of, their local CPP.

Many LOIPs have reducing inequality as a key priority; however, they lack a comprehensive gender analysis. A review of all publicly available LOIPs found that 21 out of 32 have either no or cursory reference to gender and/or women. Many include themes which are highly relevant to gender equality and primary prevention, such as poverty reduction. Therefore, the failure to include a gender analysis in LOIPs undermines the likelihood of achieving their aims. For example, some were found to contain objectives and indicators on household income and employment patterns that fail to account for women's increased caring responsibilities and different employment patterns. This means that LOIPs could be entrenching inequality rather than tackling it.

Key Issues and Challenges

Interviewees spoke passionately about their commitment to prevention work and their immense frustration at the structural barriers and inadequate resourcing that impede their progress. Many interviewees noted that VAWG does not have statutory status and that this contributes to it being given lesser priority than other areas of public protection. Some interviewees described VAWG as the “poor relation” of child protection and adult protection; these policy areas have teams of people working on them, whereas frequently, VAWG only has one or two, often part-time roles. Local authority staff are required to undertake training on child and adult protection, but training on VAWG is voluntary for staff. Interviewees reported that the lack of statutory status made it easier for local authorities to sideline VAWG when resources were stretched or cuts needed to be made.

Interviewees spoke about having inadequate resources for all the work they are expected to do, let alone for additional work to embed primary prevention. Many of the points they made were comprehensively covered by the Independent Strategic Review into funding of VAWG services in 2023, including insecure funding causing uncertainty and the need to spend valuable time contingency planning. The extension of the Delivering Equally Safe (DES) fund was welcome. This research was completed prior to the

Scottish Government's announcement in February 2025 to provide an uplift of £2.4 million to this fund. Before this announcement, interviews expressed concerns about the increased cost of living and employers' national insurance contributions. The clear message was that it is impossible to devote the time and resources necessary for effective primary prevention work when insecure and insufficient resources mean they are constantly having to manage crises.

The level of interest and priority given to the issues of VAWG and gender equality by elected members and senior leaders was cited by interviewees as a factor affecting their ability to progress prevention work. A small number of VAWPs have elected members involved in a formal capacity, for example, as chair or as a member. Most have more informal contacts, such as elected members attending events they organise. VAWPs with direct relationships between the partnership and elected members reported that these connections often elevated the profile of VAWG issues; however, occasionally, it could bring challenges with politics or personality. Some interviewees noted that they have a few elected members who are very supportive of the issues and work, but many reported that elected members lacked an understanding of VAWG and wider gender issues. This was a problem because they could be making crucial decisions without fully understanding the subject.

Similarly, although interviewees generally reported that senior leaders were interested in VAWG issues, they found they were not proactive in prioritising actions that would help progress prevention work. For example, being supportive of VAWG service delivery, but making decisions in other areas that demonstrated a lack of understanding of gender issues. Committed leadership is required to elevate VAWG to a priority issue, to create an expectation that gender equality is important and will be mainstreamed in every policy area, and to ensure that mechanisms of oversight are in place to guarantee improvements in practice.

The results of this research reinforce Engender's long-held views on the failure of the PSED to achieve its objective of ensuring that public bodies mainstream equality in all their work. Interviewees consistently described the inadequacy of EQIAs at capturing the relevant information and identifying equality issues. The general view was that the quality of an EQIA depended on its author and that processes for quality assurance either do not exist or are not working well. As Engender has previously highlighted, the PSED has enormous potential to facilitate real progress on equality if it functions well, but currently, it is not fit for purpose. It is urgent for the Scottish Government to make progress on reforming the PSED and EQIA processes to transform it into an effective tool to advance equality mainstreaming in Scotland.

Opportunities for Progress

The Place Standard is a tool for facilitating community discussions about places. It can be used by a range of organisations, including local authorities, community groups, architects, and developers, to collect information about people's experiences in a place and inform their work. One of its 14 themes is safety, and it includes asking a question about women's feelings of safety in the place. Many of the 13 other themes include issues that have gender dimensions, for example, public transport and natural spaces; however, none of the prompts for the other 13 themes ask participants about the experiences of women and girls in order to elicit consideration of gender differences. The Place Standard has the potential to facilitate a thorough gender and intersectional analysis of a place if the facilitator is familiar with gender concepts and experienced in analysing policy and/or practices using a gender lens. The current guidance for users of the Place Standard does not include information on gender, intersectionality, or how inequality within society may manifest during consultations or affect the results. Producing guidance on potential gender and intersectional issues that might arise, along with practical tips on operationalising a gender-sensitive consultation, could help the tool be more effective at reducing inequalities and improving women's safety. Public Health Scotland is currently working on developing the community safety element of the tool which provides an immediate opportunity for revisiting how it addresses gender and women's safety.

Initiatives in Glasgow and Edinburgh are attempting a transformational shift in thinking about how cities operate and who benefits from that. By recognising that women experience cities very differently to men and that, historically, cities have been developed without consideration of the impact on women, the "Feminist City" initiatives in Glasgow and Edinburgh aim to embed gender equality within the work of the respective local authorities. Glasgow was the first city in Scotland to look at what it would mean to embed feminist principles in city planning when Councillor Holly Bruce brought a resolution to the city council in 2022. The wide scope of the resolution meant that while planning policy was a focus, it would also help embed gender mainstreaming in other areas of council work. Glasgow City Council also allocated £500,000 to a Feminist City Action Fund for implementing projects. In 2023, the City of Edinburgh Council passed its own "Feminist City" motion brought by Councillor Kayleigh O'Neill. The main piece of work in Edinburgh has, so far, been a "Policy and Guidance Gap Analysis" of relevant national and local planning policies and guidance. This resulted in a report outlining the strengths and weaknesses of the policies with respect to women's safety and where they could be improved.

Conclusion

Equally Safe commits Scotland to an ambitious strategy of moving to a prevention approach while continuing to deliver services for survivors of VAWG. For this to be effective, the structural barriers identified in this research need to be addressed. Equally Safe gives responsibility for its implementation to a relatively small number of people and organisations working in partnerships. They would like to be doing much more on primary prevention. Currently, VAWPs do not have the authority or the resources required to deliver the widespread changes to policy and practice that are needed to systematically address gender inequality across all policy areas and services and to effectively move to a primary prevention approach. It needs the political will of the Scottish Government, local authority leaders, and elected members, combined with adequate influence and resourcing, to create the conditions that enable progress to be made.

Recommendations

Engender recommends the Scottish Government should:

- Act to elevate the priority given to addressing and preventing VAWG within local authorities by placing VAWPs on a statutory footing;
- Implement the recommendations of the Independent Strategic Review funding of VAWG services and ensure sufficient resources are allocated for services and prevention work, including funding to develop the infrastructure and capacity of VAWPs to deliver the work, sufficient capacity for COSLA and the Improvement Service to fully support local authorities to meet their obligations, and development of national campaigns, particularly on complex issues such as online VAWG which require specialist input;
- Revisit and expand on proposals to reform the PSED, focused on improved outcomes for protected groups
- Action the recommendation from the NACWG for integrating intersectional gender budget analysis into budget-setting processes;
- Gather learning from public bodies on barriers to collection and analysis of robust equalities data, and invest in building a comprehensive set of equalities indicators, and in developing a core dataset on VAWG.

A full set of recommendations to the Scottish Government, COSLA, the Improvement Service, Local Authority leaders, and Public Health Scotland are listed at the end of the report.

INTRODUCTION

Primary prevention means preventing violence against women and girls (VAWG) before it occurs. This requires understanding and addressing the root causes: gender inequality. Scotland's strategy for tackling VAWG – Equally Safe – commits to making the shift to a prevention approach. This means that all national and local government policies and programmes should work to address gender inequality and the discriminatory attitudes and culture that underpin it. It also requires all policy areas and public services to embed a gender-sensitive understanding of VAWG in their work.

Engender's project on primary prevention, funded by the Scottish Government through Delivering Equally Safe (DES), focuses on how different areas of public policy – including those outwith the justice and equalities domains – can better address women's inequality in order to prevent VAWG from occurring. On the 28th of March 2024, Engender brought together over 50 policy professionals from across 30 organisations at a Primary Prevention of VAWG in Policymaking Conference. This included a range of policy professionals and expertise, including many people new to gender and VAWG issues. Discussions at the conference included the need to “get more people on board, including those who don't see this work as their responsibility”, and the importance of “sharing good practice and building networks to help connect the dots between different areas of policy and VAWG, particularly for those areas ‘not perceived as affected by gender’.” (Engender, 2024a, p. 3).

This research builds on the conference attendees' desire for more attention to be paid to primary prevention in all policy areas by mapping the work currently happening, highlighting good and promising practices, and analysing barriers and challenges with a view to overcoming them. This report starts by outlining the methodology of the research and defining the key concepts and terminology used. It then examines primary prevention work happening across Scotland, including highlighting initiatives in several local authorities, before looking in more depth at two policy areas: community planning and place. The second half of the report analyses the structural issues and barriers which impede the effectiveness of prevention work, highlighting, in particular, the insufficient authority to drive necessary changes and the lack of resources of those tasked with responsibility for implementing Equally Safe.

Many of the issues raised by interviewees were covered comprehensively in the Independent Strategic Review into funding of VAWG services in 2023. Since then, the Scottish Government and COSLA have progressed some of the review recommendations

through the Equally Safe Delivery Plan 2024-2026, including by committing to establishing a sustainable funding model. Nevertheless, much of this work remains at an early stage, and many of the longer-term recommendations are not due to be progressed until later in 2025.

The report also touches on issues of lack of prioritisation of VAWG by leaders, inadequate data, and problems with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), which have been previously raised in other Engender work. The report concludes with recommendations for action, which, when implemented, should help move primary prevention from an aspiration to a reality across Scotland.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research was to examine primary prevention work happening across Scotland, including identifying good practice examples and gaps, and to focus in particular on policy areas not usually associated with VAWG. Engender was particularly interested in examining policy relating to planning, poverty reduction, and transport.

This report is based on interviews with 51 people (47 women and 4 men). The vast majority (33) were lead officers, coordinators, or members of the local authority's Violence Against Women Partnership (VAWP), mostly employed by the local authority but some employed through other organisations (NHS and local Women's Aid). Two interviewees were local Councillors, seven worked for other public sector organisations, including Public Health Scotland, the Improvement Service, and COSLA, five worked for local authorities in other policy areas, and four worked for third sector organisations. Interviewees were based in 30 local authority areas across Scotland. Interviews were conducted online using Teams between September 2024 and February 2025.

The research has also been informed by a review of relevant literature, including current legislation and policy documents, VAWP strategies, Local Outcome Improvement Plans (LOIPs) for all local authorities, local authority mainstreaming reports, relevant Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs), human rights standards on prevention of violence against women, and research on primary prevention both in Scotland and internationally.

Limitations

The research has collected information about a range of primary prevention work happening across Scotland; however, it is not exhaustive. Although multiple efforts were

made to speak to people with relevant information about primary prevention in all local authorities, information is missing for two local authorities where significant staff absence meant interviews were not possible in the available time. Not all interviewees had the same understanding of primary prevention and whether a piece of work constituted primary prevention. There are also likely to be other primary prevention initiatives happening that interviewees did not know about. The complexity of local authorities and the problem of siloed working that was identified at the Engender conference in 2024 were also highlighted by interviewees, and many of them said that they were not in a position to know about all gender mainstreaming efforts, particularly in policy areas they did not work directly on.

