

Equally Safe in Midlothian

**Midlothian's Strategy for Preventing and Eradicating Violence
Against Women and Girls
2023 to 2027**

*A Midlothian Community Planning
Partnership Approach
"Everyone has a role".*



Joint Foreword – Cllr Parry and Joan Tranent



Councillor Kelly Parry



Joan Tranent - Chief Social Work Officer

As the Leader of Midlothian Council and Chair of Community Planning Board I am honoured to launch this strategy. I am a resident and parent whose desire is also to ensure that our communities are safe places for everyone. This Equally Safe Strategy is a commitment from all partners to help bring this approach for preventing and eradicating all forms of violence against women and girls to the fore.

As Chief Social Work Officer for Midlothian, I too am a Midlothian resident and parent. From a personal and professional perspective, I am committed to the successful delivery of this strategy which will help to tackle gender inequality and violence against women and girls within our communities.

This strategy provides an important opportunity for Midlothian Council to formally adopt a strategic, crosspolicy, human-rights based approach to improving outcomes for some of the most vulnerable people and communities across the local authority area.

We feel it is important and essential to take an approach which involves both men and women, of all ages that is inclusive, and focused on making our communities safer. Often this work is seen to be the remit of community justice, Police or social work, however our vision is to embed this approach across the community planning partnership and through the Single Midlothian Plan where everyone is seen to have a role in preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls.



Midlothian’s Equally Safe Strategy sets out our vision, commitment and explains what Equally Safe means. Most importantly the strategy sets out the actions we will take as a partnership to achieve being Equally Safe in Midlothian.

**Cllr Kelly Parry Chair of Community Planning/Leader of Midlothian Council
and Joan Tranent Chief Social Work Officer**

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Introduction

Violence against women and girls is a major public health, equality, and human rights issue that has significant and adverse consequences over the life course.

This strategy outlines our commitment to implementing Equally Safe in Midlothian and working towards a shared vision where all women, children and young people in our communities live their lives free from violence and abuse and are supported to achieve their full potential.

Adopting this approach will complement, and add value to, other key priorities being progressed across Midlothian that aim to tackle the inequality of outcomes experienced by vulnerable people and communities, including women and children affected by violence, abuse, and trauma. These include:

- Keeping [the Promise](#);
- Implementing [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#) duties.
- Implementing [Public Sector Equality Duties](#);
- [Embedding trauma-informed systems, services and workforces](#); and
- Implementing [Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence \(the Istanbul Convention\)](#) duties

We are committed to protecting and building upon existing systems and services that are already in place in Midlothian that are working to improve the wellbeing and safety of women, children, and young people.

This includes the range of local and national supports currently available for anyone who has experienced gender-based violence, and for those who are causing harm to others and would like help to change their behaviour. If you or someone you know is experiencing abuse or causing harm, please ask for help so that you can get the right support.

[VAWG and Gender Based Violence Services Directory](#)

What we have achieved so far

Midlothian Council is proud to be one of four local authorities in Scotland to hold the Bronze [Equally Safe at Work](#) Accreditation. It is a national accreditation promoting best practice in tackling violence against women and promoting women's equality in the workplace.

Equally Safe at Work has a tiered programme which enables organisations to progress from building a foundation for change to embedding a strong culture of gender equality within. The bronze, silver and gold tiers are cumulative, and organisations can progress to the next level once the required criteria at each stage are achieved and maintained.



Midlothian Council HR team undertook a scoping exercise in 2020 to collect data on women’s professional networks within Midlothian and in nearby areas with the view to support more women into job or industry specific networking opportunities. A list of available professional women’s networks was then published for employees who registered their interest. Supporting women to participate in networks enables access to external expertise is one evidenced action to tackle women’s under representation in senior roles.

An awareness-raising event in November 2019 with elected members was organised by Midlothian Council as part of the 16 Days of Action campaign to end VAW. The event focused on the role of the council in supporting victim-survivors and preventing VAW and built understanding and awareness of how VAW impacts women at work and the wider Council. The important role of elected members was highlighted and elected members discussed what could be done in the local community to raise awareness of VAW.

Midlothian was one of three councils selected by the Scottish Government and NHS Education for Scotland to pilot trauma-informed training in 2019. The council has since appointed a Trauma-Informed Practice Development Lead who is working with the council and key community planning partners to strengthen capacity and capability in embedding a trauma-informed approach locally.

