



Dumfries and Galloway

Violence Against Women
and Girls

Biennial Report 2022 - 2024



Foreword from PPC Chair

I am proud to introduce this, my second biennial report, at the end of my third year as chair of Dumfries and Galloway Public Protection Committee.

This report continues to detail the innovative approach that partners have taken across Dumfries and Galloway to protect those who are at risk in our communities, whilst facing challenges from many directions.

We face and will continue to face significant challenges that have impacts on communities, staff and partner organisations that are unprecedented in nature. From the impact of wars, cost of living crisis, pandemic recovery, a divergent national agenda and the significant resourcing pressures, staff across all partners have continued to support, work with, listen to and be there for those who need them most. It is important that this commitment is recognised, and I wish to formally thank them all for their contributions.

I also wish to recognise the Chief Officers Group who continue to effectively lead the wider Public Protection Partnership, and now meet monthly to receive, review and scrutinise all the public protection activity across the partnership. It is significant that the chief officers also agreed our first three-year strategic plan for 2024-2027, which, after a process of robust research, analysis, and consultation, identified our priorities to be:

- Lived Experience
- Self-Neglect
- Sexual Harm
- Multi Agency Chronologies and Information Sharing

The strategy sets a framework for moving forward with our Public Protection responsibilities and sits across our three core pillars of Child Protection, Adult Support and Protection and Violence against Women and Girls. I am delighted that the chief officers have committed to this approach and that each has taken personal responsibility for the delivery of these priorities.

The past two years have also seen considerable progress in the development of a Performance and Quality Assurance Framework for the Partnership. Its introduction and the development of a unique set of indicators for our Violence against Women and Girls agenda, brings closer alignment across the partnership, and provides a sound basis for the analysis of information that will assist the partnership to make important decisions moving forward.

Finally, I must record special thanks to Lillian Cringles, who retired as Chief Social Work Officer in 2023. Lillian was a key architect in implementing the public protection approach in Dumfries and Galloway, an approach that is now being replicated across Scotland. I thank her for her constant support during my time in post and wish her all the very best in her retirement.



**Hamish McGhie, Independent
Chair, Dumfries and Galloway
Public Protection Committee**

Introduction

In Dumfries and Galloway, partners have a Public Protection Partnership (PPP) and Public Protection Committee (PPC) structure. This is a multi-agency approach that assumes responsibility for the strategic development and oversight of services to our most vulnerable people who are at risk of significant harm. PPC has the responsibility to implement the strategic direction and prioritisation across all public protection activity and focuses on children and vulnerable groups at risk working to ensure effective practice and arrangements are in place, whilst managing areas of overlap.

Reporting to the Chief Officers Group: Public Protection (COG: PP) who provide governance across the partnership, the Public Protection Committee shapes the delivery and review of multi-agency work through oversight of multi-agency performance, assuming responsibility for the development and delivery of relevant services. Section 46 of The Adult Support and Protection Act (Scotland) 2007 Act requires the Convenors of Adult Protection Committees (APC) to produce a biennial report analysing, reviewing, and commenting on APC functions and activities in the preceding two years. The Public Protection Committee fulfils that obligation and provides this Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) biennial report to be complementary to that commentary and is structured to mirror and align with the statutory requirements of that biennial report.





Executive Summary

This report contains an overview of the work and progress of Dumfries and Galloway Public Protection Committee (PPC), as it pertains to Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). This period has seen further work as partners from statutory and specialist services seek to prevent all forms of VAWG; provide a variety of support to victims and survivors (including children) and assist perpetrators to change their behaviours. It has been exciting to see ASSIST who provide support to victims of domestic abuse in the justice system become established in our region during 2023. Whilst we wish to celebrate the many successes of the partnership, it is important to acknowledge and reflect on the pressures our partner agencies are under and how this can impact our ability to support and protect women and children who have experienced violence against women. This includes staffing and resource shortage and ongoing demand on all our statutory and non-statutory services.

The importance of the prevention of violence against women and girls continues to be recognised with the reestablishment of the White Ribbon Campaign in Dumfries and Galloway which gained support from a variety of senior officials and staff. This work will be enhanced and further developed in the years ahead.

In Dumfries and Galloway, we have a well-established Public Protection model which supports a coordinated approach to the afore mentioned challenges, and suits the rural nature of our area, minimising duplication. As a PPC we remain focused on a program of self-evaluation and improvement, including those who work directly with adults and children in our communities in this important work. The development of our Strategic plan, public protection data dashboard, Performance and Quality Assurance Framework (PQAF) and the self-evaluation calendar, support us to take stock of challenges and focus resource where most required. There has been significant progress in the collation and scrutiny of data pertaining

to VAWG across all agencies in this time period. The Multi Agency Child Protection Self Evaluation that took place in Autumn 2022 included a focus on domestic abuse cases. The findings from this have provided a baseline for Safe and Together to enable us to understand future improvements and developments around domestic abuse.

We also recognise the importance of learning and development and how this can be particularly challenging when resources and staffing are impacted by national and local crises. The progression of training for Safe and Together to support staff to be increasingly domestic abuse informed has taken much commitment and resource. PPC remain committed to delivering and supporting staff with a varied learning and development calendar, including Public Protection Week 2025. Partners have supported a varied programme for 16 Days of Activism for the Elimination of Violence Against Women in both 2022 and 2023 and have plans to continue to work together in 2024 and beyond. Finally, and perhaps most importantly as a PPC we seek to reach our aspiration in true partnering at both an operational and strategic level with those who are experts by experience. We acknowledge to maximise self-evaluation processes, learning and development opportunities and to have effective communication, we must do this in true partnership with people using our services and local communities.



Background

This report builds on the first Violence Against Women and Girls Biennial Report 2020-2022, providing an overview and summary of the extensive work undertaken by violence against women partners involved in the Public Protection Partnership in the period from April 2022 until March 2024.

It is useful to remind ourselves that Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is part of the continuum of abuse that falls within gender-based violence. It has been recognised locally and internationally that VAW is both a cause of and caused by gender inequality. We are guided by and evaluate performance and progress against Equally Safe: Scotland's Strategy for Preventing and Eradicating Violence Against Women and Girls (2016; refreshed 2023). In Dumfries and Galloway, the Public Protection Partnership undertakes the role and responsibilities of a Violence Against Women Partnership, with a formal Public Protection Committee and dedicated VAWG Subcommittee. Other areas of Scotland will have differing structures.

In line with Equally Safe, the agreed definition of violence against women used in Dumfries and Galloway is violence against women and girls includes the actual and threat of:

- physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family (including children and young people), within the general community, and in institutions, on both physical and digital spaces and places.
- domestic abuse/coercive controlling behaviours, stalking, rape, incest, sexual harassment, bullying and intimidation.
- commercial sexual exploitation (CSE), including prostitution, lap dancing, stripping, pornography.
- human trafficking, including for the purposes of domestic servitude, sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation, which may involve gangs and organised criminal networks.

- child sexual abuse occurring within family settings, including domestic abuse and sexual abuse by male family members including siblings.
- honour based abuse, including forced marriages, female genital mutilation (FGM), dowry abuse and 'honour based' coercive control and killings.

Importantly, the refreshed strategy acknowledges that boys experience domestic abuse, sexual abuse, and exploitation in significant numbers; it therefore covers all children and young people.

It is evident from this definition that the scope of violence against women is huge. It therefore continues to be important that all partners work together to challenge and respond to this. It requires significant joined up working, trusting relationships and effective communication at every level. The VAWG Sub Committee enables this to happen more effectively, providing oversight of the activity taking place and assurance to PPC.

In this period, the VAWG Subcommittee of the Public Protection Committee met six weekly providing the opportunity to partners to share their successes as well as their challenges¹.

VAWG Subcommittee membership comes from a mix of statutory and specialist services including Women's Aid; Rape Crisis; ASSIST; NHS; Social Work (Adult, Children, Families and Justice); Education; Police Scotland; Housing and Homeless Services and Victim Information and Advice.

The membership and attendance at meetings clearly demonstrate the commitment of partners to work towards the prevention of violence against women.

