

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

29th September 2021, via Zoom

Draft Minute

Present

MSPs

Rona Mackay MSP (RMa)
Jenni Minto, MSP (JM)
Audrey Nicoll (AN)
Rhoda Grant, MSP (RG)
Elena Whitham, MSP (EW)
Beatrice Wishart, MSP (BW)

Invited guests

Liz Gilchrist (LG)
Catherine Robertson, UN House Scotland (CR)
Meg Thomas, Includem (MT)
Colette Walker, Independence for Scotland Party (CWa)

Non-MSP Group Members

Paul Aitken, Office of Rona Mackay (PA)
Nicola Gilbert – Scottish Women's Aid (NG)
Brenna Jessie, Rape Crisis Scotland (BJ)
Vikki Kerr, City of Edinburgh Council, Community, Safer Families (VK)
Fiona McMullen, ASSIST (FMcM)
Sarah McMillan, Scottish Association of Social Workers (SMcM)
Katy Proctor (KP)
Marsha Scott – Scottish Women's Aid (MS)
Megan Strickland, Rape Crisis Scotland (MS)
Heather Williams, Women's Support Project (HW)
Jan MacLeod, Women's Support Project (JMacL)
Collette Wormleighton, City of Edinburgh Council, Community Justice, Domestic Abuse Services (CWo)

Apologies

Rachel Adamson, Zero Tolerance
Nicole Beattie, National Union of Students

Sandy Brindley, Rape Crisis Scotland
Ann Fehilly, ASSIST
Lily Greenan
Catriona Kirkpatrick, Engender
Sue McKellar, Scottish Women's Aid
Richard Whitecross
Shirley Wishart

2 Cross Party Group Business

- A. Approval of February 22nd 2021 Meeting Minute
 - a. The minutes of the CPGMVAWC on February 22nd 2021 were approved as an accurate record (proposed by MS, seconded by RMa).
- B. Confirmation of Details regarding the Cross-Party Group (CPGMVAWC)
 - a. Name
 - i. The name of the group was unanimously confirmed as the Cross Party Group for Men's Violence against Women and Children.
 - b. Purpose
 - i. The purpose was unanimously confirmed, remaining as set out in the document 'Revised Purpose CPGMVAWC 2016', which was the document which set out the purpose of the Group in the 5th Session of the Group.
 - ii. MS stressed the importance of the Group adhering to the principles of that purpose.
 - iii. RMa highlighted the themed approach of meetings in the last Session and it was unanimously agreed that this approach was effective and should continue through the 6th Session.
 - c. Membership
 - i. The Group membership was unanimously confirmed, with members from the 5th Session becoming members of the 6th Session. Those who had expressed an interest in joining the Group in the current 6th Session and attended the meeting on 29th September 2021 are listed under Non-member Visitors in this Minute.
 - d. Office-bearers
 - i. Scottish Women's Aid were confirmed as the Secretariat for the group – proposed by RMa; Seconded by BJ.
- C. Membership Updates
 - a. Rape Crisis Scotland (BJ)
 - i. BJ wanted to acknowledge the loss of Emma Rich, who meant so much to so many and whose work had has such impact.
 - ii. BJ also wanted to acknowledge that this was a difficult day for many, in light of the case of Sarah Everard, with sentencing due to take place on 30th September.
 - iii. Updates on the work of Rape Crisis Scotland included:
 - 1. Highlighting that this has been a difficult time for survivors, with increasing barriers to accessing support and finding safe spaces and the discomfort some have experienced in using online sources of support.
 - 2. The recent launch of Equally Safe in Schools, which has been developed as a free resource for secondary schools, to help them take a whole school approach to preventing gender-based violence. Details are available on the website. BJ said

it would be especially helpful if MSPs and colleagues could champion this.

3. The Survivor Reference Group now has 53 members across Scotland.
 4. Rape Crisis Scotland plan to launch a podcast during '16 Days'.
 5. The Helpline continues to be very busy. BJ asked that MSPs and colleagues share and promote the Helpline.
 6. Rape Crisis Scotland Centres are also very busy.
 7. Rape Crisis Scotland has received some funding towards this work, but is keen to make further progress towards sustainable funding.
- b. ASSIST (FMcM)
- i. The themes that were explored in February's meeting continue to have an impact on survivors.
 1. The number of clients on ASSIST's books has more than doubled, due to court delays. It had previously taken 10-12 weeks for cases to be heard at summary courts. The time taken for cases to be heard at summary courts is now up to two years.
 2. A positive statistic is that engagement of 84% has been achieved with young survivors. However, it must be noted that, because of their experience of the system, many have said they wouldn't report an incident again.
- c. The City of Edinburgh Council, Community Justice, Domestic Abuse Services (CWo)
- i. CWo highlighted work taking place, both with survivors and perpetrators.
 - ii. A return to face-to-face and group work has begun, which had not been possible to this point during the pandemic.
 - iii. A women-only (as regards clients) centre in Edinburgh has provided a safe space for women to meet and receive support in person.
 - iv. Some issues have been apparent, as a result of delays in the judicial service. Issues include a dilution of confidence in the system.
 - v. Some issues emerging as a result of Covid include isolation, challenges in reach and engagement in some cases.
- d. City of Edinburgh Council, Community, Safer Families (VK)
- i. VK highlighted the importance of a consistent and safe service.
- e. Women's Support Project (JMaCL)
- i. A number of issues have emerged from the work of the Women's Support Project and their areas of work. These include:
 1. The impact of court delays.
 2. Rising food, fuel and digital poverty, leading to exclusion of some women from accessing benefits and wider support.
 3. The impact of No Recourse to Public Funds. Covid measures are still in place to ensure no one should be without accommodation. Once these come to an end, there are concerns about a potential huge increase in problems for many women, including refugees, migrants and EU nationals.
 - a. RMa suggested that issues facing these groups could be one of the thematic sessions at a future meeting of the Group.
 4. An inconsistent approach across Scotland in these issues.

