

West Lothian Gender Based Violence Strategy 2021-2024.



West Lothian Gender Based Violence Strategy

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Foreword

In West Lothian partners agree that violence against women and girls, in any form, has no place in our community. It damages health and wellbeing, limits freedom and potential and is a violation of the most fundamental human rights. Partners are committed to working together to ensure that women and girls in West Lothian are equally safe at home, at work and in the community.

We acknowledge that violence against women is a consequence of the social inequalities which exist between men and women. The focus for the West Lothian Gender-Based Violence Strategy is on all forms of violence against women, acknowledging that women and girls are at risk of such abuse precisely because they are female.

This strategy explicitly employs a gendered analysis of gender-based violence. This analysis does not exclude men, but rather recognises that women and girls are disproportionately affected by particular forms of violence that they experience because they are women and girls. Men and boys may also be victims of abuse and can experience the gendered societal views of what constitutes masculinity which can prevent them from seeking help. In West Lothian

Tim Ward,

Senior Manager, Social Policy

Chair of Gender Based Violence Committee

partners are committed to ensuring that there are appropriate services responding to the needs of all victims of such abuse.

The impact of Covid-19 on women and children who experience gender-based violence has been significant and this is recognised with this strategy.

Partners in west Lothian are committed to working together to learn the lessons of responding to the pandemic and ensuring that women and girls at risk of and experiencing violence and abuse can access joined up effective services.

This strategy builds on the Scottish Government's Equally Safe Strategy and details how partners in West Lothian will work to tackle gender-based violence.

Introduction

Gender-based violence has been described by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as a global public health problem of epidemic proportions. The Scottish Government has estimated that the cost of domestic abuse as £2.3billion, while all forms of gender-based violence cost £4billion. There is a moral, human rights and legal obligation to tackle gender-based violence.

Gender Based Violence is both cause and consequence of women's inequality and has direct and indirect connections to continued disparities in employment, health, wellbeing and participation in public life. The ongoing presence of such violence in women's lives is the surest indicator of the continuing inequality of opportunity and outcome between women and men in our communities.

The prevention and elimination of all forms of Violence Against Women and Girls requires, as a starting point, a shared understanding of the nature and causes of such violence.

The West Lothian Gender Based Violence Committee has agreed that the term violence against women should be defined as including:

- Physical, sexual and psychological abuse occurring in the family (including children and young people), within the general community or in institutions;
- 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;
- Female genital mutilation (FGM);
- Forced and child marriages;
- So-called 'honour'-based violence (HBV), including dowry related violence, female genital mutilation, forced and child marriages and 'honour' crimes.

West Lothian Violence Against Women and Girls Sub-Committee

The West Lothian Violence Against Women and Girls Sub-Committee brings together a range of statutory and voluntary agencies with the aim of improving agency responses to women, children and young people who have experienced gender-based violence.

Tackling violence against women and girls is a key priority for West Lothian Council and the partner agencies it works with, to ensure that women and girls in West Lothian are equally safe at home, at work and in the community.

The West Lothian Violence Against Women and Girls Sub-Committee leads the delivery of this strategy and is fully committed to working collaboratively with key partners in the public, private and third sectors to prevent and eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls.

Partners in West Lothian support the following Scottish Government definition of gender-based violence:

"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."

Our Mission

In West Lothian we will work in partnership with agencies, individuals and communities to reduce gender inequality, develop services which protect women and children through meaningful participation and strive for the prevention of gender-based violence through challenging those who perpetrate abuse.

Our aim is to adopt a 'whole systems approach' to tackling gender-based violence. This will be a '4 tier' approach incorporating:

PREVENTION

We will promote Prevention of significant harm by educating our children and young people, equipping our staff to identify and respond to GBV and working with our communities to have an increased understanding of GBV and ability to challenge inequality.

PROTECTION

We will provide Protection to all women and children experiencing GBV through a safety informed approach and a robust multi-agency response to safeguard our most high risk victims of GBV while targeting our serious and serial perpetrators of abuse.

PARTNERSHIP

We will work in Partnership to provide a range of high quality responsive services to meet the diverse needs of women and children identified as experiencing GBV and will hold perpetrators of GBV accountable for their behaviour.

PARTICIPATION

We will develop meaningful Participation with women and children with lived experience of gender-based violence through hearing their voices and encouraging involvement in Partnership activity and the shaping of services.

Our Principles

This strategy is underpinned by a recognition and commitment to partnership working and a shared understanding and approach to tackling violence against women and girls in West Lothian. We believe that no single agency can address violence against women and girls in isolation and by working together more effectively, we can ensure that where violence and abuse does occur, women and children are provided with the right support at the right time.

Violence against women and girls cuts across all sections of society but not all women and girls are at equal risk. There are factors that increase vulnerability to abuse such as age, poverty, ethnicity, mental health and substance misuse, disability and homelessness. It is therefore vital that partner agencies understand the impact of gender-based violence in their area.

In West Lothian we want all of our citizens to enjoy healthy and respectful relationships and for our women and children to be safe from harm. We also

want to work with men and boys to support them in changing behaviours and encouraging a shift in societal progression in equality. The 'causal story' of violence against women and girls is not simple, but lies in individual relationships, community and societal attitudes. Our preventative work with young people on relationships, sexual health and parenting is critical in shifting these attitudes for both girls and boys.

Our strategic direction for the duration of this strategy will ensure that we continue to provide high quality services which meet the needs of our survivors and perpetrators and that we improve the knowledge, skills and behaviour of our staff and community to enable them to help us address the causes and consequences of gender-based violence. Only by working together, across all sectors and with our own communities will we successfully prevent and eradicate gender-based violence in West Lothian.



In West Lothian we want **all of our citizens** to enjoy healthy and respectful relationships and for our women and children **to be safe from harm.**

Developing the Plan

This Strategy has been developed through a robust multi-agency partnership approach and provides a framework to help us achieve our aim of West Lothian being an equally safe place where gender-based violence is not tolerated and where survivors, perpetrators and communities are supported to address its causes and consequences.

In preparing the West Lothian Gender Based Violence Strategy 2021-24 the Gender Based Violence Committee has consulted widely across the Community Planning Partnership, Public Protection Committee, partner agencies, service user consultation groups and other stakeholders to review the

strategy and to determine the actions to alleviate violence against women and children in West Lothian over the next three years. The key objectives of the strategy are aligned to the four strategic priorities of Equally Safe, the West Lothian Local Outcome Improvement Plan, recognise the learning of responding to COVID-19 and takes account of local need. A high-level overview of our objectives is outlined below, more detailed information on the outcomes that we aim to achieve and the actions that we will take is provided from page 12 of this strategy and Appendix 1 details areas for development.

National Priority 1 - Scottish society embraces equality and mutual respect, and rejects all forms of violence against women and girls.

West Lothian Objectives:

- Positive gender roles are promoted.
- People enjoy healthy, positive relationships.
- Children and young people develop an understanding of safe, healthy and positive relationships from an early age.
- Individuals and communities recognise and challenge violent and abusive behaviour.

National Priority 2 - Women and girls thrive as equal citizens: socially, culturally, economically and politically.