Police Scotland School Link Officers have spoken about the White Ribbon Campaign with their SMT within their schools and pass information via email to all parents. Community Beat Officers promote The White Ribbon and That Guy Campaign at drop-in surgeries within local communities and are getting teams and organisations to sign the White Ribbon Pledge boards.

- Development of key HR policies on Gender Based Violence and Sexual Harassment.
- Equally Safe Housing and Homelessness Policy; and
- Progress embedding the Safe & Together model across Children’s Services to help develop domestic-abuse informed systems, services and workforces.
- Your chance to change for men to access support to stop domestic abusive behaviour.
- Commitment via EMPPC to the delivery of VAWG services, including Marac.
- VAWG and Gender Based Violence Services Directory
- Equally Safe Mapping of Service Gaps
- Midlothian’s trauma informed approach
- Children, Young People, Partnerships Staff Directorate’s Conference 2024 will focus on improving young people’s feeling of safety including violence against women and girls.

Our Vision

We are committed to creating a strong and flourishing Midlothian where all individuals are equally safe and respected and where women and girls live free from all forms of violence and abuse and attitudes which help perpetuate it.

What is Equally Safe?

[Equally Safe](#) is Scotland's Strategy for preventing and eradicating all forms of violence against women and girls. The primary goal is to create a Scotland where women and girls can live free from the fear, threat, or experience of violence, abuse and exploitation. Key priorities in the strategy include:

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

Equally Safe highlights that violence against women and girls' damages health and wellbeing, limits freedom, potential and is a fundamental violation of human rights. As violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a cause and consequence of women's inequality, Equally Safe encourages partners to adopt a preventative approach wherever possible, through prioritising actions that promote women and girls' equality across all policy areas.

What is Violence Against Women and Girls?

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) encompasses (but is not limited to):

- physical, sexual, psychological, emotional and financial abuse occurring in the family, within the general community and in institutions in both physical and digital spaces and places. •
domestic abuse/coercive controlling behaviours, stalking, rape and incest,
- sexual harassment, bullying and intimidation.
- commercial sexual exploitation, including prostitution, lap dancing, stripping, pornography.
- trafficking for exploitation including for domestic and sexual servitude, which may include gangs and organised criminal networks.
- child abuse occurring within family settings, including domestic abuse, and sexual abuse by male family members including siblings.
- child sexual abuse and exploitation including the production and sharing of indecent images of children.
- so called 'honour based' abuse, including dowry related violence, female genital mutilation, forced marriages, and 'honour' crimes.

While fully recognising that men may also be victims of violence and abuse, the Equally Safe in Midlothian adopts a gendered analysis of VAWG, which recognises that “violent and abusive behaviour (is) carried out predominantly by men directed at women and girls precisely because of their gender” and that “such violence cannot be understood... in isolation from the norms, social structure and gender roles within the community, which greatly influence women's vulnerability to violence.”

In support of this approach, we are committed to ensuring that policy and practice in Midlothian is underpinned by a robust understanding of the different ways that men and women experience the world at different ages and stages of life, as a result of the gendered expectations that are placed on them. We are also committed to considering how gender can intersect with other factors which can heighten someone's vulnerability to violence and abuse, such as age, race, financial dependency, poverty, disability, homelessness and insecure immigration status.

Ultimately, through adopting a gendered-analysis of VAWG we recognise that tackling VAWG cannot be solely addressed as a 'public protection' issue but instead, that a community-planning wide approach is required to improve outcomes for women, children and young people in Midlothian.

Equally Safe Leadership Partnership Group

Who we are

We are a group of senior leaders who wish to take direct action to Make Midlothian Equally Safe. We will provide leadership, direction, and resources to implement the Midlothian Equally Safe Strategy. The group will meet throughout the year to assess progress and remove barriers to allow for successful implementation of the plan. The Single Midlothian Plan Performance and Scrutiny Report will encompass the successes and challenges in implementing this strategy. The following partners create the Equally Safe Leadership Group:

- Midlothian Council including Adult Health and Social Care, Community Safety & Justice, Children, Young People and Partnership Directorate, Housing etc.
- East Lothian and Midlothian Public Protection Committee
- Women's Aid East and Midlothian
- Police Scotland
- NHS Lothian
- Other Public and Third Sector organisations

We will work closely with other with other thematic areas of Community Planning, including Community Justice, to take forward improvement actions.

As leaders we will seek out opportunities to raise awareness of violence against women and girls at the same time as providing preventative support.