5. The Labyrinth Project, a project which supports women's centres, women's groups and networks to help them, and the women they support, so they can emerge stronger from the damage that the COVID-19 pandemic is having on women's lives. The Women's Support Project has funding for one year. Recruitment will begin soon and work will include training opportunities.
- f. INCLUDEM (MT)
 - i. MT introduced the project, which provides intensive, bespoke support to young families in challenging circumstances.
 - ii. MT highlighted work being carried out with young people in terms of prevention of people becoming perpetrators.
 - g. Women's Support Project (HW)
 - i. Following on from JMacL's update, HW talked of amplifying guidance and looking at lessons learned.
 - ii. Work has been carried out with Dumfries and Galloway regarding resources, including raising awareness of CSE.
 - iii. Attention was drawn to employability support available through Encompass.
 - h. Scottish Women's Aid (MS)
 - i. MS updated the Group on the evidence she gave to the Criminal Justice Committee.
 1. There is now a backlog of 40 thousand cases, which makes leadership a key factor in prioritising domestic abuse cases.
 2. It is also vital to underline that the inequalities experienced by women lead to violence against women and girls.
 3. In terms of the COVID response, it is vital to prioritise women in areas including employment, economic planning, childcare and the justice system.
 4. MS outlined the research project which had been undertaken. It showed:
 - a. The extent of women's lack of access to legal aid and to the legal system.
 - b. This research had been funded by the Legal Education Foundation and an outcome is that two specialist solicitors will be based at Edinburgh Women's Aid who, within certain defined parameters, will be able to provide support to women, who are victims of domestic abuse.
 - c. The work is funded for one year. In practice, this means that the service will be available for six months, as cases cannot be taken on beyond that point, as they are unlikely to be resolved within the funded year.
 - d. It is interesting to note that, had Justice been in a position to match fund, the project could have run for a total of 18 months.
 - e. It is hoped that the outcomes of the project will help persuade Scottish Government and the public that Legal Aid, in its current form, is not fit for purpose, where domestic violence and domestic abuse are concerned.
 5. Other concerns highlighted by MS included the fact that some effective policies, for example those around children and the

Domestic Abuse Protection Order Act, have been delayed, leading to a delay in implementation.

6. Women are not being re-housed out of refuge. This was the case before COVID-19, but the situation has deteriorated further. As a result, some women are in refuges for longer, and others are not able to find a place in a refuge.
 7. RMa suggested that Ash Denham, Minister for Community Safety, should be invited to a future meeting of the group.
- i. Elena Whitham, MSP (EW)
 - i. EW, attending her first meeting of the Group, highlighted her background as a Scottish Women's Aid worker in Ayrshire, as well as further work in Housing.
 - ii. EW was keen that the Group look to work across portfolios as much as possible, to maximise the ability to tackle the wide variety of issues women face.
 - j. UN House Scotland (CR)
 - i. CR introduced UN House Scotland, which aims to encourage everyone to actively engage with the values and goals of the United Nations: Human Rights, Sustainable Development, Peace and Security.
 - ii. CR drew attention to a dashboard which is being developed to help monitor progress towards Sustainable Development goals. It is hoped to launch the dashboard in the near future.
 - k. Beatrice Wishart, MSP (BW)
 - i. As well as being an MSP, BW is also a Trustee at Shetland Women's Aid. BW stressed some particular issues faced by women affected by domestic abuse in island and rural communities, including, for example, a lack of practising solicitors in Shetland providing services in legal cases of this nature.
 - l. Liz Gilchrist (LG)
 - i. LG introduced her cross-cutting areas of work as a Forensic Psychologist and said that she would be happy to update the Group at Future meetings.
 - m. Rhoda Grant, MSP (RG)
 - i. RG stressed how positive it was that this Group was reconvening in the new Session.

D. AOCB

- a. RMa thanked BJ for mentioning the impact of the loss of Emma Rich of Engender, who passed away in July of this year.
- b. MS highlighted that plans are underway for legacy activities to honour her work and continue its impact.

3 Date and Time of the next Meetings

Date and time to be confirmed and circulated.