

## Analysis of Local Authority Gender Equality Schemes

### The Gender Equality Duty

The Equality Act 2006 placed a statutory duty - the Gender Equality Duty (GED) introduced in 2007 - on all public bodies when carrying out their functions to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment; and
- promote equality of opportunity between men and women.<sup>1</sup>

To support progress in delivering this duty public bodies have a specific duty to publish a Gender Equality Scheme (GES) which sets out their priorities and objectives to further gender equality. Progress on meeting the objectives in the GES is reported on annually and the scheme is revised every three years – with the first revision due by the end of June 2010.

The EHRC published guidance<sup>2</sup> on meeting the GED for public bodies, and made it explicit that addressing violence against women is crucial for tackling the causes and consequences of gender inequality.

SWA has carried out an analysis of all local authority Gender Equality Schemes in Scotland. We focussed on local authorities as the key Community Planning Partner and because as the EHRC states: “local government has an important leadership role to play to ensure that actions to promote gender equality across sectors are strategic and joined up. We believe that local government can drive effective and integrated action to address the priority areas for gender equality via existing cross-sector partnership arrangements and ongoing partnerships with the voluntary and community sector.”<sup>3</sup>

### Key Findings:

- Only 4 Gender Equality Schemes state that violence against women or domestic abuse is a cause and consequence of gender inequality.
- In 9 GESs addressing violence against women is not a stated priority.
- Only 14 GESs have more than one objective relating to violence against women and indicate how these objectives will be met.
- 10 GESs refer to children and young people who experience/witness violence, but only 5 contain objectives relating specifically to children and young people.
- Less than half of all local authorities have a published and up-to-date violence against women or domestic abuse strategy.
- The main focus of the GESs is on domestic abuse. Where violence against women terminology is used, the majority of objectives still relate specifically to domestic abuse.
- This analysis reiterates our previous concerns on how national policy is led, implemented and monitored at a local level.

## National Policy Context - Violence against women

At a national level the Scottish Government positioned tackling violence against women as a core priority in their Gender Equality Scheme. As part of the GED, Scottish Ministers were required to set Ministerial priorities for the advancement of equality, on which they must report and review progress by 2010 and every three years thereafter. Tackling violence against women features as one of the two Ministerial priorities for equality.

Scotland's strategic approach and specific funding to address this issue has gained international recognition over the last 10 years. In 2000 the Scottish Executive published a National Strategy to Address Domestic Abuse, and established a national group to oversee its implementation. The remit of the group was broadened in 2002 to encompass all forms of violence against women. In 2008 the Scottish Government published the National Domestic Abuse Delivery Plan for Children and Young People and in 2009 with COSLA published *Safer Lives: Changed Lives: A Shared Approach to Tackling Violence Against Women in Scotland*.

When developing a GES public authorities are required to take into account any national gender equality policies or priorities which Scottish Ministers have set for the advancement of gender equality, or any national policy frameworks or relevant research.

## Methodology

Our analysis consisted of a document review in which we systematically analysed the content of each GES, with attention to the extent to which priority is given to addressing domestic abuse/violence against women. Our analysis reviewed specific aspects of the schemes:

- Information gathered relating to local context
- Consultation with stakeholders
- Priority areas, key objectives and action plans to achieve objectives
- Definitions used to approach VAW in the GES
- Actions with local partners to achieve objectives

EHRC Guidance<sup>6</sup> states that local authorities must gather information on their locality, identify the salient gender equality issues and develop priorities in response to these. Our analysis therefore aims to capture this process. In this report, GES priorities are the priorities/objectives presented in the GES, which usually also include an action plan. Considering the wider focus on violence against women adopted now in Scotland, we explored the extent to which this has been put into practice and the understanding through which local authorities approach and address the issue of violence against women. As part of this process we also assessed the status and availability of local Domestic Abuse/Violence Against Women Strategies.

## Defining terms

Domestic abuse and violence against women are used throughout this report in accordance with the definitions adopted by the Scottish Government – see below.

