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| Agenda Item | 4 |
| Report No | HSW/15/20 |

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Health, Social Care and Wellbeing

Date: 12 November 2020

Report Title: Highland Violence Against Women Partnership

Report By: Interim Executive Chief Officer – Health and Social Care

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report and the accompanying slides outline for Members the work of the Highland Violence Against Women Partnership (HVAWP).
- 1.2 The report and accompanying slides offer an insight into the impact of Covid 19 in relation to reporting of violence against women and children.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - i. Note the content of the report and accompanying slides.
 - ii. Note the work of the partnership in progressing the national Equally Safe agenda and local plan resulting from this.
 - iii. Note the statistical information about the HVAWP response to this matter throughout Covid 19.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource - Funding for the partnership is made up from contributions from the partners. There are no new financial obligations sought.
- 3.2 Legal - There are no legal implications amounting from this report.
- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island) - The HVAWP supports the delivery of local services to women and children and members are very attuned to the demographics

of the Highlands. It seeks to enable services within communities to respond to need in a localised way, focusing on the individual needs of women and their children.

- 3.4 Climate Change/Carbon Clever - There are no issues in relation to this point.
- 3.5 Risk - The HVAWP is a strategic group. These groups exist within each local authority on Scotland. There are no associated risks.
- 3.6 Gaelic - No issues to note.

4. Scottish Government Definition and Participants

4.1 The Scottish Government definition of violence against women is:

- 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

4.2 The services involved in the partnership include The Highland Council, NHS Highland, Police Scotland, 4 Women's Aid groups, Rape and Sexual Abuse Service Highland (RASASH), Scottish Prison Service, Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Victim Support, Action for Children, Highland Drug and Alcohol Partnership and Mental Health Services.

4.3 The Highland Violence Against Women Partnership reports to the Chief Officers Group, along with other Public Protection Groups in Highland, including the Child and Adult Protection committees.

5. Aims of the HVAWP

5.1 The Partnership reflects the aims of the Government's Equally Safe Strategy at a local Highland level.

The Equally Safe Strategy main aims are:

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

5.2 The Equally Safe roadmap was produced in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA), Police Scotland, Health Scotland and specialist Violence Against Women support groups like Scottish Women's Aid and Rape Crisis Scotland.

- Protect and ensure adequate funding
- Work towards victim protection
- Implement the FGM National Plan
- Improve Forensic Medical Services for victims of rape

6. Why Is This Such an Important Issue?

6.1 Gender Based Violence is a major public health, equality and human rights issue.

6.2 *“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 or exclusively 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 and social structure and gender roles within the community, which greatly influence women’s vulnerability to violence.” - Scottish Government, Equally Safe Pathway*

7. What Constitutes Violence Against Women?

7.1 *‘Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.’ - Scottish Government, Equally Safe Pathway*

8. Data Gathered During Covid 19

8.1 There has been a significant focus on domestic abuse during COVID-19 with an expectancy that there will be increased risks for victims and more concerns in relation to children and young people. During the initial stages of lockdown, referrals to support services and for the purpose of child protection were extremely low. This was the case nationally as well as within Highland and it was quickly hypothesised that many victims had turned to safety planning to ensure they and their children remained safe. The very nature of lockdown also plays to the whole culture of coercive control. The full impact of COVID-19 may not be known for some time yet but support agencies have reported increasing levels of contact and requests for support as lockdown restrictions are lifted.

8.2 Third Sector Partners such as Women’s Aid and Relationships Scotland also reported increasing numbers of requests for support in relation to contact during lockdown restrictions.

8.3 Nationally, Domestic Abuse support services have reported that some women and children have had more severe experiences during lockdown and a lack of access to safe spaces. A wide range of abusive behaviours from perpetrators have been reported, related to child contact during lockdown (Scottish Government Vulnerable Children Report August 2020).

8.4 At this stage, it is too early to provide a definitive overview of the impact of COVID in terms of domestic abuse. However, it is likely that there are significant issues for many women, children, young people and families which will emerge as lockdown restrictions are lifted. It is crucial that the Violence Against Women Partnership works with partners

to identify key issues and ensures contingency plans are put in place to support victims and families should future lockdowns occur, and for the wider safety of women, children and young people.

Designation: Interim Executive Chief Officer – Health and Social Care

Date: 7 October 2020

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Operations

Background Papers: Power Point Presentation