Engender thanks everyone who gave up their valuable time to share information about their work, successes, and challenges for this report.

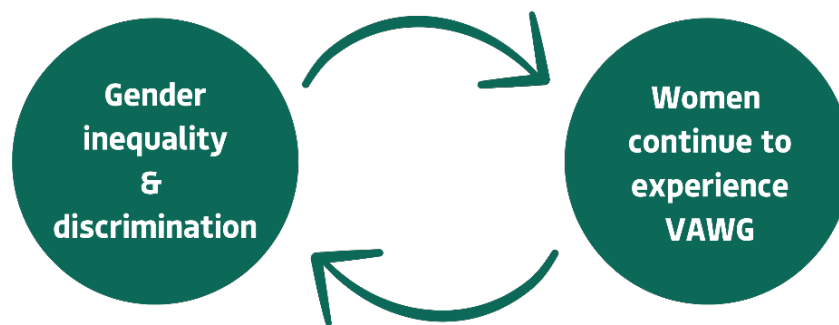
DEFINITIONS AND TERMINOLOGY

Gender-Based Violence Against Women and Girls

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women recognises that “violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women, and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men” (United Nations, 1993, pt. Preamble). The UN Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) uses the term “gender-based violence against women”, considering it to be “a more precise term that makes explicit the gendered causes and impacts of the violence” and that it “further strengthens the understanding of the violence as a social rather than an individual problem, requiring comprehensive responses, beyond those to specific events, individual perpetrators and victims/survivors” (United Nations, 2017, para. 9). The Committee also emphasises that intersecting discrimination directed towards a woman’s ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, marital status, disability, refugee status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or urban/rural location may have “an aggravating negative impact” on her experience and that “gender-based violence may affect some women to different degrees, or in different way, meaning that appropriate legal and policy responses are needed” (United Nations, 2017, para. 12).

Equally Safe, Scotland’s strategy for preventing and eradicating VAWG takes a similar approach, recognising that VAWG is a “cause and consequence of women’s inequality” (Scottish Government & COSLA, 2023, p. 3). It also highlights that women and girls may face a heightened risk of VAWG due to multiple and intersecting inequalities. As well as listing the nine “protected characteristics” under UK equality law – age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, and sexual orientation – Equally Safe highlights that intersecting inequalities “includes women in poverty and care experienced women” (Scottish Government & COSLA, 2023, p. 13).

GENDER INEQUALITY IS THE ROOT CAUSE OF ALL FORMS OF VAWG.



This can be compounded by multiple intersecting inequalities such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender identity, class status, immigration status and disability.

Primary Prevention of VAWG

Primary prevention of VAWG focuses on stopping violence before it occurs by tackling its root cause: gender inequality. Eliminating gender discrimination in law, policy, and practice, and taking action to change social stereotypes and attitudes about women’s inferiority are human rights obligations under the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (United Nations, 1979, arts. 2 & 5).

Primary prevention is a long-term goal which requires coordinated action across all levels of society. Incorporating gender equality in all areas of public policy is, therefore, vital for preventing VAWG. Engender has previously highlighted that the three requirements for achieving a primary prevention approach in policymaking are:

- Women are equally and fairly represented in policymaking and decision-making roles;
- Policymakers consistently apply intersectional gender analysis to their work;

- Policymakers mainstream primary prevention in all areas of their work

(Engender, 2024c, 2024b).

These bullet points summarise the extensive work required to achieve a primary prevention approach, including adequate resourcing and developing gender and equality competence across the public sector. Nevertheless, Engender believes that when these factors are achieved, targeted approaches to tackling women’s inequality and preventing VAWG, such as the Equally Safe Strategy, will no longer be undermined by ungendered, inequitable policies developed in other policy domains.

Gender Mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is a process to ensure that women’s needs and priorities are incorporated into the planning, design, delivery, and monitoring of all public sector activity. It aims to ensure that all legislation, regulations, policies, strategies, methodologies, and outcomes are gender responsive and contribute to achieving gender equality, making it a vital strategy for preventing VAWG.

In its gender mainstreaming handbook, UN Women lists four central principles:

- It is a strategy focused on achieving the goal of gender equality;
- The strategy is relevant for, and should be utilised in, all sectors and policy areas;
- The strategy requires explicit attention to both women and men, and diverse gender identities, ensuring that they can participate in, influence, and benefit from development policy and practice; and
- Successful implementation requires that the knowledge, concerns, priorities, experiences, capacities and contributions of women, men, and gender-diverse people are made an explicit and integral part of all policy and planning processes, to inform and influence the direction of policymaking, planning and outcomes.

(UN Women, 2022, p. 12).

This means that gender mainstreaming is relevant to all policy areas, not only those typically seen as “women’s issues”. Successful gender mainstreaming is underpinned by quantitative and qualitative data, disaggregated by sex and other relevant factors, to support an intersectional gender analysis of the gender equality context (UN Women, 2022, p. 31). Gender mainstreaming does not replace specific actions to improve women’s rights. UN Women calls for a “twin-track” approach which uses both targeted interventions to address particular problems facing women and girls, along with the

integration of gender equality considerations into every level of policy so that it becomes a routine part of public sector work (UN Women, 2022, pp. 18–19).

SCOTLAND'S FRAMEWORK FOR PREVENTING AND ADDRESSING VAWG

“To create a Scotland where women and children are safe from the harm of VAWG, we need to prevent it from happening in the first place. VAWG is avoidable. Prioritising primary prevention challenges the notion that VAWG is inevitable or acceptable”

(Scottish Government & COSLA, 2023, p. 32).

Scotland has a range of criminal and civil laws that address different aspects of VAWG, as well as policies, strategies, and action plans that are relevant to VAWG and wider gender equality. These include laws such as the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018, the Forced Marriage etc. (Protection and Jurisdiction) (Scotland) Act 2011, the Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Act 2016, and the Forensic Medical Services (Victims of Sexual Offences) Scotland Act 2009. Policies and strategies relevant to gender equality and VAWG include Ending Homelessness Together and the Women's Health Plan. Scotland has also adopted a comprehensive strategy on preventing and addressing VAWG – Equally Safe.

Equally Safe and Prevention of VAWG

The Scottish Government and COSLA first published Equally Safe – the strategy for preventing and eradicating VAWG – in 2014. It was developed collaboratively along with partners and stakeholders in the public and third sectors. The strategy was updated in 2016 and a “refresh” was published in December 2023. It retains the collaborative approach, highlighting that “all spheres of government and all sectors of society have a role to play in tackling this issue” (Scottish Government & COSLA, 2023, p. 3).

Equally Safe recognises VAWG as a public health issue, stresses the importance of work to prevent it, and acknowledges the need for all policies to address inequality, stating, “We want considerations of VAWG and the wider impact of women's inequality incorporated into all policies”. It commits to “work across spheres of government to prioritise actions that will improve outcomes for women, children, and young people” (Scottish

Government & COSLA, 2023, p. 33). The strategy highlights a range of policy areas which are relevant to implementing the strategy, including community planning, housing, health, education, justice, place, and transport.

It also sets out the leadership and governance arrangements and includes a section on making the best use of resources. It states, “We remain committed to developing a more consistent, coherent, collective, and stable funding model that will ensure both a focus on prevention and high quality, accessible, specialist services across Scotland for women, children, and young people experiencing any form of VAWG. We will consider the delivery approach of current dedicated funding for tackling VAWG, and how this funding can be further aligned to meet the ambitions of Equally Safe” (Scottish Government & COSLA, 2023, p. 40). While this is a welcome aim, it falls short of committing to provide all the resources needed for full implementation of the strategy.

Violence Against Women Partnerships (VAWPs) are the multi-agency structures tasked with implementing the Equally Safe strategy in each local authority. Scottish Government and COSLA guidance for VAWPs contains six minimum standards. These include that the VAWP “brings together the key public sector and third sector organisations”, has a terms of reference, a strategic plan, a means of measuring progress, and a “designated person who is responsible for coordinating its core activities” (Scottish Government & COSLA, 2016, p. 15). The guidance highlights that one of the core activities of the VAWP is to promote a preventative approach.

The priorities of the 2024-2026 Equally Safe Delivery Plan include developing “a primary prevention framework to VAWG to embed a gender competent approach within policy and planning across sectors”, and establishing “a collaborative programme to support local and national partners to develop an understanding of a public health approach” to VAWG (Scottish Government & COSLA, 2024, p. 9).

The Public Sector Equality Duty

The Equality Act of 2010 brought in the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). This requires public authorities to design policy that eliminates discrimination, advances equality, and promotes good relations between different groups across nine protected characteristics – age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. These three core elements are known as the general equality duty.

Additional Scotland-specific duties were introduced through secondary legislation in 2012. These were designed to help public authorities to meet their obligations under the Equality Act. The Scotland-specific duties include requiring public bodies to:

- **Report on mainstreaming the equality duty:** public authorities are required to publish a report every two years outlining the progress they have made in integrating the general equality duty into their functions;
- **Publish equality outcomes and report progress:** public bodies must prepare equality outcomes which they will work to achieve over the next four years. They must involve people with protected characteristics in the preparation of the outcomes and report on their progress in achieving the outcomes every two years;
- **Assess and review policies and practices:** before implementing a new, or revised, policy or practice, public bodies must assess the impact of it against the requirements of the general equality duty. The Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) must consider all relevant evidence, including from people with protected characteristics, and the results of the EQIA must inform future development of the policy or practice.

The PSED is, in theory, a powerful tool with the potential to facilitate progress towards making Scotland a more equal country.

PRIMARY PREVENTION IN SCOTLAND: GOOD PRACTICE AND MISSED OPPORTUNITY

There was unanimous agreement among people interviewed for this research that work on primary prevention is crucial, and they would like to be doing more of it; however, they lack the time and resources to do so. There is a variety of work happening across Scotland that either has a specific aim to prevent VAWG before it happens, or seeks to mainstream gender equality into policymaking.

The area of work most frequently cited by interviewees was work with schools, mostly through the Equally Safe at School (ESAS) programme and the Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) programme. Other Equally Safe programmes developed by the third sector – Equally Safe at Work and Equally Safe in Practice (ESiP) – were also referenced. Interviewees described a range of activities to promote attitudinal change that were

happening, mostly during specific campaign periods such as the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence (GBV) and International Women's Day. Interviewees also cited work being undertaken with men and boys, such as through White Ribbon Scotland and repeatedly spoke about the need for more attitudinal change work with men and boys, especially work on challenging toxic masculinity online.

Beyond that, there was huge variation across local authorities in the extent to which specific primary prevention initiatives were being undertaken, and in the success of gender mainstreaming efforts across council work. This variation is linked to the main challenges and barriers to improving primary prevention, which are discussed in detail later in the report. This section briefly outlines the three Equally Safe programmes developed specifically to aid local authorities with primary prevention and gender mainstreaming. It then examines the policy area of community planning, which, on paper, should be a useful tool for gender mainstreaming but is currently failing to meet its potential.

