

# EQUALLY SAFE EDINBURGH COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT 2024-2025

For the Edinburgh Chief Officers' Group



Equally Safe  
Edinburgh  
Committee

# EQUALLY SAFE EDINBURGH COMMITTEE PARTNERS:



**POLICE  
SCOTLAND**  
POILEAS ALBA



edinburgh rape crisis centre  
supporting survivors of sexual violence



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## Chair's Foreword

Having taken up the position of Chair in September 2024 I am delighted to present our report for the 2024-2025 period.

I would like to start by thanking the members of the committee for their continued contributions, both collectively and individually, as they endeavour to improve the quality of life and tackle inequalities for women and girls in our city. Facing increased demand in a difficult funding environment for many, as well as facing challenges associated with supporting and responding to the needs of those who have endured significant trauma associated with serious violence and abuse, our partners have continued to deliver a huge contribution to our committee and various subgroups.

I would also like to pay tribute to my predecessor DCI Adam Brown who chaired ESEC for the first half of the year covered in this report and for the two years previously, he left the committee in a strong place and with a culture of collaboration and support and it was a pleasure to take over his role. Thanks also to our Lead Officer, Angela Voulgari, who in addition to many other tasks, ably ensures that the work of the committee is co-ordinated, taken forward and reported upon.

Our report this year highlights the hard work co-ordinated by ESEC and carried out by the partnership. The oversight of, and direct involvement in, two key multi agency responses to domestic abuse (MARAC and DALAG) continue. Co-ordination and leadership in 2024/25 involved developing and implementing improvements and MARAC expansion as a result of increased demand. DALAG supports early intervention where there has been a decision by Social Care Direct for no further action following a domestic abuse incident involving children and MARAC supports multi-agency action planning for safety where there is a high risk of serious harm or murder.

Our continued commitment to the Women's Safety in Public Places (WSPP) Community Improvement Partnership, this year has seen an extremely successful run of the #RespectHerSpace campaign during the 16-days of activism against men's violence against women. The #RespectHerSpace campaign encourages men to think about how their behaviour may impact on women and girls and has been very well received.

The WSPP CIP has continued its multi-agency approach alongside planning, design and culture across our city to promote the consideration of gender equality at every stage and in the provision of facilities, spaces, services and infrastructure.

Following the refreshed Equally Safe strategy, launched by the Scottish Government and COSLA in Edinburgh in December 2023, the ESEC reviewed our action plan, acknowledging the impact of increased demand and reduced capacity within all the partner organisations. We streamlined our subgroups to better meet strategic outcomes and to better target our activities.

We continue our strategic work, influencing local and national policy across all areas of VAWG, and you will see the impact of this work reflected throughout this report.

As we enter the 2025/26 period our hard work continues throughout all of our areas of work and we look forward to working alongside Project Begonia to tackle the impact of commercial sexual exploitation in Edinburgh.

Linda Rodgers

CEO, Edinburgh Women's Aid

ESEC Chair

# Introduction: The Equally Safe Edinburgh Committee

## Structure

The Equally Safe Edinburgh Committee (ESEC) is a partnership between organisations and services which work together to implement the Equally Safe Strategy across Edinburgh. We strive to make sure services are always learning about how best to support and protect women and girls from abuse, violence and inequality. We provide public information on how to uphold the rights of women and girls. The work of ESEC is strategic, and we have a new five-year improvement plan which we will implement between 2023-2028. We have a dedicated webpage within the City of Edinburgh Council's website which can be found at [this link](#).

ESEC members include senior staff from the City of Edinburgh Council, Police Scotland, Fearless Edinburgh, NHS Lothian and the following organisations:

- [Edinburgh Rape Crisis](#)
- [Edinburgh Women's Aid](#)
- [Shakti Women's Aid](#)
- [Children 1<sup>st</sup>](#)
- [Sacro](#)
- [Saheliya](#)
- [Victim Support Scotland](#)
- [Feniks](#)
- [Beira's Place](#)
- [The Multicultural Family Base](#)
- [Sikh Sanjog](#)
- [Foursquare](#)

The Equally Safe Edinburgh Committee reports to the Chief Officers' Group on a Quarterly and annual basis.

## The Vision and Aim of Equally Safe

Equally Safe envisions “A strong and flourishing Scotland where all individuals are equally safe and respected, and where women and girls live free from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation – and the attitudes that help perpetuate it”. Its aim is “to work collaboratively with key partners in the public, private and third sectors to prevent and eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls”.