West Lothian Objectives:

- Women and girls are safe, respected and equal in our communities.
- Women and men have equal access to power and resources.

National Priority 3 - Interventions are early and effective, preventing violence and maximising the safety and wellbeing of women, children and young people.

West Lothian Objectives

- Justice responses are robust, swift, consistent, person-centred and co-ordinated.
- Women, children and young people access relevant, effective and integrated services.
- Service providers competently identify violence against women and girls, and respond effectively to women, children and young people affected.

National Priority 4 - Men desist from all forms of violence against women and girls and perpetrators of such violence receive a robust and effective response.

West Lothian Objectives

- Justice responses are robust, swift, consistent and co-ordinated.
- Men who carry out violence against women and girls are identified early, risk assessed and held to account by the criminal and civil justice system.
- Relevant links are made between the experience of women, children and young people in the criminal and civil system.

As with any partnership, the speed of progress and ongoing development is dependent on external factors as well as the ability of partners to respond to meet the challenges and this inevitably requires a degree of flexibility to reflect this. Given that this strategy has been written while we are still amidst a global pandemic that has had such a devastating impact on the Violence Against Women and Girls agenda, we will strive to achieve the agreed outcomes as well meeting any new challenges which arise.

The Partnership will produce an initial action plan which will be reviewed to ensure that we are continuing to meet our overarching objectives as well as specific actions and to make any necessary adaptations as required.

National Strategic Context

Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018

The new Domestic Abuse Act was implemented in April 2019 and made all domestic abuse towards a partner, whether psychological or physical, a criminal offence.

Those who suffer from domestic abuse may never experience physical violence at the hands of their partner. Instead, they are subjected to coercive control, degrading treatment or a loss of liberty on a daily basis which can be equally as damaging on partners, children and families as physical abuse.

The legislative provision recognised the research and evidence indicating the serious impact that domestic abuse can have on children if they are exposed to domestic abuse and this must be considered during sentencing. These changes drastically improved the law on domestic abuse by bringing the legal framework in line with the reality of what many victims face. The Act was designed to provide a gold standard of protections for victims in Scotland.

There were 1,681 new crimes recorded under the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 in 2019-20, the first year this legislation has been in place. Of those new crimes 94% involved a female victim and 6% had a male victim.

Equally Safe: Scotland's strategy to eradicate violence against women

In 2014 the Scottish Government published Equally Safe: Scotland's strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls. In 2016 the national strategy was updated and a framework providing guidance for implementation was included. Equally Safe provides a strategic direction to tackle all forms of violent

and abusive behaviour carried out predominantly by men directed at women and girls precisely because of their gender.

Aim of Equally Safe

The aim of Equally Safe is to work collaboratively with key partners in the public, private and third sectors to prevent and eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls.

Equally Safe Strategic Priorities

Equally Safe identifies four strategic priorities which local Gender Based Violence Partnerships are expected to work towards. These are:

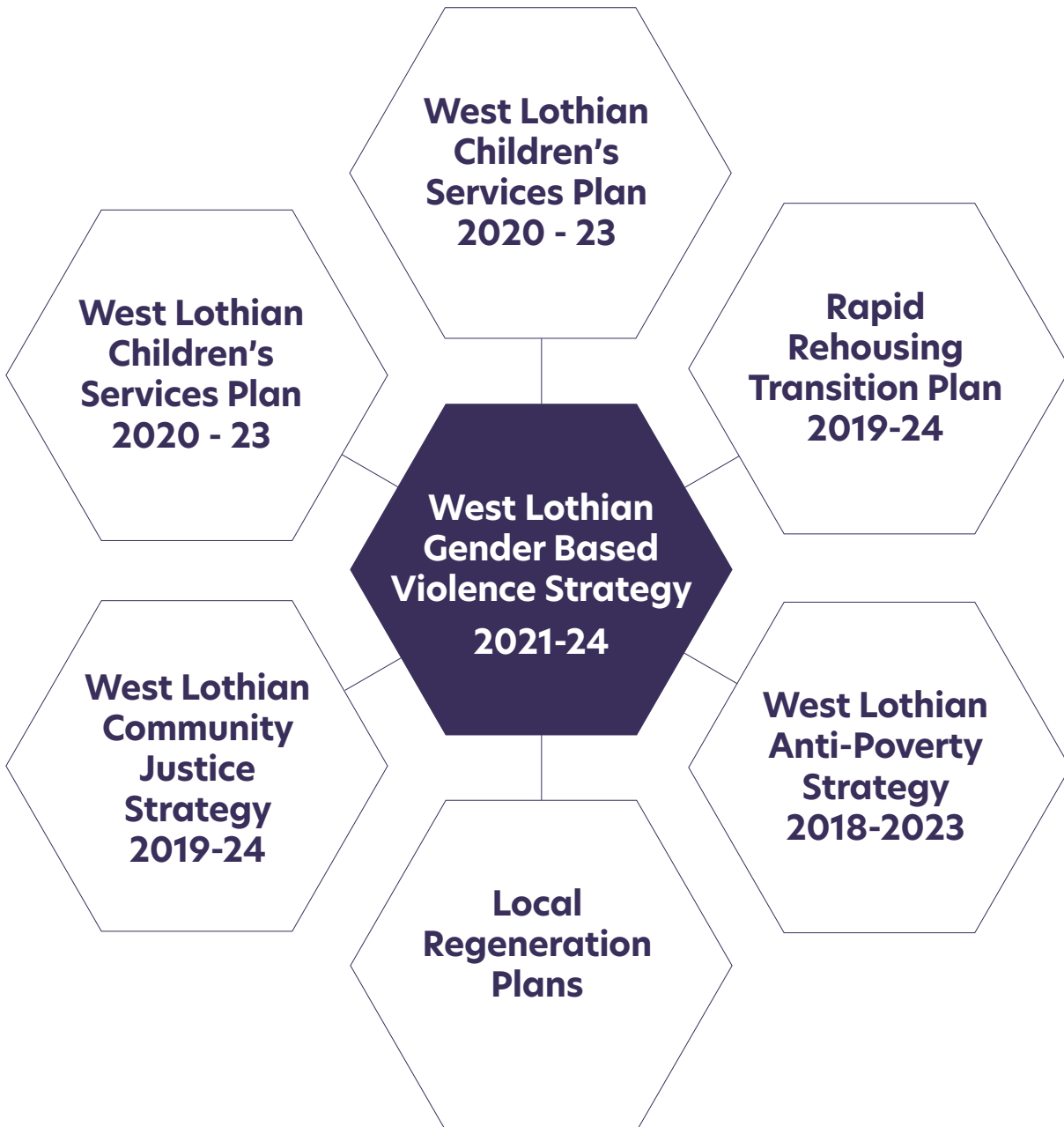
- Scottish society embraces equality and mutual respect, and rejects all forms of violence against women and girls.
- Women and girls thrive as equal citizen; socially, culturally, economically and politically.
- Interventions are early and effective, preventing violence and maximising the safety and wellbeing of women, children and young people.
- Men desist from all forms of violence against women and girls, and perpetrators of such violence receive a robust and effective response.

