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| Document Title            | Equally Safe in East Lothian - Consultation on Draft Strategy |

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| Authorised By | Nicola McDowell   |
| Designation   | Head of Education |
| Date          | 28/05/26          |

|                      |          |
|----------------------|----------|
| For Office Use Only: |          |
| Library Reference    | 48/26    |
| Date Received        | 26/05/26 |
| Bulletin             | May 26   |

|                       |   |
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| <b>COMMITTEE:</b>     | Members' Library Service                                      |
| <b>MEETING DATE:</b>  | 26 May 26   |
| <b>BY:</b>            | Depute Chief Executive – Children and Communities             |
| <b>REPORT TITLE:</b>  | Equally Safe in East Lothian – Consultation on Draft Strategy |
| <b>REPORT STATUS:</b> | Public  |

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## **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To inform members of the planned consultation on the draft Equally Safe in East Lothian strategy.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Members are recommended to:

- 2.1 Note the report.

## **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 An Equally Safe Leadership Partnership, chaired by Cllr Jardine and consisting of members of the Community Planning Partnership along with colleagues from specialist organisations, has been developing an 'Equally Safe in East Lothian' Strategy.
- 3.2 The Strategy has as its vision "A safe, inclusive East Lothian where women and girls live free from violence, abuse and exploitation, where gender inequality is actively challenged, and where our communities and services work together to prevent harm and promote equality."
- 3.3 The Strategy was informed by a number of engagement exercises with colleagues from across the Partnership, along with findings from a recent Safe and Together survey.

3.4 The Strategy is now ready for consultation. The draft strategy will be shared with:

- The Council's Senior Leadership Team, the Integrated Joint Board's Strategic Planning Group and all staff in the Council and the Health & Social Care Partnership, both as staff members and residents of East Lothian.
- All residents and interested parties including include engagement with community and other groups such as East Lothian Tenants' and Residents' Panel through the Council's online Consultation Hub, with paper copies in libraries and other public buildings.
- Lived experience groups such as the Women's Aid Shadow Group and Youth Shadow Group, the VAWG Group and other local women's groups. VCEL will support this activity by engaging through existing trusted third sector relationships and aligning participation with existing activity rather than a new standalone consultation exercise.
- Children and young people through our schools and community groups including East Lothian Kin, the Growing and Changing Group, Youth Parliamentarians and other youth groups.

3.5 Following consultation the feedback will be collated, the Strategy amended as required and a final version will be submitted to the Community Planning Partnership for approval, with presentation at an appropriate Council or Committee Meeting for noting.

## **4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The consultation exercise will provide valuable feedback to shape the final version of the Equally Safe in East Lothian Strategy.

## **5 RESOURCE AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Finance: None

5.2 Human Resources: None

5.3 Other (e.g. Legal/IT): None

5.4 Risk: None

## **6 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

6.1 ***Select the statement that is appropriate to your report by placing an 'X' in the relevant box.***

An Integrated Impact Assessment screening process has been undertaken and the subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on: equality and human rights; tackling socio-economic disadvantages and poverty; climate change, the environment and sustainability; the Council's role as a corporate parent; or the storage/collection of personal data.

or

The subject of this report has been through the Integrated Impact Assessment process and impacts have been identified as follows:

| Subject   | Impacts identified (Yes, No or N/A) |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| Equality and human rights                             | Yes                                 |
| Socio-economic disadvantage/poverty                   | Yes                                 |
| Climate change, the environment and sustainability    | No                                  |
| Corporate parenting and care-experienced young people | Yes                                 |
| Storage/collection of personal data                   | No                                  |
| Other   | No                                  |

The Integrated Impact Assessment relating to this report is in the process of being published and will be able to be accessed via the Council's website:

[https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/info/210602/equality\\_and\\_diversity/12014/integrated\\_impact\\_assessments](https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/info/210602/equality_and_diversity/12014/integrated_impact_assessments)

## 7 APPENDICES

- 7.1 Equally Safe in East Lothian Draft Strategy
- 7.2 Final Consultation Question Pack

## 8 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 8.1 None

## 9 AUTHOR AND APPROVAL DETAILS

### Report Author(s)

|                    |  |
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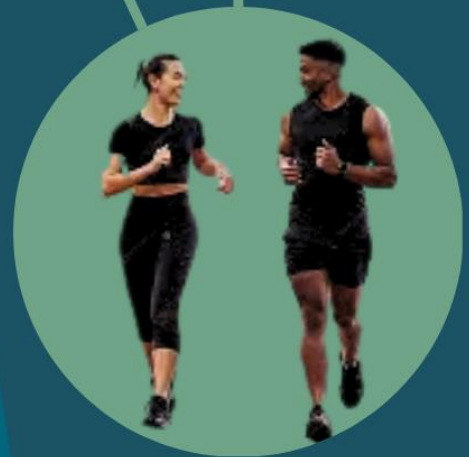
### Head of Service Approval

|   |                   |
|---|-------------------|
| <b>Name</b>   | Nicola McDowell   |
| <b>Designation</b>  | Head of Education |
| <b>Confirmation that IIA and other relevant checks (e.g. finance/legal) have been completed</b> | Confirmed         |
| <b>Approval Date</b>  | 27/05/2026        |

# East Lothian Community Planning Partnership



## Equally Safe Strategy



Preventing and Eradicating  
Violence Against Women  
and Girls

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# Equally Safe in East Lothian

## Strategy in summary

### Our vision

*A safe, inclusive East Lothian where women and girls live free from violence, abuse and exploitation; where gender inequality is actively challenged; and where communities and services work together to prevent harm and promote equality.*

