



Violence Against Women and Girls Local Strategy for West Dunbartonshire

1. Introduction

The Scottish Government uses Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) to refer to a range of actions that harm, or cause suffering and indignity to, women and children. These include but are not limited to:

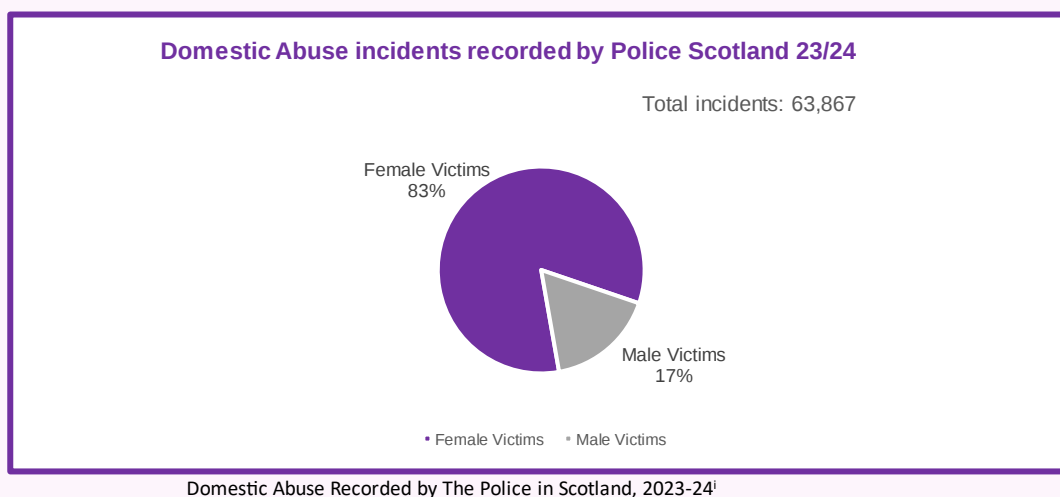
- Physical, sexual, and psychological violence in the family, general community, or institutions. This includes domestic abuse, rape, incest, and child sexual abuse,
- Sexual harassment and intimidation at work and in public,
- Commercial sexual exploitation including prostitution, pornography, and trafficking,
- So called 'honour based' violence, including dowry-related violence, female genital mutilation, forced and child marriages and 'honour' crimes.

VAWG is a form of Gender-based Violence (GBV), which is a major Human Rights, Public Health, and Equality issue. The Scottish Government definition of GBV is:

'Gender-based Violence is a function of gender inequality, and an abuse of male power and privilege. It takes the form of actions that result in physical, sexual, and psychological harm or suffering to women and children, or affront to their human dignity, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. It is men who predominantly carry out such violence, and women who are predominantly the victims of such violence.'

By referring to violence as 'gender based' this definition highlights the need to understand violence within the context of women's and girl's subordinate status in society. Such violence cannot be understood, therefore, in isolation from the norms, social structure and gender roles within the community, which greatly influence women's vulnerability to violence.'

In West Dunbartonshire, we recognise that the inequality between men and women is the cause and consequence of this violence and abuse and are therefore committed to take a gendered approach with the objective of tackling both. This gendered approach does not exclude men but recognises that women and girls are disproportionately affected by this violence, abuse and control, and that they experience it **because** they are women and girls, while men are more likely to perpetrate this violence, abuse and control. By taking a gendered approach, we can also ensure that we take into consideration gender stereotypes which may prevent men who suffer domestic abuse or sexual violence from recognising this violence and abuse and seeking support.



By also recognising that factors like age, disability, immigration status, poverty, etc, can increase women's vulnerability, or even entrap them further, we are committed to taking an intersectional approach to better consider how these factors play a role in gender-based violence and abuse.

