

## **Single Outcome Agreements: an analysis by Scottish Women's Aid**

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Scottish Women's Aid (SWA) is the lead organisation in Scotland working towards the prevention of domestic abuse. It plays a vital role campaigning and lobbying for effective responses to domestic abuse.

*The Scottish Government estimates that the cost of domestic abuse to the public purse in Scotland is £2.3 billion and the cost of violence against women £4 billion (Safer Lives: Changed Lives 2009). These costs are incurred every year by health, police and local authority services such as housing, social work and education. All of these services are key members of Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs). In 2009 the remit of Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs) was widened to become a strategic plan at Community Planning Partnership level, therefore providing a real opportunity to develop joined up work to tackle violence against women (VAW.) Our analysis in 2009 reviewed how this has been put into practice in the 32 SOAs.*

### **Background**

Scotland has led the way in developing a strategic approach to domestic abuse. In 2000 the Scottish Executive published a National Strategy to Address Domestic Abuse and established a national group to oversee its implementation. Developments in recent years include specific funding for children's support services; the joint publication by the Scottish Government and COSLA of the National Domestic Abuse Delivery Plan for Children and Young People in 2008, and of Safer Lives: Changed Lives: A Shared Approach to Tackling Violence Against Women in 2009.

This strategic approach to addressing domestic abuse in Scotland has been recognised internationally. EHRC research on the provision of violence against women support services in the UK, the Map of Gaps, highlighted that in Scotland the provision of services is distributed more equally than in other parts of the UK. The report states:

“The experience of Scotland proves that investment in frontline voluntary sector support services produces a significant return. Scotland should, therefore, be regarded as a benchmark with respect to its strategic approach, its recognition that violence is a cause and consequence of women's inequality and its commitment to enhancing capacity and diversity of provision. National and regional governments should follow the model of the Scottish Government in developing VAW strategies which have a core commitment to funding specialised support services.” (Map of Gaps 2007:7)

## **The Concordat**

The election of a new administration in Scotland in 2007, however, brought about a new approach to government relations at a national and local level. This approach is outlined in the Concordat which sets out “the terms of a new relationship between the Scottish Government and local government, based on mutual respect and partnership” (Scottish Government/COSLA 2007:1).

For Scottish Women's Aid (SWA) this raised a number of concerns:

- The move from national to local prioritisation could result in the loss of a national strategic approach and reduce the priority given to addressing violence against women.
- The removal of the ring-fence from a number of funding streams would result in this funding being absorbed into mainstream local authority services – with a reduction in funding for services to support women and children escaping domestic abuse.
- There is an absence of accountability and transparency in the new framework to measure progress and account for funding provided by national to local government.

## **Single Outcome Agreements**

An integral element of this new relationship between national and local government is the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA). The SOA is based on a performance framework which has an agreed set of 15 national outcomes, underpinned by 45 national indicators and targets. It also requires local authorities to establish local outcomes to take account of local priorities and develop local indicators to measure performance against these local outcomes.

## **Methodology**

Our analysis consisted of a document review in which we systematically analysed the content of each SOA in relation to information on domestic abuse/violence against women (VAW) and the priority and coverage given to addressing it within each SOA. Our analysis reviewed the different components of the SOA:

- The area profiles provided within each SOA
- The national outcomes to which domestic abuse or violence against women were aligned
- Local outcomes
- National and Local indicators
- Gender Equality Duty responsibilities

## **Area Profile**

Guidance issued by COSLA to CPPs states that the Area Profile is “An integrated profile of the social, economic and environmental conditions of the area is the basis of

the SOA. On the basis of the evidence the Area Profile should identify past trends and future challenges and opportunities and then the strategic local priorities, both for improved and maintained conditions.” (COSLA: 2008 p9).

The main focus of information in this descriptive section of the SOA in relation to VAW is on the incidence of domestic abuse, the increased levels of reporting and concerns about underreporting. Sixteen of the SOAs (50%) reported an increase in incidents of domestic abuse, using statements such as “upward trend”, “continuing to rise”, “a significant problem”. Most of the contextual information was largely limited to descriptive statistics of the recorded incidents of domestic abuse. This information ranged from reporting a steady year on year increase in line with national trends and increased confidence in reporting to highlighting increases in recorded incidents of between 16 – 40% since 2005/06 (5 SOAs).

Although 16 SOAs highlighted the increase in reported incidents of domestic abuse as a trend they are concerned about within their local area, addressing this locally is stated as a priority in only 11 SOAs. It is within these 11 that there is more of a description of a strategic approach being taken; within 4 SOAs it is mentioned as a Community Safety priority, in 1 as a Community Planning Partnership priority, in 1 as a police priority; the others referring to it as a partnership priority, a strategic priority or key challenge.

