Your role as an elected member: Progressing gender equality and preventing VAW

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.

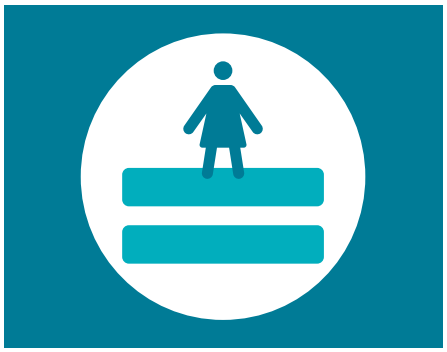
Why this matters to elected members



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 considering Equally Safe at Work

If your council hasn't joined Equally Safe at Work yet and you're interested in bringing this forward, here are some things you can do to prepare for participation:

- Raise awareness of Equally Safe at Work with fellow elected members and senior officers, and at relevant committee meetings.
- Put forward a motion to participate in Equally Safe at Work.
- Use the **Getting Ready for Equally Safe at Work** resource to understand current practice and identify gaps.
- Recommend council officers to become part of the **Community of Practice peer learning network** where they can build knowledge and practice on supporting gender equality and VAW.
- Publicly demonstrate your support for gender equality and preventing VAW through visible leadership by supporting work with local Violence Against Women Partnerships (VAWP) and attending awareness-raising events on gender equality.
- Encourage early conversations about ensuring the necessary capacity, resources, and timescales for participation.
- Work with Scottish Women's Budget Group to build capacity on gender budgeting by using their **Gender Budgeting Toolkit**.
- Direct council officers to our **Applying a gender lens: A tool for employers** to use the resource. Build in accountability by asking questions on how it's being used to improve practice.

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**'.

Encourage engagement with Scottish Women's Aid's national training programme **Equally Safe in Practice**, so staff can undertake training and development at all levels.

Promote taking an anti-racist approach to gender equality, and ask council officers to use our **anti-racist action plan checklist** to support this.

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.

www.closethegap.org.uk

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