The objectives of the West Lothian Gender Based Violence Strategy 2021-24 are aligned with the Equally Safe strategic priorities.

Local Strategic Context

The West Lothian Gender-Based Violence Strategy does not exist in isolation, in order to achieve the partnership's vision for women and girls in West Lothian who have experienced gender-based violence it is essential that a whole system approach is taken to the planning and development of services.

Gender based violence is a cross cutting theme, with the impact and consequences felt across the public, private and voluntary sectors. It is therefore intended that this strategy aligns with existing plans and strategies across the West Lothian, as detailed below:



Key Statistics

West Lothian Demographics

The estimated population of West Lothian is 183,100 (Statistics.gov.uk) and it is predicted to increase throughout the period to 2028 with the population rising to 192, 812. This is an increase of 5.9% which compares to a projected increase of 1.8% for Scotland as a whole.

The female demographic in West Lothian as recorded in the Mid-2019 Population Estimates (NRS) was 50.9% with a child population of 35,494.

Domestic Abuse National Statistics







- One in three women aged 16-59 experiencing domestic abuse in their lifetime and two women in Britain per week being killed by their partner or ex-partner (Office for National statistics 2019).

- In 2019-2020 there were 62,907 incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the police in Scotland, an increase of 3% from 2018-19.
- In 2019-20, 40% of incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the police in Scotland included the recording of at least one crime or offence.
- Where gender information was recorded, 4 out of every 5 incidents (82%) of domestic abuse in 2019-20 had a female victim and a male accused. This proportion has remained relatively stable since 2011-12.

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|  <p>In 2020-21 in West Lothian there were 2,693 incidents of domestic abuse recorded, an increase of 18% when compared to the previous year.</p> |  <p>Of the incidents recorded 41% of which resulted in a crime or offence (compared with 48% the previous year).</p> |  <p>West Lothian had a higher rate of incident of domestic abuse recorded by Police Scotland per 10,000 head of population (126 compared with 115 nationally). At a Local Authority level this places West Lothian as having the joint 9th highest rate of recorded domestic abuse.</p> |
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Sexual Violence

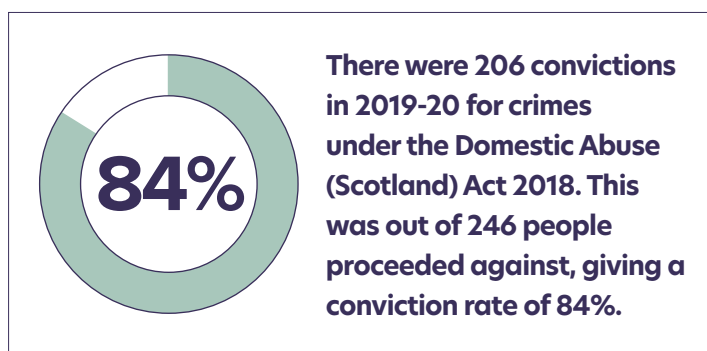
Sexual violence is a profoundly negative and traumatic life event with widespread psychological and sociological effects on survivors.

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| <h3>Change over time</h3> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>1%</p>  <p>Since 2018-19</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>100%</p>  <p>Since 2010-11</p> </div> </div> | <h3>What makes up sexual crimes</h3> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="margin-right: 20px;"> <p> Other sexual crimes (45%)</p> <p> Crimes associated with prostitution (1%)</p> </div> <div style="flex-grow: 1;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Other sexual crimes account for over two-fifths of Sexual Crimes</p> </div> <div style="margin-left: 20px;"> <p> Rape & attempted rape (18%)</p> <p> Sexual assault (37%)</p> </div> </div> |
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Sexual Violence National and International Statistics

- Global prevalence figures indicate that 1 in 3 women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. (WHO Factsheet on Violence Against Women 2016).
- 1 in 10 women in Scotland has experienced rape and 1 in 5 women in Scotland has had someone try to make them have sex against their will (Natsal-3 key findings from Scotland).
- There were 13,364 sexual offences in Scotland in 2019-20, more than double the amount recorded 10 years earlier.
- Since 2008-09 sexual offences have increased in almost every reporting year in Scotland with the peak occurring in 2018-19 at 13,547.
- At least 40% of the 13,364 sexual crimes recorded in 2019-20 related to a victim under the age of 18.
- Sexual assault accounted for 37% of sexual crimes in 2019-20.
- Rape and attempted rape accounted for 18% of sexual crimes.
- At just 1% crimes associated with prostitution continues to represent a very small proportion of the total. This year's figure is the lowest over the last 10 years.
- In 2019-20 45% of sexual offences included taking, possessing and distributing indecent photos of children, sexual exposure, public indecency and causing to view sexual images or activity.

Sexual Violence West Lothian Statistics



**Research shows that the majority of these crimes go unreported so figures are likely to be significantly higher, similar to domestic abuse statistics.*

Domestic Abuse and Children

Domestic abuse has a devastating impact on children and young people that can last into adulthood. Children can experience both short and long term cognitive, behavioural and emotional effects as a result of witnessing domestic abuse. Domestic abuse is the one of the most cited reasons for child protection case conferences in Scotland, but domestic abuse still remains drastically under-reported.




Child Contact in the Context of Domestic Abuse

For many women, ending the relationship with an abuser does not equate to safety for herself or her children. Child contact within the context of domestic abuse can be an ongoing and traumatic ordeal for some women and children. Contact can be used as a means of perpetuating coercive control on women and can have a devastating impact on children. Between January 2005 and August 2015 19 children and two women were killed by perpetrators of domestic abuse in circumstances relating to child contact either formally or informally arranged (Women's Aid, 2016).

Children and young people who experience domestic abuse and have contact are the experts in this subject. It is their right under Article 12 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) to have their views considered when making decisions about their lives.

West Lothian Council identified this as an area of concern, a gap in service and as such looked to remedy this by creating a post specifically to amplify the voice of the child - Children's Rights Officer for court ordered contact (CCCRO). The CCCRO works alongside the Scottish Courts service and partners to ensure that children understand the processes they are involved in and have the optimum opportunity to have their views conveyed and amplified to the Sheriff. Currently this is the only post in existence in Scotland and it is anticipated that it will develop and adjust to the forthcoming changes in Scottish legalisation.



Since its inception in June 2018 the **CCCRO service has received 215 referrals** for children as young as 4 to provide advice and support to provide their views to the Sheriff. Progress has notably increased with the continued use of interlocutor from the court and also re-referrals which highlights the integrity and credibility of the service. **The feedback from children and young people inform the development of the service.**

West Lothian's Strategic Objectives

National Priority 1

Scottish society embraces equality and mutual respect, and rejects all forms of violence against women and girls.



West Lothian Objectives

- Positive gender roles are promoted.
- People enjoy healthy, positive relationships.
- Children and young people develop an understanding of safe, healthy and positive relationships from an early age.
- Individuals and communities recognise and challenge violent and abusive behaviour.

The Scottish Government's first priority highlights the importance of community attitudes and how these can influence the perpetration of and response to gender-based violence. They specify that addressing gender stereotypes plays a vital role in changing attitudes towards gender and they identify the criminal justice system, the media, the education system and leadership across the public, private and third sectors as key players in regards to this priority.