### Why this matters

- Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is both a cause and consequence of gender inequality
- It remains highly prevalent locally, driving homelessness, child protection involvement and poor health outcomes
- Harm is increasingly shaped by online abuse, misogyny and coercive control
- Women and girls facing poverty, disability, racism, rural isolation, insecure immigration status or exploitation experience greater barriers to safety
- Prevention, early intervention and accountability must be prioritised alongside crisis-led responses

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### Who the strategy is for

- Everyone in society including women, children and young people experiencing or at risk of VAWG
- Communities where safety, equality and respect must be the norm
- All Community Planning Partnership (CPP) partners – prevention and response is everyone's role

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### Our Strategic Aims (2026–2029)

1. Prevent violence before it occurs
2. Strengthen early identification and response

3. Improve safety and long-term outcomes
  4. Hold perpetrators to account
  5. Challenge harmful attitudes and promote equality
  6. Provide visible, accountable leadership
- 

## What will be different as a result of the strategy?

- Harmful gender norms challenged earlier and more consistently
  - Staff across services respond confidently and safely to disclosures
  - Women and young people experience joined-up, trusted pathways
  - Fewer repeat and escalating incidents
  - Prevention prioritised alongside protection and justice
  - Men and boys engaged in prevention work, not just seen as a “risk group”
- 

## How we will deliver our strategic aims

- Equally Safe East Lothian Leadership Partnership reporting to CPP
  - A multi-year delivery plan with SMART actions and clear ownership
  - Annual public progress reporting
  - Lived experience embedded in design, delivery and review
- 

## How we will measure success

- Improved understanding of consent, respect and healthy relationships
- Increased workforce gender equality competence and confidence
- Reduced repeat victimisation and escalation
- Improved safety, wellbeing and housing stability
- Greater trust in services and willingness to seek support
- Gender equality increasingly embedded across local systems and culture

# Why we are developing this strategy

We are developing an Equally Safe Strategy because the reality, locally and nationally, is clear: violence against women and girls remains a persistent and deeply rooted inequality. It is not inevitable. It is not isolated. And it is not someone else's responsibility.

The national Equally Safe framework makes clear that violence against women and girls is both a cause and a consequence of women's inequality. That framing is important - it tells us this is not simply about responding to incidents - it is about changing systems, attitudes and power dynamics that allow harm to continue.

This strategy is informed by specialist organisations and the lived experience of women and young people in East Lothian. Their experiences highlight not only prevalence of violence against women and girls but the challenges of accessing safe, timely, and appropriate support and the gaps that remain between policy ambition and everyday reality.

A renewed approach is needed because:

- **Prevalence remains high.** Women and girls continue to experience violence and abuse at every stage of life, with lasting consequences for health, safety, economic security and opportunity.
- **We need a shared framework.** Partners require clarity about roles, responsibilities and priorities so that prevention, early intervention and response are coordinated and consistent.
- **Gender inequality continues to shape risk and outcomes.** A gendered and trauma-informed approach must be embedded across systems, not treated as an optional add-on.
- **Prevention must be prioritised.** If we do not invest upstream - challenging harmful norms, supporting healthy relationships and intervening early - we will remain locked in crisis response across housing, justice, mental health and children's services.
- **This is collective work.** Violence against women and girls will only be eradicated through whole-community effort. Leadership matters, but so does culture change.

This strategy gives East Lothian the opportunity to move beyond good intentions. It allows us to align with national expectations, strengthen local accountability, and ensure that preventing and responding to violence against women and girls is embedded across the CPP.

# What are our Vision and Aims for Equally Safe in East Lothian?

Our vision is shaped by the national Equally Safe ambition and grounded in what we have heard locally.

Nationally, the vision is of a Scotland where women and girls live free from violence, abuse and exploitation - and from the attitudes that sustain them. In East Lothian, we are clear that achieving that vision requires sustained partnership, leadership and system-wide change.

## Our Vision

A safe, inclusive East Lothian where women and girls live free from violence, abuse and exploitation, where gender inequality is actively challenged, and where our communities and services work together to prevent harm and promote equality.

## Our Aims

Drawing on national evidence and local insight, we will:

### 1. Prevent violence before it occurs

By addressing the root causes - gender inequality, misogyny, digital and online violence against women and girls, harmful norms and men's violence - and promoting respectful, healthy relationships from early years onwards. Addressing VAWG requires a clear focus on men's use of violence and abuse, and the systems that enable it.

### 2. Strengthen early identification and response

Ensuring services across education, housing, health, justice and community settings can recognise early signs of harm and respond confidently, consistently and compassionately.

### 3. Improve safety and long-term outcomes

Providing accessible, trauma-informed and gender-sensitive support for women, children and young people affected by violence and abuse. We will make a clear commitment to a "no wrong door" approach and design services shaped by the voices and experiences of women, children and young people.

#### 4. Hold perpetrators to account

Striving to ensure that those who use violence face appropriate consequences while supporting evidence-based interventions that enable meaningful behaviour change where it is safe and appropriate to do so.

#### 5. Challenge harmful attitudes and promote equality

Embedding gender equality across workplaces, schools and communities, and actively rejecting misogyny and gender-based discrimination in all forms.

#### 6. Provide visible, accountable leadership

Ensuring the CPP takes collective responsibility, aligns Equally Safe with key strategies across all services and partners, and measures progress transparently.



## **Our approach:**

# **A gendered, trauma-informed and intersectional response**

### **Our approach**

This strategy is grounded in a gendered, trauma-informed and intersectional approach to preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls.

VAWG does not happen by chance. It is perpetrated predominantly by men and is rooted in women's unequal position in society. In East Lothian, as nationally, gender inequality shapes who is most at risk, how harm is experienced and the barriers women face in accessing safety and support.

Taking a gendered approach means recognising these realities and ensuring they shape our policy, practice and decision-making.