What the data told us

Nationally, where gender information was recorded, 81% of incidents of domestic abuse involved a female victim and a male suspected perpetrator. 15% of reported incidents involved a male victim and a female suspected partner. 4% of cases the victim and suspected perpetrator were the same gender. A third of incidents (33%) occurred at the weekend. 89% of all domestic abuse incidents occurred in a home or dwelling. Whilst over 80% of victims of domestic abuse are women and girls, violence and abuse can happen to anyone whatever your gender, sexuality or background. It can also take place in any space: families, institutions, workplaces, communities, on the street and on-line.

In 2021/22 there were 1127 incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the Police in Midlothian. This equated to a rate of 122 incidents per 10,000 population, which is above the national average of 118 incidents per 10,000 population. Midlothian had the 11th highest rate by local authority.

As of June 2021, the population of Midlothian was 94,680. 51.8% of this population was female (49,082 females) and 48.2% was male (45,598 males). Of the total female population in Midlothian, 40,047 are women (aged 16 or above). Based on recent studies which suggest that at least 1 in 3 women in Scotland are likely to have experienced domestic abuse, this suggests that over 13,000 women in Midlothian are likely to have experienced domestic abuse. This figure does not include women who have experienced other forms of gender-based violence including sexual harassment, rape and sexual assault and commercial sexual exploitation.

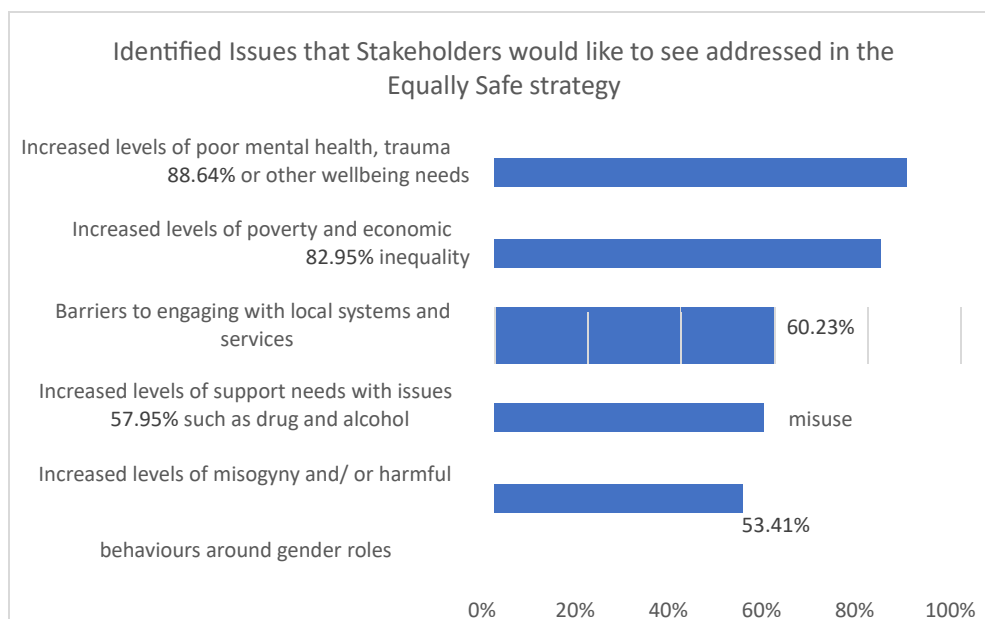
- Women often experience health inequalities that impact their access to healthcare and overall wellbeing. An example of this is women are less likely than men to be prescribed drugs that reduce the chance of a second heart attack and women are less likely to receive diagnostic testing, such as coronary angiography imaging, within 72 hours of hospital admission (BHF, Bias and Biology Report 2019). In 2018 2.1% of publicly funded research was dedicated solely to reproductive health and childbirth (SG Women’s Health Plan 2021)

What our Stakeholders Told Us

In developing this strategy, we consulted with a wide range of stakeholders to develop a better understanding of the key issues are currently affecting women, children and young people in Midlothian that should be considered within Midlothian’s Equally Safe Strategy.

Stakeholder Survey

This consultation included undertaking a stakeholder survey in June 2023, which received 95 responses from strategic and operational staff across a range of community planning areas. Stakeholders were asked to identify the key issues that they would like the Equally Safe strategy to address, from the perspective of their service/policy. These are shown below:



Other key issues identified by stakeholder responses included the cost-of-living crisis, social media, and reduced availability of support services. The cost-of-living crisis has a negative impact on women’s ability to look after themselves and their families. It has added to the existing barriers women face when trying to escape an abuser with women becoming increasingly financially dependent on the person causing them harm. The COVID pandemic also had a negative impact and service providers noted the increased levels of trauma amongst children and young people, leading to increased levels of anxiety and self-harm. Waiting list for services have not yet fallen back down to pre-pandemic levels and staff are overstretched, struggling to meet the demand.