What outcomes do we want in West Lothian?

- People who live and work in West Lothian have an increased understanding of all forms of GBV and have the confidence and skills to recognise and challenge behaviours
- 1.2 All children and young people in West Lothian develop an understanding of safe, healthy and positive relationships from an early age
- 1.3 To positively influence and have greater understanding of community attitudes in relation to GBV

What will the partnership do to achieve outcomes?

- Working with media colleagues to challenge attitudes and norms that contribute to violence against women and girls.
- All education settings to foster an ethos where gender equality is a priority and gender stereotypes are challenged.
- Early years and primary school settings to utilise Education Scotland gender equality guidance when planning play and learning activities for children.
- Secondary school settings to offer young people opportunities to engage in learning and discussion around key issues related to GBV.
- Secondary school settings to offer senior pupils opportunities to participate as mentors in the Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) programme.

- Ensuring community engagement is meaningful and inclusive, that communities have increased opportunity to be involved in addressing GBV.
- Providing support for 'Experts by Experiences' to have their voices heard and be actively involved in influencing the co-ordinated community response.
- Implementing Police Scotland's 'Domestic Abuse Prevention Plan' with the purpose of engaging with key members of the community to raise the profile of DA prevention
- Developing links with the White ribbon Programme to encourage non-offending men to challenge gender-based values and norms.

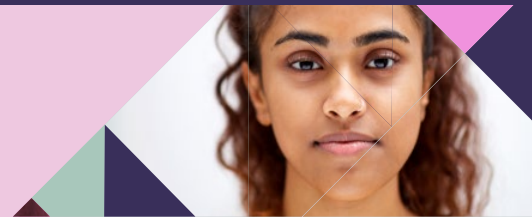
How we will know we have achieved them?

- Ongoing social media events and campaigns are taking place which challenge community attitudes towards GBV
- Societal attitudes to GBV are improved among West Lothian residents with increased confidence and willingness to share.
- Regular community awareness raising/training sessions are delivered alongside partner services.
- Ongoing meaningful participation of 'Experts by Experience' in developing and improving services
- J Division's Domestic Abuse Prevention Plan fully implemented and impact being measured appropriately.
- Participation in the White Ribbon programme leading to greater ownership and engagement from non-offending men.
- Monitoring and evaluation of societal attitudes to GBV amongst West Lothian residents, and their confidence and willingness to challenge and report it using customer surveys.
- Education staff are receiving refresher training on key issues related to GBV.
- Early years and primary-age children are engaging in play and learning activities which challenge gender stereotypes, promote healthy relationships and address unconscious bias.
- Secondary-age children are learning about relationships, sexual health and parenthood through formal RSHP lesson.
- Secondary school MVP mentors are delivering MVP lessons and providing support and advice to younger pupils.

West Lothian's Strategic Objectives

National Priority 2

Women and girls thrive as equal citizens: socially, culturally, economically and politically.



West Lothian Objectives

- Women and girls are safe, respected and equal in our communities.
- Women and men have equal access to power and resources.

In their second priority, the Scottish Government underscores the relevance of achieving gender equality across all aspects of society with the ultimate goal of eradicating gender-based violence. They want Scottish women to have the same opportunities in life as men and they see tackling the levels of women living in poverty as a crucial element of this. Furthermore, they want to improve women's safety in public spaces, thereby allowing them to live and work without fear.

What outcomes do we want in West Lothian?

- Prevent and address gender inequality across West Lothian as both cause and consequence of GBV.
- Fewer people adhere to gender stereotypes in West Lothian which provides the mechanism for GBV to exist.
- Workplace cultures of all partner services ensure that GBV is prevented and robustly challenged where it does arise.
- Promote equal distribution of power and resources for women and girls living in West Lothian.
- Increase access to opportunities for all women and girls living in West Lothian.

What will the partnership do to achieve outcomes?

- Working with partners in Corporate Equality groups to ensure that Integrated Impact Assessments are conducted on all activities that could disproportionately affect women generally but more specifically victims of GBV.
- Supporting efforts to tackling poverty in relation to GBV in collaboration with partners.
- Addressing the need for an effective response to marginalised women including those who are from Black and Ethnic Minority Groups LGBTI communities, travelling communities and those with no immigration status or recourse to public funds.

- Responding to the increased demand for specialist services for women with complex needs such as substance misuse and mental health issues who also experience GBV.
- Working in collaboration with partners to ensure that disabled women and girls who are at higher risk of experiencing GBV have the opportunity to access support available.
- Working with all partners in the public and private sectors to develop robust GBV workplace policies.
- Ensuring accessibility of services for women and children experiencing GBV through considering the rural challenges of West Lothian in service planning and delivery.

How we will know we have achieved them?

- The gender pay gap for West Lothian Council and West Lothian Residents will decrease promoting greater equality between men and women.
- The percentage of Elected Members will be an equal male to female ratio ensuring gender equality, appropriate influence and representation of local issues by women.
- Partner Organisations will regularly carry out Integrated Impact Assessments to influence their decisions, activities and resource allocations ensuring they are inclusive to women and girls.
- Women experiencing GBV with no immigration status and NRTPF will have access to the required support and service provision to ensure their safety and to aid recovery.
- Women with complex needs that intersect with GBV will receive appropriate specialist support
- There will be an increase in referrals for disabled women and children to specialist GBV services
- Partner organisations have developed robust GBV policies enabling them to prevent, address and respond appropriately to women and children experiencing GBV
- Women and children who are geographically isolated will be supported in accessing specialist GBV services

West Lothian's Strategic Objectives

National Priority 3

Interventions are early and effective, preventing violence and maximising the safety and wellbeing of women, children and young people.



West Lothian Objectives

- Justice responses are robust, swift, consistent, person-centred and co-ordinated.
- Women, children and young people access relevant, effective and integrated services.
- Service providers competently identify violence against women and girls, and respond effectively to women, children and young people affected.

The Scottish Government's third priority focuses on the quality and range of GBV services provided by public, specialist and third sector partners. It calls for services to identify those at risk and provide an appropriate, safe and consistent response. It highlights the diverse range of needs amongst those who have experienced GBV and requires a similarly diverse response from services. It stresses the importance of a multi-agency approach within an integrated system and improved information sharing between services as being crucial. Early identification and intervention are viewed as essential elements of the response to GBV.

What outcomes do we want in West Lothian?

- Partners in West Lothian have a shared understanding of GBV and are capable of delivering high quality responsive services to women and children experiencing GBV.
- Women and children experiencing GBV have their individual safety and wellbeing needs met through accessing the right services at the right time.
- Partners in West Lothian work together to deliver effective early intervention and support frameworks to ensure women and children experiencing GBV are supported quickly, effectively and with compassion.

What will the partnership do to achieve outcomes?

Support workforce development to enable front-line staff to be more confident/competent in responding safely and effectively to all forms of GBV.

- Develop a common, shared understanding of risk assessment and safety planning in relation to domestic abuse in line with Scottish Government expectations.
- Provide swift, safe and appropriate support to a diverse range of women, children and young people who experience GBV.