EQUALLY SAFE PROGRAMMES

Prevention work discussed most frequently by interviewees were programmes developed through the initiatives of third-sector women's organisations. These seek to help schools, local authorities, and other public bodies to improve their practice on primary prevention and gender mainstreaming. These constitute the clearest examples of good practice: they are based on a gendered understanding of VAWG and work towards sustainable improvements in policy and practice.

Equally Safe at School and Other Prevention Work in Schools

Primary prevention work is happening in schools in every local authority area that participated in this research. Equally Safe at School (ESAS) is a programme designed to help secondary schools take a holistic approach to preventing gender-based violence. It was developed by Rape Crisis Scotland and the University of Glasgow. The programme was piloted in six secondary schools in South Lanarkshire, East Ayrshire and Glasgow between 2017 and 2021. It includes whole school assessments to identify issues, teacher training, development of GBV policies, and a student-led group where students and staff develop actions. Schools are supported to embed and sustain key messages on gender equality, challenging discriminatory attitudes, and improving practice in responding to instances of GBV. There is an ongoing evaluation of the impact of the ESAS programme.

The vast majority of interviewees reported that ESAS was running in at least some of the schools in their local authority. Some interviewees reported the programme being run in every school. A few local authorities have developed their own schools programmes. Some interviewees mentioned that schools were interested in the ESAS programme, but staff did not have the capacity to take on the additional work required. Similarly, a few people reported that some of their local schools had been involved in ESAS but had stopped because of capacity pressures. One noted that the programme is not a statutory requirement for schools, and they are under significant pressure to deliver across multiple areas, so when capacity is stretched, they do not prioritise ESAS.

Many interviewees also mentioned the Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) programme, a peer education programme that supports young people in exploring and challenging the attitudes underpinning GBV using a bystander approach. The MVP programme is supported by Education Scotland in partnership with the Scottish Government and the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit. One local authority which has MVP running in every secondary school said that they are also planning to do some work with parents since young people may encounter the attitudes the programme seeks to change within their families and communities outside school.

Equally Safe at Work

Equally Safe at Work is an employer accreditation programme which was developed by Close the Gap. It was piloted in seven local authorities (Aberdeen City, Midlothian, Highland, Shetland, Perth and Kinross, North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire) between 2019 and 2020. It was later expanded for other local authorities, the NHS and some third sector organisations to join. There are four tiers of accreditation that employers can work towards. It requires them to undertake and sustain work on leadership, improving gender data, flexible working, occupational segregation, workplace culture, and violence against women. It involves the creation or revision of internal policies, including supporting staff experiencing GBV and promoting flexible working, examining existing data collection and improving the range and quality of data collected, and gender training for leaders. The programme was evaluated in 2021, and to date, six local authorities have received the development accreditation, and six have received bronze accreditation.

Interviewees whose local authority was involved with the Equally Safe at Work programme spoke positively about the work that had happened within the local authority as a result. Since the programme relates to employment policies and processes, it focuses on internal work rather than on policies relating to external work and service

delivery of organisations. The “gender matters” training for senior leaders was discussed positively by interviewees, who said that it had helped leaders to understand the issues better. The internal focus also meant that human resources staff were often key to progressing the work. However, a few interviewees expressed concern that the initial good work would not be sustained. The importance of building capacity and fostering sustainability was also raised in the ESAW Evaluation Report in 2023 (Close the Gap, 2023). One said that the new policies were good, but more needed to be done to ensure that all staff knew about them, and another spoke about how although, generally, understanding about gender had improved, it had not translated into consistent practice because a new internal VAWG related policy had been drafted without consulting the council’s VAWG experts. The draft was not gendered, so it needed to be redone.

Several interviewees expressed an expectation that the process of undertaking the Equally Safe at Work accreditation would lead to changes in external work practices too. Completing the accreditation requires commitment from senior leaders, a good understanding of gender by relevant staff, and resources to undertake the work. These are also the key elements to good gender mainstreaming in external policy work.

Equally Safe in Practice

Equally Safe in Practice (ESiP) is the newest of the Equally Safe programmes. Designed by Scottish Women’s Aid, this workforce development programme aims to build gender competence among staff through online training modules, peer discussions and reflective practice. The training modules include basic knowledge and skills on gender, gender inequality, domestic abuse, and sexual violence for all staff, enhanced knowledge for frontline staff delivering services, specialist professional development for VAWG sector staff, and enhanced knowledge for managers, including on supporting teams and driving organisational culture change.

The ESiP programme was piloted in selected teams within seven local authorities (Angus, Dundee, Falkirk, Fife, East Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire) from 2021-2022. Other local authorities have subsequently joined. A new kite-mark accreditation programme has been introduced recently to help organisations identify the training requirements of their workforce and ensure that learning and development lead to lasting changes in attitudes and practice.

Interviewees whose local authority had taken part in the pilot of ESiP said that all staff members in the teams involved in the pilot had to undertake the training. Where the training had been rolled out after the end of the pilot phase, it was voluntary for staff. Interviewees described the modules being made available through their online training

systems on a voluntary basis and uptake had been mixed. With voluntary training, the people who take the training are very often those who are already interested in the issues. This aligns with the findings of the ESiP Pilot Evaluation Report, which identified mixed levels of engagement amongst staff undertaking modules on a voluntary basis (Scottish Women’s Aid, 2022). Some interviewees said that they had a plan to increase the uptake over the next few years. Others were working to have senior leaders designate the modules as mandatory for some groups of staff.

COMMUNITY PLANNING

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 requires each local authority to have a Community Planning Partnership (CPP) to work with the local community to plan and deliver improved services. The Act specifies the public bodies who must be involved in the CPP. These include Police Scotland, the Health Board, Historic Environment Scotland, a local Further or Higher Education College, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and the Scottish Sports Council. Each CPP must consult on, prepare, and publish a Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) setting out the priority actions they will take over a defined period of time. They must also monitor and report on progress made towards achieving the outcomes. CPPs have a statutory duty to address inequalities (Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act, 2015). Together with the PSED, this Act is, on paper, a useful tool for mainstreaming gender into the work of public sector bodies and partner organisations as a key step towards primary prevention of VAWG.

Equally Safe highlights the role of CPPs in “bringing together local public services and the communities they serve” to address the “often deep-rooted causes of inequalities, and to use preventative approaches to manage future demands on crisis intervention services”, and it commits to work to ensure that VAWP “actions are integrated with and integral to community planning” (Scottish Government & COSLA, 2023, p. 26). Similarly, the guidance for VAWPs states that “VAW Partnerships have a leading role to play in engaging with other partnerships and strategic bodies within their CPP and helping to ensure that they prioritise tackling gender inequality and social attitudes in their own strategies and plans” (Scottish Government & COSLA, 2016, p. 17). However, while Equally Safe and associated VAWP guidance commit VAWPs to work with CPPs, there remains a power imbalance between CPPs and VAWPs. The CPP has a statutory list of organisations that are members, but, significantly, none are gender specialists, and there is no corresponding duty on CPPs to engage with their local VAWP.

The Improvement Service, National Violence Against Women Network, and Zero Tolerance published guidance on primary prevention of VAWG for CPPs in 2019 (Improvement Service, Violence Against Women Network & Zero Tolerance, 2019). This explains what primary prevention is and provides a gender analysis of key themes that CPPs are likely to work on, such as poverty, housing, planning, and education. It also recommends actions CPPs can take as a starting point in ensuring gender and primary prevention are integrated into their work. It is unclear to what extent people working in community planning are aware of the guidance and are using it.

The Equally Safe Delivery Plan 2024-2026 commits to refreshing the guidance for VAWPs, “clarifying where they sit within wider community planning structures” (Scottish Government & COSLA, 2024, p. 28). This potentially provides an opportunity to identify ways to mitigate the power imbalance between VAWPs and CPPs and highlight to CPPs the importance of integrating gender into all their work.

Community Planning Partnership and VAW Partnership Collaboration

A small number of VAWPs are (or were for a period of time) located within the CPP, and there were direct connections between the partnerships. One VAWP lead officer described how the VAWP being located in the CPP had led to improved gender integration into the work of the CPP and to positive changes to the objectives and indicators on VAWG in the LOIP. Another VAWP coordinator outlined how she had advised the CPP to broaden their objective on domestic abuse to encompass all forms of VAWG and suggested other revisions to bring the LOIP more in line with Equally Safe. However, those were rare examples; overall, this research found the connection and collaboration between CPPs and VAWPs envisaged by Equally Safe is not happening consistently in practice.

Interviews with VAWP representatives found that contacts between VAWPs and CPPs are, at best, sporadic, and many VAWP coordinators said that they have had no contact at all with the CPP. One VAWP coordinator noted that, although the VAWP was named in the LOIP, VAWP members had not had any conversations with CPP personnel or any input into their work. Another noted that she had tried to develop direct links with the CPP but had not been successful, so she relied on indirect routes to feed in information. A VAWP coordinator whose job was divided between VAWG and another policy area had been asked for input by the CPP on the other area of her work but not on VAWG.

Local Outcomes Improvement Plans and Gender Integration

LOIPs are documents that summarise the results of an extensive consultation process and set out a relatively few number of key priority themes, objectives, and indicators. Each local authority has one, but they vary in length from 6 pages to over 60 pages, so the detail and level of analysis included differs widely. Some contain detailed outcomes and indicators, some contain high-level aspirations without specifying any outcomes or indicators, and some contain broad objectives on priority themes and link to other existing strategies on those themes.

It was beyond the scope of this research to examine all local authority CPP background documents and consultation results. Therefore, it is not possible to definitively conclude that a lack of mention of gender or women in the LOIP reflects a lack of discussion of gender issues during the consultation and/or in other background documents used to prepare the LOIP. For example, in one local authority, the LOIP explicitly states that it focuses only on new work and does not include issues where work is already happening, such as on VAWG. The VAWP in that local authority confirmed that the absence of VAWG in the LOIP was because it was existing work. A number of other LOIPs mention that detailed delivery plans and indicators for measuring progress were still being developed, so it is possible that gender-disaggregated data or gender-sensitive actions will be included within other documents in future.

With that caveat, a review of the gender content of published LOIPs shows that although many LOIPs have reducing inequality as a key priority, they lack a comprehensive gender analysis, and some lack any reference at all to gender equality or to women. None include an intersectional analysis. A crude word search of publicly available LOIPs for all local authorities in Scotland for the terms “gender”, “women”, and “female” found that nine had zero mentions of any of the three terms. Another 12 had between one and four references, the majority of these relating to statistics on life expectancy, the gender pay gap, and/or a mention of gender in a list of protected characteristics. That is 21 out of 32 LOIPs with either no or cursory reference to gender and women.

All LOIPs include priority themes that are highly relevant to gender equality and primary prevention of VAWG, but the failure by many of them to include a thorough gender analysis undermines the likelihood of achieving their aims. A few LOIPs include elements of a gender analysis in their background discussions of the problems they aim to address. For example, one mentions that a lack of good employment opportunities is leading to young women moving away from the area, and several mention the impact of the pandemic on women’s employment. However, while these acknowledgements

that there is a gender dimension to the issue are a start, the respective LOIPs do not contain any plans to improve the situation.

