



Engender response to the Police Scotland 'Policing 2026 Strategy' consultation

1. INTRODUCTION

Engender works in Scotland to advance women's economic, social and cultural, and political equality with men. We make visible the ways in which women's inequality impacts Scotland, and bring women together to make change happen.

Engender welcomes this opportunity to submit our views to Police Scotland on the Policing 2026 Strategy. The structure, roles and strategy of Scotland's police force is of vital importance in both preventing and addressing violence against women and girls, and progressing gender equality in Scotland. In order to deliver actions and services that meet the needs of both men, women, boys and girls, it is vital that any policing strategy takes a gendered approach to how it thinks about the main risks, challenges, opportunities and demands in the Scottish context. We would like to see a police force that puts equality at the heart of its strategy.

2. QUESTIONS POSED BY THE CONSULTATION

Q1. Does the Policing 2026 strategy identify and acknowledge the main risks, challenges, opportunities and demands likely to impact on policing over the next 10 years?

In order to deliver actions and services that meet the needs of both men, women, boys and girls, it is vital that any policing strategy takes a gendered approach to how it thinks about the main risks, challenges, opportunities and demands in the Scottish context. Men and women face very different security and safety threats, and this should be reflected in policing strategies and methods. For example serious offences against women usually take place in private - such as rape, domestic violence, robbery and sexual assaults - whereas serious offences against men usually take place in public - such as

robbery, violence and murder. Women are also far more likely to be the victims of violent crimes by people they know.

Violence against women (VAW) is endemic in Scotland. At least one in five women in Scotland will experience domestic abuse in her lifetime and an average of three rapes is reported per day. Four percent of Scottish women have experienced serious sexual assault since the age of 16, compared with one percent of men.¹ According to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) the number of rapes, attempted rapes and sexual assaults reported to that involve an element of domestic abuse continues to grow.

Under the 'Demands We Face Every Day' section, the strategy notes that '158 domestic incidents' happen every day, and take up the most time per incident in local policing; that recorded sexual crime is increasing; and that cyber-crime is growing and changing, and includes sexual crime. What is notably absent from this analysis is reference to gender, despite the fact that of the 59,882 incidents of domestic abuse recorded by police in Scotland in 2014-15, 79 percent of all such incidents had a female victim and male perpetrator.² Where the victim's gender is known, 95 percent (1,278 out of 1,349) rapes or attempted rapes recorded by the police in 2014-15 had a female victim.³ Further, in a report by NSPCC on partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships in the UK, girls reported high levels of coercive control including surveillance through the use of online technologies and, unlike the boys in this study, reported that their welfare was severely detrimentally affected.⁴

The use of gender-neutral language and terminology, as in the Strategy, the lack of direct reference to Violence Against Women or domestic abuse, and statistics which don't mention the gendered nature of certain types of violence, obscures the specific threats faced by women from men, as well as the different needs of men and women have of the police force. It suggests that VAW and tackling domestic abuse are no longer a priority issues for Police Scotland – something which is an extremely alarming message to be

¹ <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/09/5338>.

² Equally safe

³ Equally safe

⁴ NSPCC

giving. It also raising questions over how this deprioritisation may affect day-to-day police actions and plans (for example, the time or resources given to improving the currently poor implementation of the guidelines for forensic medical examination following a sexual offence), and how it will impact particular sub-groups of women, such as BME women, LGBTI women or disabled women, and tackling particular issue areas such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) or forced marriage.

By not explicitly recognising Violence Against Women as an area of either concern or opportunity, the Strategy also obscures good work being done by Police Scotland in this area, which could be learned from and built on through to 2026. For example, Police Scotland are noted by the Equally Safe strategy as being “exemplary” in terms of the senior level commitment to tackling VAW, and as “yielding real results” through their focus on driving down the incidence of domestic abuse. Similarly, the specialist crime resources such as the National Rape Task Force and Domestic Abuse Task Force, and the Specialist Domestic Abuse Units and Divisional Rape Investigation Units that are present in every local policing division in Scotland are a testament to Police Scotland commitment to this area.

Where the Strategy does mention women explicitly, it predicts that by 2026, “inequality in the workplace will have reduced, and women will have continued to make improvements in their social and economic positions, largely due to better access to childcare, education and employment.” This is a positive prediction, however no analysis is given of how violence against women impacts on women’s social and economic positions (as both a consequence and a driver of women’s inequality), and the role that tackling VAW can play in progressing this vision. Here, the Strategy needs to reflect how reducing women's inequality will in turn reduce men's violence against women and girls and vice versa, and how this progress on inequalities can be embedded into Police Scotland’s framework.

Also notably absent from the analysis is any reference to hate crime against other protected characteristics, and the huge problem of underreporting of hate crime, domestic abuse and sexual violence that remains a crucial issue in Scotland. While we are aware of some of the improvements in this area, we feel that the need to address underreporting of these crimes could be made

more explicit in the strategy, either under this section or under the 'protection' focus area.

The absence of VAW and hate crime in the 2026 Strategy feels out of step with other governmental and institutional strategies in Scotland but also with Police Scotland's own stance, who have claimed previously that tackling VAWG is firmly on their agenda. It is vitally important that the 2026 Strategy is fit for purpose when it comes to dealing with gender-based violence, that it recognizes preventing and addressing VAW as a top-level demand and priority, and also that it recognizes the impact of gender across policing.

