Your role as an elected member: Participating in Equally Safe at Work

EQUALLY SAFE AT WORK

Close the Gap

COSLA

improvement service

Violence against women (VAW)[1] has a profound impact on all areas of women's lives, and the workplace is no exception. Taking action to address this is more important than ever with figures on VAW increasing. Every year, **3 million women** in the UK experience some form of VAW. In Scotland, **70% of women** reported having experienced or witnessed sexual harassment, and **1 in 4 women** experience domestic abuse in their lifetime.

Members of the workforce may have lived experiences of violence against women and girls (VAWG), so it's crucial that organisational policies recognise this and that line managers and leaders are equipped with the knowledge and skills to offer support. Elected members play a key strategic role in councils to influence culture, provide effective governance, and promote a safe working environment for staff. Further clarity on the role elected members can play in advancing gender equality and tackling VAW within councils will help strengthen local leadership and impact.

Close the Gap's Equally Safe at Work employer accreditation programme works with councils to improve employment practice on gender equality and prevent VAW. **This resource provides elected members with information on the benefits of Equally Safe at Work for their organisation and highlights that by joining the programme, elected members can drive forward action to create a supportive workplace that is committed to advancing gender equality and preventing VAW**.

1. Equally Safe at Work uses the shortened 'violence against women' (VAW) because of its employment focus.

What is VAW?

The term 'violence against women' refers to violent and abusive behaviour that is carried out against women, primarily by men, as a result of their gender. This abusive behaviour can be physical, emotional, psychological, sexual or economic, and stems from women's deep-rooted inequality. It's a violation of women's human rights and an enduring social problem that undermines workplaces and communities.

What is Equally Safe at Work?

Equally Safe at Work is Close the Gap's employer accreditation programme that supports organisations across the public and third sector to develop gender sensitive employment practice and prevent VAW. It was designed as a primary prevention intervention, to support the delivery of **Equally Safe**, the national strategy to prevent and eradicate VAWG which is co-owned by COSLA and Scottish Government.

The programme is aligned with the Public Sector Equality Duty and is designed to help you tackle your gender pay gap, ensure access to flexible working and create a workplace culture that promotes safety. This includes taking different actions across six key themes related to women's labour market equality:

- **Leadership**
- **Occupational segregation**
- **Data**
- **Workplace culture**
- **Flexible working**
- **VAW**

Equally Safe at Work also has a strategic link with tackling child poverty. Women's poverty is inextricably linked to child poverty, and therefore taking action to tackle women's inequality in the labour market is a necessary step to meet the statutory 2030 child poverty targets.

Why this matters to elected members



The cost of VAW is not only felt by the victim-survivor, but it also impacts local budgets through increased demands on health and social care, housing, children's services, especially in the face of increasing budgetary pressures.



VAW in local politics undermines women's participation in democracy and critical decision-making about public services.



Gender equality makes good business sense. Equalising women's employment is estimated to be worth £17 billion to Scotland's economy.



It ensures councils are meeting their legal requirements including those set out in the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023 and the Employment Rights Act 2025.



Equally Safe at Work supports councils to meet their Public Sector Equality Duty requirements, Fair Work commitments and the statutory child poverty targets.

Key actions for elected members

Creating a supportive workplace that progresses gender equality requires commitment from leadership, allocated resources, and a clear understanding of VAW as a workplace issue. **Your leadership matters**. By actively supporting Equally Safe at Work, you help create a workplace, and a wider community, where women are safe, respected, and able to thrive. As an elected member, you can demonstrate leadership by taking these actions:

- Demonstrate your council's commitment to gender equality and preventing VAW by publicly supporting Equally Safe at Work.
- Raise the profile of Equally Safe at Work by participating in awareness-raising campaigns and Equally Safe at Work events on gender equality and VAW run by the council.
- Enquire about progress and ask informed questions about accreditation milestones and what's involved.
- Direct council officers to use our **Applying a gender lens: A tool for employers** resource. Build in accountability by asking questions on how it's being used to improve practice.
- Work with Scottish Women's Budget Group to build capacity on gender budgeting by using their **Gender Budgeting Toolkit**.
- Build Equally Safe at Work within strategic plans, by including participation in the Equally Safe at Work programme as an equality outcome for the council. Outline actions required to do this such as improving data collection and embedding gender sensitive practice.
- Support further training and awareness-raising on gender equality and VAW for elected members and staff such as the ESAW elearning modules on flexible working, sexual harassment and violence against women and work.

Promote taking an anti-racist approach to gender equality, and direct council officers to use Close the Gap's **anti-racist action plan checklist** to support this.

Foster a workplace culture that builds trust with disabled women staff, challenges stigma and demonstrates that disability is a priority for the organisation. For example, increasing understanding of disabled women's experiences of employment by reading our research report, **'Excluded by Design'**.

Champion gender equality and zero tolerance of sexual harassment and VAW by modelling appropriate behaviour, upholding organisational standards and promoting awareness of reporting processes.

Use the **Engender toolkit** to assess how inclusive your practice is and work towards equal representation for women in politics.

Embed actions from Improvement Service's briefings including the **International Obligations briefing** and the Workforce Development briefing.

Support the implementation of relevant recommendations from **Engender's report on violence against women councillors in Scotland**.

Participation in Equally Safe at Work is about recognising that advancing gender equality is the aim, but it involves ongoing improvement and culture change within your organisation.

Visit **Equally Safe at Work**, **Close the Gap**, and **Close Your Pay Gap** for additional tools, resources, and updates, or email us on **esaw@closethegap.org.uk** with any questions.

Close the Gap

Equally Safe at Work is delivered by Close the Gap, Scotland's expert policy advocacy organisation working on women's labour market participation.

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