

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

8<sup>th</sup> February 2023, 18.00-19.30 via Zoom

## Minute

### 1 Present

#### MSPs

Rona Mackay (RMa) (Convener)  
Elena Whitham (EW)

#### Invited guests

Rajni Pandher (RP), Hemat Gryffe Women's Aid  
Lynsay Ross (LR), Scottish Government

#### Non-MSP Group Members

Mariam Ahmed (MA), Amina  
Ann Fehilly (AF), ASSIST  
Mirella Yandoli (MY), Church of Scotland  
Gillian Baker (GB), Individual  
Lily Greenan (LG), Individual  
Snow Curtis-Kolu (SCK), Includem  
Sandy Brindley (SB), Rape Crisis Scotland  
Claire Thomson (CT), Rape Crisis Scotland  
Sarah McMillan (SMcM), Scottish Association of Social Workers  
Gill McKinna (GMcK), Community Justice Scotland  
Marsha Scott (MS), Scottish Women's Aid  
Nicola Gilbert (NG), Scottish Women's Aid  
Linda Thompson (LTh), Women's Support Project  
Laura Tomson (LT), Zero Tolerance

#### Apologies

Audrey Nicol MSP  
Beatrice Wishart MSP (Deputy Convener)  
Katy Clark MSP  
Angela Graham, Central Advocacy Partners Falkirk

Linda Rodgers, Edinburgh Women's Aid  
Hannah Brisbane, Engender  
Liz Gilchrist – may attend later  
Nancy Lombard  
Richard Whitecross  
Ann Hayne, NHS Lanarkshire Gender-based Violence Services  
Rebekah Cheung, White Ribbon Scotland  
Davy Thompson, White Ribbon Scotland  
Jan MacLeod, Women's Support Project  
Laura Nacyte, Women's Support Project  
Jenny Wartnaby, Zero Tolerance  
Melanie McCarry

## 2 Theme: Cost of Living Crisis

- a. Mariam Ahmed, Amina  
MA gave a presentation, including an overview of work carried out in this area by Amina:
- Amina has had a Financial worker since before the Cost of Living Crisis. Amina's service users (including asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented people) have been affected by hardship for a period long preceding the current crisis.
  - MA outlined the Hardship Fund, administered by Amina.
  - MA highlighted the additional impact of the current crisis on 3<sup>rd</sup> sector organisations, coming up with new initiatives to tackle additional needs caused by the current situation.
- b. Sandy Brindley, Rape Crisis Scotland  
COVID now Cost of Living  
SB updated the Group on the impact of the Cost of Living crisis in terms of demand for the services of Rape Crisis Scotland:
- A 34.5% increase on demand when compared with 21/22, which had already seen an increase.
  - Survivors seeking the services of Rape Crisis Scotland, as they are unable to access health services.
  - The rise in women having to sell sex because of financial hardship.
  - The number of survivors, who are refugees and asylum seekers, and particularly vulnerable.
  - The impact of the backlog in the court system – a result of both COVID and the Cost of Living Crisis.

- The impact, were a funding programme which currently supports 28 support workers across Scotland, to finish at the end of the current funding period, which runs up to September 2023.
  - On a positive note, Rape Crisis Scotland's Prevention Programme has worked with 27 thousand young people in schools across Scotland.
- c. Linda Thompson, Women's Support Project  
LTh gave a presentation in which she:
- Highlighted the shift in the power balance between sex workers and their clients. Factors involved include:
    - Women are more vulnerable, and there is more availability due to the financial hardship they face in the Cost of Living Crisis. Many are mothers facing hard choices to support their families.
    - There is an increase in women who are refugees, becoming involved in sex work, as a means of survival.
    - Poverty is a gendered issue, and we are moving from talking about poverty to destitution.
    - Men's finances are constrained, so they reduce the amount they are willing to pay sex workers.
    - Sex workers are in a situation where they are being asked to do more for less, and with clients they would refuse in other circumstances.
    - There is a recorded increase in violence.
    - Once involved in sex work, the opportunities to leave are few.
    - Sex work has been normalised as a means of survival.
    - There is an increase in options to sell images online.
    - Women can become involved before they are aware of how the business works.
- d. Marsha Scott, Scottish Women's Aid
- MS commented on how she was struck by the situations described by LTh that constrain women's choices.
  - MS went on to describe the impact on the services of SWA:
    - Through information drawn from the Helpline, it is clear there is a rise in cases where perpetrators

threaten to withhold child maintenance if child or mother don't comply.