## Equally Safe Priorities

The Equally Safe Strategy has four clear priorities for Scotland:

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

Equally Safe uses ‘Violence Against Women and Girls’ (VAWG) to describe “*violent and abusive behaviour directed at women and girls because they are women and girls. It is behaviour which is carried out predominantly by men. It is an abuse of power and stems from systemic, deep-*

*rooted women's inequality. VAWG limits women's and girls' freedom and potential and is a fundamental violation of human rights" (p.10)*

## Definitions of Violence Against Women and Girls

According to Equally Safe, Violence Against Women and Girls includes the actual and threat of:

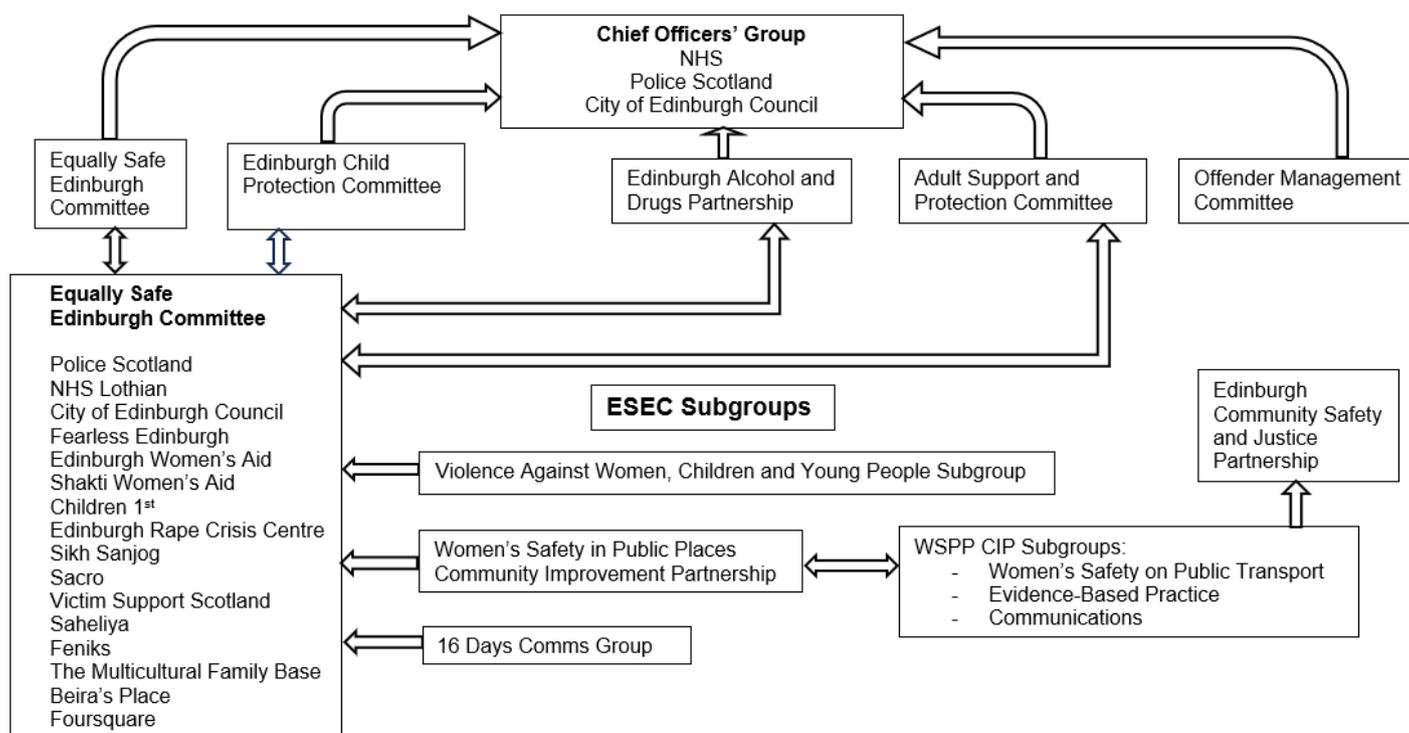
- Physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, and financial abuse occurring in the family, within the general community and in institutions, in both physical and digital spaces and places
- domestic abuse/coercive controlling behaviours, stalking, rape, incest, sexual harassment, bullying, and intimidation
- 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 include gangs and organised criminal networks
- child abuse occurring within family settings, including domestic abuse, and sexual abuse by male family members including siblings
- child sexual abuse and exploitation including the production and sharing of indecent images of children
- honour-based abuse, including forced marriages, female genital mutilation (FGM), dowry abuse and 'honour based' coercive control and killings.

This is not an exhaustive list of what constitutes VAWG. Rather, it is the wording of the Equally Safe Strategy's definitions of VAWG (p.11). The definition also includes any kind of childhood sexual abuse, adult entertainment activities, and any kind of 'honour'-related violence.

Boys experience domestic abuse, sexual abuse, and exploitation in significant numbers. That is why the Equally Safe strategy also references and covers all children and young people.

## Governance Arrangements

The ESEC is one of three inter-agency public protection committees reporting directly to the Chief Officers' Group. Reports include activities undertaken by subgroups and short life working groups under the direct oversight of ESEC.