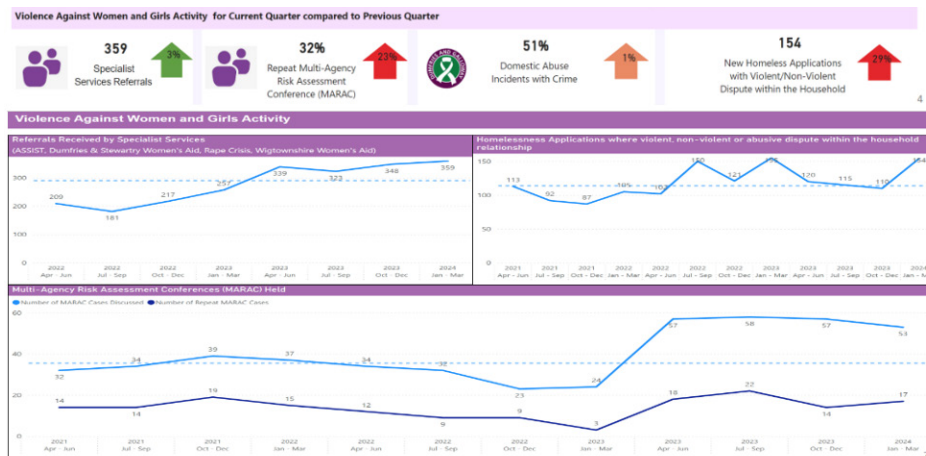
¹ We recognise that some of the challenges cannot be rectified locally (or indeed nationally) but are the result of global issues.



What your data tells you

Significant work has taken place over the last two years to create an innovative and unique multi-agency data dashboard to help us understand our local area better and identify areas for improvement. This work has involved all partners within the Violence Against Women and Girls Sub Committee with scrutiny of the data taking place at every second meeting. The importance of the scrutiny of the data cannot be underestimated, this is where partners can add valuable context to the data gathered, helping us to make sense of what we see. Incorporating data from our third sector partners has been a huge step forward for us in Dumfries and Galloway and whilst this supports public protection to really see the bigger picture it should also be useful to the partners involved, supporting funding bids and annual reporting requirements. Violence against women data is now embedded within the newly developed Performance Quality and Assurance Framework (PQAF) of Public Protection.

Chart 1 – Quarterly Violence Against Women and Girls Performance Activity Dashboard illustration



A total of 2,495 referrals were received into specialist VAWG services in 2022/24, a 24% increase compared to 2020/22. This increase was both due to the commencement of ASSIST services from April 2023 as well as an increase in referrals into Women's Aid and Rape Crisis in comparison to the previous two-year period. This reflects increased demand for specialist support for victims and survivors.

Police remain the highest referring agency to specialist services, making up almost a third of all referrals. Self-Referrals make up 29% with the remaining referrals coming from a variety of statutory and non-statutory services.

Data shows a rise in domestic abuse identified under Child and Adult Protection in the most recent quarter of 2023/24. At the same time, the number of domestic abuse incidents and crimes reported by police increased with referrals to specialist services and Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) remaining high. To further understand the rise, targeted audit and self-evaluation activity will continue through 2024/25.

Women aged 30-39 remain the most affected age group making up 27% of those referred into specialist services. This is consistent with those supported under adult support and protection with psychological harm, substance use, and physical harm the highest associated concern/harm types identified. Despite referral routes into mental health and specialist drug and alcohol services for women and girls, increased demand across all services remains a challenge. Current mental health pathways can be limited where individuals are not open to mental health and referrals into social work are not always appropriate. Further work to improve processes will continue into the next reporting period. There are referral routes into Specialist Drug and Alcohol Services as part of their wrap around support, however demand across services affects the ability to support people in a timely manner. This then impacts on increased waiting time to access support.



Young people aged 16-25 years made up the second highest age group referred to specialist services (19%); an increase of 10% compared to the last two-year period.

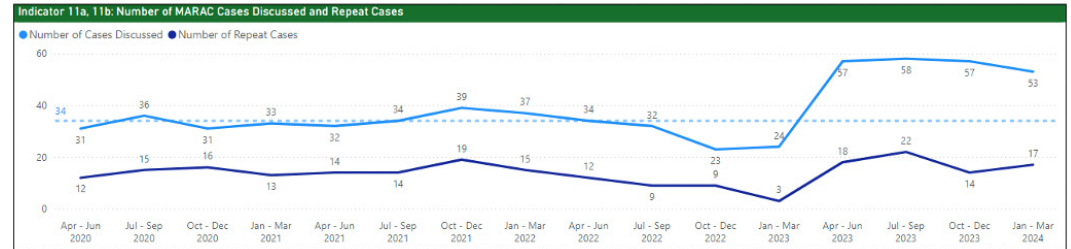
Homelessness services also saw a rise in applications for younger people where domestic abuse was a factor in this reporting period. 2022-2024 saw the introduction of a Young Persons Housing Pathway, working in conjunction with Education, Children and Families Social Work (CFSW) and other partners to support young people more effectively. This provides a point of contact for services to access the right support for young people experiencing homelessness across the region. Furthermore, the additional recruitment of a Children and Young Persons Worker in Dumfries and Stewartry Women’s Aid in March 2023 reflects growing demand to provide support for younger people.

In the period 2022/24, a total of 338 MARAC cases were discussed with 104 repeat cases (31%) compared to a total of 273 MARAC cases with 118 repeat cases (43%) in the previous two-year period. The percentage of cases discussed has increased by 20% with repeat cases falling by 12% compared to the previous 2-year period. It should however be noted that we have seen further increases in both the number of MARAC cases and repeat cases over the last 12 months and we expect this to continue to increase into the next reporting period.

Table 1 - Comparison of Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) from 2020/22 to 2022/24.

| Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) | 2020/22 | 2022/24 | Percentage Change (2020/22 to 2022/24) |
|--|---------|---------|--|
| MARAC Cases Discussed | 273 | 338 | 20% |
| Repeat MARAC Cases Discussed | 118 | 104 | -12% |

Chart 2 - Comparison of Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) by Quarter from 2020/22 to 2022/24



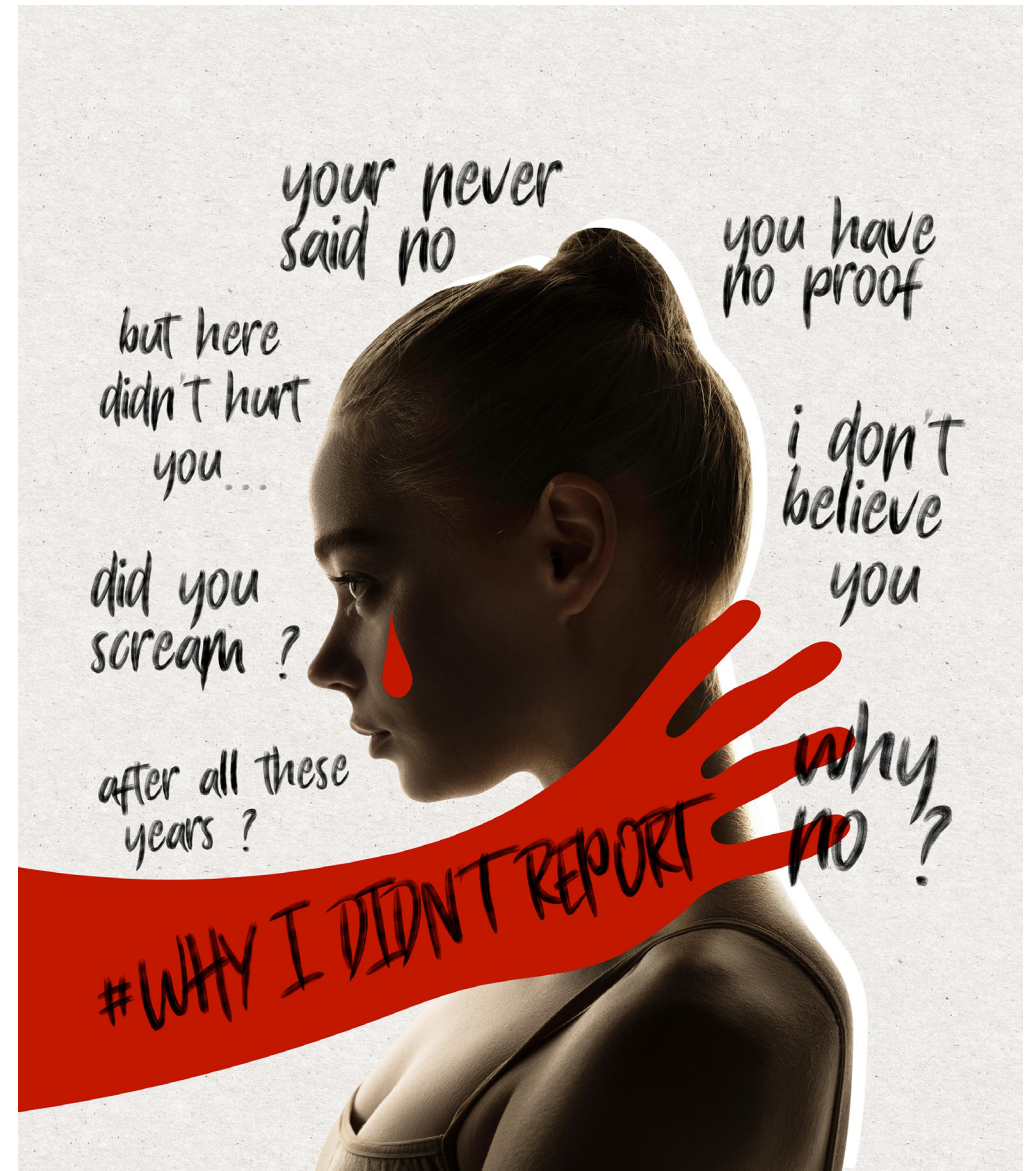
As in previous years the primary reasons for repeat MARAC cases were due to breach of bail, breach of Non-Harassment Order (NHO) or breach of undertaking of court order. This was consistent with the previous two-year period and the current national trend. Close working relationships with community justice means this has also been raised within the Community Justice Partnership, reflecting strategic alignment and collaborative working.