### **Why a gendered approach matters**

Women and girls face specific and disproportionate risks. Local and national evidence consistently shows that most domestic abuse, sexual violence and coercive control involves a male perpetrator and a female victim. Women and girls are also more likely to experience sexual harassment, online abuse and controlling behaviours, often from a young age.

### **Gender inequality shapes women's options and safety**

Economic inequality, caring responsibilities, housing insecurity and reduced access to resources limit women's ability to leave abusive situations or recover from harm. Without recognising these conditions, responses risk focusing on individual behaviour rather than structural causes.

### **Harmful gender norms influence behaviour**

Attitudes around masculinity, entitlement and control underpin many forms of VAWG. Online spaces, pornography and misogynistic narratives increasingly shape how boys and young men understand relationships, consent and power. Challenging these norms early is essential to prevention.

### **Trauma-informed and person-centred**

Women, children and young people affected by VAWG often experience repeated trauma and contact multiple services at points of crisis. A trauma-informed approach recognises the

impact of harm on behaviour, trust and help-seeking, and prioritises safety, choice, dignity and control.

This strategy commits to responses that are:

- Person-centred rather than system-led
- Focused on recovery and long-term wellbeing, not just immediate risk
- Designed to reduce re-traumatisation across services

## Intersectional by design

A gendered approach does not replace intersectionality – it requires it. Some women face additional and overlapping barriers due to racism, disability, poverty, immigration status, age or geography. These factors interact with gender inequality to increase risk and restrict access to protection and justice.

Our approach recognises that:

- One-size-fits-all responses are insufficient
- Equity requires adapting systems to meet different needs
- Lived experience must inform design and delivery

## What this means in practice

This approach underpins every aim and action in this strategy. It means:

- Prevention work that challenges harmful norms and engages men and boys
- Services that identify harm earlier and respond safely and consistently
- Housing, justice, health and education systems that recognise gendered risk
- Perpetrator accountability that centres women's and children's safety
- Leadership that embeds Equally Safe across all policy areas

A gendered, trauma-informed and intersectional approach is not optional or additional. It is essential to preventing violence, improving outcomes and achieving our vision of an East Lothian where women and girls live free from violence and inequality.

# Overview of the national context

## What is 'Equally Safe'?

[Equally Safe: Scotland's Strategy for Preventing and Eradicating Violence Against Women and Girls](#) (VAWG) was launched in 2014 and refreshed in 2023. The strategy sets out the Scottish Government and COSLA's joint vision for 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 it.

Equally Safe recognises that VAWG damages health and wellbeing, limits freedom and potential, is a major public health issue and a fundamental violation of human rights. Equally Safe notes that tackling VAWG is everyone's business, and sets out seven priority actions to support a cross-policy, strategic approach to be taken to tackling VAWG:

- prevent VAWG before it occurs
- support early intervention
- build a broad and shared understanding across our society and communities of what VAWG is, how it affects those who experience it, its impact on society more generally, the scale of the problem, and what causes it so that we can reduce the harm together
- build political, institutional, sectoral, organisational, community, and personal commitment and contribution to preventing and tackling VAWG
- hold perpetrators of VAWG to account, supporting change where possible
- deliver sustainable, informed and safe specialist and universal service responses for victim/survivors that are holistic and meet victim/survivors' individual needs
- promote an intersectional approach to preventing, recognising, and responding to the compounding inequalities and risks that some women, children, and young people may experience as a result of their ethnicity, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or immigration status.

## What is 'Violence Against Women and Girls' (VAWG)?

***"The phrase 'Violence Against Women and Girls' is used to describe violent and abusive behaviour directed at women and girls because they are women and girls. It is behaviour which is carried out predominantly by men. It is an abuse of power and stems from systemic, deep-rooted women's inequality."*** (Equally Safe)

VAWG includes the actual and threat of:

- physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, and financial abuse occurring in the family, within the general community, and in institutions in both physical and digital spaces and places

- domestic abuse/coercive controlling behaviours, stalking, rape, incest, sexual harassment, bullying, and intimidation
- commercial sexual exploitation (CSE), including prostitution, lap dancing, stripping, pornography
- human trafficking, including for the purposes of domestic servitude, sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation, which may include gangs and organised criminal networks
- child abuse occurring within family settings, including domestic abuse, and sexual abuse by male family members including siblings
- child sexual abuse and exploitation including the production and sharing of indecent images of children
- honour-based abuse, including forced marriages, female genital mutilation (FGM), dowry abuse and 'honour based' coercive control and killings.

## Who does VAWG affect?

Equally Safe recognises that while all women and girls are at risk of experiencing VAWG, some women, children and young people may experience increased risk of violence, abuse, and exploitation due to the prejudice and structural barriers in society which cause inequality. This includes, but is not limited to, black and minority ethnic women, migrant women, women with disabilities and LGBTQI+ women.

Equally Safe also recognises that women and girls with multiple and complex needs may experience increased risks of violence, abuse and exploitation as well as facing additional barriers to accessing support with these needs. This includes, but is not limited to, women and girls with physical or mental health issues, women and girls affected by substance use, women in the justice system and homeless women.

Equally Safe also recognises that boys experience domestic abuse, sexual abuse, and exploitation in significant numbers. For that reason, the national Equally Safe strategy covers all children and young people and works to ensure all women, children and young people in our communities are equally safe.



# Local context:

## Violence Against Women and Girls in East Lothian

### Violence Against Women and Girls in East Lothian

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) remains a persistent and deeply rooted issue in East Lothian. While reporting levels have remained relatively stable in recent years, local services and data point to increasing severity, complexity and risk, particularly in relation to coercive control, repeat victimisation and online abuse.