## Primary Roles and Responsibilities of the ESEC

The primary roles and responsibilities of the Committee are to:

- deliver on the aims and priorities of Equally Safe in Edinburgh
- promote a culture of joint working amongst all organisations and individuals involved in violence against women issues, equalities work, education (through the life-course), violence prevention/early intervention as well as any organisation that can support the aims and priorities of Equally Safe
- prepare strategic assessments and action plans for violence against women at time intervals agreed as appropriate by the committee, an annual business plan and an annual report on the work of the Partnership for consideration and approval by the Chief Officers' Group and thereafter the constituent organisations represented on the Partnership
- report to the Chief Officers Group on performance and key activities on a quarterly and annual basis
- contribute to the development of public protection campaigns; promote the work of agencies involved in issues regarding all aspects of violence against women; and provide advice and information on access to services

- f. develop, implement and review regularly a learning and development strategy together with the Edinburgh Adult Support and Protection Committee and the Edinburgh Child Protection Committee
- g. share best practice and learning with other violence against women inter-agency groups and partnerships and manage any cross-boundary issues; and
- h. promote continuous improvement of work in respect of gender equality and violence against women through the use of:
  - development, publication and dissemination of policies, procedures and protocols (within and across agencies)
  - development of management information systems
  - development, implementation and review of inter-agency quality assurance mechanisms (including preparation for integrated inspections); and
  - the promotion of good practice.

# ESEC Key Activities in 2024-2025

## General Developments

### *Change of ESEC Chair:*

The ESEC started the year 2024-2025 with Linda Rodgers, CEO of Edinburgh Women's Aid as Chair, and Lesley Johnstone, CEO of Beira's Place as Vice Chair. Our former Chair, DCI Adam Brown, stepped down following his 2-year tenure. The ESEC would like to extend thanks to DCI Brown for his support and leadership of the ESEC. We would also like to warmly welcome Linda Rodgers and Lesley Johnstone at the helm of our partnership for the next 2 years.

### *Prostitution- challenging and deterring men's demand: a strategic approach*

Following the announcement of the Scottish Government's '[Prostitution – challenging and deterring men's demand: a strategic approach](#)', an initial discussion was held with Glasgow City Council to discuss implementing the approach. Glasgow declined involvement as existing initiatives have been successfully running in the city for a number of years, and they have proved to be successful in supporting women and deterring men from buying sex.

In the winter of 2024, a Scottish Government officer was seconded to Police Scotland to initiate the implementation of 'Operation Begonia' in Edinburgh, Dundee, Glasgow and Aberdeen. Operation Begonia is a policing approach to street prostitution that has run in Aberdeen for over 10 years, and it has now been identified as the first step towards implementing the Scottish Government's new strategic approach to prostitution through a justice angle.

The colleagues from Police Scotland and the Scottish Government responsible for the implementation of Operation Begonia gave a presentation on this new approach to the Chief Officers' Group during their April 2025 meeting. This work is ongoing, the ESEC continues to work with partners to support an effective multiagency response in Edinburgh and we will continue to report on this to the Chief Officers' Group in due course.

### *Raising awareness of the refreshed Equally Safe strategy within the Council*

On 21 May 2024, the ESEC organised an event at the City Chambers inviting elected members, heads of service, directors and members of the corporate leadership team to find out more about the revised Equally Safe Strategy and upcoming work to implement it within the Council. During the event, attendees had the opportunity to hear from national stakeholders, including:

- COSLA (The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities), co-owners of Equally Safe together with the Scottish Government;
- The Improvement Service, supporting the implementation of Equally Safe in Scotland's Local Authorities;
- Close the Gap, Scotland's organisation on women's participation in the labour market, and organisers of the Equally Safe at Work programme;
- Scottish Women's Aid, about their Equally Safe in Practice workforce training programme on gender equality and Violence Against Women and Girls.
- The Equally Safe Edinburgh Committee, highlighting the costs of VAWG to Scotland.

Following presentations from the above stakeholders, there was an opportunity for attendees to discuss gender equality and gender-based violence; the impact on the Council as an employer

as well as on Edinburgh as a City; and the actions they can take within their directorates/ teams/ business areas to promote gender equality and tackle the attitudes and beliefs that underlie and perpetuate inequality and VAWG. Due to scheduling conflicts, attendance was fluctuating, averaging approximately 25 attendees. All attendees had the opportunity to participate in an open discussion about next steps and what learning they would take back to their areas of work based on the information that was provided to them on the day.

### *Possible repeal of the Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) ban in the Gambia*

During the spring of 2024 there were concerns about the possible repeal of legislation banning FGM in the Gambia in July 2024. Edinburgh has a populous Gambian community, many of whom would likely travel to the Gambia during the school holidays. As a result, there were concerns that families from the Gambian and surrounding West African communities may need additional support and information to safeguard children travelling during the summer.