- Review the use of refuge accommodation in West Lothian to ensure that women and children's housing needs are met.
- Adopt a trauma informed approach to tackling violence against women and girls.
- Provide a protective multi-agency framework for women who are assessed as being most at risk (MARAC).
- Ensure a robust response to women who experience FGM/ Forced marriage/Trafficking
- Fully embed the routine enquiry model across all key areas of HSCP.

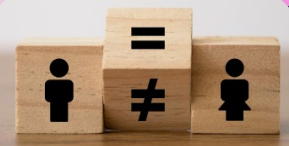
How we will know we have achieved them?

- Staff within partner services receive robust training enabling them to be more confident and competent in responding safely and effectively to all forms of gender-based violence.
- Domestic Abuse training features the critical components and understanding of the Safe and Together model and is evident across partner services in their response to domestic abuse.
- A streamlined approach to domestic abuse is identified in children's plans for Looked After reviews, Independent Education Plans, Child Protection Plans and Child's plans.
- Women and children are regularly asked how they feel about services received and their views are used to further shape and develop provision.
- The impact of services provided are reviewed and evaluated to determine if women and girls are receiving the appropriate services which are adapting to the changing needs of our population.
- Waiting times for specialist services in West Lothian are monitored and reviewed and swift action is taken to prevent any delays in provision.
- Women and children who have experienced GBV in West Lothian are able to access safe and appropriate housing that fully meets individual needs.
- MARAC is effectively coordinated and data is collated on numbers, demographics, waiting times and patterns in referrals to identify gaps, needs and trends.
- A diverse range of health services in West Lothian actively use routine enquiry including G. Ps, mental health services, A&E, sexual health services.
- Women and children who are 'experts in experience' have regular opportunities to be actively involved in partnership activities and influence the co-ordinated community response.

West Lothian's Strategic Objectives

National Priority 4

Men desist from all forms of violence against women and girls and perpetrators of such violence receive a robust and effective response.



West Lothian Objectives

- Justice responses are robust, swift, consistent and coordinated.
- Men who carry out violence against women and girls are identified early, risk assessed and held to account by the criminal and civil justice system.
- Relevant links are made between the experience of women, children and young people in the criminal and civil system.

In their fourth and final priority, the Scottish Government emphasise that perpetrators must expect a proportionate, swift and effective response to their offending behaviour. They stress the importance of prosecution for survivors and the need for those affected to feel supported by the justice system. However, they also make clear that prosecution alone is not enough and that where appropriate perpetrators should be supported to change their behaviour.

What outcomes do we want in West Lothian?

- Improve outcomes for women and children experiencing GBV perpetrated by individuals who are in the criminal justice system
- Robust, swift and coordinated justice responses to those who perpetrate GBV
- Perpetrators of GBV to be held accountable and change their offending behaviour through offence focused work
- The rights of women and children experiencing GBV are upheld and that their voices are heard within the criminal justice system through partnership work
- Increased conviction rates against those who are charged with GBV offences through partnership work

What will the partnership do to achieve outcomes?

- Engage with partners in the court system to improve the court outcomes for survivors of gender-based violence.
- Support the human rights of children experiencing domestic abuse within the context of court ordered contact by ensuring their voices are heard through the CCCRO role.
- Work alongside partners in the court system to ensure information is shared with courts in relation to risk of further harm and/or the victim impact (Court Advocacy).

- Work alongside partners in The Criminal and Youth Justice Service operating a structured programme for perpetrators convicted of domestic abuse offences.
- Review the community management of perpetrators who pose a high or very high risk of serious harm via Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA).
- Provide a protective multi agency framework to ensure that high risk perpetrators are identified and monitored within West Lothian (MATAC).
- Promote the Domestic Abuse Disclosure Scheme giving the public the 'right to ask' and partner agencies the 'power to tell' individuals that they may be at risk within interpersonal relationships.

How we will know we have achieved them?

- The rate of Domestic Abuse and Sexual Crimes per 10,000 population in the West Lothian Council area will be reduced.
- The rate of convictions for Domestic Abuse and Sexual Crimes in West Lothian will increase.
- Court waiting times for survivors of GBV are reduced and women and children report that they feel better supported by the justice system.
- Partnership agencies have the opportunity to work together to review cases and court outcomes to identify areas for improvement (Domestic Abuse Court Mtg).
- Courts recognise and uphold the rights of all children by requesting that their views and wishes for contact are heard within the court system by referring to the CCCRO.
- The number of women who engage with Court Advocacy services will increase resulting in robust risk assessments being shared with court services.
- The number of perpetrators who have a programme requirement and have completed the UP2U perpetrator programme will be monitored.
- Effectiveness of UP2U will be monitored via the number of people who have been completed the programme and re-offended post completion (after 2 years).
- The number of high-risk offenders discussed at MATAC will be monitored.
- The use of Police Scotland DSDAS applications by the public and professionals will increase.

The Impact of COVID-19

During the Covid-19 pandemic all protecting people committees and partnerships developed a Covid-19 Strategic Risk Register and work is now underway to develop this into a broader integrated strategic risk register to support business as usual activity across the protecting people structure.

This integrated risk register will ensure that we are focused on the key risks relating to violence against women in West Lothian and will form the basis for our Gender Based Violence Committee meeting agendas as well as our reporting into the Chief Officers Group.

Key risks identified as we move into the recovery phases of the pandemic and integrated into the strategic plan are:

- Leadership for coordination of Violence Against Women and Girls core duties and MARAC
- Representation at the Violence Against Women and Girls Sub-Committee
- Demand/Funding for specialist services
- Court delays/backlog