In 2024/25, 1,233 incidents of domestic abuse were recorded in East Lothian. As with the national picture, the vast majority involved a male perpetrator and a female victim. Domestic abuse continues to be one of the most common drivers of homelessness and child protection involvement locally, with long-term impacts on women's safety, health, economic security and wellbeing, as well as children's development and life chances.

It is important to recognise that recorded incidents reflect only reported abuse. Evidence from specialist services and national prevalence estimates indicate that many women do not disclose abuse due to fear of consequences, lack of trust in systems, concerns about child contact, immigration status, housing insecurity or previous negative experiences of services. As a result, the true scale of harm in our communities is significantly higher than official statistics suggest.

### Patterns of harm and risk

While domestic abuse remains the most prevalent form of VAWG, it rarely occurs in isolation. Local intelligence highlights ongoing and emerging patterns including:

- Escalation post-separation, where risk often increases when women attempt to leave abusive partners
- Increasing recognition of coercive control, stalking and non-fatal strangulation
- The growing role of technology-facilitated abuse, including harassment, surveillance, image-based abuse and online misogyny
- Repeat and cumulative harm experienced by women over the life course

Increased detection of associated offences, including bail breaches, reflects improved system awareness and enforcement. However, higher detection does not always equate to improved safety or outcomes for women. Specialist services continue to report that many cases do not progress through the justice system due to safety concerns, withdrawal, fear of retaliation or lack of confidence in processes.

## Housing, poverty and inequality

Domestic abuse is the leading cause of women's homelessness in East Lothian. Women presenting as homeless frequently describe unsafe living situations, financial instability and limited options for staying safely in their homes.

Structural gender inequality shapes these risks. Women in East Lothian are more likely to:

- Have lower incomes or reduced economic independence
- Carry primary caring responsibilities
- Work in part-time or lower-paid roles
- Face barriers accessing safe, affordable housing

Rising living costs, housing pressures and poverty compound these challenges. For women with no recourse to public funds, insecure immigration status, disabilities, substance use issues or mental health needs, routes to safety can be severely constrained. These intersecting inequalities actively limit women's ability to leave abuse and rebuild independent lives.

## Children and young people

Children and young people in East Lothian are directly and indirectly affected by VAWG. Domestic abuse continues to feature prominently in child protection concerns, and exposure to coercive control and violence has profound impacts on children's emotional wellbeing, development and sense of safety.

Schools, youth services and specialist organisations report increasing concerns about:

- Sexual harassment and misogynistic language among peers
- Sharing of sexual images
- Online bullying and abuse
- Confusion about consent, boundaries and healthy relationships

Evidence from young women and non-binary young people locally highlights high levels of harm in intimate relationships and sexual violence, alongside significant barriers to accessing support. Shame, fear of judgement in small communities, lack of awareness of services and perceptions that support is only available at crisis point all delay disclosure and recovery.

## Online harm and cultural influences

VAWG increasingly takes place across both physical and digital spaces. Local practitioners and national research identify online misogyny, image-based abuse and the influence of harmful online content as growing drivers of risk, particularly for girls and young women.

Digital spaces are not neutral. They can reinforce gender inequality, entitlement and hostility towards women and girls, normalising harmful attitudes and abusive behaviour. Prevention efforts must therefore extend beyond traditional settings and actively address online environments, digital literacy and the impact of misogynistic narratives on boys and young men.

## Women facing additional barriers

Some women experience compounded risk and exclusion due to intersecting inequalities. In East Lothian, this includes but is not limited to:

- Black and minority ethnic women
- Women with disabilities or long-term health conditions
- Women in poverty or with insecure immigration status
- Women living in rural or isolated communities
- Women affected by commercial sexual exploitation

For these women, barriers to safety can include language access, racism, fear of statutory involvement, lack of appropriate accommodation, digital exclusion and limited availability of specialist, culturally competent support.

## Local strengths and ongoing challenges

East Lothian benefits from strong partnership working, committed specialist services and established multi-agency risk management processes, including MARAC. There is growing recognition across services of the importance of trauma-informed practice, gender equality competence and early identification.

However, demand for specialist support continues to outstrip capacity. Workforce confidence in responding to coercive control and online harm is variable, and current perpetrator interventions are limited in scope. Addressing these challenges requires sustained leadership, system-wide commitment and a shift towards prevention and early intervention.

# Strategic context

Preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls (VAWG) requires action across the full breadth of local policy, service delivery and workforce practice. Violence against women is not confined to one service area; it intersects with housing, health, education, justice, poverty, community safety and organisational culture. As such, Equally Safe in East Lothian is designed to operate as a cross-cutting framework, supporting greater alignment across the CPP.

## Aligning Equally Safe locally

In Autumn 2025, leads across a range of policy and service areas were asked to reflect on existing and emerging strategies, actions and reporting frameworks, and to identify where there were opportunities to more clearly align with the four priorities of the national Equally Safe strategy. This exercise reinforced that much relevant activity is already underway locally, but that stronger and more explicit alignment would improve coherence, accountability and impact.

The key opportunities identified through this process are summarised below.

## Community planning and corporate priorities

At a strategic level, Equally Safe has a clear role to play in shaping and informing community planning priorities. Opportunities for closer alignment were identified with:

- **East Lothian's Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP)**, particularly in relation to prevention of harm, improving safety and wellbeing and improving long-term outcomes for women, children and young people.
- The **Customer Strategy 2023–2028**, where there is an opportunity to clearly highlight the role of accessible, inclusive and trauma-informed services in supporting early identification and safe responses to violence and abuse.

Embedding Equally Safe within community planning processes supports shared ownership, ensures prevention is prioritised alongside response, and helps reduce siloed approaches.