VAWG has an impact across the whole of society, and we all have a role to play in both preventing and eradicating it. We consider that it is therefore everyone's responsibility to create a West Dunbartonshire where the attitudes and behaviours which perpetuate VAWG are not tolerated, and where all individuals can be equally safe, having healthy, happy, and fulfilling lives.

2. National and International Legislative Context

Istanbul Convention

The Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, known as the Istanbul Convention, is a significant Human Rights treaty which has established legal standards to ensure that women are free from violence. This Convention recognises that VAWG is a violation of Human Rights and a form of discrimination against women. The Convention has four main aims:

- The prevention of VAWG.
- The protection of victims.
- The prosecution of perpetrators.
- The implementation of co-ordinated policies.

"A lot of the time I blamed myself for his behaviours, I am starting to see clearly that I had no control over the things he was doing." Caledonian Project Client.

The UK signed the Istanbul Convention in 2012, which was fully ratified in July 2022, coming into force on the 1st of November 2022. This means that the UK must now comply with the four aims of the Convention and monitor their implementation.

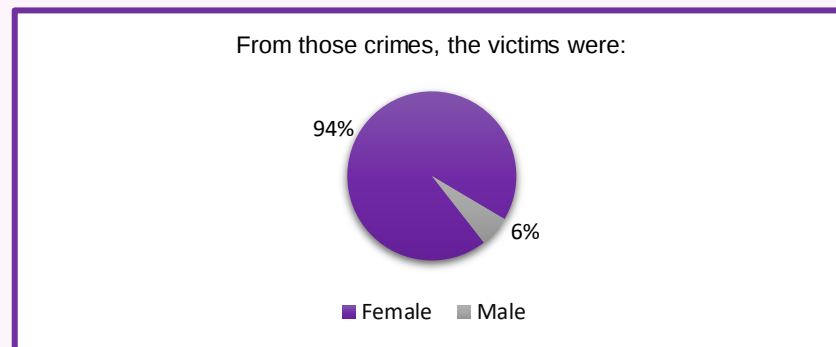
Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018

The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 came into force on the 1st of April 2019. This Act created a new statutory offence of engaging in a course of behaviour that it is abusive of a partner or ex-partner; the aim of the Act is to improve the response to Domestic Abuse within the Justice system. The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 recognises a range of abusive and harmful behaviours, including sexual violence, physical violence, and homicide; in addition, the Act also covers abusive behaviour such as exploitation, coercive control, and other emotional and psychological harms.

"It has been helpful to talk to other parents in the same or similar situations, making you feel less alone." CEDAR Client.

The Act also ensures that the harm caused to children by gender-based violence is both formally recognised and recorded within the Justice process and at sentencing.

- ii In 2023-2024, **2,042** crimes were recorded under the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018.



Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Act 2016

The Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Act 2016 introduced a 'statutory domestic abuse aggravator' to ensure courts take domestic abuse into account when sentencing offenders; giving the courts power to make non-harassment orders in cases where they cannot do so at present; this requires Judges to give juries specific directions when dealing with sexual offence cases to help improve access to justice for victims. This Act also makes provision to create an offence of sharing private intimate images without consent (commonly known as 'revenge porn').

- iii **38%** of the 63,867 incidents of domestic abuse recorded by Police Scotland in 2023-2024 included the recording of at least one crime or offence.

- iv In 2023-2024, **30,100** charges were reported to COPFS with a domestic abuse identifier.

Equally Safe

Equally Safe is Scotland's strategy to prevent and address all forms VAWG. This strategy was initially published in 2014, updated in 2016, and refreshed in 2023.

The Strategy's vision is:

"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 these."

This vision is framed within the context of upholding human rights, reducing the prevalence of trauma and adversity, reducing poverty and inequalities, and public service reform in responding to GBV in all its forms. This vision is also reinforced by current and forthcoming legislation and treaties, including the Istanbul Convention, the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 and Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Act 2016 explained above.

"The support I have received has been second to none, I would not have come this far without it."

Women's Safety and Support Service Client.