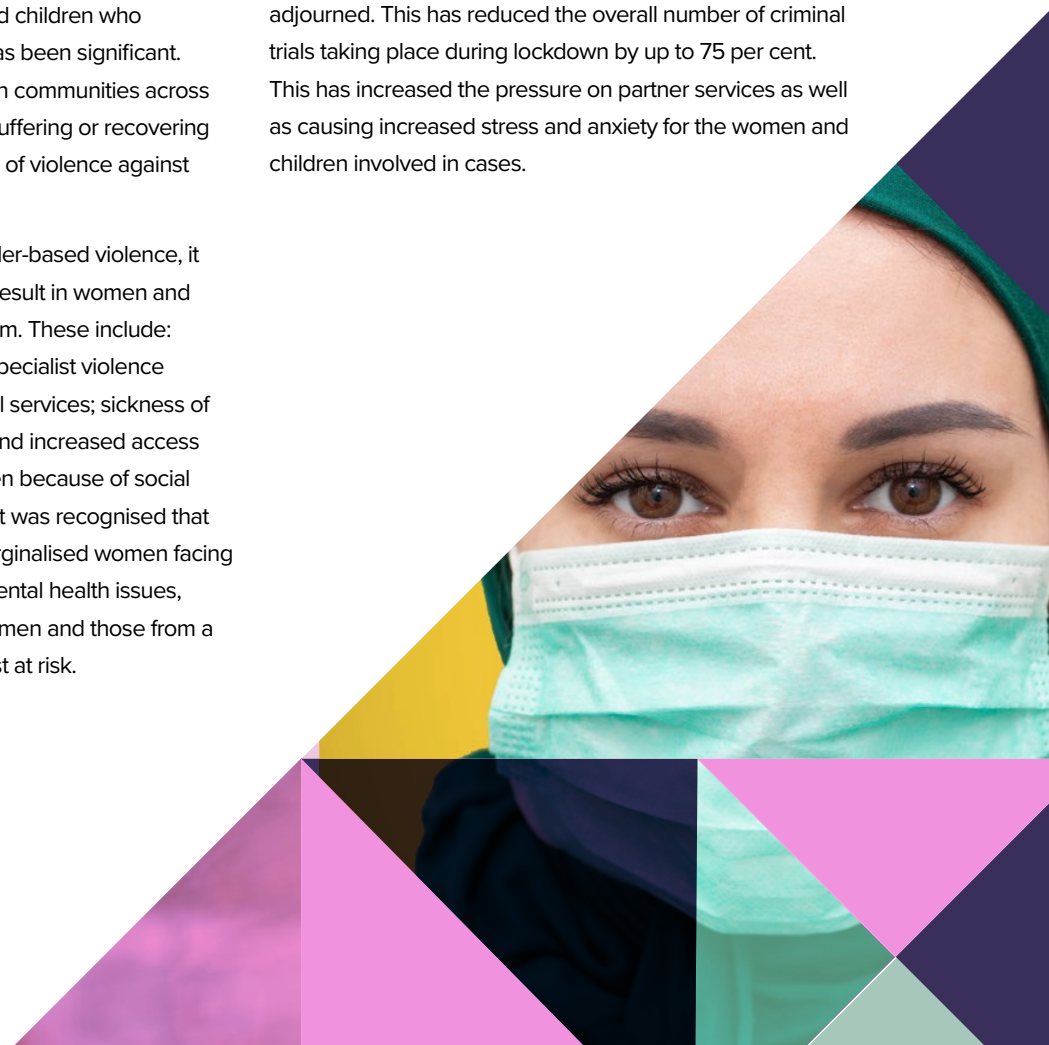
The impact of Covid-19 on women and children who experience gender-based violence has been significant. The social restrictions on movement in communities across Scotland created new risks to those suffering or recovering from domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women and girls.

While COVID-19 does not cause gender-based violence, it has created a number of factors that result in women and children being at increased risk of harm. These include: reduced capacity and reach of both specialist violence against women services and universal services; sickness of frontline specialist service providers and increased access by perpetrators to children and women because of social distancing and lockdown measures. It was recognised that all women were at increased risk; marginalised women facing additional barriers such as poverty, mental health issues, substance misuse, disability, older women and those from a minority ethnic background were most at risk.

In West Lothian we have strived to ensure that we were able to maintain front line services across the partnership and that crucial supports remained available to those in need throughout the duration of the pandemic. Specialist violence against women and girls services generally saw an initial lull in referrals followed by a sharp increase in demand for support as the effects of the lockdown continued. We have seen a continual rise in the numbers of referrals across the partnership and this has included more high risk cases and women with diverse and complex needs requiring support.

The impact on the criminal justice system has been significant with major delays and backlogs in criminal and civil cases being heard. The criminal courts have continued to focus on the most serious trials and the majority of summary trials in the Sheriff Court and Justice of the Peace Court have been adjourned. This has reduced the overall number of criminal trials taking place during lockdown by up to 75 per cent.

This has increased the pressure on partner services as well as causing increased stress and anxiety for the women and children involved in cases.



Children and Young People

The lockdown has had a huge impact upon schools in terms of safeguarding and child protection. School staff were no longer able to have 'eyes on' our most vulnerable children and young people every day and were reliant on communication online or via telephone. This presented obvious concerns that were mitigated to an extent due to the close working which took place between colleagues in Education and Social Policy. The most vulnerable pupils were jointly identified and processes were put in place for assessing risks and needs.

The lockdown has seen a rise in school children being exposed to incidents of domestic abuse. This is both due to a rise in the prevalence of domestic abuse during lockdown but also because children were witnessing incidents they may previously have missed as they would be at school during the day. Education Services has put in place a Wellbeing

Recovery Plan to help support pupils experiencing this and other wellbeing issues which have arisen out of the lockdown and schools all put their own version of this plan into action when pupils returned in August.

Schools have also utilised the multi-agency Wellbeing Recovery Screening Group (WRG) to seek support for pupils whose mental health and wellbeing has been impacted upon. Referrals to this group have effectively doubled since before the pandemic began. The number of children and young people diverted to specialist violence against women and girls services from the WRG has also increased significantly throughout the duration of the pandemic.

A more detailed overview of the impact of the pandemic on the delivery of services for woman and girls who experience gender-based violence is provided in Appendix 2.

“Communication has been great, and sessions promptly arranged, and seen fairly quickly. Even though COVID 19 restrictions in place, didn't feel the standard of the service affected”

“You continue to carry out such amazing work to those who need it and never so much as now. Even through this pandemic which can be a very hard and frightening time for many who need support and advice.”

“Sessions have been done by video call which is an alien format for me but my worker was friendly & personable. It is reassuring & comforting to have a service like this during the uncertain life path of the pandemic.”

“Quick turnaround from initial referral to seeing someone. Workers flexibility really helpful. Was anxious about telephone counselling but worker put me at ease.”

West Lothian Objectives

Covid-19 has both exposed and exacerbated existing inequalities within our communities, and presented new challenges that have required us to adapt services and alter practice at a rapid pace. The gendered nature of these inequalities is clear and there continues to be an urgent need to take steps to advance gender equality and act in ways that both prevent and respond to the violence and abuse that impacts so disproportionately on the lives of women, children and young people.

It is anticipated that there will be an increased need for a wide range of support and recovery services as the country returns

to normal following the pandemic, particularly as schools and other universal services begin to identify children and families who require support and as women and children are more able to safely seek support. We must ensure that we have robust services and capacity in place to support this increased demand.

Support planning through recovery, renewal and transformation will be crucial to ensure that women, children and young people's equality and human rights are promoted at a strategic level in order to support a longer-term shift towards preventing gender-based violence in Scotland.

Governance and Structure

In West Lothian we recognise that Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is a cross cutting issue relevant in all spheres of work. It is promoted and prioritised across the Community Planning Partnership and developed in many areas including Safer Communities and within Health and Social Care Integration.

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| <p>The West Lothian Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) sets out how the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) will deliver improved outcomes for its communities. The LOIP has identified 7 outcomes, 3 of which relate directly to the aims of this strategy:</p> | <p>Our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed</p> |
| | <p>We live in resilient, cohesive and safe communities</p> |
| | <p>People most at risk are protected and supported to achieve improved life chances</p> |

The governance arrangements for the planning and delivery of services for women and girls who experience gender-based violence falls within West Lothian's Public Protection arrangements as detailed below.