To address these concerns, the ESEC worked together with the Edinburgh Child Protection Committee to bring together organisations and services to discuss how to best raise awareness of families' responsibilities to protect women and girls and supports available. These organisations included:

- the City of Edinburgh Council
- NHS Lothian
- Police Scotland
- The UK Border Force
- Shakti Women's Aid
- Sacro
- Saheliya
- Fantanka Diaspora
- Passion 4 Fusion
- Project Esperanza
- KWISA (African Women in Scotland Association)
- The Multicultural Family Base
- Mwamba

To address community needs, an event for the Gambian community was organised with support from Fantanka Diaspora on 29 June 2024. It brought together community members, including a religious leader from the Gambia, and the NSPCC to discuss FGM, supports available and how to safeguard children over the summer holidays if traveling abroad.

A briefing was also circulated to schools throughout Edinburgh. The briefing provided additional context to the practice of FGM in the Gambia, its prevalence and its legal status in Scotland. It further reiterated professionals' responsibilities when there is a concern about FGM and where families and women can be signposted for support and information if they need it.

On 15 July 2024, the Gambia's National Assembly rejected the Bill that attempted to repeal the 2015 ban on FGM.

### *Commemoration event for Fawziyah Javed*

On 2 September 2024, a bench was unveiled in Holyrood Park in memory of Fawziyah Javed, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of her murder by her husband. The event was co-organised by the ESEC together with [Karma Nirvana](#). Fawziyah's murder and the subsequent court case has been made into a documentary titled '[The Push: Murder on the Cliff](#)'.

ESEC partners were present at the event to pay their respects. The Depute Lord Provost, as well as Detective Chief Inspector Bob Williamson, who led the investigation into Fawziyah's death, delivered a speech addressing Fawziyah's family, her legacy and committing Edinburgh's support to ending Violence Against Women and Girls. The event was thoroughly reported on the news by the [BBC](#), [the Edinburgh Evening News](#) and [STV](#), while Karma Nirvana also released a

[statement](#) following the event. Private communication following the event stated that Fawziyah's family were extremely grateful for the support.

#### *Edinburgh Integration Joint Board funding cuts*

On 1 November 2024, a report was presented to the EIJB proposing the removal of grant funding to third sector organisations in Edinburgh as a cost saving measure. This would affect a total of 64 charities, 4 of whom are ESEC partners. Following deputations to EIJB meetings and the announcement of the Third Sector Resilience Fund, 3 out of 4 ESEC partners have been able to secure funding to continue their work.

### The Edinburgh Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)

In 2024-2025, 409 cases were referred, and 298 cases were heard at MARAC. The Risk Review meetings err on the side of caution and there is no concern that cases are being missed. 69% of referrals are referred based on actuarial risk assessment count (14 points on the DASH RIC/DAQ) and 23% are referred on Professional Judgement. There were 7 survivors under 18 years old and 6 perpetrators under 18 years old. The spread of cases across the four localities continues to be weighted towards the Northeast of Edinburgh, but this is in line with previous years.

There has been a clear and substantial increase in cases heard at MARAC over the years, and this has resulted in an additional half day per four-week period of MARAC meetings in 2024. Fewer repeat cases have been recorded, and this has been a trend in recent years. There has been a steady rise of MARAC-to-MARAC referrals. The number of children recorded in MARAC referrals was 305 in 2024 which is an increase on previous years.

It was noted that there is a 10% reduction of BME referrals, and this has been reducing over time. It was noted that LGBT referrals were 9% in 2024 which is an increase on previous years. Cases where a disability is recorded remain steady at 12%. In 2024, cases where the survivor is male was 1%.

Two MARAC steering group meetings were held in 2024/25 the meeting monitored the MARAC data, including equalities data; case numbers; referring agencies; children involved and attendance. Acting where necessary. Early in 2024 the group made the decision to increase MARAC meetings by 50% to meet the increased demand.

The MARAC TOR and DPIA was updated during 2024/25 and approved by the steering group in April 2025. Work in early 2025/26 will include updating the information sharing agreement to bring into line with the updated DPIA.

Other activities in progress by the steering group include:

- MARAC PhD – partnership between Edinburgh Women's Aid and University of Edinburgh Social work. The observation of MARACs concluded during 2024, and the final stages of the PhD are in progress. A conference around initial findings was held in December 2024 and the work to date is supporting the Scottish Government review of MARACs in Scotland.
- Review of MARACs in Scotland – ESEC Chair is a member of this working group, and the Edinburgh model is reflected in the review to date.

- Child Protection and MARAC – work on improvements in data sharing and communication regarding MARAC referrals where children are involved have been developed and implemented in 24/25.
- Under 18s referred to MARAC as victims/perpetrators – discussions around this increasing trend are ongoing and work to ensure that a co-ordinated, appropriate and effective approach around this cohort is ongoing.

## The Domestic Abuse Local Action Group

The Domestic Abuse Local Action Group (DALAG) is a new support pathway specific to Edinburgh. The DALAG is an interagency discussion between the City of Edinburgh Council, Police Scotland and Edinburgh Women’s Aid. It aims to prevent the escalation of domestic abuse and to protect children within a family when domestic incidents have taken place. In contrast to the MARAC, which deals with high risk and high complexity cases, the DALAG is triggered following police response to a domestic incident that has been assessed as low risk, low complexity and where children (including unborn children) are present.