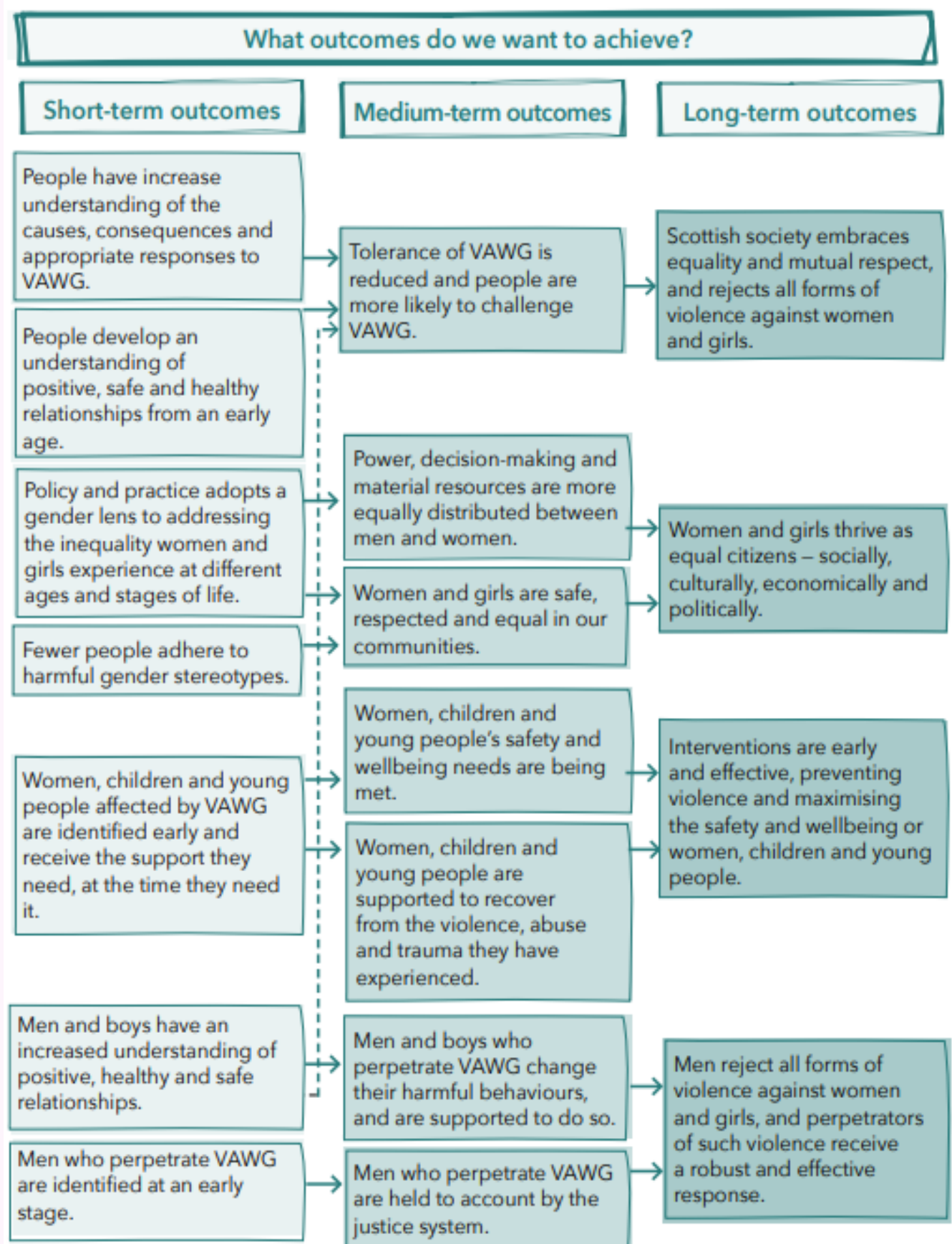
The priorities of the Strategy are aimed at achieving greater gender equality, tackling perpetrator behaviour, and intervening early and effectively to prevent violence and abuse, maximising the safety and wellbeing of women, children, and young people.

