

EQUALLY SAFE AT **WORK**



Equally Safe at Work
Successes from the pilot

Contents

Introduction	2
Equally Safe at Work	3
What councils did	4
Case studies from pilot councils	6
What we have learned	12

Introduction

Equally Safe at Work is an innovative employer accreditation programme developed to support Scottish local authorities to improve their employment practice through advancing gender equality at work and supporting victim-survivors of violence against women (VAW). The programme was developed by Close the Gap, Scotland's women and labour market expert, which works with employers, policymakers, trade unions, and employees to influence and enable positive action to address the causes of women's inequality at work.

Equally Safe at Work was developed to advance women's labour market equality in Scotland through working directly with employers to ensure that workplace policies and practice take account of women's experiences of employment. The programme was designed to support councils to understand how gender inequality and VAW affect women in the workforce and the wider organisation, and to provide a framework to drive change.

During the pilot of Equally Safe at Work, early adopter councils completed a range of activities to address the causes of gender inequality and also implemented new mechanisms to better support victim-survivors at work. Through their participation in the pilot, councils generated integral learning on local government employment practice on gender equality and VAW that will inform future development of the programme.



Equally Safe at Work

Equally Safe at Work supports the local implementation of Equally Safe, the Scottish Government and COSLA joint strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls. Equally Safe recognises that violence against women and girls is a cause and consequence of gender inequality. Eliminating women's workplace inequality and other gendered inequalities in society is therefore a fundamental step in preventing VAW.

Equally Safe at Work was piloted in seven early adopter councils which included Aberdeen City, Midlothian, Highland, Shetland Islands, Perth & Kinross, North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire.

The pilot started in January 2019 and ended in November 2020. The timeline for completing the pilot was extended due to the impact of Covid-19. Due to capacity constraints as a result of Covid-19 two councils were unable to complete the pilot, but it was agreed with Close the Gap that they would continue working towards accreditation beyond the timescales of the pilot.

Four of the seven pilot councils received bronze accreditation. All the councils received pilot accreditation to recognise their important role in piloting Equally Safe at Work and in generating key learning that will shape the future development of the programme.

'The pilot has really allowed us to focus on gender inequality in the workplace and has provided a real impetus for us to do something about it. It's been an excellent programme.'

Midlothian Council

What councils did

The programme is the first of its kind to look at both gender equality and VAW in the workplace. It comprises six standards which align with women's workplace equality:

- Leadership;
- Data;
- Flexible working;
- Workplace culture;
- Occupational segregation; and
- VAW¹.



Each standard includes criteria, separated into bronze, silver and gold tiers. As part of the pilot, councils completed a range of activities to meet the bronze tier. Activities included:

- demonstrating leadership commitment to gender equality and VAW with internal and external statements from chief executives and council leaders;
- reviewing and updating equality policies to include information on occupational segregation, VAW, sexism, misogyny, and intersectionality.
- reviewing employment policies to ensure they are gender- and VAW-sensitive;

¹ Due to the employment focus of Equally Safe at Work, the programme focuses on forms of VAW most likely to impact women's experience at work which include domestic abuse, stalking, sexual harassment, rape and sexual assault and so-called 'honour-based' violence.

- updating flexible working policies to ensure the needs of different groups of women, including victim-survivors, are met;
- providing training to line managers on flexible working and VAW;
- supporting quantitative and qualitative data-gathering on employees' attitudes and behaviours around gender equality and VAW, and experiences of working in the council;
- reviewing practice on progression, recruitment, and development to ensure it addresses the barriers women face;
- developing improved data-gathering systems to capture the experiences of different groups of women in the workforce;
- developing systems to collect data on flexible working, disaggregated by gender;
- developing initiatives to address occupational segregation; and
- delivering internal awareness-raising campaigns on VAW and gender inequality.

'We've learned quite a bit more about our own organisation. We've recognised the significant impact of VAW on individuals but feel that we have more to do to build on how to change our culture.'

Shetland Islands Council

Case studies from pilot councils

North Lanarkshire Council

Providing specialist support officers to support victim-survivors of VAW.

North Lanarkshire Council established a voluntary role of Gender Based Violence (GBV) support officer, undertaken by existing staff members, who can be contacted by individual employees who are experiencing, or have experienced, VAW. Currently, the council has eight GBV support officers.

The GBV support officers receive training on the gendered dynamics of VAW and the impact of trauma on victim-survivors. They have a dedicated email address and a rota to ensure the email is regularly monitored. They signpost to support mechanisms within the workplace, as well as to external specialist support organisations such as the local Women's Aid or Rape Crisis Centre. The team also provides support to line managers on best practice when supporting victim-survivors.

As part of the pilot, the GBV support officers have implemented a system to collect intersectional data on employee experiences of VAW. This will be used to inform the council's approach and ensure that different groups of victim-survivors feel supported by the council.

The council also delivered an awareness-raising campaign where stickers were posted on the back of toilet doors and posters were distributed throughout the council to increase awareness of the GBV support officers and the support that is available to employees.

Aberdeen City Council

Building women's leadership capacity.

Prior to the pilot, Aberdeen City Council had encouraged employees to participate in a Leadership Exchange programme which is a cross-sector initiative which pairs leaders at middle, senior and executive levels to learn from each other, and improve leadership skills.

As part of the pilot, the council identified tackling the under-representation of women among senior leaders as a priority. The council examined the barriers women face in progressing into senior roles, and as a result developed a plan to encourage more women to participate in the Leadership Exchange programme. To enable participation, Chief Officers have been asked to nominate women in their teams for the programme.