Since autumn 2024, the DALAG has had low referral rates. The DALAG Oversight Group did an analysis of performance over the last 2 years to identify potential causes of this and the views of DALAG group participants were also sought to help inform next steps.

To improve the performance of the DALAG, a number of next steps were decided, including:

- The creation of a DALAG Handbook
- Additional training for the Social Care Direct team to support appropriate shortlisting and referral of cases
- The inclusion of additional organisations and services as DALAG partners, specifically Shakti Women’s Aid, the Umbrella Hubs and Midwifery/Health Visiting services

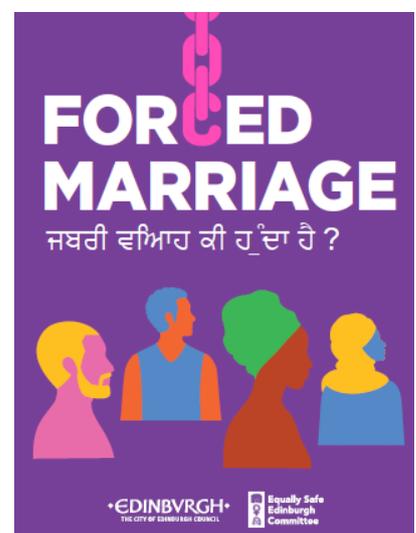
The DALAG Handbook has been created and is awaiting sign-off, while meetings have been arranged with NHS Lothian and Shakti Women’s Aid to discuss engagement with the DALAG. The Umbrella Hubs have joined as official partners in the DALAG.

## Local VAWG Policy Revisions

### *Forced Marriage Policy*

Edinburgh’s Forced Marriage Policy was revised, approved by the Policy and Sustainability Committee on [28 May 2024](#). It is now uploaded to the [City of Edinburgh Council’s website](#). Following an addendum during the Policy and Sustainability Committee’s meeting called for a resource to be created on explaining what forced marriage is, and how to obtain a Forced Marriage Protection Order (FMPO). It was requested that this resource be translated into multiple languages with priority given to South Asian languages and disseminated to charities and third sector organisations.

A leaflet was created describing a forced marriage, outlining rights to marriage and relationships, how the law can help victims and how to obtain a FMPO. The contact information of specialist



support organisations was also included. The resource has been translated into Hindi, Urdu, Arabic, Mandarin, French and Arabic and it has been disseminated to third sector VAWG organisations.

#### *Multi-Agency Domestic Abuse Policy*

Edinburgh's Multi-Agency Domestic Abuse Policy was updated in 2024 and approved by the Policy and Sustainability Committee on [22 August 2024](#). It has been uploaded to the [City of Edinburgh Council's website](#).

#### *Edinburgh's Position Statement on Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE)*

One of the Equally Safe Performance Standards for local authorities is to have a position statement on CSE. An expert group on CSE worked over 18 months to produce a position statement and Briefing Paper on CSE which was presented to the Policy and Sustainability Committee on [22 August 2024](#) (deferred) and [10 December 2024](#). A decision of 'no action' was taken at that time, meaning that Councillors did not decide on the matter at that time. The Position Statement can be discussed again at a future date. There are current legislative changes in development, as well as a revision of the National VAWG Network's Position statement on CSE and of the Equally Safe Performance Standards. The ESEC intends to re-visit this issue in due course once decisions have been taken on these developments.

#### *Equally Safe Housing Policy*

Edinburgh has an existing Domestic Abuse Housing Policy, which the ESEC is working to transform into an Equally Safe Housing Policy. This is to ensure that all forms of VAWG are included in the policy. This work is in progress and is expected to complete in the autumn/winter of 2025.

#### *Human Trafficking Policy*

Edinburgh's existing [Multi-Agency Support Protocol for Victims of Human Trafficking](#) is currently being reviewed by the lead officers for Child Protection, Adult Protection and Equally Safe to better reflect more recent legislation, policies and guidance. The decision was made to separate the existing document into a Human Trafficking Policy and Human Trafficking Procedures. This work is ongoing and is expected to complete in the autumn/winter of 2025.

## Committee Reports

#### *'Make Public Sexual Harassment Illegal' Campaign*

Following a motion at Full Council on [4 May 2023](#), the ESEC worked together with education colleagues to compose this report. The report was presented to the Education, Children and Families Committee on [16 April 2024](#). It outlined how the Council has endorsed and supported the campaign, how Education, Justice and Children's services work to identify actions through schools to educate pupils on Public Sexual Harassment and how to tackle it. It also called for the formal endorsement of the non-legal definition of misogyny provided by Baroness Kennedy in her report '[Misogyny: a Human Rights Issue](#)'. Following actions allocated at the 16 April meeting, [a follow-up report](#) was submitted to the Education, Children and Families Committee on [21 November 2024](#) to update on progress on these actions.