The Strategy has the following long-term outcomes:

"Wholeheartedly, you go above and beyond. You have helped me with everything. You make us feel safe and that there is light at the end." Clydebank Women's Aid Client.

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

The Strategy also incorporates medium and short-term outcomes, that will help to achieve the long-term outcomes, and therefore the overall vision of the strategy:



Equally Safe Logic Model, Equally Safe: Scotland's Strategy for Preventing and Eradicating Violence Against Women and Girls, Scottish Government and Cosla (2023)⁹

To achieve these outcomes, the Strategy has a strong gendered public health approach addressing all forms of GBV, rooted in a preventative approach recognising that women's experience of inequalities is both a cause and consequence of GBV, with an impact across all levels of society. By taking a preventative approach, the focus is therefore on preventing violence and abuse, thereby minimising the occurrence of GBV within wider society.

Where individuals and communities are impacted by GBV, responses should be trauma informed, compassionate, and impactful, including the creation of sensitive, safe, and responsive local services.

"I can say anything and there's no judgement. It helps to talk about things and to understand things, it feels better knowing that I'm not going mad, it's him that's the problem, not me."

Dumbarton and District Women's Aid

West Dunbartonshire Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy is therefore aligned with the Equally Safe Strategy, creating a local strategic plan delivering against both local and national priorities in this context.

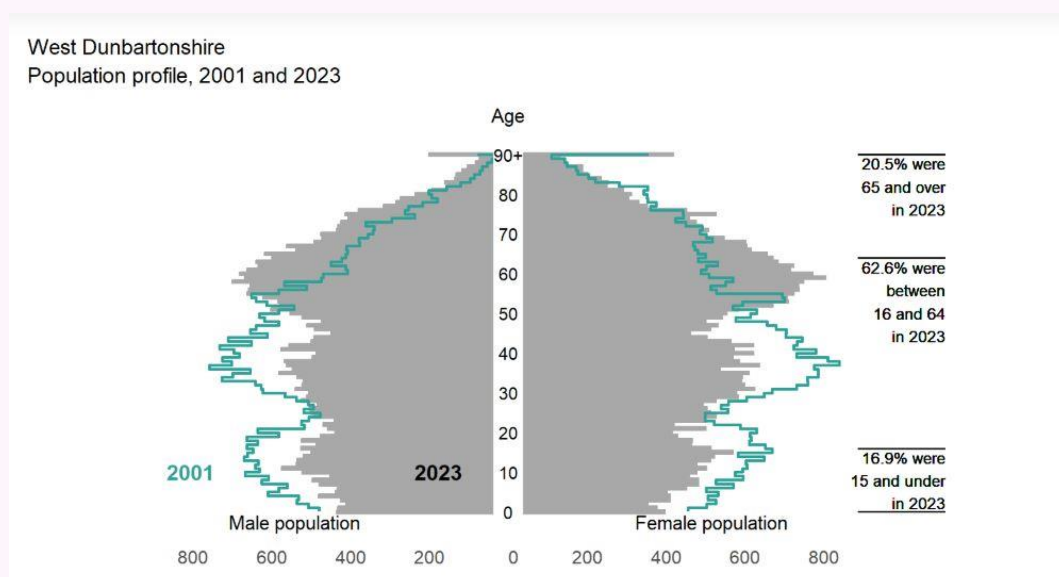
VAWG Partnerships

No single agency can prevent and eradicate VAWG on its own; Equally Safe promotes a multiagency approach, ensuring all agencies work collaboratively to achieve the strategic priorities.

Violence Against Women Partnerships (VAWGs) are therefore the multi-agency vehicle delivering on Equally Safe at a local strategic and operational level.