Shetland Islands Council

Building capacity on VAW and work through e-learning modules and guidance for new managers.

To accompany the development of the VAW policy, Shetland Islands Council produced resources for employees to build understanding and awareness of the role of employers in supporting victim-survivors and preventing VAW. They developed an e-learning module on VAW and work which provides information on what VAW is and how to recognise it in the workplace. It also links to external support agencies including the local Rape Crisis Centre and Women's Aid group.

Shetland Islands Council also developed council-specific guidance on VAW which includes information on Equally Safe at Work and is included in inductions for new line managers.

Perth and Kinross Council

Positive action in recruitment to challenge occupational segregation.

In Perth and Kinross Council, to ensure all job advertisements included the availability of flexible working, standardised text was developed which all managers must include in the recruitment information when advertising for a new role. To make sure that recruitment practice was free from gender bias, standardised equality statements were also developed to be included in all job advertisements. This includes a statement for advertising roles characterised by occupational segregation, which challenges the notion of gender norms and stereotypes.

Midlothian Council

Supporting women to participate in women's professional networks.

In Midlothian Council, the HR team undertook a scoping exercise to collect data on women's professional networks within Midlothian and in nearby areas with the view to support more women into job- and/or industry-specific networking opportunities.

The council then published a list of available professional women's networks for employees. Employees register their interest with HR to ensure their participation is recorded by the council. They can also receive paid time off to participate in the network.

This initiative in the council links with their Making Performance Matter process which enables employees to explore their development needs with their line managers. Guidance for Making Performance Matter is provided to both employees and managers to ensure they're able to effectively use the process. Supporting women to participate in networks enables access to external expertise is one evidenced action to tackle women's under-representation in senior roles.

Shetland Islands Council

Improving communication with women catering workers.

In Shetland Islands Council women working in the catering department highlighted that they were often unaware of what was happening in the council, such as staff events or changes in employment policies, because they didn't have access to a computer at work.

This issue emerged through the Equally Safe at Work employee experience panels. In response, the council provided the catering staff with a computer so they can access the staff intranet, and a council email address so they can stay connected with what's going on in the council.

The catering staff now also have time during their shift to check the intranet for updates from the council.

Midlothian Council

Engaging with elected members to increase understanding and awareness of VAW at work.

Midlothian Council organised an awareness-raising event with elected members as part of their 16 Days of Action campaign to end VAW. The session had speakers from the local Women's Aid Group, Close the Gap, Midlothian's VAW Co-ordinator, the Head of Adult and Social Care in the council and the HR Manager.

The event focused on the role of the council in supporting victim-survivors and preventing VAW, and built understanding and awareness of how VAW impacts women at work and the wider Council.

The important role of elected members was highlighted and elected members discussed what could be done in the local community to raise awareness of VAW. One elected member agreed to work with local football clubs to raise awareness among men and boys about VAW.

Aberdeen City Council

Developing tailored approaches to addressing occupational segregation.

To address occupational segregation Aberdeen City Council undertook a detailed data analysis to identify which areas in the council required specific focus. Teams in the council have been divided into seven categories depending on the proportion of male or female employees. For example, category 1 includes areas where 90% or more of employees are either exclusively male or female. This includes Early Years, Building Services, Environmental Services, and Waste Services. Category 1 is designated a priority area for tackling occupational segregation.

The council have developed an action plan for each category which includes increasing women participating in an existing mentoring programme, offering part-time and flexible working, providing shadowing opportunities and offering individual development plans for male and female staff who are interested in a sideways move. The council is also exploring delivering a targeted recruitment campaign to attract women and men into non-traditional roles. The council will be monitoring the implementation of the action plan on a quarterly basis to monitor progress.

Early adopter councils

Convening working groups with expertise and authority to progress work Equally Safe at Work.

As part of the pilot, each council convened a cross-departmental working group to oversee the delivery of the Equally Safe at Work pilot. All working groups were required to have a senior member of staff who had authority to progress the work and in one council the Chief Executive was the chair of the working group.

Working groups comprised a wide range of expertise from across councils including trade union representatives, elected members, and representatives from HR, health and wellbeing, social work, IT, organisational development, community justice, media and campaigns, housing, and employee relations. By bringing together different expertise, councils were better able identify solutions to challenging criteria and progress through the programme.

What we have learned

The Equally Safe at Work pilot has been an important lever in enabling councils to take substantive action on gender equality and better support victim-survivors. Councils have created positive changes to employment practice which contribute to the advancement of women's equality. The programme has also built capacity in councils to better understand, respond to and prevent VAW. By participating in the pilot, local government employers have demonstrated commitment to addressing women's inequality in the workplace and leadership on preventing VAW.

'We have made a big shift from where we felt we were and where we are now. We are more optimistic across all areas and we've made progress in every area. It feels as if it's been significant – making advances in occupational segregation aren't big but we are refocusing the mind in services that can make a difference.'

North Lanarkshire Council

'Equally Safe at Work has enabled us to progress work in a number of areas, but there's still more to be done. If we were building a house, the architecture is done and some engineering but not the fittings yet.'

Highland Council

Close the Gap works in Scotland on women's labour market participation. We work with policymakers, employers and unions to influence and enable action that will address the causes of women's inequality at work.

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Close the Gap (SCIO) (known as Close the Gap) is a Scottish charity, no SC046842.

Published March 2021



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