It was noted that young women are being pressured to engage in harmful sexual activity and face high levels of sexualisation across society. Social media was highlighted as an amplifier to this by magnifying the voices of

men who portray women as commodities. Concerns were raised around the lack of positive male role models boys may have in their lives and the risks social media pose through influencers with misogynistic views filling that void. There is a need to engage with young boys positively to better understand why they are attracted to these views' influencers have against women, for example Andrew Tate.

Stakeholder Action Planning Session

Stakeholders from different community planning areas across Midlothian came together on 7th August 2023 to discuss the emerging learning from the work that had taken place to date to help shape the new Equally Safe Midlothian Strategy and to identify the actions that they would like to see prioritised in the new strategy.

Specifically, attendees were invited to reflect on the 7 priorities set out in the Midlothian CCP Single Midlothian Plan and for each priority, consider the following questions:

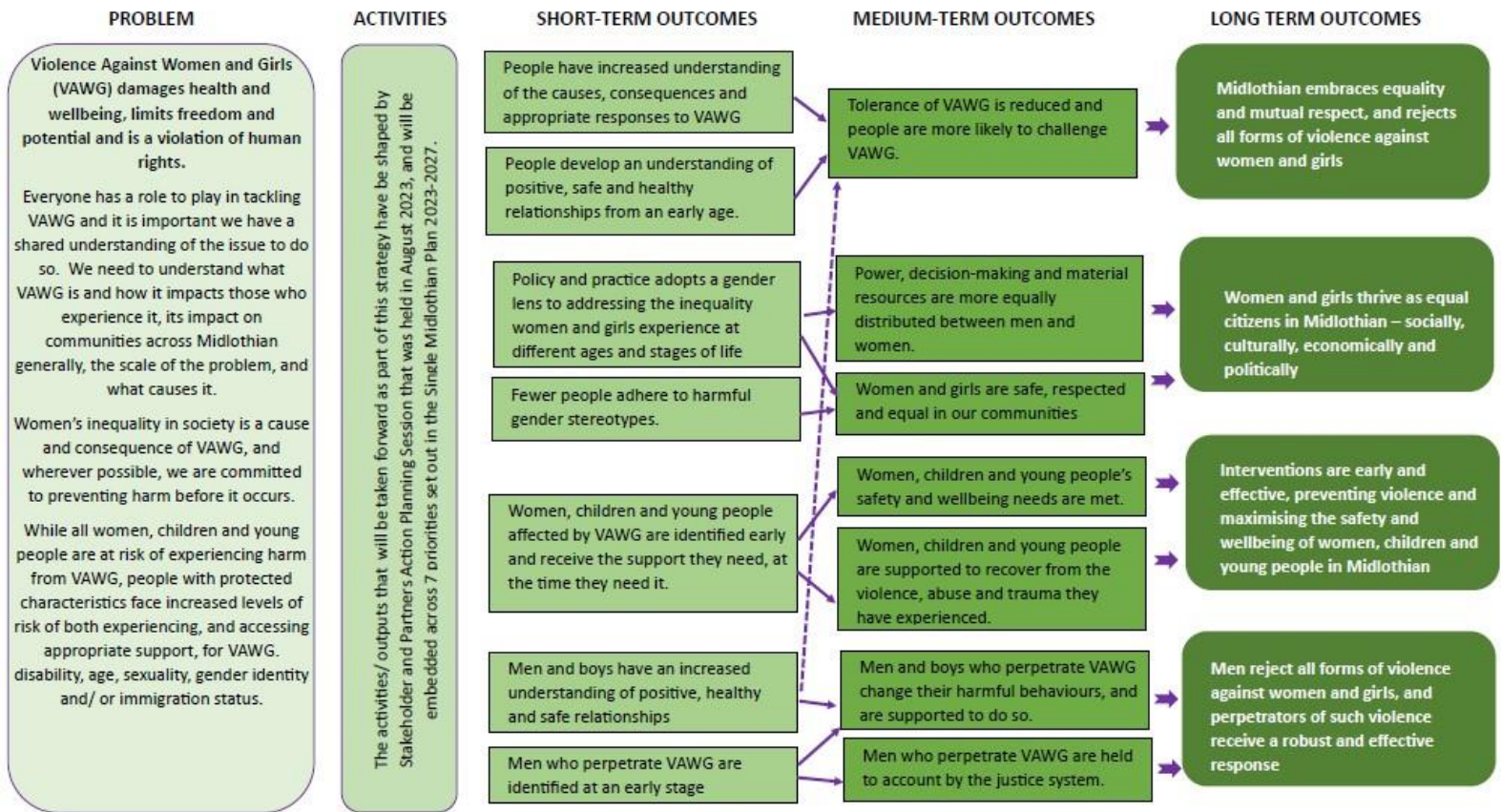
- What would 'good' look and feel like for women, children and young people in Midlothian if this outcome was achieved?
- What are the key outcomes/ activities that you would like to see prioritised in the Equally Safe Midlothian strategy which will support this thematic area?
- What support/ leadership is needed to ensure these outcomes/ activities are embedded into your service/ policy area?