3. Local Context

From the last data available in 2023^{vi}, the population in West Dunbartonshire was 88,750, being the 26th local authority most populated out of 32 local authorities in Scotland. 52% of this population were female, and 48% were male.

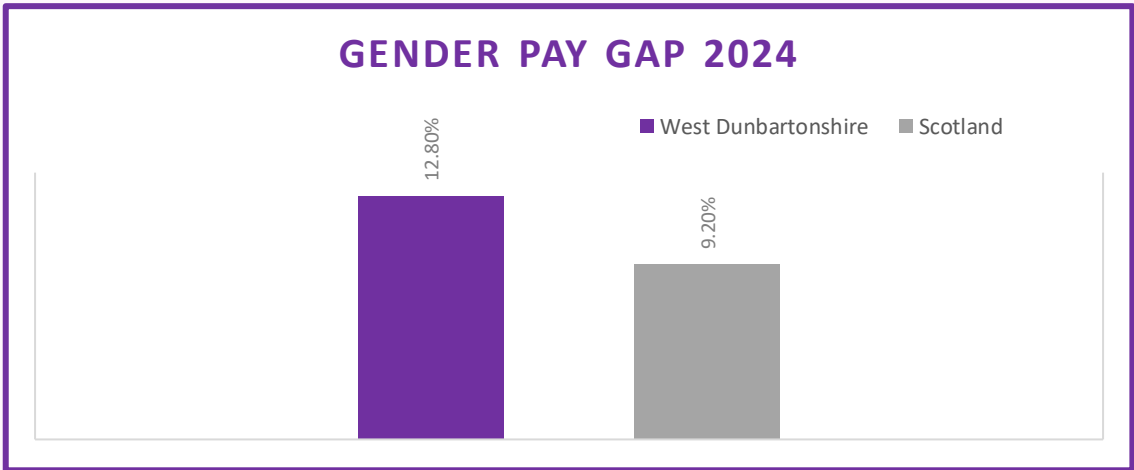
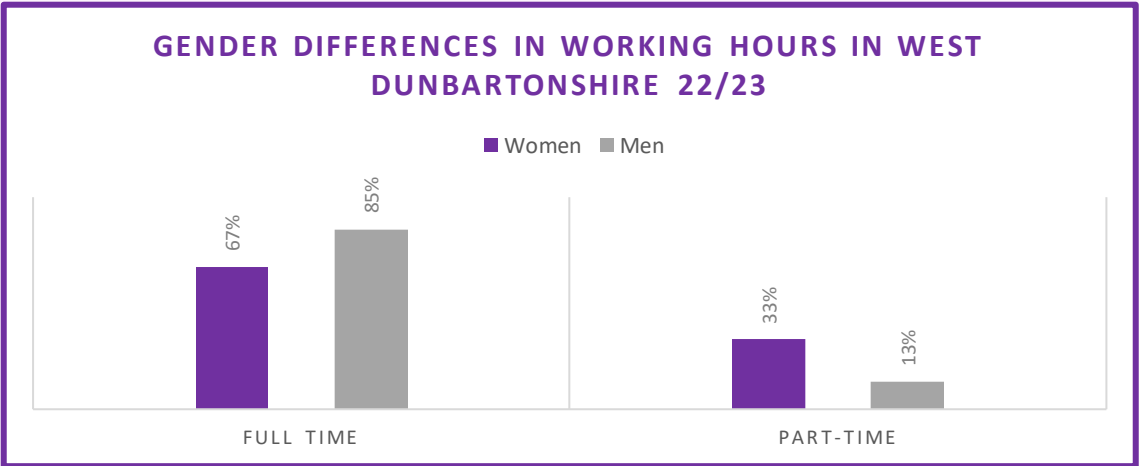


West Dunbartonshire Council Area Profile, National Records of Scotland, July 2024

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is the Scottish Government's standard approach to identify areas of multiple deprivation in Scotland. If an area is identified as 'deprived', this can relate to people having a low income, but it can also mean fewer resources or opportunities. SIMD looks at deprivation across seven domains: income, employment, education, health, access to services, crime, and housing. In 2020, West Dunbartonshire contained 48 of 121 (40%) data zones amongst the most deprived 20% in Scotland^{vii}.

