

Developing an ambitious Midlothian Equally Safe Strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls.

Report by: Joan Tranent, CSWO and Chief Officer Children's Services, Partnerships and Communities

Report for Decision

1 Recommendations

In the context of the 16 Days of Activism 2021, it is recommended that Midlothian Council makes a commitment to develop an ambitious Midlothian Equally Safe Strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls.

2 Purpose of Report/Executive Summary

This report advises of work to date to deliver Equally Safe, Scotland's Strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls, through the work of East Lothian and Midlothian Public Protection Committee (EMPPC).

The report highlights the importance of the annual 16 Days of Activism campaign to end gender based violence from 25th November to 10th December and the 2021 campaign's call to action #What WillYOUDo?

In this context, the report proposes that Midlothian Council makes a commitment to develop a Midlothian Equally Safe Strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls.

Date: 18 November 2021

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3 Background

3.1 The Scottish Government and COSLA's Equally Safe Scotland's strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls was developed in 2014 and updated in 2016.

The strategy's vision is '*A strong and flourishing Scotland where all individuals are equally safe and respected and where women and girls live free from all forms of violence and abuse – and the attitudes that help perpetuate it.*'

The strategy has four priorities:

1. Scottish society embraces equality and mutual respect, and rejects all forms of violence against women and girls
2. Women and girls thrive as equal citizens – socially, cultural, economically and politically
3. Interventions are early and effective, preventing violence and maximising the safety and wellbeing of women, children and young people
4. Men desist from all forms of violence against women and girls and perpetrators or such violence receive a robust and effective response.

The strategy defines violence against women and girls as follows:

Violence against women and girls encompasses (but is not limited to):

- Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family (including children and young people), within the general community or in institutions, including domestic abuse, rape, and incest;
- Sexual harassment, bullying and intimidation in any public or private space, including work;
- Commercial sexual exploitation, including prostitution, lap dancing, stripping, pornography and trafficking;
- Child sexual abuse, including familial sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation and online abuse;
- So called 'honour based' violence, including dowry related violence, female genital mutilation, forced and child marriages, and 'honour' crimes.

3.2 To date Midlothian Council has been committed to delivering on aspects of Equally Safe locally through the work of the East Lothian and Midlothian Public Protection Committee, specifically through the Violence Against Women and Girls section of the Improvement Plan. It is fair to say that this has focused mainly on priorities 3 and 4, which fit well within public protection and community justice partnership work.

An important aspect of systems change has been the work of Children's Services to embed the Safe and Together model into local multi-agency practice. In addition, the Council has achieved 'Equally Safe At Work' bronze accreditation and has established key HR policies on Gender Based Violence overall and Sexual Harassment.

- 3.3.** Over recent years, public awareness and rejection of violence against women has grown across Scotland, the United Kingdom and internationally. This has seen an increase in demand for specialist services for survivors as well as for perpetrators and importantly an increase in demand for culture change to achieve gender equality and respect for the rights of women and girls, which would bring about the end of gender based violence.

This year the pressing need for systems change has been highlighted through the circumstances of the murder of Sarah Everard and many other women (one woman is killed every three days in the United Kingdom (Femicide Census 2009-18), as well as the pervasiveness of rape culture among young people (see [Everyone's Invited](#) website).

- 3.4** The time is right to build on our good work to date and develop a high level Midlothian strategy to ensure that our area becomes Equally Safe for women and girls.

This strategy will enable the Council Management Team to consider the dual focus of improving gender equality and eradicating violence against women and girls across all areas of policy and practice including: leadership, economy and business, housing, communities, education, health and social services, internal services ..., which will give all universal and targeted services the opportunity to contribute.

- 3.5** Over the last few years, we have participated in the global 16 Days of Activism Campaign to End Gender Based Violence, which runs from 25th November, the International Day to End Violence Against Women and Girls to 10th December, International Human Rights Day.

Midlothian Council is a member of the National Violence Against Women Network through EMPPC as well as through COSLA. This year for the 16 Days of Activism the National Violence Against Women Network has agreed a call to action with the slogan: **#WhatWillYouDo**.

4 Report Implications (Resource, Digital and Risk)

4.1 Resource

No new resources are required to develop the strategy. The Improvement Service through the national VAW Coordinator will facilitate the development of the strategy. The process will require leadership and collaboration from the Leadership Team and the Council Equalities Officer and shared EMPPC VAWG Coordinator.

4.2 Digital

None.

4.3 Risk

There are no identified risks.

4.4 Ensuring Equalities (if required a separate IIA must be completed)

As a new overarching strategy which will change policy and practice in relation to Equalities, therefore an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) has been carried out and no negative impacts were identified. The IIA is attached to this report.

4.4 Additional Report Implications

In September 2021, East Lothian and Midlothian Public Protection Committee delivered a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment to the Critical Services Oversight Group, which is jointly chaired by the Chief Executives of Midlothian and East Lothian. The lack of sustainable funding for services for survivors of gender based violence was highlighted in this report.

Appendices

Appendix A – Additional Report Implications

Appendix B – Background information/Links

APPENDIX A – Report Implications

A.1 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

Not applicable

A.2 Key Drivers for Change

Key drivers addressed in this report:

- Holistic Working**
- Hub and Spoke
- Modern**
- Sustainable**
- Transformational**
- Preventative**
- Asset-based**
- Continuous Improvement**
- One size fits one

A.3 Key Delivery Streams

Key delivery streams addressed in this report:

- One Council Working with you, for you**
- Preventative and Sustainable**
- Efficient and Modern**
- Innovative and Ambitious**

A.4 Delivering Best Value

The report does not directly impact on Delivering Best Value

A.5 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

The report does not directly relate to involving communities at this point. The development of the strategy will involve communities of interest and have a positive impact on health, wellbeing and safety. The strategy will involve key partners and partnerships across community planning themes.

A.6 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

The report does not directly impact on Midlothian Council's performance and outcomes

A.7 Adopting a Preventative Approach

As discussed the first two priorities in the strategy will develop a preventative approach to gender based violence by enhancing gender equality and taking into account intersectionality.

A.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

This strategy will positively contribute to social and economic sustainability

APPENDIX B

Background Papers/Resource Links (if applicable)

Equally Safe, Scotland's strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/equally-safe-scotlands-strategy-prevent-eradicate-violence-against-women-girls/documents/>

16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, UN Women: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/take-action/16-days-of-activism>

Femicide Census: UK Femicides 2009-18
<https://www.femicidecensus.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Femicide-Census-10-year-report.pdf>

Everyone's Invited: A place for survivors to share their stories.
Everyone's Invited's mission is to expose and eradicate rape culture with empathy, compassion, and understanding. <https://www.everyonesinvited.uk/>