A number of common themes were identified across all of the discussions. These include the need to:

- Adopt a gendered approach to progressing each of the 7 priorities and consider the different challenges/ barriers that women generally, and victims/ survivors of VAWG specifically, may face in relation to this priority and the specific actions that may help to address these barriers.
- Ensure that policymakers and practitioners working across each of the 7 priority areas having the training and support they need to take forward actions to improve outcomes for people affected by VAWG and gender inequality, in a way that is appropriate to their role.
- Support a joined-up approach to be taken to progressing actions across these 7 priority areas that will make a meaningful difference to the lives of women, children and young people affected by VAWG in Midlothian; and
- Ensuring that people and communities across Midlothian know that VAWG is never acceptable and that support is available for anyone affected by it. It was highlighted that work being undertaken across all the 7 priority areas may provide an opportunity to engage with women, children and young people affected by VAWG who may not otherwise come into contact with other services.

These discussions were used to shape the following logic model which sets out:

- What are the outcomes we want to improve?
- What will we do to improve the outcomes?
- Short-, Medium- and Long-Term outcome
- Our overall vision



PRINCIPLES

- Lived Experience**
The voices of women, children and young people with lived experience of VAWG will be listened to and respected, and will be used to shape policy and practice.
- Workforce Care and Support**
Professionals working within universal and specialist services will have the knowledge, skills and support they need to effectively respond to victims/ survivors.
- Trauma-Informed**
The systems and services that victims/survivors come into contact with will be person-centred and trauma-informed, and will address the additional barriers some victims/ survivors may face to accessing support.
- Evidence and Data**
We will take an evidence-based approach to investing in systems and services that will improve outcomes for women, children and young people, and will use evidence and data to measure progress and performance.
- Leadership**
There will be strong collective leadership at across all key policy agendas that have a role to play in improving outcomes for women, children and young people affected by VAWG

Adopting a Community Planning-wide approach to Embedding Equally Safe in Midlothian

The Way Forward

Below are the priorities that will be taken forward as part of this strategy and how they will support and compliment the 7 thematic outcomes set out in the [Single Midlothian Plan 2023-2027](#).

The Equally Safe Leadership group will drive forward a shared agenda and priority areas of action to reduce violence against women and girls which will further strengthen the foundations to build an Equally Safe Midlothian. This will be done by:

- Producing a robust communications and engagement plan targeted at Community Planning Partners to raise awareness of the prevalence and impact of violence against women and girls in Midlothian and the role that they can play in addressing this.
- Building awareness and a shared understanding with practitioners and policy makers of what it means to adopt a “gendered lens” within their own policy/ service area and support them to identify tangible actions they can take to ensure that policy and practice delivers the best possible outcomes for women, children, and young people.
- Co-developing and publishing a Delivery Plan with SMART actions by the end of 2024 to help monitor progress against our agreed activities and outcomes and identify areas for future improvement. This will be informed by the stakeholders’ survey and the voices of those with lived experience. This will include practical elements such as:
 - Implementing a suite of available programmes in early years and school settings to support the delivery of priority 1 – such as the continued roll out of the Mentors in Violence Prevention Programme, Equally Safe in Schools
 - Training on gender-based violence, including implementation of Women’s Aid Equally Safe in Practice Programme (Level 1 (for general workforce) and Equally Safe Level 6 (for Leaders))
- Continuously assessing our progress, aiming to reduce all forms of VAWG. We will use evidence and data to understand how our joint efforts are affecting change.

Tracking, Monitoring and Reporting Progress through the Community Planning Partnership

The Leadership group will report on progress to the Community Planning Board every 6 months as part of the tracking and monitoring for the Equally Safe Strategy Implementation.