Women are more likely than men to live in poverty, and poverty can be a factor in preventing women victims of VAWG from accessing the support they need for safety and wellbeing. In West Dunbartonshire women are more likely to have part time jobs, and our Gender Pay gap is 3.60 % higher than the Scottish average.

“You have saved my life and made me, and my daughter feel comfortable. She wants to come back to live in refuge! There’s a reason why we stay in contact, you listen.” Clydebank Women’s Aid Client.



In terms of Domestic Abuse, West Dunbartonshire the second Local Authority area where more incidents of Domestic Abuse are recorded by Police Scotland. In 23-24, there were 153 recorded incidents per 10,000 population, and 45% of the total incidents included a crime or offence.

1,607

Women and children accessed specialist VAWG services in West Dunbartonshire in 23/24.

On average, in 2024/2025, **48.7%** of the children in the Children Risk Register were registered under the Domestic Abuse heading.

Domestic abuse also impacts children and young people. Legislation now recognises that children and young people are not simply witnesses to domestic abuse, they are victims of domestic abuse in their own right. They experience the abuse by seeing or hearing the abuse, its aftermath or by being physically or emotionally hurt themselves, as well as being subjected to coercive control, isolation, and financial abuse.

"My children don't have to worry about what's happening at home now when they're in school, they know I'm much safer, I can see the difference in them." Dumbarton and District Women's Aid Client.

In 2023-2024, there were **227** sexual crimes recorded in West Dunbartonshire. In rape cases, over **85%** were **committed by someone known to the victim.**

It is of note also that the local area has higher rates for alcohol and drugs related hospital admissions and deaths than the Scottish average^{viii}. While substance and alcohol misuse are not an excuse for abusive behaviours, when they co-occur with Domestic Abuse, they increase the complexity of the cases and exacerbate risks.

West Dunbartonshire Community Planning Partnership

West Dunbartonshire Community Planning Partnership is committed to improving outcomes for all residents, ensuring that West Dunbartonshire is a great place to live, work and visit. To achieve this, the West Dunbartonshire five priority local outcomes are:

- ✓ Our local economy is flourishing.
- ✓ Our adults and older residents are supported to remain independent.
- ✓ Children and young people are nurtured.
- ✓ Our residents are empowered.
- ✓ Our communities are safe.

This is also reflected in the National Performance Framework Scotland and, in particular that:

- ✓ We grow up loved, safe and respected so that we realise our full potential.
- ✓ We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe.
- ✓ We are healthy and active.
- ✓ We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth, and power more equally.
- ✓ We respect, protect, and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination.
- ✓ We have a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive, and sustainable economy.

"I am so grateful for the support I am receiving as I felt that no one cared about my situation. I couldn't speak to anyone as I was ashamed for staying when I should have left. My children are so much happier without him around and I feel calm inside for the first time in years." Women's Safety and Support Service Client.

West Dunbartonshire VAWGP is therefore located within a national and local community planning context, operating locally within a public protection context.

WD VAWG Partnership is primarily accountable to the Chief Officers Public Protection Group (PPCOG).



Governance arrangements

The Partnership will:

- Report to the PPCOG in line with the accountability and governance arrangements of this body.
- Provide reports to Scottish Government in relation to VAWG activity as required and in line with Equally Safe.
- Ensure any relevant reports are shared appropriately across the other Public Protections groups/Committees and the wider Community planning partnership and relevant DIGs.

West Dunbartonshire Violence Against Women and Girls Partnership

VAWG has no place in West Dunbartonshire; using an evidence based and collaborative multiagency approach, WD VAWGP are committed to preventing all forms of GBV, by ensuring that victims have access to justice, advocacy, and support, via trauma-informed services available to all at the point of need.

