

Cross Party Group on Men's Violence against Women and Children

26th January 2022, 18.00-19.30 via Zoom

Minute

Present

MSPs

Rona Mackay MSP (RMa) (Convener)
Elena Whitham, MSP (EW) (Deputy Convener)
Paul McLennan, MSP (PMcL)
Audrey Nicoll, MSP (AN)

Invited guests

EI Gray, Office of Katy Clark, MSP

Non-MSP Group Members

Mariam Ahmed, Amina The Muslim Women's Resource Centre (MA)
Eilidh Dickson, Engender (ED)
Ann Fehilly, ASSIST (AF)
Nicola Gilbert – Scottish Women's Aid (NG)
Lily Greenan (LG)
Ann Hayne, NHS Lanarkshire – EVA Services (AH)
Brenna Jessie, Rape Crisis Scotland (BJ)
Jan MacLeod, Women's Support Project (JMacL)
Melanie McCarry (MMcC)
Sarah McMillan, Scottish Association of Social Workers (SMcM)
Marsha Scott – Scottish Women's Aid (MS)
Linda Thompson, Women's Support Project (LT)
Laura Tomson, Zero Tolerance (LTo)
Sarah Weldon, Forensic Mental Health and Learning Disability Service of Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS (SW)

Apologies

Paul Aitken, Office of Rona Mackay
Sandie Barton, Rape Crisis Scotland
Claire Baker, MSP
Katy Clark, MSP
Natalie Don, MSP
Rhoda Grant, MSP

Paul O’Kane, MSP
Vikki Kerr, City of Edinburgh Council, Community Justice, Safer Families
Stephen Madill
Sue McKellar, Scottish Women’s Aid
Fiona McMullen, ASSIST
Linda Rodgers, Edinburgh Women’s Aid
Davy Thompson, White Ribbon Scotland
Michelle Thomson, MSP
Richard Whitecross
Beatrice Wishart, MSP

Cross-Party Group Business

A. Approval of 29th September 2021 Meeting Minute.

- a. The minutes of the CPGMVAWC on 29th September 2021 were approved as an accurate record - proposed by Brenna Jessie (BJ), (Rape Crisis Scotland), seconded by Elena Whitham (EW), MSP.

B. Thematic Session – 2022 Policy Landscape Update

Three presentations followed, where a number of themes in common emerged:

- a. Eilidh Dickson, Engender
 - i. ED outlined key issues, as identified by Engender. They included:
 1. Concerns were expressed about the lack of a gender, equality or a human rights approach in the terms of reference for the Scottish Government Covid-19 Independent Inquiry, to be chaired by Lady Poole. The inquiry will be vital in learning the lessons of the pandemic, and the ensuing recovery on women’s equality, to mitigate the expected rollback in women’s equality that is already being felt.
 - a. Engender and other women’s organisations in Scotland have written to the Deputy First Minister, with the support of 27 equality and human rights organisations, to raise this and ask for the omission to be corrected as the inquiry moves forward.
 2. The Misogyny and Criminal Justice Working Group will shortly publish its final report, which examines how criminal law can be developed in ways to address gaps in the law, and its implementation around certain forms of violence against women.
 3. The Scottish Government Public Sector Equality Duty, the key mainstreaming tools available in Scotland to integrate gender and other equalities concerns into the development of policy and practice.
 4. The Scottish Government consultation on the first steps towards incorporation of key international human rights frameworks into Scots Law, including the Convention on

the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

5. Issues around women's poverty, housing and healthcare. Consideration needs to be given to how Scotland could improve housing outcomes for women and children experiencing domestic abuse.
 6. ED referred to the Equally Safe Update and to Legal Aid proposals.
 7. ED highlighted recommendations from the recently published Parliament's Criminal Justice Committee report. These included:
 - a. The vital importance of Lady Dorrian's recommendations in relation to the Improving the Management of Sexual Offence Cases review.
 8. The review of funding for violence against women services, to ensure capacity and sustainability, and a Short-Life Equally Safe Delivery Plan to refresh actions within the overall strategy.
- b. Dr. Marsha Scott, Scottish Women's Aid (SWA)
- i. Dr. Scott presented a series of slides, on the following themes:
 1. COVID Recovery
 - a. The court backlog, which currently stands at over 40,000.
 - b. Issues around implementation of virtual specialist domestic abuse courts in each sheriffdom.
 2. Access to Justice
 - a. The critical importance of legal reform.
 - b. A new model, which is being tested in Edinburgh
 - c. The availability of solicitors in domestic abuse cases, not least in Highlands and Islands.
 - d. Issues arising out of corroboration and the not-proven verdict.
 - e. Accountability regarding implementation.
 3. The Strategic Review of Funding
 - a. The need to stabilise funding and shift to a needs-led, rights-based funding structure.
 - b. The need for bold ambition and swift action.
 - c. It was noted that local government accounts for between 40 and 70% of funding for abuse services. The impact of short- or medium-term strategies is profound.

c. Brenna Jessie, Rape Crisis Scotland

- i. BRJ's presentation expanded on priorities for Rape Crisis Scotland:
 1. The urgency of implementing Lady Dorrian's recommendations was highlighted.
 - a. While processes are in already place, there is a need to move to act on solutions.

2. The Nationality and Borders Bill, which risks criminalising survivors of domestic abuse.
3. The court backlog which, it is estimated, could currently take until 2026 to clear, with resultant impact in human terms.
 - a. The option of judge-led trials should be considered to combat a crisis of confidence in the system.
4. The impact removing the Not Proven verdict could have, in part because it is widely misunderstood. BJ emphasised that it is critical to listen to survivors on this issue.
5. The Strategic Review of Funding. Currently unstable funding means it is not possible to meet the high demand for services.
6. Building on university work, regarding effective processes in relation to sexual misconduct complaints.
7. Opportunities afforded by supporting the Equally Safe Toolkit – Schools and local communities can show leadership in this.

C. Discussion: Themes for sessions for 2022

- a. The group discussed the presentations (from Agenda Item B), as well as suggestions for themes for coming meetings, including Covid recovery and VAWG, legal services reform, implementation of Scottish Government commitments on VAWG, human rights incorporation, provision and advocacy for women and children experiencing VAWG who have no recourse to public funds, needs and services for BME survivors, and commercial sexual exploitation.
 - a. Members chose Covid recovery as the theme for the next meeting.

D. Member Updates

- a. Sarah Weldon confirmed that she is now a Board member of White Ribbon Scotland.

E. Confirmation/Approval of New Members

- a. Includem
 - i. Were welcomed as new members of the Cross Party Group on Men's Violence against Women and Children.
- b. UN House Scotland
 - i. Were welcomed as new members of the Cross Party Group on Men's Violence against Women and Children.

Both organisations had confirmed their acceptance of the Purpose of the Cross Party Group on Men's Violence against Women and Children.

F. AOCB

- a. There were no further items on this occasion.

Date and Time of the next Meeting

To be confirmed.