In the report we refer to domestic abuse/violence against women to reflect these definitions and the terminology used in the GESs. Domestic abuse is defined as follows:

*“Domestic abuse (as gender-based abuse) can be perpetrated by partners or ex-partners and can include physical abuse (assault and physical attack involving a range of behaviour), sexual abuse (acts which degrade and humiliate women are perpetrated against their will, including rape) and mental and emotional abuse (such as threat, verbal abuse, racial abuse, withholding money and other types of controlling behaviour such as isolation from family and friends).”*

In June 2009 the Scottish Government and COSLA published *Safer Lives: Changed Lives: A Shared Approach to Tackling Violence Against Women in Scotland*. The approach is informed by the definition developed by the National Group to Address Violence Against Women based on the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993).

*“Gender-based violence is a function of gender inequality, and an abuse of male power and privilege. It takes the form of actions that result in physical, sexual and psychological harm or suffering to women and children, or affront to their human dignity, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. It is men who predominantly carry out such violence, and women who are predominantly the victims of such violence. By referring to violence as ‘gender-based’ this definition highlights the need to understand violence within the context of women’s and girl’s subordinate status in society. Such violence cannot be understood, therefore, in isolation from the norms, social structure and gender roles within the community, which greatly influence women’s vulnerability to violence.”*

## The local context – information gathering and consultation

“In order to understand which of its functions have the greatest relevance to gender equality, a public authority will need to gather and use information on how women and men are affected by its activities. This information will have a crucial role in helping the public authority to determine its gender equality priorities, conduct effective gender impact assessments of policies and practices, and monitor progress towards its gender equality objectives.”<sup>7</sup>

Each individual local authority must therefore collect and analyse information from their local area in order to identify priorities for action. They also have a specific duty to consult stakeholders when identifying their gender equality objectives.

In our analysis we found that of the 32 local authority GESs, 21 schemes made reference to domestic abuse/violence against women from their analysis of local information and consultations and 11 contained no reference to domestic abuse/violence against women.

<b>Gender Equality Strategies</b>	
<b>Local context information</b>	
Local or national statistics relating to violence against women/domestic abuse	10
Domestic abuse/violence against women raised as a concern in consultations with stakeholders	6
Reference to work carried out by their local violence against women/domestic abuse partnership	5
No reference to domestic abuse/violence against women	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>

The emphasis in the 21 schemes which recognised domestic abuse/violence against women as an issue locally is that it is a crime and community safety problem rather than one of gender equality. The statistical evidence used largely referred to incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the police and not other forms of violence. Additional statistical information included patterns of abuse experiences (2), NHS Scotland's attitude survey (1) and 1 scheme supplemented police statistics with figures from Women's Aid.

The consultations with stakeholders highlighted concerns about violence against women and women were recognised as being the victims in the overwhelming majority of cases.

The vast majority of GESs provided either statistics, or data from consultations, or evidenced the work of their local Domestic Abuse or Violence against Women Partnership. Only 3 schemes referred to more than one form of information gathered to form the basis of their evidence from which to set priorities for action.

### **Gender Equality Schemes: Priorities and Objectives**

GES Guidance states that although councils must identify priorities according to the needs of the local context, they are also expected to *"benchmark their own priorities against stated national priorities, for example the national Domestic Abuse Strategy [and] the Scottish Executive's Equality Strategy."*<sup>8</sup> The *National Strategy to Address Domestic Abuse*<sup>9</sup> highlights gender inequality as both a cause and consequence of domestic abuse, and tackling violence against women is a key objective of the Scottish Government's Gender Equality Scheme.<sup>10</sup>

Our analysis found that only 14 of the schemes prioritised addressing violence against women.