The Gender Based Violence Committee is responsible for advancing the objectives of this strategy. The Sub-Committee is chaired by a senior member of the partnership and has core membership from the following services and agencies;

- Police Scotland
- Criminal and Youth Justice Services
- NHS Lothian
- Housing
- Education Services
- West Lothian Women's Aid
- Domestic and Sexual Assault Team
- Wellbeing Scotland
- West Lothian College
- Equality and diversity corporate services

The committee meets on a quarterly basis and has developed an action plan and performance and scrutiny framework in order to promote and advance this strategy.

Performance and Scrutiny

In order to ensure this strategy is appropriately monitored and delivered effectively a performance framework has been devised that will enable the Gender Based Violence Committee to provide sufficient levels of scrutiny.

These performance indicators measure the progress and effectiveness of the agreed GBV outcomes. An action plan has also been developed which will be monitored and reported on to both the Public Protection Committee and the Chief Officers Group as well as more widely across the Community Planning Partnership.

The Equally Safe Quality Standards and Performance Framework

The Equally Safe Quality Standards and Performance Framework respond to the expectations set out in Equally Safe and in the Violence Against Women Partnership Guidance, in relation to effective performance management.

The Quality Standards aim to raise awareness of the types of services, policies and processes that are most effective in tackling GBV and capture data on the extent to which they are currently being delivered across Scotland. The Performance Framework aims to measure the impact that these services, policies and processes are having on the lives of people and communities affected by GBV. Collectively, the two resources aim to support VAWPs to capture key performance data and facilitate a consistent approach to measuring and reporting on the progress being made to achieve the ambitions set out in Equally Safe at a local level.

Areas for Development

As well as strengths, the VAWP have agreed areas for development with regards to West Lothian's overall response to gender based violence. The areas which have been identified will be prioritised over the next 3 years and included in annual action plans:

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| <p>We want to undertake a comprehensive strategic needs assessment alongside practitioners, policy makers and those with lived experiences to assess how well systems and services are currently meeting the needs of women and children experiencing GBV. This will further inform the strategic direction over the next 3-5 years, highlight any gaps in current provision as well as practice and processes.</p> |
| <p>We want to have strong and effective leadership within the Gender Based Violence Committee and this will require a dedicated Lead Officer to oversee the implementation and development of the gender based violence strategy and subsequent actions as well as coordinating core activities. Lead Officer</p> |
| <p>We want to secure a sustainable approach for the funding of GBV specialist services to meet the demand of increased referrals during the pandemic and the anticipated rise during the recovery period. We must ensure we have the capacity to meet the demand of increased high risk cases and women with complex needs.</p> |
| <p>We want to have a more robust multi agency protective framework for women who are identified as being at most risk and this will require a dedicated MARAC coordinator to strengthen this process. This will ensure that women are safeguarded, perpetrators are identified and that partners are supported to improve and maintain safety and reduce repeat victimisation.</p> |
| <p>We want to strengthen collaborative working with other local strategic partnerships/ policy agendas working to shared outcomes. This can be achieved through improving communication and collaboration with services like the Alcohol and Drug Partnership and mental health services where there is a clear intersection between substance use/mental health and violence against women.</p> |
| <p>We want to have the Safe and Together model embedded across the partnership to ensure a streamlined approach to protecting children, supporting the non-offending parent and holding perpetrators of abuse accountable. This will require developing a remote domestic abuse training programme which includes an overview of the Safe and Together principles with follow up support.</p> |
| <p>We want to establish that women are being regularly asked about their experiences of gender-based violence through improving links with Health and Social Care partners to ensure that the Routine Enquiry is regularly undertaken within all priority settings of maternity, mental health, substance misuse, A& E, community nursing and sexual health services. This can be achieved through more robust engagement with senior HSCP partners.</p> |
| <p>We want to ensure we have a robust policy in place for women and children with no immigration status and who have No Recourse to Public Funds. There has been an increase in the number of women presenting with these challenges in West Lothian who will require a swift, appropriate and consistent response from partner services.</p> |
| <p>We want to have meaningful participation, engagement and co-production in identifying and delivering solutions from those with lived experience of gender-based violence to ensure women's and children's voices are being heard. We can do this through encouraging active involvement of women and children in appropriate Partnership activity, including within specific working groups of the Partnership.</p> |
| <p>We want to engage with the men and boys in West Lothian to encourage them to individually and collectively take a stand against gender-based violence. We can do this through working alongside the White Ribbon Programme which supports men and boys in calling out abusive and sexist behaviour among their friends, colleagues and communities to promote a culture of equality and respect.</p> |
| <p>We want to gather data on the views and attitudes towards gender-based violence within West Lothian. In order to measure a baseline and any subsequent change in local societal attitudes we must firstly increase opportunities to engage with and gather the views of the community. This can be achieved through quantitative public surveys as well as smaller more qualitative focus groups.</p> |
| <p>We want to improve the knowledge, skills and response of the wider community around gender-based violence through awareness raising and community engagement. In order to do this, we must increase opportunities to meaningfully engage with the public on a continual basis and not only when specific campaigns are taking place. This can be achieved through working alongside media partners and community action groups to ensure that GBV is a constant theme.</p> |
| <p>We want to ensure that we are supporting the needs of the LGBT community in relation to their experiences of gender-based violence. This can be done in partnership with LGBT youth who can provide specific training to partners as well as the opportunity to sign up to the LGBT charter.</p> |

Appendix 2

Specialist Provisions in West Lothian

Covid-19 has undoubtedly placed additional stresses on women and children experiencing domestic abuse in West Lothian. Women still living with their abuser have required a range of responsive methods of reaching out for help and support in a way that has been safe for them (using social media, email, and advice sessions out with traditional hours). Services have had to adapt to the new circumstances by being innovative with the support provided which included moving to online platforms, phone support, socially distance walks and for high risk clients we were able to continue to offer carefully assessed home/school visits.

Employment opportunities have been impacted with job losses and those on zero-hour contracts facing difficulties in continuing to work whilst managing the challenges of being in lockdown and providing childcare/home-schooling and additional living costs in increased clothing, daily provisions and increased costs in heating the home and providing for children 24/7. Women have also struggled to engage in face-to-face support options due to children now being at home.

Services have ensured that practical aid and additional funds have been made available for all families via vouchers for clothing, food, top up cards for phones, assistance in transport, additional support with utilities and food parcels, and more specialist items such as CCTV for women who feel they are at ongoing risk and access to technology to ensure that remote support can be maintained.

Domestic and Sexual Assault Team (DASAT)

West Lothian's Domestic and Sexual Assault Team (DASAT) offer a unique integrated public service, housed within local government, working in close partnership with key partners Police Scotland, Crown Office Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), Social Work, Housing and Education, NHS Lothian, West Lothian Women's Aid and other third sector partners. It is the only service in Scotland that integrates services for domestic abuse and sexual assault. DASAT is a responsive, evidence-based public service that intervenes early, reduces violence, increases resilience, and promotes recovery.

In 2020-21 DASAT supported a total of 1843 women and children compared to 1599 in 2019-20: 100 % of women and children asked, reported feeling safer as a result of intervention.

Covid-19 has impacted on the referrals to DASAT who saw a change in the demographic of their service users including women and children who have never previously accessed services and we have supported more older women than ever before. We have also seen an increase in the number of women who experience additional barriers such as substance misuse and mental health issues and women who require the support of translation services.