Within the last two years, there has been increased use of bail supervision and diversion managed by the Early Intervention and Diversion team within Justice Social Work. This reflects a national drive to reduce the use of custody, using prison as a last resort whenever possible. Whilst we understand that community sentences and early intervention are often positive, this becomes more challenging in relation to domestic abuse and considering victim safety. These national drivers and decisions in justice have impacted negatively on victims and survivors with increasing demand on specialist services to support women and children affected by violence. In turn, this affects statutory services when the capacity of services to offer specialist support is reached; the overall responsibility to keep people



safe sits with the local authority. Despite this, evidence indicates that staff continue to provide a high standard of support to those most at risk across our region. Quality assurance provides the partnership with assurance that people are listened to, involved and there is good collaborative working evident across services. However, the risk to all services if any one service could not deliver the current level of support would have a significant impact across the partnership.

Early intervention work continues such as Mentor in Violence Prevention (MVP) programs in schools tackling attitudes and misogyny with young people, more information about this can be found later in this report. A misogyny working group has been established to try and map work taking place across the region by all partners working in this area.





Outcomes, achievements, and service improvements

As previously identified, there has been huge progress in the development of data collation and scrutiny to achieve greater understanding of violence against women and girls/children locally. This work has required significant time and commitment from all partners in an area that has previously been very challenging due to differences in collation within the many agencies involved in this area of work. This is a work in progress but due to the success to date, commitment of staff and goodwill of partners, it is expected that this will develop further going forward.

Our focus on training in relation to Safe and Together is detailed later within this report. It is important to highlight in this section as the purpose of this training is to support improvements in service delivery and increase the understanding and confidence of staff when supporting women and children who may be experiencing domestic abuse.

MARAC – Multiagency Risk Assessment Conferences.



As can be seen from the data MARAC has continued to build on the success from previous years as highlighted in the Violence Against Women and Girls Biennial Report 2020-2022. MARACs have continued online as the changes established during lockdown were positive for us in Dumfries and Galloway in terms of time and attendance. This has also improved effectiveness and increased collaboration with other MARACs in the UK.

In the case of MARAC transfers (where victims relocate to D&G), online MARACs have made it possible for agencies out with Dumfries and Galloway – Independent Domestic Abuse Advocates in particular – to attend and share first-hand knowledge on both victims and perpetrators, thus enriching the discussions and adding clarity to the decision-making process. Likewise D&G MARAC Reps have attended other MARAC meetings to talk about cases transferred to other parts of the country, ensuring continuity in safety

planning. This has enhanced the response to victims. During the reporting period MARACs took place four weekly with regular updates being brought to VAWG Sub Committee.

Both Dumfriesshire and Stewartry Women's Aid and Wigtownshire Women's Aid continued to provide advocacy support to female victims going to MARAC with ASSIST supporting male victims who meet the MARAC referral criteria.

At the beginning of March 2023, ASSIST (Advocacy Support Safety Information Services Together) launched their new service in Dumfries and Galloway initially covering Stranraer Sheriff Court. The team currently consists of a Service manager, Lead Advocacy Worker, three Advocacy Workers and a Children's Advocacy Worker.

ASSIST provides specialist domestic abuse advocacy and support focused on reducing risk to and improving the safety of victims of domestic abuse. Its aim is to ensure that all victims of domestic abuse² – are safe, informed and supported throughout their involvement with the criminal justice system. ASSIST supports victims of domestic abuse where a person has been charged or is likely to be charged with a domestic abuse related crime. The abuse might be historical, recent, or ongoing and the perpetrator may be a current or an ex-partner. The length of the relationship does not matter.

In addition to ASSIST and Women's Aid, Rape Crisis have an advocacy service for victim/survivors of rape/sexual abuse. They provide ongoing support to survivors going to court. In this last year, delays in the justice process have impacted support services, survivors and their families. Rape Crisis provided support to 251 survivors across their whole service, 33% of whom were recorded as being adult survivors of CSA (Child Sex Abuse).

2 women, children and men



Specialist Services

Over the reporting period Dumfries and Stewartry Women's Aid (DSWA) introduced a Domestic Abuse Awareness Group for Survivors. Prior to setting up of the group women were consulted and all agreed they would feel uncomfortable discussing issues within a large group. Listening and hearing the voices of those with lived experience enabled DSWA to provide sessions in groups with a maximum of six women, with all attendees agreeing to confidentiality.

Feedback from survivors supported by DSWA:

Thank you for the support you have given my daughter. She is back to being the girl I know and love. Her confident and outgoing personality has returned. She is studying again and has decided she wants to be a teacher. I'm sure she will achieve her goal although for a period of time her future was in doubt. I can't thank you enough.

You have always been great in supporting me in the past, H, and I will always be really grateful to you and Women's Aid for saving me and giving me the strength to realise that I was worth more than being in that awful marriage

I was at my lowest ebb and would be dead now if it wasn't for Women's Aid

People don't think us young people are traumatized by domestic abuse in the house. It's horrible having to lie in bed and listen but because we don't live with him now all that is in the past. I had A as my worker and my mum got help from N who got us a flat in the refuge.

Part of the work Wigtownshire Women's Aid (WWA) has undertaken in the past year is to work in local secondary schools to raise awareness of healthy relationships; provide information to community groups and to fully engage in multiagency groups, including MARAC. In addition, staff have continued to facilitate the Own My Life course. This is an educational and creative 12-week course to help women, children and young people affected by domestic abuse to regain control of their lives. The course includes using short videos, structured discussions, group and individual activities, and a comprehensive learning journal, which includes their own My Story Journal providing participants with all the ideas, key concepts, and content from the course with space for reflection and notes. This has proved so successful it will now be offered to all women, children and young people using WWA's service.



Feedback from survivors supported by WWA:

"The support I received was second to none. My worker – T – helped me in every aspect in my life. And has gave me faith that there are genuine honest caring people that genuinely cared for my wellbeing her support was amazing and has gave me strength to get away from a horrendous situation which I had been too scared and felt trapped I now believe my kids and I are going to have our happy ever after can't express how much her support has meant to me I believe she went above and beyond to help me build up my trust enough to speak out without it I know I would still be stuck and scared and in danger, but now my kids and I are safe and on our way to such a better life I can't thank her enough. She deserves a medal."