Gender Equality Strategies	No of schemes
Priority given to violence against women	
Not a stated priority	9
Mentioned as a personnel policy only	3
Referred to in general terms - no details of any actions	6
A stated priority or an objective with actions planned	14
	32

It is important to differentiate between schemes which demonstrate a depth of commitment to violence against women and those which demonstrate a superficial mention of the issue. We therefore selected the 14 schemes which had violence against women as a GES priority and that also had more than one action planned as indicative of a greater commitment to the issue.

Of these 14 Gender Equality Schemes with more than one action planned relating to violence against women, the majority contained two or three actions, which cover a range of activities that fall into 5 broad themes:

- Improve services and responses to victims of domestic abuse/violence against women (10)
- Improve or increase levels of staff training on domestic abuse/violence against women (6)
- Develop personnel policies and improve responses to staff experiencing domestic abuse/violence against women (5)
- Improve cross-agency coordination, including more multi-agency training and increased collaboration with voluntary sector organisations (5)
- Greater research, monitoring and evaluation, including mapping of service gaps (4)

Other objectives include improving support for rape victims (1), tackling prostitution (1), providing appropriately resourced services (1), supporting perpetrator programmes (1) and tackling harassment (1).

Prevention features weakly in local authority GESs, with just three schemes including the term prevention in their gender equality priorities and related action plans.

Only 10 GESs mentioned support for children and young people experiencing or witnessing domestic abuse and of these only 5 included specific actions for children and young people. These referred to the CEDAR project (1), improved services for looked after children (1), greater equity of access and service responses for children and young people (2) further research into service responses to children and young people (1).

## Approach to violence against women

The Scottish Government has played a leading role in addressing gender-based violence, most notably domestic abuse, through its *National Strategy to Address Domestic Abuse*, the focus of which was widened in 2002 to violence against women.

Our analysis found that the main focus of the GESs is heavily weighted towards domestic abuse. Fifteen GESs make reference to domestic abuse rather than violence against women more broadly. Thirteen refer to violence against women and 4 contain no reference to either.

However, even where violence against women terminology is used, the objectives focussed largely on domestic abuse. Only 4 of the schemes included actions to address wider forms violence against women; these included rape and sexual abuse (3) and prostitution (2).

Only 4 schemes referred to violence against women as a cause and consequence of gender inequality. Instead, there is a general recognition that women are more likely to experience domestic abuse or violence and it is this inequality in patterns of victimisation which results in its consideration as an equalities issue. Failure to approach violence against women as an issue of gender inequality means that the response will be less likely to move beyond numbers and address the context and impact. A gender analysis examines the differences in women's and men's lives, including those which lead to social and economic inequity for women, and applies this understanding to policy development and service delivery.

"Gender analysis acknowledges that there are differences and that these differences need to be understood to avoid discriminating against some people..... Seeing violence against women in the context of gender helps to make sense of the nature and scale of it and to understand how we can stop it."<sup>12</sup>

The Scottish Government makes it clear that "*violence against women is a consequence of continuing inequality between men and women, and it is also a barrier to achieving equality [... and] tackling violence against women is therefore essential in meeting the Gender Equality Duty.*"<sup>13</sup> COSLA also reiterates, "*Violence against women is not only a consequence of gender inequality, it also perpetuates it. Tackling violence against women is therefore a prerequisite to reducing inequality between women and men in Scotland.*"<sup>14</sup>

## Links to Violence Against Women/Domestic Abuse Partnerships

Domestic Abuse or Violence Against Women Partnerships were directly referred to in only 8 GESs, while a further 8 schemes referred to other partnerships such as Community Safety Partnerships. Sixteen schemes did not include any reference to partnership working in meeting their objectives. It is important that the next round of GESs are much more robustly linked to key strategic plans and partnerships if they are to be effective. A multi-agency response to domestic abuse has been found to be the most effective way to support and protect women and children who have experienced domestic abuse and to challenge male perpetrators.<sup>15</sup>

In order to consider the objectives of the Domestic Abuse/Violence Against Women Partnerships which were referred to in 8 of the GESs we carried out a brief review of the strategies produced by all the partnerships in Scotland. The strategies were often difficult to source and less than half of those located were up-to-date.