## Education, children and young people

Education and early intervention are fundamental to preventing violence against women and girls. Strong opportunities for alignment were identified across education and children's services, including:

- **Education and Early Years – East Lothian Education Priorities**, with links to prevention and early intervention, particularly through whole-school approaches to healthy relationships, consent and gender equality.

- **Education and Early Years – Health and Wellbeing Framework**, which provides a clear vehicle for embedding prevention-focused work aligned to Equally Safe priority one.
- **Children’s Services Planning**, where plans can explicitly recognise the impact of domestic abuse and gender-based violence on children’s safety, wellbeing and life chances, and strengthen links between Equally Safe and GIRFEC practice.

These connections support a consistent approach to early identification, prevention and recovery for children and young people affected by VAWG.

## Justice, community safety and accountability

Justice and community safety partners play a critical role in holding perpetrators to account and improving safety. Opportunities for closer alignment were identified with:

- The **Justice Social Work Service Plan**, ensuring clear alignment with all four national Equally Safe priorities, including prevention, early intervention, victim safety and perpetrator behaviour change.
- **National Community Justice strategies and performance frameworks**, which intersect with Equally Safe priorities around reducing reoffending and improving outcomes for victims.
- **Community Justice and Safety activity**, including Police Scotland’s local work, where reporting and assurance mechanisms provide opportunities to highlight Equally Safe-aligned prevention and accountability actions.

Strengthening these links supports more coherent multi-agency responses and reinforces the shared responsibility for preventing harm and addressing perpetration.

## Poverty, equality and economic security

Work to reduce poverty and inequality is closely connected to women’s ability to access safety and recovery. Several existing strategies provide opportunities to more clearly reflect Equally Safe priorities, including:

- The **East Lothian Poverty Plan**, highlighting the links between poverty, economic abuse and women’s pathways into and out of violence.
- **Community Wealth Building and Employability Partnerships**, which can support longer-term economic security and independence for women affected by abuse, aligning with Equally Safe priorities around early intervention and improved outcomes.

Addressing the structural inequalities that constrain women’s choices is central to preventing violence and disrupting cycles of harm.

## Place-based planning, housing and the built environment

Women’s safety is shaped by where they live, work and travel. Opportunities for alignment exist within:

- **East Lothian Council’s Open Space Strategy**, particularly in relation to designing and maintaining safe, inclusive public spaces that consider women and girls’ experiences.
- **Housing and Homelessness strategies**, where links to Equally Safe priorities around safety, recovery and perpetrator accountability can be highlighted, particularly given the role of domestic abuse as a driver of women’s homelessness.

Embedding Equally Safe considerations into place-based planning supports prevention and contributes to safer communities.

## Organisational policies and workforce practice

Partners also highlighted a wide range of organisational policies and workforce processes where there are opportunities to more clearly signal commitment to Equally Safe principles. These include, but are not limited to:

- Gender-based violence, sexual harassment, bullying and harassment policies
- Equality, diversity and inclusion frameworks
- Recruitment, safer recruitment and flexible working policies
- Policies supporting carers, maternity, menopause and special leave
- Workforce development, training and wellbeing frameworks

This includes policy activity across East Lothian Council, NHS Lothian, Police Scotland and third-sector partners such as VCEL. Strengthening the visibility of Equally Safe within organisational policies reinforces cultural change, supports earlier identification, and ensures that workplaces themselves are safe and supportive environments.

## A collective opportunity

This mapping exercise confirms that Equally Safe is not an additional or standalone strategy. Rather, it provides a shared framework that can strengthen existing work, improve consistency across services, and ensure that preventing and responding to violence against women and girls is embedded across East Lothian’s strategic landscape.

Through this strategy, the CPP commits to using Equally Safe as a lens to align priorities, influence future policy development, and support coordinated action that improves safety, equality and long-term outcomes for women, children and young people.

# How will we implement, monitor and measure success?

## Co-development of the strategy

This strategy is being developed by the East Lothian Equally Safe Leadership Partnership which is part of the CPP.

## The draft strategy will be shared with:

The Council's Senior Leadership Team, the Integrated Joint Board's Strategic Planning Group and all staff in the Council and the Health & Social Care Partnership, both as staff members and residents of East Lothian.

All residents and interested parties through the Council's online Consultation Hub, with paper copies in libraries and other public buildings.

Children and young people through our schools and community groups.

Lived experience groups such as the Women's Aid Shadow Group and Youth Shadow Group, the VAWG Group and other local women's groups. VCEL can support this activity by engaging through existing trusted third sector relationships and aligning participation with existing activity rather than a new standalone consultation exercise. This will include engagement with community and other groups such as East Lothian Tenants' and Residents' Panel, East Lothian Kin, the Growing and Changing Group, Youth Parliamentarians and other youth groups.

The final version will be submitted to the CPP for approval and noted at a meeting of East Lothian Council.

## Implementation: How we will deliver the strategy

This is a live strategy that will be supported by a multi-year delivery plan. Progress will be monitored through annual reporting to the CPP and the strategy and delivery plan will be reviewed and refreshed as required. We will:

### **a. Establish a strong governance structure**

- Continue the work of the Equally Safe East Lothian Leadership Group with the focus of the Group shifting to oversight and monitoring. This Group will report to the Keeping Safe Oversight Subgroup of the CPP.
- Ensure clear roles and accountability so every partner knows how they contribute to prevention, protection, and equality.

## **b. Develop a multi-year delivery plan with SMART actions**

This will include:

- Specific, measurable actions across all services and partners.
- Clear timescales, leads, resources, and intended outcomes.

## **c. Submit an Annual Progress Report to the CPP**

The report will include:

- Progress against actions in the Delivery Plan
- Trends in local data
- Qualitative insights from communities and lived experience
- Staff training uptake and system improvements
- Barriers or resource gaps

Where possible, progress will be measured using mixed methods: data + lived experience and system-level insight. Lived experience will be embedded in implementation and review including mechanisms to regularly gather and reflect the experience of women and young people accessing services.