"The support I received has been life changing I will be forever grateful Support helped me to start going back out again, with encouragement to attend groups but no pressure, after slowly moving from phone calls to meeting with me at home to simply going out for a coffee, during the restrictions of lockdown this contact was vital to me. I was also provided with physical support to transport house contents in boxes to allow me to get repairs in my home, this was massively helpful to me and helped me deal with a hugely traumatic experience in manageable small sections which I otherwise would not have been able to do. My support worker also helped me let go of aspects of the fallout from the abuse, by being a voice of reason when I couldn't see beyond the short term, for that I am thankful also. Women's aid saved my life."





Dumfries and Galloway Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Support Centre provide services to victim/survivors of rape and sexual abuse over the age of 12 (their service includes men). They also welcome survivors of sexual violence and their non-abusing friends, partners, and families.

Justice Social Work – Working with Perpetrators

Whilst men can be signposted for support if they recognise their own behaviour or feelings are problematic, the only direct work carried out with perpetrators continues to be provided by Justice Social Work (JSW) and is court mandated. The Caledonian System is a combined response to men’s abusive behaviour for men convicted of domestic abuse related offences. It comprises of a programme for men and a service for women, children and families affected. During the reporting period JSW have delivered the Caledonian Programme to forty-six men, a 21% increase compared to the previous reporting period (38 men).



Men who have completed the Caledonian programme have said:

"Made me realise change can be a good thing and I can give up control now and being wrong is not a bad thing but a learning experience."

"An understanding that DA happens in many shapes and forms, and that there are more ways to go about things than this..."

"Working on myself so I can be better for everyone and myself."

"The facilitators are welcoming and superb at their job."

"I feel like I can deal with things a lot better and think before I speak. I have learnt different ways to work through things."

"Learning on how to control my anger and my emotions better as well as feel a lot happier talking to the group about things that happened in my life, better to get things off my chest."

JSW also continued to deliver the Moving Forward: Making Changes (MFMC) Sex Offender Programme. In the past 24 months the service has had 13 MFMC Programme Requirements imposed as part of a Community Payback Order and currently have groups running east and west of the region with an average of five men per group. A few men received intervention on a 1-1 basis due to complex needs which makes this the preferred treatment option for the individual.

JSW also delivered 7 MFMC interventions and 3 Caledonian interventions to men released from custody post-sentence compared to 5 MFMC interventions and 1 Caledonian intervention in the last reporting period. This work is becoming more frequent for the team due to men serving custodial sentences (short term and long term) not being able to access programmes within a prison setting prior to release. Where feasible work will start whilst men are undertaking home leave periods to ensure planned and consistent intervention pre- and post-release.



Police Scotland

Police Scotland arrange and chair regular Multi Agency Tasking and Coordinating meetings (MATACs) where the focus is on domestic abuse perpetrators. There are links with MARAC where referral to MATAC is a common action. For the first time information and data in relation to MATAC is now shared with the VAWG Sub Committee, this is a positive step forward.

Disclosure Scheme for Domestic Abuse Scotland (DSDAS)

You have the right to ask about whether your partner or someone you're seeing has an abusive past.

You can also apply on behalf of a friend or relative.

Find out more at:
www.scotland.police.uk/advice-and-information/domestic-abuse/

RIGHT TO ASK

The Police provide the Disclosure Scheme for Domestic Abuse Scotland (DSDAS). This is similar to Clare's Law in England where people in a new relationship (or their friends and family) have the right to ask if there is any information relating to their partner's domestic abuse history or agencies can ask for the power to tell when they are aware of a domestic abuse perpetrators' past. Police reported an increase in applications following their input during 16 Days of Action: from 223 applications in 2020/22 to 328 applications in 2022/24.

The White Ribbon Campaign



The White Ribbon Campaign (WRC) is an international movement to end men's violence against women and girls. Whilst anyone can get involved in White Ribbon the aim is to involve more men to challenge violence against women.

A new Dumfries and Galloway White Ribbon Steering Group started in March 2023 and has evolved to direct and support the local campaign. The Chair is a Police Scotland Superintendent, and the Vice-Chair is the Governor of HM Prison Dumfries. Members of the Steering Group include representatives from Queen of the South FC, Fire Service, Education Service, Social Work, Public Protection, Developing the Young Workforce, Youth Work, NHS D&G, and the Health and Social Care Partnership.

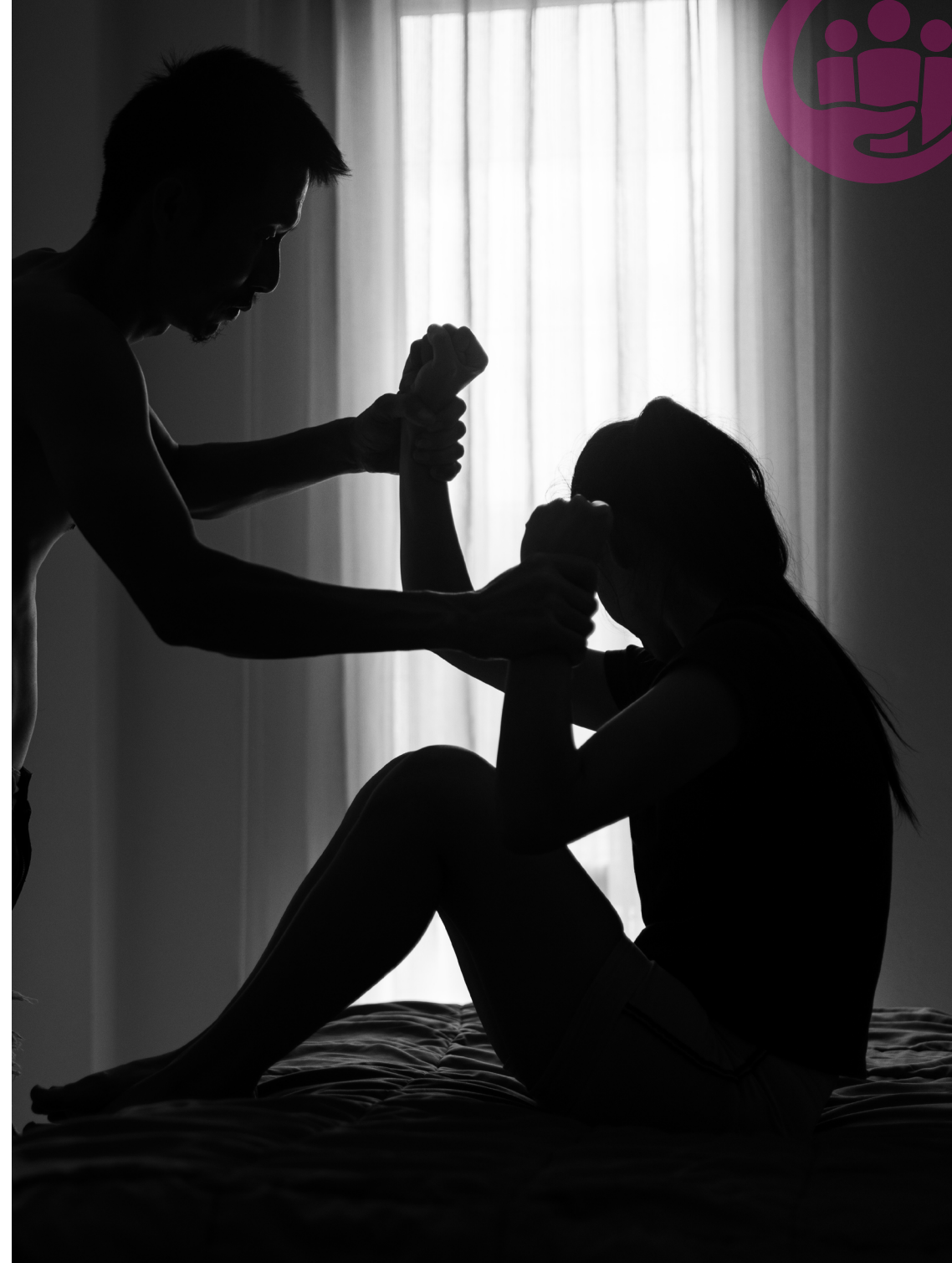
The Group is supported by staff from the Council's Public Protection Team (VAWG Coordinator and Research and Information Officer) and: the Community Justice Partnership Manager (Chair of VAWG Sub Committee).