In the majority of LOIPs, reducing poverty and increasing employment opportunities are key priorities. These are both gender issues and risk/protective factors for VAWG, so they are important for prevention. LOIPs with poverty reduction as a priority often focus on the need to increase household income and cite statistics on the percentage of families living in poverty who had at least one adult in work. Some mentioned that lone parents were more likely to be affected by poverty, but did not specify that 92% of lone parents are women. Several LOIPs contain objectives to increase employment rates and reduce the proportion of households with no adult in work.

Without including a gender analysis of employment patterns and using gender-sensitive, sex-disaggregated data to measure progress, local authorities are at risk of undertaking actions that achieve their objective of increasing employment rates but fail to positively impact women's employment. For example, failure to integrate gender analysis frequently results in the introduction of job creation schemes in male-dominated employment sectors that fail to respond to women's increased caring responsibilities as a barrier to women's employment. Only a few LOIPs give details of indicators the local authority will use to measure progress on poverty reduction and employment. They largely do not specify that the data will be disaggregated by gender. This means it is very probable that some LOIPs are entrenching gender inequality rather than tackling it, thereby creating an enabling environment for VAWG to occur rather than helping to prevent it.

In contrast, one LOIP contained a significantly better-gendered analysis of poverty than the others: Clackmannanshire's 2017 – 2027 plan. In its background on the context in Clackmannanshire, it identified areas where the local authority data differed from national averages relating to gender equality. These included a higher proportion of women with disabilities or caring responsibilities, a higher teenage pregnancy rate, fewer women in employment than the national average, and considerably lower earnings for women than the national average. It also noted that many people in Clackmannanshire travelled to other local authorities for work and recognised that, due to child-care and unpaid care duties, women tended to travel shorter distances for work, so they were more affected by the shortage of jobs located in Clackmannanshire. The LOIP contained four main outcomes, one of which was that "women and girls will be confident and aspirational, and achieve their full potential" (Clackmannanshire Alliance, 2017). Data on women's pay, young women's participation rates in training, employment, and the number of women in modern apprenticeships were included as indicators.

However, during the time period of this research, Clackmannanshire replaced this LOIP with a new Wellbeing Local Outcomes Improvement Plan 2024 – 2034. The new LOIP has three overall strategic outcomes – wellbeing, economy and skills, and places (Clackmannanshire Alliance, 2024). While the wellbeing outcome includes the aspiration to reduce gender-based inequality and improve the health of women and girls, the economy and skills outcome is missing the gendered analysis that the previous version contained. Overall, the new plan is significantly weaker in its gender analysis than the plan it replaced. However, it states that there will be delivery and action plans to underpin the LOIP and that they are still developing some of the indicators (Clackmannanshire Alliance, 2024, pp. 10 & 21). It is important that the gender analysis from the previous plan informs the delivery plan and indicators for the new LOIP, in order to prevent the new plan being a backwards step on gender equality.

Importance of Gender Expertise and Good Data

A few LOIPs which do not include a gender analysis of their priority areas nevertheless include an objective on VAWG. How the objectives have been designed and the indicators used for measuring impact are illustrative of how gender expertise and appropriate data are essential to effective work on VAWG. Eleven LOIPs state an aim to reduce domestic abuse or VAWG more broadly. Five of those have general statements about working to reduce GBV, or working to implement Equally Safe, but they do not include specific targets or indicators. While it is positive that these LOIPs mention VAWG, the lack of a comprehensive gender analysis, details on what they will do and how they will measure effectiveness could negate the good intentions. Six LOIPs do contain objectives, activities, and indicators. Of these, several are undermined by inappropriate indicators chosen to measure the reduction in VAWG.

Inconsistency in understanding of VAWG and the challenges of measuring the prevalence of VAWG means that several local authorities are using different, and opposing indicators to measure their progress. Some local authorities with an objective to reduce VAWG in their LOIP are using the number of police reports to measure their success; they are equating fewer crime reports to the police with a reduction in levels of crime. In contrast, a different local authority views an increase in police reports of domestic abuse as a sign of victim confidence to report and uses an increase in reports of domestic abuse to the police as its indicator of success.

The VAWP coordinators in the local authority using an increase in police reports as the indicator in the LOIP told Engender that collaboration between the VAWP and CPP was important in the selection of this indicator. The VAWP provided information about levels

of under-reporting, including data from local VAWG service providers, and provided gender expertise to promote a better understanding within the CPP of the factors that affect women's likelihood of reporting domestic abuse to the police. With a shared understanding among the VAWP and CPP that an increase or decrease in police reports does not necessarily mean a corresponding increase or decrease in VAWG, the local authority decided to use an increase in reports to police as an indicator of survivors' increased confidence in reporting. In another LOIP, the local authority explicitly recognised that the number of police reports does not reflect how well they are doing at addressing domestic abuse and stated that they are working towards identifying appropriate indicators. The challenge of how to measure success in primary prevention, and the need for meaningful measurements of the prevalence of GBV in Scotland is discussed further below.

KEY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

The overwhelming consensus that emerged from interviews was an understanding of how essential it is to move from crisis management to preventing VAWG before it occurs, and how challenging this is to implement in practice. Interviewees spoke passionately about their commitment to prevention work and their immense frustration at the structural barriers and inadequate resourcing that impede their progress.

INSUFFICIENT AUTHORITY, INFLUENCE & RESOURCING

The Scottish Government has allocated responsibility for implementing Equally Safe at the local level to VAWPs, and this includes responsibility for embedding a primary prevention approach. Interviewees raised two critical and interlinked challenges they face:

- a lack of authority to ensure that VAWG work is prioritised in their local authority
- insufficient resources for the work they currently do, let alone the primary prevention work they would like to be doing more of.

A Structure that Constrains VAWP Influence and Effectiveness

VAWPs across Scotland are all structured differently and sit within different departments and policy areas. For some, the structure and the departments they are located in are positive factors helping to give visibility and importance to the work. For others,

the structure hinders their effectiveness. Many have been moved between different departments following restructuring, and some have been moved multiple times.

One structure that has been cited as a good practice is that of Dundee, where the issue of VAWG has been given the same status as other protection groups (Child Protection, Adult Support and Protection, and Alcohol and Drugs). The VAWP itself has been integrated into the new structure with the aim of enabling VAWG to be more effectively mainstreamed within the council. A lot of work was done previously, which built the foundations for the new structure. This included making senior leaders more aware of the harms of VAWG and building a mainstreaming and evaluation approach within all projects (Scottish Government, 2023, pp. 61–62). Other VAWPs are also located within public protection, but it does not work as well for everyone. Interviewees in some other local authorities where the VAWP is with public protection told Engender that, for them, it was not effective. VAWP coordinators in two local authorities said that VAWG had been moved into public protection from community safety. Both thought that their former location within community safety had been more beneficial to the work, and one said that a lack of gender analysis within public protection made the new structure more challenging.

Regardless of where the VAWP was situated, many interviewees described VAWG as the “poor relation” of the other public protection areas within their local authorities. Whereas both child protection and adult support and protection have statutory status, VAWG does not. According to the majority of VAWP coordinators interviewed, this lack of statutory status makes it easier for local authorities to deprioritise or sideline work related to VAWG, especially when resources are stretched, or spending is constrained.

Interviewees identified a number of practical consequences of this inferior status, including:

- child and adult protection having substantial teams of people working on the issues, whereas VAWG commonly only had one person;
- local authority staff have to undertake mandatory training on child and adult protection, whereas training on VAWG is voluntary;
- VAWG lead officer or coordinator posts were frequently part-time with the post holder working across other areas such as community justice or child poverty as

well. Many also coordinate MARACs.¹ Several posts had had their hours cut, including one which had been reduced from full-time to one day a week;

- VAWG lead or coordinator posts were at a lower grade than corresponding posts in child and adult protection, and consequently, the VAWG post holders had a lower status and less authority to advocate with or ask questions of senior leaders.

The effectiveness of VAWPs depends on their members, their level of interest in the issues, their capacities, and their willingness to collaborate to progress the work. While membership varies, VAWPs typically consist of representatives of a range of public bodies such as Police Scotland, the NHS, local authority teams such as social work, education, child and adult protection, community safety, and third-sector organisations delivering VAWG services. Some interviewees said that their partnership was working well, with committed members engaging with the work. Others said that they struggled to get members to engage or attend meetings because they didn't have enough capacity. For some of these members, VAWP was a very small fraction of their job or an add-on to their full-time job. Several interviewees in local authorities where they struggled to get engagement from across the VAWP membership said that very often it was a small group of the same members who attended and took on the bulk of the work. Some interviewees also said that when members were too busy, they did not prioritise the VAWP work because of the lower status of VAWG issues. This was especially the case for members from other council teams. For example, one VAWP coordinator spoke about how difficult it was for them to engage with colleagues in the education team, whereas child protection staff did not encounter the same difficulties with them. Some VAWPs have an independent chair, and interviewees felt this was positive in both raising the profile of the work and in increasing the capacity of the partnership. This is discussed more later in the report.

The Independent Strategic Review into Funding and Commissioning of Violence Against Women Services, published in June 2023, highlighted that key informants raised the lack of statutory status of VAWPs “as a key factor that dilutes the effectiveness of VAWPs and the drive for collaborative leadership locally” (Scottish Government, 2023, p. 59). The review recommended “Placing Violence Against Women Partnerships on a statutory

¹ A MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) is a meeting to discuss what can be done to safeguard people who are experiencing domestic abuse and are at a high risk of murder or serious harm. Different agencies attend MARACs, including from the police, health, housing, child protection and others. The person at risk is represented at MARACs by an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA).

footing, including in Public Protection arrangements at local authority level” (Scottish Government, 2023, p. 88). This call was echoed consistently across interviews for this report.

Inadequate Resourcing

The refreshed Equally Safe strategy stresses that prevention work is in addition to the provision of services to survivors:

“This strategy reaffirms our commitment to this [the change in values, attitudes, and structures needed to prevent VAWG] and aims to achieve the collective challenge of ensuring that the prevention of VAWG is given prominence. This does not mean that support for victim/survivors will be reduced. It means expanding the focus to minimise the chance of women and girls experiencing violence in the first place”

(Scottish Government & COSLA, 2023, pp. 32–33).

However, to date, there has been no allocation of additional resources for this expanded work, giving VAWPs and other DES funded organisations the message that they are expected to do more work with the same or fewer resources.

VAWPs “have responsibility to identify the resources required (e.g. staff, volunteers, budgets, etc) to deliver on their local multi-agency strategy and action plan”, and partnerships are expected to “pool their collective resources” (Scottish Government & COSLA, 2016, pp. 17 & 20). The guidance also mentions some potential funding streams they could apply for; however, there is no commitment by the Scottish Government to provide all necessary resources for the work, only an “aim... to see VAW Partnerships adequately resourced” (Scottish Government & COSLA, 2016, p. 21).

The Independent Strategic Review into VAWG funding provides a comprehensive overview of resourcing of the VAWG sector and services. Many of the points made about insufficient and insecure funding discussed in the review were also raised by interviewees who spoke to Engender. Interviews for this research were conducted both before and after the announcement in December 2024 that DES funding would be extended for another year or the announcement in February 2025 that this funding would receive a £2.4 million uplift.