# **Measuring success:**

## **What good looks like in East Lothian**

Success in East Lothian will include:

### **Preventing violence before it occurs**

- Children and young people demonstrate age-appropriate understanding of consent, respect, and healthy relationships
- Harmful gender norms are challenged earlier and more consistently, including in digital spaces
- Men and boys are actively engaged in positive masculinity and prevention work, not just seen as a “risk group”

### **2. Strengthened early identification and response**

- More staff trained in trauma-informed and gender-sensitive approaches
- Staff across universal services recognise early signs of harm and escalation
- Shorter waiting times

### 3. Improved safety and long-term outcomes

- Developing a “no wrong door” principle
- Increased trust and confidence in services amongst women, children and young people affected
- Reduced barriers to support - pathways feel joined-up rather than service-dependent

### 4. Holding perpetrators to account

- Greater and consistent use of perpetrator programmes
- Better multi-agency risk management
- Fewer repeat and escalating incidents

### 5. Challenging harmful attitudes and promoting equality

- Reduced acceptance of misogyny and victim-blaming
- Increased willingness to intervene as a bystander
- Gender equality understood as everyone’s business

### 6. Providing visible, accountable leadership

- Equally Safe is routinely considered in decision-making and strategy development, and a commitment statement or action is included in each policy and strategy developed
- Clear governance, reporting and accountability structures
- Prevention is prioritised, not just response



## Delivery Plan with Outcome Measures

| Aim 1: Prevent violence before it occurs  |  |           |  |
|---|--|-----------|--|
| Action  | Lead                                   | Timeline  | Outcome Measure  |
| In-line with the National Equally Safe Strategy and Delivery Plan, increase staff training in gender-based violence and trauma awareness and continue to review the Health and Wellbeing curriculum to ensure the inclusion of equalities, gender-based violence and internet safety. | Education                              | 2026–2029 | All secondary schools will be registered with ESAS by December 2026<br>All secondary DHT Pupil Support & PTGs (minimum key staff) will have completed ESAS e-learning by December 2026<br>Secondary schools will ensure all school staff complete the minimum requirements of trauma awareness - Ongoing<br>East Lothian will ensure the new health and wellbeing curriculum provides coverage of relationships, equalities, GBV and online safety, including technology facilitated VAWG by June 2029 |
| Expand Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) and peer-led prevention programmes  | Education, Community Wellbeing         | 2026–2028 | 100% of schools delivering Mentors in Violence Prevention by June 2028   |
| Develop positive masculinity and men’s engagement programmes  | Community Wellbeing, Third Sector      | 2026–2029 | Increase in participation levels; positive qualitative feedback from participants; reduced tolerance of misogynistic attitudes   |
| Run public-facing campaigns challenging harmful norms, including online misogyny  | Corporate Communications, CPP Partners | Annual    | Broader campaign reach and feedback; community survey data showing positive attitude change  |

## Aim 2: Strengthen early identification and response

| Action   | Lead   | Timeline  | Outcome Measure  |
|--|--|-----------|--|
| Embed safe enquiry and early identification across universal services                                  | HSCP, Housing, Education, Communities & Partnerships | 2026–2027 | Increased staff confidence in surveys; improved quality of referrals   |
| Roll out trauma-informed and gender-competent training (Equally Safe in Practice)                      | Organisational Development, CPP                      | 2026–2028 | Increase in % of workforce trained; increased confidence in responding to disclosures  |
| Align Equally Safe with homelessness, addictions, GIRFEC and poverty policies, strategies and pathways | CPP Strategic Leads                                  | 2026–2029 | Clearer referral pathways (more getting to the right place first time); increase in service user feedback indicating joined-up responses |

## Aim 3: Improve safety and long-term outcomes

| Action  | Lead                                       | Timeline  | Outcome Measure   |
|---|--|-----------|---|
| Develop and implement a local 'No Wrong Door' protocol    | VAWG Partnership                           | 2026–2027 | Reduced repeat presentations; improved service navigation feedback                  |
| Strengthen coordinated safety planning                    | MARAC oversight partners, VAWG Partnership | 2026–2028 | Increased evidence of multi-agency safety plans; improved safety outcomes for women |
| Increase access to advocacy and recovery-focused services | VAWG Partnership / Third Sector            | 2026–2029 | Reduced crisis re-entry; positive qualitative recovery outcome feedback             |

#### Aim 4: Hold perpetrators to account

| Action   | Lead                | Timeline  | Outcome Measure  |
|--|---------------------|-----------|--|
| Assess all perpetrators for suitability for behaviour-change programmes          | Justice Social Work | 2026–2029 | Increased assessments for perpetrator programmes; evidence of positive attitudinal change      |
| Strengthen multi-agency risk management through MARAC                            | VAWG Partnership    | Ongoing   | Any outcomes / actions from MARAC reduce risk to victim (and any children) and increase safety |
| Consideration of housing enforcement actions based on perpetrator accountability | Housing / Legal     | 2026–2028 | Increased considerations of tenancy protections; improved victim safety                        |

#### Aim 5: Challenge harmful attitudes and promote equality

| Action  | Lead  | Timeline  | Outcome Measure  |
|---|---|-----------|--|
| Embed gender equality across workforce culture and leadership development | All CPP Partners                            | 2026–2029 | Workforce surveys showing increased gender equality competence             |
| Support bystander approaches in schools, workplaces and communities       | Education / All CPP Partners / Third Sector | 2026–2029 | Increased willingness to intervene; positive attitudinal change indicators |