The aim of the local WRC is to continue to raise awareness of all forms of violence against women, their effect on women and girls and society in general and to encourage people to act against all these forms of gender-based violence. It encourages people to engage in several ways including:

- signing the WR Pledge to never commit, condone, or remain silent about any form of violence against women or girls.
- becoming WR Speakers – training is provided free of charge.
- becoming WR Champions and support the development of the campaign in the workplaces, clubs, or places of worship.

Over thirty people have been trained as White Ribbon Speakers with the Steering Group continuing to develop ways of supporting them, so they feel confident in their role and are able to identify opportunities to raise awareness of the breadth and harm caused by VAWG.





Training, learning and development

Multi agency domestic abuse training continued to be provided to staff in 2022 with a decision taken to review this training during 2023. In addition, tailored and specific training has been offered to staff by partners. The focus of domestic abuse training in this time was the role out of Safe and Together.

The Safe and Together (S&T) Model (<https://safeandtogetherinstitute.com/>) is based on working with domestic abuse survivors and perpetrators to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children. The three key principles are:

- Keeping the child safe with the non-abusing parent
- Form a supportive partnership with the non-abusing parent, and
- Hold the abusive parent accountable for their abuse.

There have been three online sessions held in 2022 and 2023 with 248 staff attending these, providing them with greater understanding of domestic abuse informed practice. In addition to this, four-day online training was started for staff working in child protection. There have been 102 staff who completed this and passed the exam. Four local members of staff have undertaken training for trainers and going forward the plan is to deliver Safe and Together training in person rather than online. In 2023 a four-day training event was held for 37 Supervisors who were predominately from Social Work. The aim of this training was to further embed the principles of S&T into everyday practice when working with victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse and their children.

“Since completing the Safe and Together training I have been able to use the model to improve my practice and use the skills I gained in my day-to-day practice. Having knowledge of assessment, interviewing and case planning has given me valuable tools to support families and ensure the safe and together principles are being followed by all agencies involved in a case as well as giving me the confidence to challenge professionals

when I feel the principles are not being followed. I am able to recognise when coercive control of the non-offending parent is being overlooked and blame is being placed on the non-offending parent, being able to refer to Safe and Together model in these situations or similar has made challenging much easier. It has also given me the knowledge to focus on the protective factors that women put in place to protect their children and ensure these are heard and considered by all professionals involved. Safe and Together has given me the skills to recognise when language within reports and case planning is not holding a perpetrator to account and has enabled me to advocate for families when this happens. The interviewing techniques I learned from the course are vital in aiding me and ensuring I am always doing this in a trauma informed way, I am now able to use these skills day to day and am confident in doing this.”

As part of the scheduled work of PPC Performance Quality and Improvement Sub Committee, a multi-agency child protection self-evaluation commenced in Autumn 2022. A Multi-Agency Child Protection Self-Evaluation Steering Group (MA CP SE) consisting of operational managers from across the partnership was set up in summer 2022 to oversee the work.

The self-evaluation included record reading across the four main partner agencies of Social Work, Police, Health, and Education. It was agreed that to establish a baseline of understanding of practice in terms of Domestic Abuse in the context of us implementing Safe and Together. This would allow us to measure any improvements resulting from developing that approach.

The MA CP SE Steering Group agreed that the “Care Inspectorate Quality Framework for Children and Young People in Need of Care and Protection 2019” would be used for file reading however, there was a need for some more specific questions in terms of our practice around domestic abuse.



When working with families where domestic abuse has been identified as a risk factor for the child or children, there was good collaborative working at the early stages of the process within Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and Initial Referral Discussions (IRDs) however, this was not as often evident in assessment, planning and support provided. The impact of the domestic abuse on the child or children was not always recognised and they can become lost in the process and not seen as individuals even as part of sibling groups. There was also a lack of consistency in terms of holding perpetrators to account, it may be due to a lack of skill and/or confidence of staff.

There appears to have been a historical expectation or reliance on the victim/mothers in terms of addressing risk and keeping children safe. Evidence of inappropriate language and victim blaming was found in the earlier cases however, there is evidence in the newer cases that this is changing. This provides a baseline of current practice in terms of domestic abuse to enable us to measure changes.

Training was also delivered on other forms of VAW included Trafficking; Revenge Porn; Rape and Commercial Sexual Exploitation. Trafficking awareness training was delivered by TARA and there were four sessions delivered in this period. The numbers attending was not recorded until 2023/24 when there were fifty-nine attendees. Revenge Porn awareness was delivered by the Revenge Porn Helpline with ten attendees.

Staff within NHS D&G undertake Routine Enquiry in many services including maternity, health visiting and addictions. Staff are offered training, so they can provide suitable support and signpost to other specialist support agencies. Capturing data in relation to routine enquiry is part of ongoing improvement activity.

16 Days of Activism for the Elimination of Violence Against Women

Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls
in Dumfries and Galloway
25 November - 10 December

Training

16 Days of Action

Activism **Events**

Find out more at: www.dgppp.org.uk/16days

16 Days of Activism is an international campaign that runs from the 25th of November (the International Day for the Elimination of VAW) until the 10th December (International Human Rights Day).

Planning for Dumfries and Galloway's programme of events and messages started in the spring of 2022 with the establishment of a Steering Group. Representatives came from Community Justice; Youth Work; the Alcohol and Drugs Partnership; Police Scotland; Wigtownshire and Dumfries and Stewartry Women's Aid organisations; Dumfries and Galloway Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Support Centre; Dumfries and Galloway Council; University of the West of Scotland; Education services; Social Work; and NHS Dumfries and Galloway. This approach was replicated in 2023.

Along with the local Steering Group, a National Steering Group, led by the Protecting People Team at the Improvement Service (IS), also met regularly to agree national messages and themes. Following on from approved messages in previous years, it was agreed that there should be two main national messages, #whatnext as well as #lightup in 2022 and Imagine Scotland without VAWG in 2023. IS provided a toolkit with images and messages to be used on local media; some of which were used on Dumfries and Galloway's social media campaigns, along with additional local information. The 16 Days social media campaign was shared by local partners with a combined reach of over 200,000 people in 2022.



In 2022, Tik Tok was used to engage with young people for the first time. Youth Work Services worked alongside thirty young people from various projects including Dumfries and Galloway Youth Council, The Young Women's Network, The Toon, Dumfries and Galloway Peer Educators from across Dumfries and Galloway to develop a series of sixteen videos tackling issues important to young people related to Violence against Women and Girls. The videos which were posted across Instagram, Facebook, Tik Tok, Twitter, Snapchat and YouTube prompted conversations and provided an opportunity for young people to be open about their own experiences and learn where they could go for support. The videos reached over 5,000 people through social media and more through youth groups and face to face conversations.

The programme of events included:

- Building Moral Rebels to Prevent Men's Violence Against Women and Girls - with Graham Goulden
- Revenge Porn Helpline and Intimate Image Abuse Awareness Training Session - with Kate Worthington
- Safe and Together Overview
- Emily Test Online Talk
- Right to Ask - Disclosure Scheme for Domestic Abuse Scotland (DSDAS)
- Wigtownshire Women's Aid Open Afternoon
- Commercial Sexual Exploitation: Strategic and Policy Context - with Linda Thompson from the Women's Support Project
- White Ribbon Champions Talk

In 2023 the theme "Imagine a world without Violence Against Women and Children" was used to good effect. On 27th November 2023 there was a morning conference at The Bridge in Dumfries with the theme "Imagine Dumfries and Galloway without Violence Against Women and Children". 120 people attended, and it was exciting to hear about the activities local

young people are involved in, both in schools and with other groups and organisations. Pupils and teachers spoke about the inspirational "Boys to Men" project in Lockerbie; Mentors in Violence Prevention (in Lockerbie, Dumfries Academy, North West Campus and Dalbeattie High School); there was an excerpt from the Locker Room Diaries delivered by pupils at Sanquhar Academy who also delivered "Imagine" a poem by Myra Ross. It was encouraging to hear and see such talented young people.