At that time, interviewees repeatedly highlighted the challenge of not knowing whether service providers and some council-run projects in their local area would have funding in a few months’ time. This uncertainty meant that the focus of their work was on

contingency planning for how to manage if the Scottish Government did not extend the DES funding. Several VAWP coordinators did not know at the time of the interview whether they would have a job in a few months. Others said that some good colleagues working on DES-funded projects had already left to take up other roles with more job security. At that point, they were unable to recruit replacement staff because they did not know whether the post would exist past March 2025.

While it is welcome that this funding has now been extended, it is worth noting that interviewees expressed concern about finding themselves in a similar situation next year, even with this extension. They noted the challenge of recruiting a new staff member only for them to face the same uncertainty again the following year. Prior to the Scottish Government's announcement to uplift DES funding, interviewees were also worried about the impact of cost of living increases and national insurance contributions. Several interviewees noted that the under-resourcing and insecure funding of the VAWG sector is a gender equality issue; it is an issue predominantly affecting women and girls, the sector is staffed predominantly by women, and, despite repeated calls over many years for improvements, it has been chronically underfunded with inadequate, short-term resources for years.

A related issue is the wide range of skills and experience that are needed for all the work required to fully mainstream gender and primary prevention across all council work and how unrealistic it is to expect only one or two members of staff to do it all. The work includes:

- coordinating the VAWP,
- planning and organising events, training staff on gender equality and VAWG,
- supporting staff in all policy areas to identify and address gender issues in their work,
- gender budgeting.

The skill sets required, for example, for upskilling council policy teams on gender equality and working with finance staff on gender budgeting are different. Even if other members of the VAWP could share this work, they would also require additional resources due to their own capacity issues that have been previously discussed.

A number of interviewees who worked for small local authorities (small by population and a number of local authority staff, not necessarily small geographically) said that an advantage for them was that staff tended to know each other, and this facilitated cross-team collaboration. With a smaller number of staff overall, many of them covered multiple thematic areas, and people were more likely to know who to approach to try to

progress work. They felt that this might not happen so much in larger local authorities. However, the smaller numbers of staff brought additional challenges, especially for those covering large geographic areas and/or island communities. Interviewees said that they faced the challenge of being expected to implement the same amount of work across the same number of themes as larger local authorities, but they had fewer human and financial resources to do so. They also highlighted that in-person work was more expensive and time-consuming when there were large distances to travel and that budgets often do not take this into account sufficiently.

The consistent message from interviewees was that currently the Scottish Government is funding the tip of the iceberg when it comes to preventing and addressing VAWG. It is impossible for them to devote the time and resources needed for effective primary prevention work when insecure and insufficient resources mean that they are constantly having to manage crises and create contingency plans. While the funding extension and uplift are welcome, the findings from this report demonstrate the need for a more sustainable and long-term approach to funding VAWG work in Scotland. This supports the findings of the Independent Strategic Funding Review in the Funding and Commissioning of VAWG Services, which also highlighted the need for a significant shift towards funding prevention work.

The Role of Elected Members and Senior Managers

Another factor affecting VAWPs' capacity to implement Equally Safe locally was the level of priority given to VAWG issues by local elected members and senior council leaders, which, according to interviewees, varied widely across Scotland.

VAWPs have very different structures and reporting arrangements from each other. Some VAWPs' structures enable them to have close connections to elected members. A small number of interviewees described elected members being directly involved with the VAWP either as chair or as a member. Most had more informal contacts with elected members, for example, elected members attending events for the 16 Days campaign. Other VAWP interviewees said they were not allowed to make direct contact with elected members, and that any contact with elected members had to be made through more senior council leaders.

Interviewees whose VAWP had direct relationships between the partnership and elected members said that these connections often elevated the profile of VAWG issues. For example, one interviewee said that having an elected member as chair meant that the VAWP had more influence, and the chair was also able to get more people to attend events. While having elected members interested in VAWG issues was generally seen as

positive, occasionally, it could bring challenges with politics or personality. One VAWP used to have an elected member as the chair; however, a consensus emerged that for reasons of political balance, it would be better to have no formal links between the VAWP and elected members.

For the majority of VAWPs without direct connections to elected members, links are informal and ad hoc. Some interviewees noted that they have a few elected members who are very supportive of the issues and work, others described the efforts they had to make to connect with elected members. One said that they held a stall with information outside one meeting of elected members and talked to them about VAWG issues as they arrived and left. A number of interviewees also expressed concern that many elected members lacked an understanding of VAWG and wider gender equality issues, particularly because they may be making crucial decisions which impact the lives of women and girls without fully understanding these subjects.

Interviewees generally reported that senior leaders were interested in VAWG issues but that although they often said the right things, they were not proactive in prioritising actions that would help progress prevention work. For example, one interviewee described senior leaders as being very supportive of VAWG services and service delivery, but the decisions they made in other areas showed that they did not properly understand gender issues.

Interviewees often thought the commitment from senior council leaders to VAWG issues depended on the individuals. Several interviewees said that their Chief Executive or heads of some teams were particularly supportive. Others expressed disappointment in a lack of engagement by leaders. For example, one interviewee described organising training for senior leaders on gender, and they were disappointed that no men attended. She said that while there were a lot of women in senior positions in that local authority, there were many male leaders who could have attended the event but did not. Similarly, others spoke of disappointing attendance at 16 Days events among senior council leaders. Although interviewees recognised that senior leaders were extremely busy, what they choose to prioritise or not prioritise sends a message to others about what subjects the local authority considers to be important.

It is clear that interviewees appreciate the support of senior leaders and elected members when they receive it, and that they understand that leaders are very busy and are working within constrained budgets. However, it is also clear that additional leadership is required to elevate VAWG to a priority issue, to create the expectation that gender

equality is important and will be mainstreamed in every policy area, and to ensure that mechanisms of oversight are in place to guarantee improvements in practice.

Progress Despite Challenges

Despite limitations to the influence and resources they have, VAWPs have made progress in elevating VAWG and gender equality within the work of local authorities. Interviewees told Engender about a number of different initiatives and structures which have helped VAWPs progress their work. These include:

- advocating for the local authority to appoint an independent chair of the partnership, elevating the status of the partnership and its work, and providing additional capacity;
- advocating for the local authority to provide funding for administrative support. One VAWP interviewee said that having 16 hours a week of administrative support had made a huge difference to the capacity of the VAWP by freeing up staff time to focus on other substantive work;
- establishing coordinating processes with lead officers of other public protection groups to improve collaboration and address cross-cutting issues. Several VAWPs told Engender about coordination meetings that had been set up, bringing together staff working on VAWG, adult protection and support, child protection, and drugs and alcohol;
- having work on domestic abuse included as one of the local authority's equality outcomes. The VAWP coordinator of that local authority said that it has raised the profile and status of the issue, demonstrating how action on domestic abuse is relevant to the work of many people in different policy areas. The local authority is also required to report on progress in its mainstreaming report;
- conducting gender analysis workshops with senior leaders to demonstrate how a gender analysis improves the quality and effectiveness of all policies;
- having a goal of ensuring that all public protection policies are revised to be consistent with the principles in Equally Safe and allocating time from a funded post to work with public protection teams to review and revise policies, and to give additional input on gender when requested.

Some interviewees called for more direction from the Scottish Government on what to prioritise, and for guidance on how to address some complex issues, for example technology-facilitated VAWG. They felt that their limited capacities meant that centrally

developed strategies and messaging would be helpful, as long as they had the flexibility to adapt these for local implementation.

PRIMARY PREVENTION AND GENDER MAINSTREAMING: HELPFUL TERMINOLOGY OR BAFFLING JARGON?

Since effective work to prevent VAWG requires consistent integration of gender into all policy areas, including by those who may not be gender and equalities specialists, it needs to be as easy to understand and straightforward as possible. It could be beneficial to consider whether the terminology used is helpful, or whether it hinders efforts to integrate gender equality across all public policy.

The vast majority of interviewees for this research worked directly on VAWG issues but came from an array of different work backgrounds, for example, social work, health, VAWG service provision, and community justice. The interviews highlighted that specialists working on VAWG for many years can have different levels of exposure to terminology. When discussing prevention work, many interviewees talked about prevention as a whole without distinguishing between primary and secondary prevention; others discussed the blurred boundaries between primary and secondary prevention and whether particular work counted as primary prevention or not. Many talked about primary prevention as being about work with children and young people because that was the work they were involved in, whereas with the integration of gender into policy areas they were not familiar with, it was more of a challenge to understand how they could be doing that. Several interviewees asked for clarification of the definition of gender mainstreaming and were more comfortable talking about using a gender analysis or gender lens in policy work.

Given the different levels of familiarity and comfort with the use of terminology among VAWG specialists, perhaps it is not surprising that non-specialists may struggle to grasp the concepts and understand what this should mean in practice for their work. It could be useful to consider how the terminology of gender mainstreaming and primary prevention is understood by non-specialists. As noted above, there is high-quality training available for local authorities, including through the Equally Safe in Practice and the Equally Safe at Work programmes. Through the new Equally Safe Delivery Plan, the Scottish Government has also committed to developing a primary prevention framework. The aim of this framework is to provide stakeholders with clarity about the implementation of primary prevention and embed a gender-competent approach across sectors (Scottish Government, 2024).

MEASURING PREVENTION

Through the Equally Safe strategy, Scotland has committed to move to a prevention approach. To ensure it is successful requires a means of measuring the effectiveness of prevention work nationally, and at a local level. One key element of this is to identify appropriate indicators to evaluate the effectiveness of local prevention initiatives, for example, feelings of safety of park users before and after design modifications are made, or knowledge of, and attitudes towards, GBV among school pupils before and after taking part in a programme. The other key element is a reliable means of measuring, over the long term, the prevalence of VAWG in Scotland, and the attitudes and discriminatory beliefs that underpin it.

The problems with using police reports as a measure of prevalence have been discussed above. In addition to the issues with under-reporting already mentioned, with a recent willingness to look at historic abuse, more people are coming forward to the police to report GBV they experienced many years ago. These incidents are then recorded in the data for the year in which they reported it, thereby affecting the overall figures. There are two surveys which each provide some relevant data: one about people's experience of partner abuse and sexual violence, and one that looks at social attitudes across the population in Scotland. Each provides some useful data; however, methodological challenges mean that neither currently provides the accurate measurements that are needed.

Measuring Prevalence

The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS) asks a representative sample of the Scottish population about their experience of crime. It includes questions on people's experience of partner abuse, stalking and harassment, and sexual violence, but it does not cover all aspects of GBV. The report publishes an estimate of the percentage of the population in Scotland who have experienced sexual violence and/or partner abuse since the age of 16, and in the year before they were interviewed for the survey. (Scottish Government, 2021a).