Q2. Do you agree the main areas of focus proposed within the Policing 2026 strategy are the right ones to deliver an enhanced policing service?

In response to this question, Engender would like to refer back to the responses submitted by Scottish Women's Aid and Zero Tolerance to Police Scotland's 2016 consultation on Draft Strategic Priorities. These responses, while recognising the "high level" nature of the draft priorities, called for greater focus on violence against women, and a particular focus on ensuring that Police Scotland meet their obligations in responding to women, children and young people experiencing domestic abuse, and gave a detailed breakdown on how these should be addressed through each priority area. If anything, the revised areas of focus outlined in the 2026 strategy appear to deprioritise these issues even further, and lack any reflection on gender at all.

As with the majority responses to the previous consultation, Engender welcomes the focus on prevention as a key area of concern for dealing with women's safety and security, and we also welcome the shift from 'localism' to 'communities', which better reflects engaging with groups that have shared protected characteristics but are geographically dispersed around the country, such as women, ethnic minorities, LGBTI groups. More attention could be given in the strategy to the needs and treatment of particularly vulnerable groups, such as women with mental health concerns, and to police engagement within communities – i.e. not not only consulting with community leaders, as this often leaves out significant portions of community, particularly minority ethnic women, as noted by Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (CRER) in their 2016 consultation response.

We are particularly disappointed to see that Equally Safe – Scotland’s strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls – is not referenced anywhere in the document, despite the fact that it should be a key driver of how Police Scotland are setting their strategy, and in particular thinking about prevention.

Engender would also like to see greater integration and prioritisation of Police Scotland’s Equality and Diversity Strategy within the 2026 strategy’s areas of focus, and more attention given to the Equalities Impact Assessment process, which came under fairly serious criticism from equalities organisations during the last consultation. The 2017 Equality and Diversity Strategy includes objectives relating to hate crime; the safety of protected groups; gender-based violence; meaningful engagement with police and services; and Police Scotland’s workforce being a place where people feel valued. Such objectives/ambitions should not be siloed, but be a central part of Police Scotland’s strategic thinking overall. The fact that there is little overlap between the two strategy documents suggests that equality is not being adequately mainstreamed across Police Scotland. It is vitally important that equality and addressing the needs of women is made explicit throughout the strategy, not just assumed that it is implied through language around communities and engagement.

Q4. The Policing 2026 Strategy states that public confidence will be a key measure of success and the effectiveness of Police performance. Do you agree with this approach?

Yes, we agree that public confidence and trust in the police is integral to a well-functioning police service. However, it is important to look at how this varies across groups, particularly hard-to-reach groups and groups that are known for under-reporting crime to the police (for example, those experiencing domestic abuse or victims of hate crime). Of equal importance is police accountability, which was given more prominence in the 2015/16 draft priorities, including but not limited to transparent data collection, monitoring, and publication that routinely disaggregates for gender, race, and other protected characteristics.

Q5. The Policing 2026 strategy highlights that we will need to re-shape our

organisation with a workforce focused on having the right skills and capacity to meet future challenges. Do you agree with this approach?

Having the right skills and capacity in the workforce is extremely important. However, a key part of this is to have diversity in the workforce, and we are pleased to see in the Strategy a commitment to strengthening the diversity of the whole workforce. It is vital to take into account how the police staff reflect the communities they serve and to ensure that men and women are equally represented across different roles and ranks within the force.

As such, increasing the numbers and the promotions of women and ethnic minority police officers should be a top-level aim for the Police Scotland workforce to 2026, alongside measures to ensure that the working environment is fair and flexible in order to retain officers and staff from underrepresented groups.

Engender has recently released a report called 'Sex and Power' which highlights the extent of men's over-representation in positions of authority and influence in Scotland, and women's unequal access to power, decision-making and participation throughout all areas of public life. The report shows that alongside other public sector services, Police Scotland has a dismally low representation of women in senior roles. Since Scotland's eight police forces were reformed into one body in 2013, there has been a reduction of the number of senior staff (the executive management team, responsible for the strategy and policy direction of Police Scotland) from 27 to 15. Currently, 14 of these senior staff are men; one is a woman (7 percent of the total, compared to 15 percent of the total in 2011).

Despite action to increase diversity in Police Scotland, including the introduction of the hijab as part of its official uniform, 71 percent of police officer posts are currently occupied by men and only 1 percent of police officers consider themselves to be from an ethnic minority (which CRER note is likely the most significant barrier for minority ethnic communities in engaging with police services locally and nationally). The statistics are markedly worse in the promoted ranks and within specialist departments. Police Scotland's Equality and Diversity Mainstreaming Progress Report 2017 also notes that male and female police officers are likely to exit the organisation for different reasons, with female police officers more likely to resign and male police officers more likely to retire. Greater emphasis in the 2026 Strategy should be

placed on flexible and part-time working in order to retain diverse skills and capacities across the force.

Q6. Is the strategy presented in a clear and understandable way?

Yes, but it lacks enough detail to be able to comment on how the strategy, when implemented, will likely impact on women in Scotland.

Q7. We would welcome any additional views you have on our strategy and how it will affect you, or any other person.

It is important to keep improving the collection of – and using – gender disaggregated data in both monitoring crimes and the police workforce.

For Further Information

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About Engender

Engender has a vision for a Scotland in which women and men have equal opportunities in life, equal access to resources and power, and are equally safe and secure from harm. Engender is a feminist organisation that has worked in Scotland for 20 years to advance equality between women and men.