The Young Women's Network also provided an input on the Network's activities and plans. A fantastic poem was written and delivered by a young person supported by Wigtownshire Women's Aid.

In addition, there was input on the local White Ribbon Campaign as well as the National White Ribbon Coordinator speaking about the campaign from a woman's perspective. Rape Crisis's Sexual Violence Prevention Worker provided an input on the project to raise issues such as the impact of pornography and consent in local schools. 16 Days 2023 also included inputs on:

- Incel...links to vulnerability with David Russell
- Psychological Trauma with Rab McColm
- Revenge Porn Webinar with Kate Worthington
- Women through a different Lens– Stigma a shared issue-Online Workshop
- Commercial Sexual Exploitation Workshop with Linda Thomson from the Women's Support Project
- Safe and Together Overview (on two separate afternoons)



Wigtownshire Women’s Aid held three exhibition style events across the locality, one in Stranraer, one in Newton Stewart and one in Whithorn. All three events were open to professionals and the public and included videos, poetry, quotes, interactive activities, and a display of shoes to commemorate the lives of woman killed in the UK by a partner or ex-partner in one year. Feedback from the events has been positive and includes “wow, that’s emotional” and “it brings home what women suffer and it’s not right”.

Dumfriesshire and Stewartry Women’s aid held a successful open day with the launch of a short film raising awareness of the impact of domestic abuse on families. Over sixty people attended providing networking opportunities along with awareness and learning about the work of DSWA. Following the event there was positive feedback including:

“I hope you will repeat it in the future, it was welcoming, informative, honest and really good to meet some of the Team”

Post event questionnaires were sent out and responses were received from seventy-nine participants with 94% saying they had learned from the events. Feedback was positive with comments including:

“I wasn't aware of all the work taking place in schools, particularly in relation to MVP and the Boys to Men project. I could see how this links with the VAW agenda but also to wider public protection issues, community justice, alcohol, and drugs”. (Attendee at Conference)

“I took so much from this event. Seeing the vulnerabilities of those involved was eye opening. It's made me think much more about early intervention and identification so that we can offer support sooner. Asking ourselves why young men are drawn to this messaging is challenging for us all but provides us with a chance to make things different”. (Attendee at INCEL online event)

“As a Social Worker I work with not only the child but the family and the wider network, therefore, having a thorough understanding of a person is important when making my assessment. Being trauma informed arms us with the necessary skills to help understand how trauma can impact on a person and the family environment. (Attendee at online Trauma event)

“It has made me more aware of attitudes, assumptions and beliefs towards women, how the subtle seemingly harmless comment is a part of the culture that leads to violence. It has made me more self-aware of the culture I was brought up in and my own attitudes towards women that I can now question and gives me a bit more confidence to question the actions of others”. (Attendee at Bystander Film Screening)

Visit of members of the **Comite National des Violences Intrafamiliales**



(Commission recherches auteurs/Research Commission on Offenders).

In 2023 staff from the Public Protection Team were approached by a member of staff from University of the West of Scotland (UWS) with the proposal of having a knowledge exchange on domestic abuse with agencies from Dumfries and Galloway, UWS and members of the French National Committee on Domestic Violence. As part of the three-day visit there was a conference. This allowed staff from Dumfries and Galloway to gain deeper understanding of the good practice activity taking place in Dumfries and Galloway and across Scotland and learn from the French approach to domestic abuse which is embedded in gender equality. To have experts at such a senior level from France was an



honour and an opportunity that those who worked closely with them will benefit from³.

Feedback from the conference included: *“The conference gave us an opportunity to reflect on the progress made in Scotland in relation to violence against women whilst recognising there is still much work to do. ...I was struck but the passion of all those working in this field, from police, Justice Social Work, third sector and academia. We were delighted to highlight and share the learning to date on the Caledonian Programme, working with perpetrators of domestic abuse and supporting the women and children affected by such abuse, the progress of Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act and the implementation and embedding of Safe and Together; having the opportunity to meet with services after the conference provided another valuable perspective. There is much we can share with our French colleagues we also have to acknowledge there was learning for us to take away, particularly in relation to the status victims are given within court processes, the recognition of forced suicide and innovations in non-court mandated (pre- sentence) perpetrator work with men. It was an honour to be part of this unique collaboration”.*

Public Protection Week 2023 and 2024

This has become a key opportunity for learning and development across the Public Protection Partnership and covers the three core pillars of Adult Support and Protection, Child Protection and Violence Against Women and Girls. It is held in February of each year and culminates in targeting media and training on national ASP Day.

Dumfries and Galloway Public Protection Week 2023 included an overarching theme of what public protection is and what the multi-agency partnership does. The week offered twelve online events and one in person

with varied topics and speakers to support and enable understanding of how the different themes tied together. It also highlighted the importance of how services across the partnership work together. We had a range of presenters including.

- Your Safety Matters - Police Scotland
- Signpost to Safety - Scottish Fire & Rescue Service
- Prevent Awareness Training
- Domestic Abuse Overview and Police Response - Workshop
- SARCs - Sexual Assault Response Coordination Service
- Neglect
- Multiagency Adult Support and Protection - Level 2 Training
- Whole Family Support
- Signs of Safety Webinar
- Adult Support and Protection Guidance Suite
- Scottish Prison Service
- Let's Talk Financial Harm
- Alcohol and Drugs Support Southwest Scotland - Being There Service

3 The Conference Programme can be found in appendix 1.



D&G Public Protection week 2024 marked the fourth annual Public Protection week with the theme being the importance of lived and lived experience. We had a range of presenters including Police Scotland, NHS, Social Workers, Women's Support Project, Families Outside, Summerhill Community Centre and Authentic Voice Project. Like previous years a daily social media campaign was arranged that had varied theme(s) from one event or both each day of Public Protection week. We focused on promoting the organisation that was presenting along with their logo where we could and key message. As well as stall set up at various HSCP facilities including DGRI the Galloway Hospital and Mountainhall.

The week saw 199 delegates attend the various sessions with overwhelming positive feedback for all events.

Anti Stigma Strategy - over the reporting period our local Alcohol and Drug Partnership (ADP) were keen to look at stigma and the development of an anti-stigma strategy. This was as a direct result of feedback from people in recovery, including families, that stigma is one of the greatest challenges they face. We recognised this as an opportunity as we know stigma is also a huge issue for women and children experiencing domestic abuse as well as those with justice involvement, either past or present. As our Community Justice Partnership Manager is also Chair of the Violence Against Women Sub Committee it was suggested the Violence Against Women Coordinator should also be involved in exploring the potential of a joint anti-stigma strategy. Initial discussions went well, strategic links and shared experiences of those involved in each area of work were clear to see. Work has now commenced with consideration being given to language and the potential to produce a Strategy for Kindness. On the back of the anti-stigma strategy work a joint ADP, VAWG and CJP workshop took place during 16 Days of Activism on the challenges and intersectionality facing women in each of these areas.

The Women through a different lens workshop was delivered online and well supported by multi-agency staff.



Engagement, involvement, and communication

One of the strengths of the Violence Against Women and Girls Subcommittee is the key representation by VAWG Specialist Services which adds real value to our work. There are four services within the region that offer specialist services to survivors of VAW. The meetings offer these services the opportunity to share the voices of victims and survivors, sharing feedback on successes and challenges being experienced by their service and the victims/survivors of all forms of VAWG. VAWG Sub Committee also offers the opportunity for other statutory and third sector services to hear about challenges and barriers, and where possible and necessary, progress solutions and escalate to PPC.

One of the key aspects of work to address VAW is prevention as well as the provision of support. Often partners will share information on behaviour and trends during meetings that require action or awareness raising activity. An example of this and something currently being worked on is non-fatal strangulation.

In this period there have been several multi agency campaigns to raise awareness and educate people. The opportunities included 16 days of activism, and festive period campaigns. Articles and awareness raising information was shared on social media and included in the Public Protection Partnership's newsletter. Wigtownshire Women's Aid also had strong community engagement through their Facebook page.

Mentors in Violence Prevention

Eleven of the possible fifteen local secondary schools are undertaking Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP). MVP is a national school-based programme that supports young people to positively influence the attitudes and behaviour of their peers to tackle the issue of gender-based violence. There is training and skill development for older students who in turn support learning and understanding for younger students.