There are methodological challenges, which mean that the published data is not as informative as it could be and that important elements are missing, including a breakdown at the local authority level. The technical report for the 2019/2020 survey (the last one where GBV data was published) states that 10,408 addresses were selected across Scotland. Since the sample was designed to be representative of Scotland, the numbers selected in each local authority were proportionate to the population. This

means that the numbers of selected addresses range from 1,142 in Glasgow and 868 in Edinburgh to 41 in Orkney and 39 in Shetland. However, not everyone whose address was selected participated in the survey; there was a 63.4% response rate overall (Scottish Government, 2021b, pp. 15 & 20). The report does not give response rates for each local authority. The questions about partner abuse and sexual violence were contained in a self-completion questionnaire, which further lowered the response rate; 87.7% of those who participated in the main survey also completed the self-completion questionnaire. In total, 4,870 respondents from the 10,408 selected addresses answered the questions on GBV. This has important implications for the reliability of disaggregated data and, therefore, the usefulness of the SCJS in its current form as a measure of the prevalence of GBV.

When data is broken down into smaller categories, such as by local authority, it is likely that there will be some categories with very small numbers (less than five individuals). This poses two problems: firstly, there is a risk of identification of individual respondents if the information is published, and secondly, small numbers are less reliable for statistical calculations. As an example to illustrate the issue, if we assume that 50% of the 4,870 people who filled in the self-completion questionnaire were women (assumed because the report doesn't give sex-disaggregated data), that gives a baseline of 2,435 women respondents. The survey results reported that 3.7% of women experienced physical or psychological abuse by a partner in the year before the survey, which is 90 respondents to the survey across all local authorities in Scotland.

The report does not give total numbers of respondents to the self-completion questionnaire by local authority, the only available figure is the number of addresses originally selected. Assuming that 50% of 1,142 selected addresses in Glasgow had women as potential respondents (571), 63.4% of those responded to the main survey (362), and 87.7% of those responded to the self-completion questionnaire (317), 12 women (3.7% of 317 women) in Glasgow would have reported experiencing partner abuse in the previous year to the SCJS. This means that for the majority of local authorities in Scotland, the figure would be less than five, and for some, it would be zero. That is not because no women experienced domestic abuse in those areas but because the sample is too small to produce reliable data for local authorities. This is why the SCJS does not publish figures on the experience of domestic abuse or sexual violence in the last 12 months at the local authority level. It is also for these reasons that it does not publish a range of other disaggregated data that would be useful for the women's sector; for example, it does not publish a gender breakdown of the data on experience of sexual violence in the last 12 months.

In the long term, a more reliable way of measuring levels of GBV in Scotland is needed to monitor how effective the shift to focusing on prevention is at reducing VAWG. At a minimum, all data needs to be disaggregated by sex; however, to be meaningful, it should also be robust enough to be disaggregated by sex and other demographic characteristics, including age, ethnicity, and disability status, as well as by local authority. A first step would be to look at increasing completion rates for the self-completion questionnaire. It comes after the main survey, which is a long interview itself. The technical report states that “ran out of time” is the most common reason given for people not completing the questionnaire (Scottish Government, 2021b, p. 23). Moving the self-completion questions to earlier in the survey might encourage a better response rate.

Even if all respondents to the main survey also answered all the questions on GBV, the overall sample size of around 6600 (63% of the original 10,400 addresses) would not be sufficient to reliably disaggregate the results by the factors needed to measure local progress on preventing VAWG. Possible solutions include boosting the sample periodically, perhaps every five years, so that a much larger number of people can be asked about their experiences of GBV. Even with a larger sample, it might still be challenging to have a reliable breakdown by local authority. Data could, instead, be disaggregated by health board or police division to provide some more localised data without going to the level of local authority. The Scottish Government could also consider commissioning an initial one-off, large-scale survey of women across Scotland, designed to overcome the issues with the SCJS, which could act as a baseline measurement of women’s experiences of VAWG. Follow-up measurements could be done periodically through a boosted sample of the SCJS or by adding relevant questions to either the Scottish Health Survey or the Scottish Household Survey. Both of these surveys have significantly larger minimum targets for the number of interviews conducted in each local authority (125 for the Scottish Health Survey and 250 for the Scottish Household Survey).

Measuring Attitudes

Since 1999, the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey has been tracking the opinions of people in Scotland on a wide range of topics. In 2014 and 2019, questions were included in the survey on attitudes towards VAWG, including on attitudes towards rape and rape myths, physical and verbal domestic abuse, and coercive control. The questions were designed to reveal people’s attitudes towards specific behaviours. They generally took the form of a description of an action and asked respondents to rate on a scale of 1 – 7 how wrong they thought the action was. Participants were also asked how harmful they thought certain behaviours were. Demographic information, including sex, age,

education, and marital status, was collected to see whether these factors affected people's attitudes.

The survey also included questions designed to help understand why people hold their attitudes. One asked whether people had experienced any of a list of abusive acts; the report stresses that this question is not a measure of the prevalence of GBV in Scotland; it is limited to being a factor for analysing people's attitudes. There were also two questions designed to measure whether people held stereotypical views about gender.

If the questions on attitudes towards VAWG are repeated in future surveys, this will be a useful measure of the extent to which Scotland is making progress in raising awareness of and addressing the underlying causes of GBV. There are, however, limitations to the survey. The report acknowledges the challenge of measuring attitudes to a course of conduct that has multiple, overlapping layers of different kinds of behaviours using survey questions. A question on persistent text messaging tried to explore whether attitudes were different when the behaviour was a pattern rather than an isolated instant, but the report noted that alternative qualitative or mixed methods methodology would be needed to study attitudes towards coercive control involving multiple behaviours (Reid et al., 2020, pp. 15 & 43).

The sample constituted 2790 addresses across Scotland. There were 1022 people who completed the main survey (41%) and 959 who completed the self-completion section, which included the questions about VAWG (Reid et al., 2020, p. 13). As with the SCJS, this is a large enough sample for Scotland-wide data but not large enough to disaggregate the data to the local authority level. Data disaggregated to local authority level may not be needed; however, it could be useful to have some geographical breakdown, for example by health board, to understand whether there are differences in attitudes across regions of Scotland. Prevention work focusing on changing attitudes would then be able to be tailored more locally to address any potential regional variations. To make the survey a more useful indicator of progress in addressing the attitudes that underpin VAWG, additional questions that explored the acceptance of gender stereotypes in more depth would also be useful.

INADEQUATE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PSED AND POOR QUALITY EQIAS

The results of this research reinforce Engender's long-held views on the failure of PSED's implementation to achieve its objective of ensuring that public bodies

mainstream equality into all their work. This includes a failure to understand the requirements of mainstreaming among staff and leaders, and a focus more on producing reports more so than on achieving progress on equality in practice.

This research has highlighted some striking examples of a lack of understanding of equalities in general, and of how gender inequality affects every aspect of the work of local authorities. Two examples:

- a) the mainstreaming report of one local authority outlined work it had done on the redesign of a transport hub, reporting that, in terms of equality, it focused on disability because the “built environment” tended not to affect people with other protected characteristics This analysis fails to recognise the well-known gendered differences in how women and girls navigate public space. It also overlooks the fact that women are more likely to be disabled or provide care for disabled people, which also impacts their access to their local area.
- b) interviewees reported instances where references to women had been removed from plans because decision-makers thought they could not refer to one group unless they mentioned all protected characteristics, failing to understand that equality does not necessarily mean treating everyone the same.

Despite the Equality Act imposing legal obligations on public authorities, there is no statutory duty on them to employ an equalities expert to guide their work. Some local authorities have a designated equalities officer. Interviewees reported that for many equalities officers, it is only one aspect of their role. Some worked in human resources, and others covered several policy areas. Some local authorities do not have an equalities officer at all. The challenging funding situation for local authorities in recent years has exacerbated this; for example, one interviewee said that when their equalities officer retired, the local authority decided not to recruit a replacement. Interviewees told Engender that the focus of many equalities posts was internal to the local authority, which is focused on equality issues relating to their role as an employer rather than on equality in relation to policy and service delivery for the local population.

Interviewees consistently described the inadequacy of EQIAs in capturing the relevant information and identifying equality issues. The general view was that the quality of an EQIA depended on its author and that processes for quality assurance either do not exist or are not working well. VAWP coordinators told Engender that they are sometimes asked to contribute to EQIAs that are being done by other teams. They thought this was positive. However, they also expressed frustration that they depended on other teams

approaching them to ask for this input because they did not have the capacity to proactively reach out to them.

The problems with EQIAs that interviewees mentioned are not new; all have been highlighted previously by Engender. These include:

- the EQIA was completed after the policy design was finished so that the content of the EQIA did not inform the policy development;
- the content of the EQIA lacks any gender analysis even when the policy area has relevant gender dimensions, suggesting a lack of understanding of gender by the person completing it. For example, EQIAs for LOIPs state that there is no impact on the protected characteristic of sex despite a key element of the plan being about a highly gendered issue such as poverty;
- EQIAs that assert that the policy will benefit everyone so there is no impact on any protected characteristics but do not include any evidence to support this.

Several interviewees said that the available data was not what they needed to evidence potential impacts for EQIAs. For example, data was not disaggregated, or in local authorities with smaller or dispersed populations, the numbers involved were too small for disaggregation. Some interviewees noted that different organisations and partners had different data collection systems, and it was challenging to combine them to provide a consistent, comparable dataset. Although a few interviewees said that the quality of EQIAs were improving and that work had been done on improving templates and training of staff, most were frustrated that not enough was being done to improve them, and that bad EQIAs were being approved. It needs senior leadership to insist that EQIAs are important and must be done to a high standard, rather than allowing decisions to be made and policies and programmes to be approved when the EQIA is inadequate.

As Engender has previously highlighted, the PSED has enormous potential to facilitate real progress on equality, but only if it functions well, and, currently, it is not fit for purpose. The National Advisory Council on Women and Girls (NACWG), an advisory group to the First Minister, recommended in 2020 that the Scottish Government place additional duties on public bodies to “gather and use intersectional data” and “integrate intersectional gender budget analysis into their budget setting procedures” (First Minister’s National Advisory Council on Women and Girls, 2021, p. 27). In 2022, the Scottish Government consulted on proposed changes to the PSED and Engender, in coalition with 26 equalities organisations, responded highlighting the inadequacies of the proposals. Engender also submitted, with Professor Nicole Busby, a draft of revised

regulations that included focusing on embedding equality rather than on reporting, and included new duties on data and gender budgeting. However, since then, the Scottish Government has further scaled back its proposed reforms. This research has demonstrated, once again, how urgent it is for the Scottish Government to act to reform the PSED and EQIA processes and transform them into effective tools to achieve equality mainstreaming in Scotland with clear accountability mechanisms for ensuring implementation.

LEARNING FROM GOOD PRACTICES

The problem of people working in silos was a key issue raised by participants at the Engender conference on primary prevention in policymaking in 2024. While interviewees spoke about different mechanisms for cross-departmental collaboration, such as coordination meetings among lead officers from public protection, challenges remain. A key issue is how to share good practices and learning internally when local authorities are large, complex organisations, as well as how to share good practices across other relevant public and third-sector partner organisations.

When asked about how information is shared within local authorities, interviewees mentioned a range of mechanisms, including posts on the staff intranet, all staff emails, and blogs written by the chief executive; however, they also said that people often do not have time to read general information emails or the intranet. This means there is no guarantee that learning shared via these channels will be picked up and used by relevant teams. Interviewees did not know any formal way of sharing good practice on gender with other teams in order to request them to implement similar practices within their work.