<b>Status of Domestic Abuse\ Violence Against Women Strategy</b>	<b>No of Local Authorities</b>
Current strategy	14
Out of date strategy	10
No strategy	4
Reference to Community Safety strategy	4
Total	32

### **Future action on the Gender Equality Duty**

In Scotland public authorities are required to review their GESs by the 29 June 2010. In preparation for this, the EHRC published 'A Practical Guide to Revising Gender Equality Schemes'. The guidance highlights four long-standing areas where there is significant disadvantage or barriers to opportunity, which they expect public authorities to take action on. One of these four issues is the causes and consequences of violence against women and girls. The guidance states:

"Historically, there has been a lack of action to prevent and end violence against women by the public sector to address this key gender equality issue. The Commission expects:

- Action to work more effectively with other public authorities to deliver better responses and to work together with the voluntary sector to develop integrated strategies for preventing violence against women and girls.
- Action by employers to eliminate sexual harassment within the workplace and to support victims/survivors of violence, for example through adopting a domestic violence policy to reduce the social and economic impact of domestic abuse in the workplace.
- Action to prevent violence happening in the first place by changing attitudes and challenging perpetrators.
- Action to increase access to support for victims/survivors in order that they can access safety and justice and be able to rebuild their lives.
- Action to deal more effectively with perpetrators."

The guidance goes onto state that local government has 'an important leadership role to play to ensure actions to promote gender equality across sectors are strategic and joined up.' In the revision of their Gender Equality Schemes it specifically requires local authorities to:

"Develop and implement integrated approaches to preventing violence against women and girls and integrate the needs of women and children who have experienced violence

when delivering and commissioning services, particularly health services, the criminal justice system, housing, the safeguarding of children and education.

This includes:

- Ensuring provision of specialised support services to meet local needs, including women's aid services, refuges, perpetrator programmes targeting offenders, specialist domestic violence courts, sexual assault referral centres, specialist sexual violence services such as rape crisis centres, and services specifically for ethnic minority women suffering violence.
- Taking account of the impact of violence against women and girls when taking action on other priority areas for local government, such as educational attainment, youth crime, teenage pregnancy, poverty and health inequalities."

Our findings suggest that the majority of the current local authority GES's will require considerable revision in order to comply with these guidelines.

## Conclusion

Our analysis of Scottish local authority Gender Equality Schemes found that only 14 GESs identify violence against women as a priority and include more than one action to address this. Only 4 local authority schemes state that violence against women is a cause and consequence of gender inequality. However the inclusion of that statement did not necessarily result in planned objectives to then address the issue.

Of the other 18 GESs - 9 do not identify or include violence against women as a priority within their GES. The remaining 9 demonstrate a superficial reference (one or no actions planned to achieve priority). Finally, only 14 local authorities have published an up-to-date violence against women or domestic abuse strategy.

These findings underline previous concerns highlighted in our analysis of Single Outcome Agreements on how national policy on violence against women is implemented and monitored at a local level. Scottish Women's Aid's 2009 analysis of SOAs found that addressing violence against women was stated as a priority in only 11 SOAs.

SWA has real concerns about the absence in practice of meaningful compliance with the Gender Equality Duty. In our experience robust equality impact assessments are not routinely and meaningfully conducted on proposed commissioning and procurement plans, service re-design or on the assessment of funding cuts. Gender Equality Schemes need to provide a real foundation for local authorities to ensure integrated actions to address gender equality are implemented and strategically linked across all their areas of responsibility. If addressing violence against women as a cause and consequence of gender equality is not effectively articulated in GESs then it will not be seen as a priority or linked to the main policy drivers within a local authority.

The revision of Gender Equality Schemes provides local authorities with the opportunity to strategically address participation, prevention, protection and provision in tackling violence against women to demonstrate leadership and "ensure actions to promote gender equality across sectors are strategic and joined up."<sup>17</sup>

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