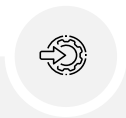
#### Aim 6: Provide visible, accountable leadership

| Action  | Lead                          | Timeline     | Outcome Measure   |
|---|-------------------------------|--------------|---|
| Require gendered analysis for all new CPP strategies and policies | CPP / Policy Leads            | 2026 onwards | Evidence of gendered analysis in new strategies                               |
| Embed Equally Safe actions into LOIP and key partner plans        | CPP Board                     | 2026 onwards | Clear alignment across strategies; annual reporting showing positive progress |
| Publish annual Equally Safe progress and outcomes report          | Equally Safe Leadership Group | Annual       | Public reporting; transparent monitoring of progress                          |

# Logic Model: Equally Safe in East Lothian

*Our Vision is for a safe, inclusive East Lothian where women and girls live free from violence, abuse and exploitation, where gender inequality is actively challenged, and where our communities and services work together to prevent harm and promote equality.*

**Problem:**  
Violence against women and girls is a cause and consequence of gender inequality. In East Lothian it continues to undermine safety, health, wellbeing, housing stability and life chances for women, children and young people while placing sustained pressure on public services.



## Inputs

- Community Planning Partnership leadership & governance
- Skilled universal and specialist workforce
- Lived experience of women, children and young people
- Evidence, data & national guidance
- Sustainable funding & commissioned services
- Cross-system partnerships



## Activities

- Prevent violence before it occurs
- Strengthen early identification and response
- Improve safety and long-term outcomes
- Hold perpetrators to account
- Challenge harmful attitudes and promote equality
- Provide visible, accountable leadership



## Outputs

- Clear prevention and early-intervention pathways
- Increased workforce confidence and consistency
- Improved access to advocacy and support
- Strong multi-agency risk management
- Better use of data and lived experience in decision-making



## Outcomes

- Improved understanding of VAWG and its causes
- Reduced tolerance of misogyny and harmful attitudes
- Earlier identification of risk and harm
- Safer, more supportive responses
- Improved safety, wellbeing and stability
- Reduced repeat victimisation and escalation
- Stronger system alignment
- Greater trust in services and disclosures



## Impact

- Reduced prevalence and severity of VAWG
- Women and girls live safe, equal and independent lives
- Children and young people grow up with healthy relationship norms
- Gender equality embedded across East Lothian's systems and culture

## Glossary of Terms

| Term                           | Meaning   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Gendered approach              | Understanding that people's experiences can be different because of their gender, and making sure support and services respond to those differences in a fair and appropriate way.  |
| Intersectionality              | Recognising that people can face different kinds of inequality or discrimination at the same time (for example because of their race, gender, disability, or background), and that these can overlap and affect their lives in unique ways. |
| Coercive control               | A pattern of behaviour where one person tries to control another person by isolating them, threatening them, or making them feel scared or dependent, even if there is no physical violence.  |
| Technology-facilitated abuse   | Using phones, social media, apps, or other digital tools to harass, monitor, threaten, or control someone.  |
| Commercial sexual exploitation | When someone is made, pressured, or tricked into sexual activities in exchange for money, goods, or something else of value.  |
| Perpetrator accountability     | Making sure that the person who causes harm takes responsibility for their actions and is held to account, with consequences and support to change their behaviour.   |
| Trauma-informed practice       | Working in a way that understands people may have been through difficult or harmful experiences, and making sure support is safe, respectful, and does not cause further harm.  |



Produced by East Lothian  
Community Planning Partnership

[www.eastlothian.gov.uk/equally-safe](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/equally-safe)

### **Intro text (top of survey):**

The East Lothian Partnership are consulting on a draft strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls. Your feedback will help shape the final strategy and ensure it reflects local priorities, lived experience and practical realities.

### **General Questions**

1. Do you agree with our shared vision to create "a safe, inclusive East Lothian where women and girls live free from violence, abuse and exploitation; where gender inequality is actively challenged; and where communities and services work together to prevent harm and promote equality"?

Strongly agree

Agree

Not sure

Disagree

Strongly disagree

If you are not sure or you disagree, what do you think should be changed?

2. Do you think the aims and actions included in the draft strategy will help us to achieve our vision?

Strongly agree - Agree - Not sure - Disagree - Strongly disagree

If you are not sure or you disagree, what do you think should be added or changed?

3. Do you find the strategy easy to understand and/or relate to your own experience?

Strongly agree - Agree - Not sure - Disagree - Strongly disagree

If you are not sure or you disagree, what do you think should be added or changed?

4. Do you feel the aims and actions are realistic, measurable and deliverable in East Lothian?

Strongly agree - Agree - Not sure - Disagree - Strongly disagree

If you are not sure or you disagree, what do you think should be added or changed?

5. Do you feel the actions are clear enough about who is responsible, what will change, and how progress will be measured?

Strongly agree - Agree - Not sure - Disagree - Strongly disagree

If you are not sure or you disagree, what do you think should be added or changed?

6. Are there any issues that you think could be highlighted more clearly in the draft strategy, or anything you think is missing?

Free text

5. Please share any other thoughts and reflections on the draft strategy.

Free text

**Possible additional questions for management teams:**

1. Do you feel the strategy places enough emphasis on prevention and early intervention, not just responding to crisis?

Strongly agree - Agree - Not sure - Disagree - Strongly disagree

2. What do you think would make the biggest difference locally in preventing harm before it occurs?

Free text

3. Does the strategy make clear that preventing violence against women and girls is everyone's responsibility, not just specialist services?

Strongly agree - Agree - Not sure - Disagree - Strongly disagree

If not, what do you think should be added or changed?

**CLOSING STATEMENT**

Thank you for sharing your views. All feedback will be carefully considered and used to refine the final Equally Safe in East Lothian strategy.