There are formal processes for referring matters among local authority committees. For example, council committees can refer reports to other committees. While this provides a channel for extending awareness of the work to the elected members and council officers involved in those committees, it does not necessarily mean that any further action will be taken. Potentially, if a report about gender good practice was referred, members of those committees could read about the work, think it was a good initiative, and request similar work to be done in a policy area within that committee's remit. This would need committee members to have time to read all the documents, to have an interest in the issues, to have an understanding of why the work on gender constituted

good practice and would be useful for other policy areas, and be prepared to push for action within their committee.

The Improvement Service coordinates several Scotland-wide networks for lead officers working on a policy area. This includes the National Violence Against Women Network and a network of community planning managers. There is also an equalities network, which is managed by equalities officers. These networks provide opportunities for information sharing and learning among council officers working in similar roles across different local authorities. Bringing together these networks on cross-cutting issues could break down some of the siloed working. For example, by facilitating conversations about why improving the gender analysis of LOIPs is important. This would benefit the local authority in the long run and support connections between the local VAWP and CPP.

A crucial factor in ensuring that good practices and learning are shared and acted on is the interest and influence of senior leaders. Where senior leaders are committed to improving gender integration and an intersectional analysis of policy, they are more likely to ensure that their staff have the knowledge needed to effectively undertake the work, look out for good practices and make sure those are shared with relevant teams, and create an expectation that gender mainstreaming should be done routinely across all areas of work.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRESS

OPPORTUNITY TO STRENGTHEN AN EXISTING TOOL: THE “PLACE STANDARD”

Public Health Scotland recognises the importance of “place” in a public health approach to VAWG. It highlighted that a public health approach requires consideration of women’s differing needs in relation to the key elements of Place: Movement (including active travel and public transport), Spaces (including streets and natural space), Resources (including services, work, and housing), Civic (including identity and feeling safe), and Stewardship (including maintenance and influence) (Public Health Scotland, 2022).

The Scottish Government and COSLA have adopted a “Place Principle” to encourage collaboration on improvements to places in order to better meet the needs of

communities. The “Place Standard tool” is a framework for assessing places by facilitating structured conversations about the complex issues associated with them. It was developed by the Scottish Government, NHS Health Scotland (now Public Health Scotland), Architecture and Design Scotland and Glasgow City Council and was launched in December 2015. One of its key aims is to reduce inequalities (Architecture & Design Scotland, et al., 2023). The Place Standard Tool can be used by a range of organisations, including local authorities, community groups, architects and developers to collect information about people’s experience of a place to inform their work.

Based around 14 themes, the Place Standard enables detailed consideration to be given to relevant elements of a place, including physical features such as buildings, green space, and public transport, and social elements such as whether people feel safe, and whether they feel they have an influence on decision making. Each of the 14 themes has an overarching question and a number of sub-questions to help prompt thinking on the issue. People taking part in Place Standard consultations are asked to give a rating of 1 (lots of room for improvement) to 7 (little improvement needed) for each of the 14 themes. They are also asked for feedback on two general questions: “What is good now?” and “How could we make it better in the future?” (Architecture & Design Scotland, et al., 2023, p. 5). The results of the ratings given to the different questions are plotted on a chart, which becomes a visual overview of what the community thinks is good and what needs improvement. The detailed answers to the questions are recorded and analysed. The Place Standard can be completed by individuals or discussed in groups with a facilitator.

One of the 14 themes is safety. The first sub-question of that theme asks “Does everyone feel safe in our place? (daytime, evening and night-time, children and teenagers, adults and older people, women)” (Architecture & Design Scotland, et al., 2023, p. 19). Four more sub-questions ask about physical barriers or specific areas that feel unsafe, about social issues such as anti-social behaviour, hate crimes or inequality, and about how people can share concerns about safety.

The other 13 main themes all cover issues which have gender dimensions, for example:

- whether public transport is safe, reliable, goes to the places people need to get to, accessible and affordable;
- whether natural spaces are welcoming, easy to get to, safe, accessible, and well looked after;

- whether the local economy has a good mix of business and work opportunities for those who want it, how the local economy affects how people feel about the place

None of the main or sub-questions to the other 13 themes ask participants to think about the experiences of women and girls in order to prompt consideration of gender differences. This means that whether gendered information on those themes emerges from a consultation conducted using the Place Standard is likely to depend on whether the facilitator is aware of potential gender issues and, therefore, looks for and records gender differences in the responses.

Guidance on Using the Place Standard

The organisations that designed the Place Standard have developed a range of guidance and resources for users. The Place Standard tool has been translated into Arabic, Chinese, Polish and Ukrainian. There is an inclusive communication toolkit with practical tips on how to adapt consultations so that people who have difficulties in communicating can participate in different ways. There is also an adapted version of the Place Standard for use with children and young people.

However, there is no specific guidance on gender, intersectionality, or how inequalities within society may manifest during Place Standard consultations and affect the results. Two guidance documents touch briefly on aspects of diversity and could be strengthened to provide facilitators and consultation organisers with a deeper understanding of inequalities and additional tools so they could use an intersectional analysis in Place Standard consultations.

A guidance document outlines the purpose of the Place Standard and how to use it, including explaining the 14 themes, sub-questions and scoring. In a section covering how to review the information gathered it includes a list of questions for organisers, including: “Have you considered issues that may be raised by other people in different groups such as people with specific needs or barriers?” (Architecture & Design Scotland, et al., 2023, p. 23). While this prompts organisers to consider different groups, the wording could be clearer and ask specifically about gender and its intersections. For example, it could ask whether organisers have examined responses to look for variances among people with different demographic characteristics, noting that people of different genders are likely to have varying experiences of a place. It could also ask organisers to think about whether any groups might have been missed out from the consultation so far.

There is also a learning resource which consists of modules designed to help people plan and carry out a consultation using the Place Standard tool. It outlines the tool and gives tips on defining the place, building partnerships, understanding the community and methods of engaging with the community. It explains why it is useful to collect some demographic information about participants and gives age, race, and sex as types of data that could be useful to collect to see differences in people's perceptions of place. The example it uses of how different groups can score a place differently is of children and young people giving different scores to the community as a whole. The learning resource also outlines examples of how to analyse the comments collected during the consultation, and how to use the scoring to prioritise issues to address (Scottish Government et al., 2022). Aside from the brief mention of collecting demographic data on sex, there is no guidance on methods organisers can use to ensure that gender dynamics are fully explored in the consultation. For example, it could suggest that organisers consider the gender composition of focus groups and whether women-only focus groups and/or groups held with women from minoritised communities would help to better understand women's feelings of safety. It could also give facilitators tips for managing power dynamics within focus groups, such as who speaks first, whether some individuals dominate discussions, and how members of the group respond to opinions that differ from theirs, etc.

To ensure that no relevant documents had been missed, Engender checked with Public Health Scotland whether there was any gender specific guidance for the Place Standard. Public Health Scotland responded that, as a community engagement tool, users of the Place Standard should follow best practices for community engagement and referred to the National Standards for Community Engagement.

These standards for community engagement were first developed in 2005 and were reviewed and updated in 2015/2016 (Scottish Government, Scottish Community Development Centre and What Works Scotland, 2016, p. 3). They contain seven minimum standards that public bodies are expected to meet during community engagements and set out indicators to show how organisers will know they are meeting the standards and examples of good practices. The only specific reference to gender comes in a list of protected characteristics. However, the first of the seven standards is inclusion. It states, "We will identify and involve the people and organisations that are affected by the focus of the engagement". It includes as indicators of meeting the standard that "Measures are taken to involve groups with protected characteristics and people who are excluded from participating due to disadvantage relating to social or economic factors", and "A wide range of opinions, including minority and opposing views, are valued in the

engagement process” (Scottish Government, Scottish Community Development Centre and What Works Scotland, 2016, p. 10). These are both important factors in ensuring a community engagement that incorporates a gender and intersectional analysis; however, the standards set out broad aims but do not contain detailed guidance on how to achieve them in practice.

The Place Standard is a tool which has the potential to facilitate a thorough gender and intersectional analysis of a place; a facilitator who is familiar with gender concepts and experienced in analysing policy and/or practices using a gender lens would be able to use the Place Standard to uncover gender differences within all 14 themes. However, since a wide variety of individuals and groups may organise consultations using the Place Standard, there is no guarantee that the requisite gender expertise will be available within the organising team. Guidance documents containing more specific information on potential gender and intersectional issues that might arise, along with practical tips on operationalising a gender-sensitive consultation, could help the tool be more effective at reducing inequalities and improving women’s safety.

Public Health Scotland is currently working on developing the community safety element of the tool. Following focus group discussions on the community safety elements in each of the 14 themes, there will be pilot projects run in three areas. Depending on the outcome of these pilot projects, changes may be made to the main place standard tool, or an additional, more in-depth tool focusing on community safety may be created. Inverclyde is one of the pilot areas, and the VAWP has been involved in the work. This perhaps provides an immediate opportunity for including a more thorough gender analysis of women’s experiences of place, and women’s safety in the different themes of the Place Standard.

FEMINIST CITIES

Initiatives in Glasgow and Edinburgh are attempting a transformational shift in thinking about how cities operate and who benefits from that. By recognising that women experience cities very differently to men and that, historically, cities have been developed without consideration of the impact on women, the “Feminist City” initiatives in Glasgow and Edinburgh aim to embed gender equality within the work of the respective local authorities. By insisting that gender mainstreaming is an integral part of work on city planning, budgeting, design, policy, and procurement, in the long term, sustained improvements in gender equality should contribute to improved prevention of VAWG.

Glasgow: Scotland's First Feminist City

In 2022, Councillor Holly Bruce brought a resolution to Glasgow City Council calling for Glasgow to embed a “feminist city” approach in its work. The resolution highlighted that to create public spaces that are safe for women, “it is fundamental that women are central to all aspects of planning, public realm design, policy development and budgets”, and that the “Council believes that intersectionality and actively addressing socio-economic inequalities must be at the heart of this approach” (Glasgow City Council, 2022).

The resolution instructed the Council Chief Executive to prepare reports to relevant committees on what changes are needed to council policy and practice to meet a series of goals. The goals included collecting intersectional gender-disaggregated data in all council consultations, “gender competence training” for heads of service and key council staff, beginning gender budgeting, adopting feminist town planning in planning policy, and ensuring EQIAs embed gender equality in strategy and decision-making.

Glasgow was the first city in Scotland to look at what it would mean to embed feminist principles in city planning. However, the wide scope of the aims of the resolution meant that while planning policy was a focus, implementation of the feminist city approach, if applied, should help embed gender mainstreaming throughout the work of the council. The Council allocated £500,000 to a Feminist City Action Fund in the 2024-2027 budget (Glasgow City Council, 2024) and recently allocated a further £500,000 to the fund in the 2025-26 budget (Glasgow City Council, 2025).

To implement the resolution, the Council created a Feminist Urbanism working group made up of elected members and council officers. Minutes of working group meetings are not available publicly; however, the group will report on progress to a future meeting of the Economy, Housing, Transport and Regeneration Policy Committee.