“The support from Caledonian helped me to face my abuser in court, when I first started support, I was scared and confused and truly believed I would never have the strength to face my abuser, however I took my life back that day in court. I looked him in the eye, and I have never looked back since.” Caledonian Project Client.

In addition, West Dunbartonshire VAWG and Community Justice Partnership will ensure that perpetrators are held accountable for their actions in this context, by the application of evidence-based whole system interventions that manage risk and promote change for those men perpetrating abuse and promotes safety planning and well-

being for the women and children that are affected by domestic abuse.

West Dunbartonshire VAWGP are committed to facilitating effective, collaborative and evidence based multi-agency arrangements, within a continuum from preventative work through to direct intervention in order to safeguard women and children, and address and disrupt the behaviour of men who perpetrate violence.

The WD VAWG Partnership was refreshed in 2023, and includes within its membership:

- Women’s Aid organisations
- Victim Support
- Police Scotland
- Scottish Fire & Rescue
- West Dunbartonshire HSCP Criminal Justice
- West Dunbartonshire HSCP Children and Families Social Work
- West Dunbartonshire HSCP Adult Services
- West Dunbartonshire Housing Services

- West Dunbartonshire Education Services
- NHS
- Other third sector organisations and leading Violence Against Women and Girls charities.

4. Vision, aims, and areas for development.

Vision and aims

Our vision and commitment are:

We will work collaboratively with key partners in the public, private and third sectors to prevent and eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls as part of a robust co-ordinated community response that is victim lead, but perpetrator focused.

We will continue to invest in the community to ensure a strong and flourishing West Dunbartonshire where all individuals are equally safe and respected, where women and girls live free from all forms of violence and abuse – and the attitudes that help perpetuate it.

We will continue to ensure that no woman or girl in West Dunbartonshire is subjected to violence or abuse of any kind (physical, emotional, sexual, psychological, or financial) and no child or young person should have to experience gender-based violence or have to live with the impact of this Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) across their lifespan.

The aims from the WD VAWG Partnership are:

- To work collaboratively with key partners in the public, private and third sectors within West Dunbartonshire to prevent and eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls.
- To take a coordinated, multi-agency approach to deliver the services and preventative activities which effectively address VAWG across West Dunbartonshire.
- To engage with women and children who are affected by violence and abuse in order to understand their needs and experiences.
- To support West Dunbartonshire in ensuring the VAWG agenda is considered core business within the wider Public Protection framework.