### *Response to Domestic Abuse: Equally Safe, Adult Support and Protection and Justice*

Following a spotlight Business Bulletin item for the Education, Children and Families Committee by Justice Domestic Abuse Services (JDAS) on [11 June 2024](#), a report was requested on how the City of Edinburgh Council responds to Domestic Abuse within the LGBTQ+ community in relation to Equally Safe, Adult Support and Protection and Justice Services. This report was presented to the Education, Children and Families Committee on [3 September 2024](#).

### *Response to Air Weapons and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2015 - Licensing of Sexual Entertainment Venues*

This report was in response to an amendment at the Regulatory Committee on [5 February 2024](#) requesting a proposal for a programme of work exploring actions to support women currently working in SEVs who might be considering other employment opportunities. The report was composed and submitted to the Policy and Sustainability between its [10 December 2024](#) and [11 March 2025](#). However, it was decided that the report would be withdrawn from the agenda and presented as a Briefing for elected members instead.

## Influencing local and national policy

### *Licensing of Sexual Entertainment Venues (SEVs) in Edinburgh*

The ESEC has been engaging with the Regulatory Committee and the Licensing Subcommittee to raise awareness of the harms of the sex industry. We have opposed the licensing of SEVs since 2021. The Council has decided to license the current number of SEVs in Edinburgh, however when licenses were applied for, the ESEC also submitted objections to them. As the Equally Safe Strategy defines CSE as a form of VAWG, the ESEC will continue to highlight the impacts of the sex industry in Edinburgh and advocating for a nil cap on licenses in Edinburgh.

### *Unbuyable: Proposed Prostitution (Offences and Support) (Scotland) Bill*

This consultation concerned [a Members' Bill](#) proposed in the Scottish Parliament. It proposed the repeal of Section 46 of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (soliciting for the purposes of prostitution in a public place and repeal of previous convictions under section 46); a new criminal offence of paying for sexual services; and giving people in prostitution the legal right to support. The ESEC submitted a response to this consultation that fully supported the proposals adding further context based on the knowledge and experience of VAWG organisations in Edinburgh.

### *Criminal Justice Modernisation and Abusive Domestic Behaviour Reviews (Scotland) Bill*

The main body of the response to this consultation was provided by the City of Edinburgh Council's Justice services. However, the ESEC provided input to [this Bill](#) supporting elements of the proposed Bill with specific regards to Abusive Domestic Behaviour Reviews.