Councillor Bruce told Engender about some of the work being undertaken as part of the Feminist City initiative. This included the liveable neighbourhoods team applying a feminist city lens in procurement decisions. A development project in Cardonald was the first that was awarded to a company that integrated a gender analysis into its plan.

In October 2023, Councillor Bruce brought a motion on access to public toilets, which highlighted that toilet provision is subject to systemic biases and that poor provision creates barriers for women and minoritised groups in their daily lives. In the motion, the council agreed to develop a public toilet strategy, including mapping of provision in the city, investigation of options for increasing provision, removal of charges for use

of public toilets, and ensuring contracts for outdoor events include suitable toilet provision (Glasgow City Council, 2023).

Edinburgh: “Gender Gap” Analysis of Planning Policies

In May 2023, the City of Edinburgh Council passed its own “Feminist City” motion. The motion, brought by Councillor Kayleigh O’Neill, recognised that “more work was needed to create safer and inclusive spaces for women and people of marginalised genders and that it was fundamental that gender equity was central to land use planning, and the management and design of public spaces”. It also requested the creation of a Short Life Cross Party Working Group to examine ongoing and planned work relevant to women’s safety, ensure gender equity is central to planning, management and design of public spaces, and to report to the council’s Planning Committee (City of Edinburgh Council, 2024, pp. 7–8). The creation of the Feminist City Working Group was approved by the Planning Committee in November 2023. Working Group members included an elected member from each of the political parties, as well as council officers.

At its initial meeting in January 2024, members of the Feminist City Working Group agreed that council officers would undertake a “Policy and Guidance Gap Analysis” of relevant national and local planning policies and guidance to review the effectiveness of these policies at promoting the safety of women and people of marginalised genders. The policy and guidance review included the National Planning Framework (2023), the Edinburgh Local Development Plan (2016), the Edinburgh Design Guidance (2020), and Council Factsheets on topics such as pedestrian movement, street furniture, and lighting.

The Working Group produced a report of its analysis, which outlined the intent of the various policies and guidance, their strengths with respect to women’s safety, and commented on shortcomings and where the policies and guidance could be improved. For example, the gender gap analysis report included that although the National Planning Framework includes the design of places to support “the prioritisation of women’s safety”, the Scottish Government has yet to issue guidance on specific measures for developments to include which would meet this aim. The analysis of the Edinburgh Local Development Plan noted that although the “layout design” policy provided that designs should ensure that “car and cycle parking areas and pedestrian and cycle paths are overlooked by surrounding properties”, and that designs should promote “safe and convenient” access and movement, the policy makes no direct reference to women’s safety (City of Edinburgh Council, 2024, p. 18). The report also suggests where there is scope for amendments to policies and guidance. For example, the analysis of the council

Factsheet on promoting pedestrian movement states that there is “Scope to amend current text to include guidance on avoiding use of tunnels where roadworks are underway, given tunnels may allow better pedestrian movement but women and girls avoid them as routes given they inhibit visibility” (City of Edinburgh Council, 2024, p. 30).

While the report made recommendations for changes to many of the policies, most of the policies have a defined process and timeline for review over several years, and, therefore, council officers cannot make any changes before the scheduled review process has concluded. However, at the same time as this policy gap analysis was being undertaken, the planning team was in the process of reviewing and revising the Edinburgh Design Guidance. This provided an immediate opportunity to address some of the gaps identified in the various policies.

The gender gap analysis report to the Planning Committee noted that the revised Edinburgh Design Guidance will address an issue identified by the working group. For example, the analysis noted that the previous Edinburgh Design Guidance from 2020 has a section on community safety but that it does not mention issues of particular concern to women and people of marginalised genders. The report highlights that the new Edinburgh Design Guidance “will expand the Council’s planning guidance on community safety, making specific reference to the safety of women and marginalised groups, and addressing issues such as active frontages, movement routes, maintenance and lighting” (City of Edinburgh Council, 2024, p. 28). The Planning Committee approved the draft Edinburgh Design Guidance in November 2024. At the time of writing, there is an ongoing public consultation on the draft. Once the consultation closes in April 2025, the Planning Committee will review it again.

At its November 2024 meeting, the Planning Committee approved the report of the Working Group, enabling it to continue work into 2025. Meetings of the Working Group are confidential, and there is no public information available about the next steps for the work. The Working Group will report again to the Planning Committee in November 2025.

Edinburgh’s Feminist City work is more limited in scope than Glasgow’s since it relates specifically to planning policy rather than cutting across all council work and has no dedicated budget. Nevertheless, it has resulted in new relationships and cross-department working, which could have an ongoing positive effect on gender integration into policy work. The policy gender gap analysis resulted in a new collaboration between the council planning team and the Equally Safe Edinburgh Committee – the city’s VAWP – with planning officers taking advice from the VAWP. The planning team also used the

results of a survey previously conducted by the Equally Safe Edinburgh Committee on women's safety in public places to inform the revision of the Edinburgh Design Guidance.

CONCLUSION

Equally Safe commits Scotland to an ambitious strategy of moving to a prevention approach while continuing to deliver services for survivors of VAWG. For this to be effective, the structural barriers identified in this research need to be addressed. Equally Safe gives responsibility for its implementation to a relatively small number of people and organisations working in partnerships. They would like to be doing much more on primary prevention; however, they need the political will of the Scottish Government, local authority leaders, and elected members, combined with adequate resourcing, to create the conditions that will enable progress to be made.

In practice, VAWPs do not have the authority or the resources required to deliver the widespread changes that are needed to systematically address gender inequality across all policy areas and services and to effectively move to a primary prevention approach. To achieve the aim in Equally Safe of shifting to preventative work, there needs to be fuller recognition of and funding for the additional work which is required. The VAWG sector is full of passionate staff who want to make a difference and who put in extra work to try to make progress despite the barriers they face. However, expecting already overworked people to do more while allocating the same or fewer resources is not sustainable. When services are overcapacity with associated waiting lists, and staff are uncertain about the future funding of the service, it is not surprising that responding to these issues becomes the main priority for VAWPs. Success in moving to a preventative approach is closely connected to establishing adequate, sustainable funding for VAWG services. Implementation of a new funding model should lessen the need for crisis response and free up greater time within VAWPs for the challenging work of primary prevention.

Creating the conditions for effective primary prevention cannot just be the role of VAWPs; it also requires effective gender mainstreaming in all public sector work. This means the reforms to the PSED that Engender and other organisations have long called for are essential. Alongside PSED reform and increased resources, there must be increased respect for the expertise of gender specialists and the support of senior leaders

to ensure that the systemic changes required to mainstream gender and embed a primary prevention approach are sustainably integrated across all council work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To realise the aim of shifting to a preventative approach as set out in Equally Safe, a transformation is required in the way that VAWG is understood, prioritised, and resourced. Engender recommends the following actions to help address the barriers identified in this report and create the necessary conditions for effective primary prevention work across Scotland.

The Scottish Government should:

- Act to elevate the priority given to addressing and preventing VAWG within local authorities by placing VAWPs on a statutory footing;
- Ensure sufficient resources are allocated for services and prevention work, including funding for:
 - The development of the infrastructure and capacity of VAWPs to support the local implementation of primary prevention
 - sufficient capacity for COSLA and the Improvement Service to fully support local authorities to meet their obligations to reduce inequality and prevent VAWG
 - The development of national campaigns, particularly on complex issues such as online and technology-facilitated VAWG;
- Revisit and expand on proposals to reform the PSED, focused on improved outcomes for protected groups;
- Work with equality organisations and people with protected characteristics to co-produce regulations that will improve outcomes;
- Action the recommendation from the NACWG for integrating intersectional gender budget analysis into budget-setting processes;

- Gather learning from public bodies on barriers to collection and analysis of robust equalities data, and invest in building a comprehensive set of equalities indicators, and in developing a core dataset on VAWG;
- Improve data collection through the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey and the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey so that their methodologies ensure the collection and disaggregation of appropriate data for measuring changes in the prevalence of VAWG in Scotland and the attitudes and beliefs that underpin VAWG.

The Scottish Government working with COSLA should:

- Ensure that its joint work to review local governance in Scotland incorporates the role that CPPs have in addressing inequalities and, in particular, to strengthen mechanisms for embedding a gender analysis and gendered priorities in local community planning mechanisms and systems in order to deliver gender-sensitive outcomes.

COSLA should:

- Examine how their programme of work to enhance women's access to power and resources, as set out in the Equally Safe Delivery Plan, can support the increased understanding of gender and gender inequality as the root cause of VAWG among local authority staff and elected members, and facilitate gender mainstreaming across all areas of work.

Local Authority leadership should:

- Join the Equally Safe at Work and Equally Safe in Practice programmes, if they have not already done so, and support schools to join the Equally Safe at School programme;
- Ensure that induction processes for new staff and elected members include a basic understanding of gender and equalities. Further ensure that elected

members, senior leaders and managers have a thorough understanding of gender, intersectionality, equalities, VAWG and their obligations under the PSED;

- Ensure that all staff involved in EQIAs understand equality issues and follow best practices to develop effective EQIAs. Ensure that only policies and plans for which a good quality EQIA has been produced are approved;
- Examine the most appropriate ways of ensuring that gender expertise is available to the CPP and that the LOIP includes a comprehensive gender analysis across all themes;
- Examine gender mainstreaming efforts across all policy areas to identify good practice, and initiate or strengthen mechanisms for sharing these good practices in order that they can be adapted to other areas of work;
- Be proactive in supporting VAWG prevention and gender mainstreaming, including through consistent messaging about its importance, creating expectations among managers and staff that gender will be mainstreamed in all work, and prioritising allocation of available resources to VAWG and gender issues.

The Improvement Service should:

- Facilitate collaboration between networks to encourage improved coordination, for example, by organising joint meetings of the VAWG network and CPP network and/or Equalities network;
- Include an introduction to equality and equalities law in its induction materials for elected members, and review its gender and equality-related briefings for elected members, bearing in mind their wide variety of backgrounds and differing levels of familiarity with the issues.

Public Health Scotland and other Place Standard Partners should:

- Produce guidance on the place standard from an intersectional gender perspective.

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APPENDIX

The 51 interviewees for this research worked for local authorities, other public sector, and third sector organisations across 30 local authority areas in Scotland.

Local Authorities

Interviewees were lead officers, coordinators, members of Violence Against Women Partnerships, or officers from policy areas covered by this report in:

Aberdeen City	Edinburgh	North Lanarkshire
Aberdeenshire	Eilean Siar	Orkney
Angus	Falkirk	Perth & Kinross
Argyll & Bute	Fife	Renfrewshire
Clackmannanshire	Glasgow	Scottish Borders
Dumfries & Galloway	Highland	Shetland
Dundee	Inverclyde	South Ayrshire
East Ayrshire	Midlothian	Stirling
East Lothian	Moray	West Dunbartonshire
East Renfrewshire	North Ayrshire	West Lothian

Public Sector Organisations

COSLA	Improvement Service	Public Health Scotland
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Third Sector Organisations

Close the Gap	Scottish Community Development Centre	Scottish Women's Aid
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Councillors

Edinburgh	Glasgow
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Engender is Scotland's feminist policy and advocacy organisation, working to increase women's social, political and economic equality, enable women's rights, and make visible the impact of sexism on women and wider society.

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