- There is a rise in eviction, now that the pause, which had taken place during COVID, has ended.
  - Legal Aid services are not fit for purpose in cases of domestic abuse.
  - Legal Aid solicitors are increasingly unavailable for survivors, and it is often too expensive to find a private solicitor, as an alternative. Some locations have not had a Legal Aid office for a significant period of time – for example, in the case of Shetland, 5 years.
  - In such cases, women are faced with the choice of representing themselves, or withdrawing.
  - The impact of competitive tendering on Women's Aid services that are already on their knees in the wake of austerity measures since 2010.
  - The impact on funding sources, some of which haven't had an uplift since 2016. In effect, situations such as that mean that 3<sup>rd</sup> sector organisations are in the position of subsidising government provision.
  - Referring to the Hardship Fund, outlined by Amina, MS asked if there was the possibility of setting up something similar nationally.
  - The Government has accepted the recommendation from the Improving Housing Outcomes for Women and Children Experiencing Domestic Abuse of establishing a Leaving Fund and individual payments of social security. It is necessary to move to effective implementation and prioritisation of the needs of women and children.
- MS shared that SWA have reached the 2<sup>nd</sup> round in the application process with a funder, for work in the area of financial security.
  - MS highlighted, as had MA, the issue of no recourse to public funds.
  - MS suggested that representatives, across parties in Scotland could come together, ahead of the next election for Westminster, to discuss how to approach the reserved matter of no recourse to public funds.

- It was agreed that a meeting of the CPG should be devoted to this topic.
- LT clarified the situation regarding the Emergency Assistance Fund, which is available for specific costs and items in the aftermath of a crime. It is stressed that it is not a compensation fund.

## Questions and Responses to the Presentations

### Elena Whitham (EW)

- EW was asked by the Convener if she would like to say a few words in response to the presentations.
- EW highlighted the need to link up between different policy areas, and for all departments to consider where these issues sit in their own portfolios.
- EW confirmed that the subject of implementation of recommendations would be picked up in a meeting with MS.

### Sandy Brindley (SB)

- SB highlighted the importance of linkages across policy areas and taking an intersectional approach.
- Also, the importance of a robust framework to collect data across Scotland.

## 3 Cross Party Business

- A. Approval of 26<sup>th</sup> October 2022 Meeting Minute  
The minutes of the CPGMVAWC meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> October were will be approved as an accurate record once an item in Member Updates has been amended.
- B. New Member Applications  
Carlene McAvoy  
Carlene McAvoy was welcomed as a new member of the Cross Party Group on Men's Violence against Women and Children.
- C. Member Updates  
It was suggested that a new approach could be trialled for this agenda item:

- A member spotlight item, where a member could highlight their/their organisation's work, or a particularly topical/salient area of work of interest to the Group members.
  - Volunteers for the spotlight agenda item should email NG at [nicola.gilbert@womensaid.scot](mailto:nicola.gilbert@womensaid.scot)
  - Members would still have the opportunity to give verbal updates but, in case of time constraints, could also forward a written summary of work they are keen for members of the Group to be aware of. Such updates could be circulated to all members of the group.

#### D. ACOB

- MS drew attention to the SWA response to the Delivery of 70/30 report, which had been circulated in advance of this meeting.
  - RMa confirmed that Recognition had been withdrawn from the Cross Party Group for Prevention and Healing of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) group in December.
- RMa drew attention to work through the Justice Committee on Bail and Release, in particular, surrounding the removal of Section 23D.
- MS raised the topic of what the Group can do to progress work on no recourse to public funds, which is linked to immigration, which is a reserved matter.
- MS also highlighted that the Istanbul Convention has now been ratified.
  - It was agreed that this could be the theme for the next meeting, ideally with input from legal specialists, involved in international law, or other academics.

#### E. Date and Time of Next Meeting

To be confirmed – The date is likely to be for late spring.