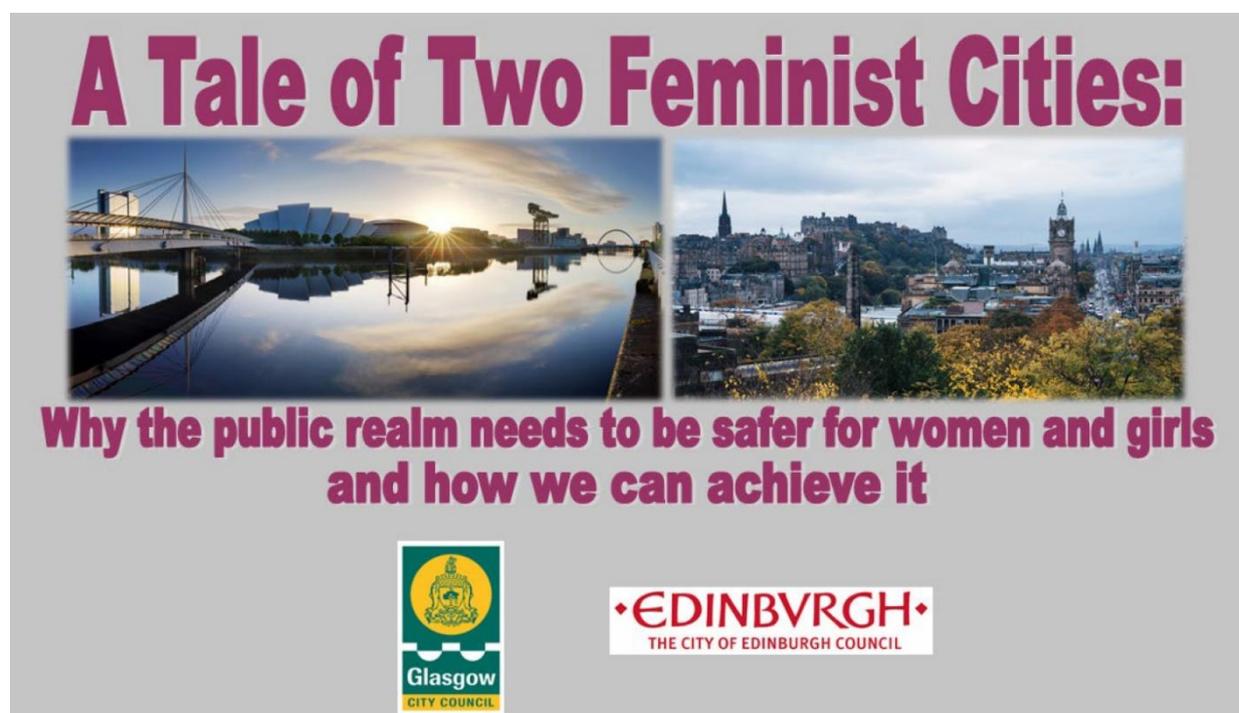
## ESEC Subgroup Activity

### *Women's Safety in Public Places Community Improvement Partnership (WSPP CIP)*

The WSPP CIP has been working on implementing its action plan over the next 12 months. It is currently focused on a collaborative policing approach in areas identified as 'hotspots' of women and girls not feeling safe, using data obtained through the Women's Safety consultations in 2022 and 2023. This is currently being done with support from the Prevention, Intervention and Partnerships Team who represent Police Scotland on the WSPP CIP.

Together with the Feminist City Officer Group, on 10 March 2025, the WSPP CIP helped to organise an event to honour International Women's Day, titled 'A Tale of Two Feminist Cities: Why the public realm needs to be safer for women and girls and how we can achieve it'. We were joined by colleagues in Glasgow carrying out similar work, and the event included presentations from Elected Members, Public Health Scotland, VAWG Lead Officers in Edinburgh Glasgow, and colleagues from Planning, Placemaking and Mobility, Spatial Development Operations and Green Space and Biodiversity.

The event was very successful with over 100 attendees in person and online. It provided us the opportunity to showcase the Edinburgh [Women's Safety Factsheet](#) and [Women's Safety Audit Proforma](#). These documents are expected to be used by anyone carrying out planning/ construction/ regeneration activity in Edinburgh, and any new proposed plans will also be assessed on the basis of how well they take women's safety into consideration. This is a significant achievement that has generated a lot of interest nationally, enabling us to share our learning on how women's safety can be promoted, how violence can be prevented and how planning practices can be improved to make public spaces safer by design for women and girls.



The poster features a large title in purple, two landscape images (Glasgow and Edinburgh), and logos for Glasgow City Council and Edinburgh City Council.

# A Tale of Two Feminist Cities:

Why the public realm needs to be safer for women and girls and how we can achieve it



### *Violence Against Women, Children and Young People*

Currently, the ESEC and ECPC lead officers are both attending the Child Exploitation and Contextual Safeguarding subgroup of the ECPC. Opportunities for joint work and actions have

been identified for both committees to help consolidate Edinburgh’s approach to safeguarding children and young people.

### 16 Days Communications Group

The 16 Days Comms Group meets annually between April – November to organise activities around the International Campaign ’16 Days of Action against Gender-Based Violence. In 2024, the group delivered and supported the activities below:

- 25 November 2024: on the International Day for the Elimination of all forms of Violence Against Women and Girls, we lit up the City Chambers in orange – the official colour of the campaign.
- On 29 November, the [InfraSisters](#) used the [#RespectHerSpace](#) campaign materials during an evening cycle ride. They displayed posters to encourage road users to consider the needs of women cyclists for additional space.
- On 2 December, we held a women’s storytelling event. This featured stories of women’s experiences of gendered abuse in both private and public spaces.
- On 3 December, the Council organised themed Bookbug sessions in 8 libraries. These included songs and stories celebrating women and girls.
- Throughout the 16 Days a re-run of the [#RespectHerSpace](#) campaign ran throughout Edinburgh. This time we displayed posters of the campaign in men’s restrooms in hospitality venues. The posters encouraged men to think about the impact on their behaviour in public spaces on women and girls.
- We updated the Council’s website to include additional information and resources on how men can help women and girls feel safe in public spaces. This includes how to prevent public sexual harassment; how to prevent violence against women and girls and what small changes in behaviour can help women and girls to feel safer in public spaces.

Photos from 16 Days events 2024:



Left: image from a Bookbug Session in an Edinburgh Library.

Middle: Example of #RespectHerSpace campaign posters displayed in men’s restrooms during the 16 Days

Right: Example of a full #RespectHerSpace campaign poster.



Top Right: Promotional poster and performer photos from the 'Universal Space' event on 2 December 2024.

Top Left: Social Media Post including a statement on Edinburgh's support of the 16 Days Campaign and a photo of the City Chambers lit in orange.

Left: Example of the InfraSisters' use of #RespectHerSpace campaign posters during the 29 November night ride.



## ESEC Improvement Plan Updates

In 2024-2025, the ESEC reviewed its Improvement Plan spanning the period 2023-2028. This was in light of both structural changes within the Council impacting the operation of subgroups, as well as due to national developments in terms of policy, practice and strategy. Capacity and demand for VAWG services across the partnership also compelled us to review our Improvement Plan to ensure that it focuses on activities that can be realistically delivered until 2028.