## Alternative and additional questions for children and young people:

The East Lothian Partnership (this is a group of people from the council, NHS, Edinburgh College, the Fire and police service, and charities and youth projects) are interested in your views on a plan to prevent and eradicate (stop) violence against women and girls. Your views will help shape the final strategy (plan) and ensure it reflects your experiences and views.

They are developing a plan called the **Equally Safe Strategy** because the reality, locally and nationally, is clear: violence against women and girls remains a persistent and deeply rooted inequality. It is not inevitable. It is not isolated. And it is not someone else's responsibility.

Meaning Violence against women and girls is still a big problem and comes from deep unfairness in society. It's not normal, it's not just a one-off situation, and it's everyone's responsibility to do something about it.

### 1. The aim of this work is to create

"a safe, inclusive East Lothian where women and girls live free from violence, abuse and exploitation. Where gender inequality is actively challenged; and where communities and services work together to prevent harm and promote equality"

For clarification -

A safe East Lothian where women and girls can live free from violence, abuse and exploitation

(Exploitation means taking advantage of someone unfairly, for example pressuring them to do something they don't want to do.)

Where unfair treatment based on gender (whether someone is female, male or non-binary) is challenged and stopped.

And where communities and services — like the council, NHS, schools and police — work together to prevent harm, support people, and make sure everyone is treated fairly and has the same opportunities to succeed

### 1. Would you agree this is a good aim?

Strongly agree - Agree - Not sure - Disagree - Strongly disagree

If you are not sure or you disagree, what do you think should be added or changed?

2. Do you think the strategy gives enough attention to children and young people's experiences, including online harm and healthy relationships?

Strongly agree - Agree - Not sure - Disagree - Strongly disagree

If not, what do you think should be added or changed?

3. What makes people your age feel unsafe in:

- Relationships
- School
- Online
- In the community

4. What do you think would make the biggest difference to women and girls to make your relationships, school, community, online safer?

- Relationships:
- School:
- Online:
- Community:

5. What should adults, schools and services do earlier to help young people stay safe and have healthy, respectful relationships?

Free text

**CLOSING STATEMENT**

Thank you for sharing your views. All feedback will be carefully considered and used to refine the final Equally Safe in East Lothian strategy.

## **Optional prompts and activities for children and young people:**

### **Activity-Based Approach: Exploring Safety**

#### **1. Warm-up: “What does feeling safe mean?”**

Start by grounding the group. This helps them understand the concept before applying it.

#### **Prompt questions:**

- “What does feeling safe look like?”
- “What does feeling unsafe feel like in your body or mind?”
- “Where do you feel most safe? Why?”

#### **2. Scenarios**

Create short, realistic situations across the four areas:

##### **Relationships**

- “Someone you’re going out with checks your phone without asking”
- “A friend listens and respects your boundaries”

##### **School**

- “A teacher ignores bullying in class”
- “There’s an adult you trust you can go to for help”

##### **Online**

- “Someone keeps messaging you even after you’ve said stop”
- “You know how to block and report someone”

## Community

- “There are adults around you trust if something goes wrong”
- “You feel judged or unsafe walking in your area”

Ask after each scenario:

- “Does this feel safe or unsafe?”
- “Why?”
- “Would this make you more likely to feel okay or worried?”




### 3. Sorting Game: “Safe / Unsafe / Not Sure”

Give young people cards with behaviours or situations.

#### Examples:

- “Someone respects your opinion”
- “Being shouted at”
- “People sharing your photos without asking”
- “Having rules that are fair and explained”

Ask them to sort into:

-  Safe
-  Not sure
-  Unsafe

#### Follow-up prompts:

- “What makes this feel safe/unsafe?”
- “What would make this safer?”

### 4. “Step forward / step back” activity

**Instructions:**

- Stand in a line
- Read statements
- Step forward if it feels safe, back if unsafe, stay still if unsure




**Statements:**

- “I can say no without being pressured”
- “Adults listen to me seriously”
- “I feel safe walking around where I live”
- “I know what to do if something online feels wrong”

**5. Mapping activity: “Safe and Unsafe Spaces”**

Give a simple map outline or blank sheet.

Ask them to:

- Draw or label:
  -  Places they feel safe
  -  Places they feel unsafe
  -  Places they're unsure about

For example:

- School
- Home
- Online spaces (apps/games)
- Local area

**Prompts:**

- “What makes this place feel safe?”
- “What would improve safety here?”

## **6. Guided prompt list (for discussion or worksheets)**

You can use these prompts directly:

### **Relationships**

- “What makes someone treat you in a safe/respectful way?”
- “What behaviours make you feel uncomfortable or controlled?”

### **School**

- “What helps you feel safe at school?”
- “What makes school feel unsafe or stressful?”

### **Online**

- “What makes being online feel fun and safe?”
- “What makes it feel risky or upsetting?”

### **Community**

- “Where do young people feel safest in your area?”
- “Where do they feel unsafe, and why?”

## **7. “Fix it” activity (solution-focused)**

After identifying unsafe situations:

Ask:

- “What would need to change to make this safer?”
- “Who should help fix this?”
- “What would good support look like?”

**Possible additional questions for lived-experience groups and women's organisations:**

1. What do you think would make the biggest difference locally in preventing violence against women and girls?
2. What would build greater trust in services for people affected by violence?
3. What helps people feel believed, respected and safe when they disclose harm?
4. What currently stops women and girls from seeking support?
5. Did you feel the strategy recognised your experience, or did it feel like it was describing someone else's situation?
6. Do you think the strategy says enough about holding perpetrators accountable for their behaviour?
7. What should services, communities, or agencies do differently to challenge abusive behaviour and increase accountability?

**CLOSING STATEMENT**

Thank you for sharing your views. All feedback will be carefully considered and used to refine the final Equally Safe in East Lothian strategy.