MVP aims to increase pupils' confidence to alert staff to safety concerns; develop skills for both staff and pupils to be aware of behaviours that harm others; improve school ethos; increase presentation skills and teamwork; develop leadership skills and support all members of school communities to become active bystanders and challenge gender-based violence. The Secondary Schools who have not yet implemented MVP plan to progress this in the future. It is recognised that there still needs to be work with Primary Schools. This will require multi-agency action and will be a focus for the VAWG Subcommittee.

In June 2022 Dumfries & Galloway Rape Crisis (DGRC) were invited to take part in Dumfries & Galloway's flagship youth event "Youth Beatz" where they engaged with over a thousand young people from across the region. RC provided information packs and "goodie bags" with useful resources, safety devices and contact details for out of hours support etc. This has created increasing valuable links in the context of staff and students knowing how and where to refer or to seek help.

During this reporting period the Prevention & Community Engagement team at DGRC have been involved in some excellent pieces of collaborative work right across the region, raising awareness of the organisation and its commitment to tackling GBV through education and activism. In recognition of their sexual violence prevention work* (delivering the Rape Crisis Scotland national program) they were invited to participate in the First Minister's visit to Moffat Academy for the launch of the first ever national approach to gender-based violence (GBV) for schools. The guidance will enable schools to build on our work and prioritise gender-based violence, honouring the voices of the children and young people who called for change. This visit was covered by mainstream and RCS social media which highlighted some of the key strengths of the guidance and increased the focus on the prevalence of GBV affecting children and young people particularly girls, and the need for schools to take a child-centred, trauma-informed approach to support.



In the lead up to the 16 Days of Activism which ran from 25th November DGRC launched a competition asking young local creatives to submit work inspired by the word EMPOWER to reflect their support model and to send a strong message of strength and survival out to our communities. This culminated in a “Night of Empowerment” event at the Stove Network, a local community art collective. The work on display featured a selection of entries comprising of individual interpretations of empowerment, in some cases bringing to life the experience of surviving sexual violence and prompting important conversations. The exhibition is now going on tour across Dumfries & Galloway.

The DGRC team also worked alongside Wigtownshire Women’s Aid to co-facilitate workshops at the Four Nations Young Women’s Conference 2024. The two-day event was hosted by D&G Council and took place at the Northwest Castle Hotel in Stranraer. Again, lots of social media coverage and networking which has led to engagement with other groups and projects across the region of which there are examples below:

- Better Lives Partnership- working closely with this group across three locations, dropping into open days to keep a close relationship and a reminder to the YP of what support is available.
- Police- Taking part in organised events such as ‘Do the Right Thing’ and ‘Moving on Project’ where various agencies get together and provide YP with information during a school day.
- The Toon- Worked with a performance-based youth group to develop a workshop that explored issues around Sexual Violence. These workshops took place at a Young Women’s conference ran by Youth Work.
- International Women’s Day- Ran an awareness raising week setting up information stalls in local schools and organisations such as: The Usual Place (a café which supports and employs YP with additional support needs), Kate’s Kitchen (A safe space for anyone to join in on different activities and get a hot meal), D&G College

- The Usual Place, Good connections for Autistic Adults – This was a small collection of local organisations set up to provide a drop by event for people with ASN. This led to organising future Prevention sessions with a group of YP.

DGRC led a successful International Women’s Day week of engagement with a focus on reaching out to the private sector to raise awareness of GBV, the organisation, and services through a “celebrating women in business” visiting campaign where they handed out goody bags, information leaflets and promoted their 10 Actions to Support Women - advice and support for students, friends or colleagues and spreading the prevention message.

Youth Work in Dumfries and Galloway are very proactive and work with young people raising awareness of issues including gender equality and violence against women. Staff undertake a variety of activities some examples of activity included workshops within schools on healthy relationships and on domestic abuse and where to get support; delivery of the Toon incorporating raising awareness of domestic abuse; issue-based groups such as boys / girls groups that look at positive and healthy relationships; and seasonal awareness raising including Christmas where 25 Days of Youth Information is delivered across social media.

Supporting local schools: As well as Sexual Violence Prevention work and support to survivors, Rape Crisis staff have continued their work with local schools to determine a safe referral pathway for young people who disclose sexual violence and are unable to attend support out-with the school timetable and premises. Education and Rape Crisis co-produced a good practice guide for all Dumfries and Galloway secondary schools with the offer of trauma informed training for school reception staff. Young people have reported feeling safer in the school environment knowing that they can have support with only those directly involved with their case (support worker and school welfare officer for example) being privy to information pertaining to support session related class absences.

Wigtownshire Women's Aid (WWA) delivered awareness sessions to all S1 and S4 pupils in both secondary schools in Wigtownshire. These are age appropriate, interactive and focussed around healthy relationships; what DA is and where to seek support. Children and Young Peoples' workers co-facilitate the Do The Right Thing multi-agency educational programme to all secondary schools in Dumfries and Galloway annually. This is delivered in conjunction with other partners to S3 pupils and includes domestic abuse and healthy relationships (along with other issues).

The VAWG Subcommittee has carried out VAWG attitudes surveys since 2010 and repeated this during the 16 Days period in November 2022. The survey closed in March 2023, 370 people took part. 86% of respondents were female and the largest age group was 46 to 65. The survey focused on the public views of VAWG and findings are used to underpin awareness campaigns. Encouragingly 72% of respondents were aware that the Domestic Abuse Scotland Act protects people from psychological as well as physical and sexual harm and 68% were aware of the Right to Ask – Disclosure Scotland Domestic Abuse Scheme (DSDAS). Some of the messages coming from the survey include the negative impact of the purchase of sex, consent and the gendered nature of domestic abuse. It is reassuring that previous messages have had an impact, as demonstrated by the data, and crucial that we continue to raise awareness and ask the right questions.





Challenges and areas for improvement

Housing is a key part of the response to survivors of VAWG. Within Dumfries and Galloway there is a variety of high-quality supported accommodation across the region with a range of options available for women and children affected by domestic abuse, which are safe, secure and responsive to their needs. However, it should be noted that a significant lack of permanent housing and general suitable accommodation across D&G has resulted in waiting lists and created severe pressures for housing availability for victims and people at risk. This has also led to waiting lists for refuge due to people having to stay for longer. Housing Options and Homeless service in Dumfries and Galloway has faced significant increases in demand over the past three years. In 2019/20 there were 884 Homeless applications, this rose to 1253 in 2022/23, a 42% increase. In 2023/24 this remains 31% up from pre-2020. This increase in demand results in an inevitable strain on resources but also has far wider impacts across a range of service areas.

While household disputes remain the main reason for homeless presentations there have been notable increases in other areas i.e.:

- 52% increase in people leaving violent or abusive households,
- 65% increase in specific domestic violence cases
- 71% increase in Landlord terminating tenancies (non arrears related)

There has also been a rise in presentations from younger people with 347 applications from under twenty-five's in 2022/23, a 40% increase from 2020. Linked to the increased level of homeless approaches from people leaving violent and abusive households is the increase in declared mental health issues, with a staggering increase of 81% of cases reporting this as a specific issue. The current economic challenges and cost of living crisis is also contributing to homeless presentations with a 20% increase in households sighting financial difficulties.

Funding continues to be a challenge for VAWG specialist services. All the local services must spend significant portion of their time seeking continuing funds. In 2022 there was a national funding review for VAWG services in Scotland, however the way forward is yet to be resolved.

During this period, many local organisations provided input to the Scottish Government's Funding Review. This was commissioned in recognition that for some survivors of violence again women access to support is a postcode lottery. The findings of the review can be found at: The Independent Strategic Review of Funding and Commissioning (www.gov.scot)

There has also been no uplift in funding for JSW for the Caledonian System, despite numbers increasing.

Many of the areas for improvement are out with the control of individual services, an example of this is changing legislation within justice and a national drive to reduce the prison population. The VAWG Subcommittee has been informed of survivors of VAWG having to wait more than four years before cases are going to court. The impact on survivors, their families and support services cannot be underestimated.