Our initial Improvement Plan included 7 subgroups to the ESEC:

1. CSE Short Life Working Group (whose work is now completed)
2. Women's Safety in Public Places Community Improvement Partnership
3. Violence Against Women, Children and Young People
4. 16 Days Communications Group
5. Data Review Group
6. Intersectionality, Learning and Development

## 7. Women and Justice

To simplify our Improvement Plan and to ensure that the work of the ESEC was as streamlined as possible, the ESEC decided to continue the work of three subgroups:

1. The Women's Safety in Public Places Community Improvement Partnership
2. Violence Against Women, Children and Young People and
3. The 16 Days Communications Group

The CSE Short-Life Working Group has completed the task for which it was assembled. However, members have agreed to reconvene in future should any further need arise to carry out strategic work on CSE.

The Data Review subgroup has been postponed due to national developments around data collection on VAWG. The National Violence Against Women Network (NVAWN), in which COSLA are stakeholders, will be reviewing the data required to accurately report on VAWG throughout Scotland. Concurrently, the Improvement Service has been funded by COSLA and the Scottish Government to carry out a VAWG needs assessment throughout Scotland to inform future data collection. This work is expected to be completed by March 2026. Once the outcome of this work is shared with the ESEC and other VAWG Partnerships, the ESEC will revisit the discussion around the need for a Data Review Group, its membership and remit.

Intersectionality, Learning and Development will be absorbed in all areas of the ESEC's work. Considering the increasing diversity of the population of Edinburgh, the ESEC has decided that Intersectionality needs to be applied to all areas of the work of the partnership. Similarly, work is underway to update the current available training on VAWG, particularly on domestic abuse. This will include exploring new available training nationally and how learning and development opportunities can be shared across services and agencies to ensure that VAWG is identified as early as possible and that appropriate support and safeguarding are in place.

Lastly, as the 'Women and Justice' subgroup was intended to be a short-life working group, to avoid duplication and to keep the work focused, the ESEC has decided to ensure more direct engagement with Justice services, particularly those working with men whose behaviour is abusive towards their partners/ex-partners, as well as raise the profile of the needs of women involved in the Justice process – the overwhelming majority of whom are survivors of VAWG.

## Next steps

In the next 12 months, the ESEC will focus on the following areas of work:

- The subgroups will continue to focus on delivering on their action plans. Specifically:
  - the WSPP CIP will revisit its membership to ensure that it includes more professionals with a role to play in enhancing women's safety in Edinburgh's public spaces. This will include closer joint work with the Feminist City Officer Group to avoid duplication of the work and promote the prevention of VAWG in public spaces.
  - The 16 Days Communications group is aiming to deliver events during the 2025 campaign focusing on young people's experiences of abuse within intimate relationships. This is in line with the national trends being observed of increasing number of young people seeking support for domestic abuse and sexual violence.
  - The Violence Against Women, Children and Young People will work to define its role and remit and its relationship to the Child Exploitation and Contextual Safeguarding Subgroup of the Child Protection Committee.
- The ESEC will continue to work alongside the Scottish Government, Police Scotland and COSLA to monitor and, where possible, support the implementation of Operation Begonia in Edinburgh.
- The ESEC will explore additional opportunities for joint work with the Edinburgh Alcohol and Drugs Partnership to ensure that women affected by substance use and VAWG are identified early and supported as effectively as possible.
- A number of resources on Domestic Abuse will be finalised and published on the City of Edinburgh Council Website. These will support professionals to accurately identify, risk assess and respond to domestic abuse.
- Together with colleagues from Public Protection and Housing, the ESEC will support the creation of a Human Trafficking Policy and Procedure for Edinburgh and finalise the Equally Safe Housing Policy.
- In partnership with public protection colleagues across the Lothians, the ESEC will support the revision of the [Inter-agency Procedures for the Protection of Girls and Women at Risk of Female Genital Mutilation](#) (FGM).
- Alongside the revision of the Interagency procedures on FGM, the ESEC will work alongside national partners to prepare for the new [Female Genital Mutilation \(Protection and Guidance\) \(Scotland\) Act 2020](#). According to the Scottish Government, this Act is expected to start to be implemented by the summer of 2026. The ESEC will work with public protection partners and stakeholders to ensure its effective implementation across Edinburgh.
- With the national VAWG needs assessment underway, the ESEC will engage with Improvement Service to ensure that the needs of women and girls across Edinburgh are accurately represented.
- In the summer and autumn of 2025, the ESEC will support the revision and delivery of multi-agency domestic abuse training. With the revision of the [Inter-agency Procedures for the Protection of Girls and Women at Risk of Female Genital Mutilation](#) (FGM), there will also be an exploration of the current training available on FGM and 'Honour' Based Abuse to ensure that it is relevant, up-to-date and fit for purpose.

- Last but not least, the Scottish Government has announced that the new Misogyny legislation will now be postponed until the next parliamentary term. The ESEC will monitor developments and support the development of the new legislation in due course.

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# Equally Safe Edinburgh Committee

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