Over the last 3 quarter (9 months) there has been a 10.9 % increase in the duty domestic abuse referrals (including self-referrals) and a 19% increase in the referrals from police. The children's service has seen a 27% decrease in referrals which has likely been impacted on by the closures of schools and the perception that groupwork could not be undertaken (CEDAR). The domestic abuse courts in West Lothian have been profoundly impacted upon with trial dates being delayed for up to a year in some cases which has caused prolonged anxiety for women and children who are awaiting outcomes and in some cases are required to give evidence.

West Lothian Women's Aid (WLWA)

WLWA is the sole charitable organisation working within West Lothian to support women, young people and children experiencing domestic abuse. The charity offers an advice and information service, refuge support for women and children made homeless due to domestic abuse, a peer support group structure, a children and young person's service and resettlement support for women and children moving forward into their own tenancies/rehousing options. The charity also campaigns to raise awareness of women's rights to improve policy and practice.

WLWA experienced a notable increase due to Covid-19 with a 151% increase in service uptake and demand for support noted from the previous year (May 19-20). This increase has remained the pattern to date with a 115% service uptake increase over the last 12-months with a notable increase in referrals of high risk cases and women with complex needs. During Covid-19 WLWA were obliged to hold occupancy levels at 66% (leaving 3 units void) at their large communal house, to ensure all families had access to their own bathroom/ washing facility in reducing the likelihood of infection/cross contamination.

Appendix 2

During this time, they also extended support services to offer outreach support to women and children and young people not residing in refuge accommodation but who were still very much in need of support services. WLWA have also supported women through an online groupwork programme called the freedom project which has kept women connected during the pandemic.

Wellbeing Scotland

Wellbeing Scotland are a voluntary organisation with services across Scotland. They offer client centred, holistic, trauma informed therapeutic services and have specialism in abuse and trauma work.

During 2019/20 Wellbeing Scotland counselling service had 155 referrals and managed to bring their waiting list down from 6 months to 3 months due to the move to online work. This enabled them to move resources from other areas to West Lothian. 140 of the referrals received were women.

When Covid-19 hit Wellbeing Scotland raised funding to buy online equipment for the team in order to continue their counselling service. Many student counsellors contacted them as they had lost their placements so their skills were utilised. All services were moved online and the majority of clients were happy to have virtual support. The waiting list was significantly reduced and referrals increased. Service users reported that they were finding lockdown very difficult with some requiring additional support so Wellbeing Scotland developed befriending services for people who were struggling with isolation. Many of those befriending wanted to give back to the community during Covid-19 and they have offered a weekly virtual art group and other peer support groups.

MARAC

In West Lothian we know we have a high number of women who are at high risk and require the support and protection of a multiagency framework which ensures safety planning and highlights the behaviour of perpetrators of abuse. In 2019-20 we supported 134 women and 24 were re-referred due to level of risk.

During the pandemic we have seen an increase in the number of women referred to MARAC and referrals have included more marginalised women who experience issues such as substance misuse, mental health and those from minority

ethnic backgrounds. We have also seen an increase in repeat offenders who perpetrate domestic abuse against multiple women.

From April 20 –to January 21 we have had 130 referrals, so there will be an increase this financial year. During the previous quarter we had 8 referrals to translation services over a 3 month period and since January this year, we have had 7 already which highlights the demand for those who require support with interpretation.

Criminal and Youth Justice Service

We have now implemented the UP2U: Creating Healthy Relationships perpetrator programme in West Lothian. The programme is evidence based and has been developed in consultation with Victim Support Services, Mental Health, Children's Services, Substance Misuse Services and Health. The length of the programme can range from 6 to 40 sessions, with the option of extended sessions where risk and need indicate. The programme can be tailored to work with both males and females from the age of 16 and can be delivered to people who use domestically abusive behaviours in same sex relationships. To be eligible a person must accept that they use abusive or unhealthy behaviours in their relationship and want to change these behaviours.

The programme also includes modules relating to stalking which has the potential to fit in with the Stalking Assessment and Management (SAM) training completed by Social Workers in West Lothian Criminal and Youth Justice Service. Victim and children's safety is a priority and is required to be taken account of via weekly contact with partner support agencies to monitor risks and any threats to safety. The Partner Support Workers are now in situ and are based within DASAT.

During the pandemic work with individuals on orders and requiring the UP2U domestic abuse group and individual programme has been affected by the restriction levels with work starting then stopping due to the changing pandemic situation. Telephone contact has mainly been provided and workers have assessed and carried out behavioural change work and home visits as appropriate to individual circumstances.

During April and May 2020, court business was interrupted however since that time the court has been operating in a restricted capacity. Custody cases have continued to be dealt with throughout. Providing criminal justice social work reports remains a priority and sentencing has continued since June 2020. Orders have continued to be imposed although there is likely to be a reduction overall. We have continued to provide as comprehensive a service as possible during this time to help support individuals and keep communities and victims safe. We have used MAPPA to manage individuals convicted of a sexual or violent offence. As lockdown eases we will reintroduce direct contact individual work and groupwork.

Police Scotland

Domestic Abuse Task Force East proactively target the worst domestic abuse perpetrators who present the greatest risk of harm to victims and their families. Cases are presented at the Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination Conference (MATAC). At that forum J Division bid for specialist resources to support local investigations into the perpetrators who present the greatest risk of harm. Predominantly DATF cases involve investigations which have multiple victims or potential victims. They frequently include significant enquiry into non-recent offences, making proactive approaches to previous partners to build a strong case. Investigations are truly national, crossing divisional, and often Force boundaries.

West Lothian Domestic Abuse Investigation Unit (DAIU) proactively target the perpetrators of serious and complex domestic abuse cases on a local level. They also provide specialist support and guidance to Police colleagues regarding Domestic Abuse investigation. The DAIU offer early and effective support to victims and their families, signposting

and referring them to partner agencies. DAIU have a crucial role in the MATAC process and also the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) referring the most vulnerable victims and ensuring safety plans are in place.

The J Div Local Policing Plan for 2020 – 2023 sets out the priorities for the division in relation to domestic abuse and violence against women and girls as follows:

- Protect people considered vulnerable and prevent all forms of abuse, neglect and exploitation including domestic abuse, child sexual abuse and exploitation, rape and sexual crime, human trafficking and online abuse;
- Implement the Violence Against Women and Girls Prevention Model across the four local authority areas;
- Proactively identify and target offenders utilising an intelligence-led approach to prevent offending, including bail checks and execution of warrants relating to violent and domestic abuse offenders;
- Develop partnership approaches, including third party reporting systems, to engage and involve our vulnerable communities to ensure they have the confidence to report incidents of harm and abuse.

The Domestic Abuse Prevention Delivery Group operates to deliver the above priorities. There has been successful engagement with local employers and third sector organisations to deliver Domestic Abuse Training, which has been well received. Social Media campaigns will soon be backed up with community engagement events to ensure our message is delivered to “hard to reach” groups. The group will also deliver our preventative message to male dominated environments to give men the tools to challenge, report and prevent violence against women.

West Lothian Gender Based Violence Strategy

2021-2024.

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