Whilst a significant number of people have undertaken Safe and Together training in various forms (see page 15) this has not been without challenge. The completion of online Safe and Together training has been difficult due to significant work pressures over the reporting period. There is also recognition that delivering this training online via e-learning has created additional challenges. The original bid for funding was made during Covid-19, a time when in-person training was not possible. It has now been agreed that future training will be delivered in person to support knowledge exchange and enabling staff to prioritise attendance at training with no distraction.



Challenges with online domestic abuse training has been available through DAART (Domestic Abuse Awareness Raising Tool) but the numbers completing this cannot be measured. The online domestic abuse training for Council staff was lost following a move to a new system. This meant that there has been no measurable online domestic abuse training. A solution has been found to this challenge and in the next year resources from Equally Safe in Practice will be available on the Council's system.

Feedback from specialist services has identified that there is increased use of strangulation in people's sexual relationships. Research indicates that this can be very harmful (even when "consent" has been given) and there is no safe level. There will be a campaign to raise awareness of the harm during 16 Days of Activism 2024.

Development of the Public Protection Strategic Plan

During the reporting period and as mentioned a key piece of work for the Public Protection Committee and partnership has been the process of developing the strategic plan. The four priorities chosen reflect significant and challenging issues locally and nationally: -



Lived / Living Experience



Self Neglect



Sexual Harm



Multi-Agency Chronologies and Information Sharing

The process of identifying which areas to focus on was robust and was based on multiagency analysis of our data and its scrutiny and from other sources such as local learning review notification and full learning reviews, as well as the incorporation of national themes and challenges. We recognise that this will require significant work and focus, as such each priority area and will be led by a chief officer.



Looking forward

The VAWG Subcommittee will support the activity required to meet the priorities outlined within the PPC Strategy. The areas of lived and living experience and Sexual Harm are particularly pertinent to tackling VAWG and already well considered by partners. Work on the Strategy will be progressed in the next period with work to evidence how the work we already do contributes as well as identifying future actions and improvement activity.

In the year ahead funding continues from the Delivering Equally Safe Fund to further develop and embed the Safe and Together approach to responding to domestic abuse. There are four local trainers who will deliver training including Overview Training to raise awareness of domestic abuse and Core Training for staff working with families where domestic abuse is being perpetrated. In addition to this staff within Children and Families Social Work will be encouraged to use the Perpetrator Mapping Tool which supports the identification of the perpetrator's pattern of coercive control along with any actions that will harm the child and the adverse impact of their behaviour on the child. This in turn, should support staff to work with perpetrators to reduce risks to the children.

The Domestic Abuse Guidance will be completed and will support staff across public protection in their response to domestic abuse that will include the Safe and Together approach.

As part of our approach to strive towards best practice a multi-agency plan for the delivery of DASH RIC training will commence as a rolling programme. This ensures that staff feel confident to recognise and respond to risk, increasing safety for women and children.

A local Commercial Sexual Exploitation Position Statement will be launched during 16 Days of Activism and will encourage greater understanding of the harm caused by this form of Violence Against Women. The position statement will also be supported by training and awareness raising.

Multiagency Trafficking Guidance will be developed and launched in the next period to support greater understanding of trafficking and how to recognise signs and respond appropriately.

Collaborative work will continue to take place across VAWG, CJP and ADP, recognising the increasing strategic links, cross cutting agendas and benefits of joint approaches.

Funding continues to be a challenge for all services. In 2021 an Independent Review of the Funding and Commissioning of Violence Against Women and Girls Services started and was completed in June 2023. It was expected that the findings from this review would support a new approach to the national funding for specialist services and work to tackle VAWG. However, delays to the development of this has meant that there was an extension to the Delivering Equally Safe Fund for the financial year 2024/25 (and this was towards the end of the financial period, increasing agency and staff concerns) and there is lack of clarity of the way forward beyond this period. The PPC Chair and the Chair of the VAWG Subcommittee will engage with national fora to support the ongoing funding for specialist services and raise awareness of local challenges caused by lack of funding certainty.

It is recognised that as well as funding uncertainty, there are funding cuts in real terms. This impacts staff wellbeing, particularly where there is the risk of redundancy. Staff continue to be challenged due to increased workloads which has been further exacerbated with challenges in recruitment across services and staff have experienced burnout. It is unclear how these challenges can be easily tackled at a local area, but it is recognised that Dumfries and Galloway are not alone in facing these and support is offered within individual teams and multiagency groups to mitigate the impact as far as possible, including the provision of staff training to increase their skills and confidence.



Staff from specialist services have identified that there have been delays in the justice system, particularly Courts. Examples of victims having to wait up to four years for their cases to come to court has been raised locally and this is unlikely to improve significantly in the foreseeable future. These concerns including the impact on victims, perpetrators and the staff who support them, will be raised at national meetings and forums with the VAWG Subcommittee offering a place for services to raise concerns for escalation. The emergency early release of prisoners, and long-term prisoner release process consultation proposing changes to legislation have the potential to increase risks for victim survivors and their children. Sometimes their abuser's primary offence may not be domestic abuse, and they are then unaware of their potential release from prison. The VAWG Subcommittee will support actions to identify and reduce risk, including referrals to MARAC for high-risk victims. The Children, Care and Justice (Scotland) Act also raises concerns for young victim/survivors in relation to the support they can be offered when people are routed through the Children's Hearing system rather than criminal system.

As with much of Scotland, Dumfries and Galloway is facing a shortage of housing stock. This has the potential to create backlogs in housing provision for victims of domestic abuse and for victims to feel they have no alternative but remain in homes with their abusers. This housing shortage coupled with justice concerns highlighted above may mean women feel pressured to let their partner back into the home on release. The PPC and VAWG Subcommittee will continue to receive feedback on the challenges and to support organisations to identify solutions where these are possible.

VAWG links to gender and other forms of inequality. The issue of misogyny and the influence of pornography to increase these attitudes are recognised. In the next period there will be activity to support White Ribbon Speakers to increase their confidence and ability to raise awareness of violence against women. In addition, Mentors in Violence Prevention

will be supported through training and awareness raising. The local Young Women's network will encourage work to challenge sexist attitudes. Planning will take place to identify an anti-strangulation campaign, recognising the harm caused by such behaviour that is being normalised through mainstream pornography. Opportunities will be sought to increase awareness and understanding of participating in the national Equally Safe in Schools approach.

Increased links with Community Planning will be sought to enhance understanding of VAWG and the underpinning inequality and cultural issues that are wider than public protection, this will include strengthening ongoing links with Community Planning's Equality and Diversity Group.

Work will continue to implement our first Public Protection Partnership Strategic Plan 2024-27 which was agreed in March 2024 by the Child Officers' Group (COG) and was launched in April 2024. The Strategic Plan has four priority areas of focus that sit across the core pillars of public protection activity; these are critical aspects of public protection activity for high-risk groups that will be addressed through multi agency activity. These set out what the Public Protection Partnership want to achieve in partnership with all agencies over the next three years. In delivering the Strategic Plan, associated annual workplans will be developed. The process will be dynamic in nature to ensure capture of emerging challenges and will be updated throughout the lifespan of the plan. The responsibility for implementing this plan sits across the partnership with dedicated steering groups working alongside PPC, the sub-committees and wider partnerships and agencies, who will report progress back to the COG:PP, according to their terms of reference.

This is the first strategy of its format and set out the ambitions for the next three years across Adult Support and Protection, child Protection and Violence against Woman and Girls.



Following a very robust process of consultation, self-assessment, analysis, data and intelligence gathering locally and nationally, the following will be our four priority areas:

- Lived and Living Experience
- Self-Neglect
- Sexual Harm
- Multiagency Chronologies and Information Sharing



The **Public Protection Strategy** was published in April 2024 along with and aligned to an approved Performance and Quality Assurance Framework (PQAF). We will undertake activity required for Performance to be managed through the new Performance and Quality Assurance Framework (PQAF) 2024-2027 which will be launched alongside the Strategic Plan, providing an effective way to measure both our performance and quality assurance together building on previous Performance Frameworks, and Quality Assurance principles.

Performance Indicators outlined in the PQAF will form the core data included in the new Public Protection Committee Dashboards. These dashboards will be tailored for all members of the partnership.