Areas for development

Areas for Development	Equally Safe Standard
1) To ensure that violence and abuse is prevented, all residents in West Dunbartonshire will be given the opportunity to develop an understanding of positive, safe, and healthy relationships. This will include prevention and awareness raising work throughout the community, ensuring supporting greater understanding of the causes and consequences of GBV, with the aim of changing the attitudes, gender roles and stereotypes that perpetuate all forms of VAWG.	Scottish society embraces equality and mutual respect, and rejects all forms of violence against women and girls.
2) In line with the prevention work, we will develop a multi-agency public communication strategy which will raise the profile and awareness of VAWG within the community. We will ensure that all communications/media opportunities are identified, all key partners messaging/activity is promoted, and ensure that we deliver meaningful, constant, and consistent messages about VAWG. We will aim to have VAWG materials accessible for public distribution.	Scottish society embraces equality and mutual respect, and rejects all forms of violence against women and girls.
3) We will strengthen relationship-based work with young people, ensuring greater understanding of healthy and positive relationships from an early age. Interventions will consider new technologies and the impact that this can have for young people and VAWG.	Scottish society embraces equality and mutual respect, and rejects all forms of violence against women and girls.
4) We will strengthen the work with men and boys, encouraging them to challenge misogynistic behaviours and to stand against GBV.	Men desist from all forms of violence against women and girls and perpetrators of such violence receive a robust and effective response.
5) We will strengthen the links with private sector businesses, increasing awareness and building commitment to addressing VAWG, working in partnership to change the culture that tolerates VAWG creating a safer West Dunbartonshire.	Scottish society embraces equality and mutual respect, and rejects all forms of violence against women and girls.
6) We will participate in international and national campaigns like '16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence', promoting meaningful engagement with the community.	Scottish society embraces equality and mutual respect, and rejects all forms of violence against women and girls.
7) We will ensure effective links and joint working between West Dunbartonshire VAWG partnership and other local Public Protection groups such as the Adult and Child protection Committees, Alcohol and Drugs Partnership, Community Planning Partnership, Community Justice Partnership, etc.	Multi-agency Partnership working.
8) We will work together to ensure that public sector policies are gender-sensitive and recognise the barriers to women's workplace equality.	Women and girls thrive as equal citizens — socially, culturally, economically and politically.
9) We will promote equality across all areas, ensuring that men and women have equal access to power and resources, therefore reducing gender inequality.	Women and girls thrive as equal citizens — socially, culturally, economically and politically.
10) Our approach to VAWG will be intersectional responding appropriately to the risks that some women, children, and young people may experience due to having protected characteristics and immigration status. Our approach will be trauma informed and person centred.	Women and girls thrive as equal citizens — socially, culturally, economically and politically.
11) Using meaningful engagement and communication, and by using lived experience, we will shape the design and delivery of VAWG policies and services.	Interventions are early and effective, preventing violence and maximising the safety and wellbeing of women, children and young people.
12) We will ensure that victims receive appropriate responses, including the "one chance approach", and will ensure that all front-line staff are trauma informed and have knowledge of the indicators of domestic abuse.	Interventions are early and effective, preventing violence and maximising the safety and wellbeing of women, children and young people.
13) The Partnership will disseminate learning and development opportunities.	Interventions are early and effective, preventing violence and maximising the safety and wellbeing of women, children and young people.
14) We will improve links with Health and Social Care partners to ensure that Routine Sensitive Enquiry is undertaken, that staff feel confident and can respond effectively to disclosures of domestic abuse and wider GBV.	Interventions are early and effective, preventing violence and maximising the safety and wellbeing of women, children and young people.
15) To ensure our interventions are evidence based, we will develop an agreed Data Base/Set, assisting us to monitor trends in respect of domestic abuse and other forms of GBV in West Dunbartonshire. The collection and sharing of data will help to better understand all forms of VAWG locally and develop further measures to prevent and/or eradicate it.	Interventions are early and effective, preventing violence and maximising the safety and wellbeing of women, children and young people.
16) We will work together in Partnership to support specialist services and advocate for them to be adequately resourced.	Multi-agency Working.

Performance and monitoring

To measure the progress made in West Dunbartonshire preventing and eradicating VAWG, the WD VAWG Partnership will develop an action plan which will be monitored and will be reported periodically to the Public Protection Chief Officers Group.

We will report annually using the Equally Safe Quality Standards and Performance Framework which supports national benchmarking of trends and activity.

The Strategy will be reviewed every three years.

ⁱ [Domestic Abuse Recorded By The Police In Scotland, 2023-24](#)

ⁱⁱ [Recorded Crime in Scotland, 2023-24](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [Domestic Abuse Recorded By The Police In Scotland, 2023-24](#)

^{iv} [Domestic abuse and stalking charges in Scotland | COPFS](#)

^v [equally-safe-logic-model.pdf](#)

^{vi} [\[ARCHIVED CONTENT\] West Dunbartonshire Council Area Profile](#)

^{vii} [Scottish Indices of Multiple Deprivation \(SIMD\) 2020](#)

^{viii} [Drug-related hospital statistics - Scotland 2022 to 2023 - Drug-related hospital statistics - Publications - Public Health Scotland](#)