Seven SOAs made no reference to VAW in the Area Profile contextual information. The guidance highlights that the Area Profile should present a picture of the area that clearly establishes its key challenges and opportunities. – which then determine the basis and the rationale for the priorities and outcomes set out in the SOA We can reasonably assume, that if VAW is not identified within the Area Profile as a key challenge - it will not be identified as a priority in 7 (22%) local authority areas in Scotland.

In only 10 SOAs is there a specific reference within the Area Profile to children affected by domestic abuse. This is disappointing given the national strategic focus introduced in June 2008 by the National Domestic Abuse Delivery Plan for Children and Young People, which “signals our intention to drive forward the agenda for change, in the context of the new partnership environment between Government and local government, and improve outcomes for children and young people affected by domestic abuse, their families and communities.”(Scottish Government/COSLA: 2008 p3).

### **National Outcomes**

The SOA guidance states that all of the 15 national outcomes (NOs) should be considered in preparing the SOA, but whether and how they will be addressed will depend on their demonstrated relevance to the evidence and strategic priorities identified in the integrated Area Profile.

The majority of SOAs (25) aligned violence against women to national outcome NO 9 (We live our lives safe from crime, disorder and danger). This may be due to the fact that the only national indicator available relating to VAW is statistical information collected by the police on recorded incidents of domestic abuse. Only 5 SOAs related violence against women to gender inequality, NO7 (We have tackled the significant inequalities in Scottish society). In only 6 SOAs is there reference to violence against

women in relation to health - NO 6 (We live longer healthier lives). In 2 SOAs there is no reference to violence against women within the National Outcomes section of the SOA.

### **Local Outcomes**

The guidance in relation to local outcomes states that, “The number of local outcomes should be meaningful and manageable, reflecting the strategic priorities drawn from the evidence in the Area Profile.” (COSLA: p9)

A range of local outcomes are used within SOAs which refer to VAW. They fall into 4 broad themes:

- Reduction in crime and antisocial behaviour\safer communities (17 SOAs)
- Child protection\safety of vulnerable adults (6 SOAs)
- Domestic abuse\gender based violence specific (6 SOAs)
- Health and well being (3 SOAs)

The VAW specific local outcomes, in all but one case, relate to the reduction of domestic abuse or violence against women, for example “reduce violence and its impact including gender based violence.” Two SOAs contained no local outcome or indicator in relation to domestic abuse or violence against women.

### **Local indicators**

The majority of SOAs (22) used as an indicator the rates of domestic abuse incidents per 100,000 of the population. This information is collected by the eight Scottish police forces which record the incidents of domestic abuse coming to the attention of the police. A few (5 SOAs) contained indicators other than police statistics. These largely relate to the number of women and children accessing support or a specialist service.

Although the majority of SOAs used the same indicator the targets used to measure progress varied and are contradictory. Half of the SOAs (11) using this indicator (rates of domestic abuse incidents) set a target to increase the number of reported incidents, while the other half, (11 SOAs) set targets to reduce the rate of reporting. Two SOAs contained a mix, with an increased target for first time victims of domestic abuse and a reduced target for repeat victims. A further 3 SOAs set no specific target.

The difficulty with using this indicator is that measuring the number of domestic abuse incidents recorded by the police measures just that. It does not measure how well the strategic approach taken by the local authority and its community planning partners is working. It does not measure performance against the stated outcome. The varied use of local outcomes and contradictory mix of indicators and targets make any national monitoring of Scotland’s progress in addressing domestic abuse difficult at best.

This factor has now been recognised and the indicator was removed from the ‘menu’ of local indicators provided by COSLA earlier this year. However, no alternative indicators have been developed. There is an urgent need to develop national indicators that can be used locally to measure the scope, prevalence and incidence of

violence against women **and** the impact of policy initiatives on its reduction and prevention.

### **Gender Equality Duty (GED)**

All the SOAs make some reference to equalities, most commonly by broadly stating that all the partners to the agreement are committed to equality or have schemes in place to comply with their duties in relation to legislation. Further content beyond broad commitment varies enormously, with some focus on equality strands, some on deprivation and inequality – and in other SOAs no further information.

Only a few (5 SOAs) make any reference to VAW in relation to gender equality, or how the CPPs will meet their legal obligations under the GED.

### **Conclusion**

Our analysis of SOAs in 2009 found an increased reference to VAW in comparison to the previous year. However, it is important to differentiate between SOAs which demonstrate a strategic commitment to address violence against women and those which demonstrate a superficial mention of the issue.

It is evident that many CPPs do not fully share an understanding of the need to tackle VAW in order to achieve national outcomes and to meet their obligations under the GED. Only 5 SOAs referred to violence against women as a cause and consequence of gender inequality. Instead, there is a general recognition that women are more likely to experience domestic abuse or violence and it is this inequality in patterns of victimisation which results in its consideration as an equalities issue. Failure to approach violence against women as an issue of gender inequality means that the response will be less likely to move beyond numbers and address the context and impact.

Safer Lives: Changed Lives states, “Through the Concordat, local and national Government in Scotland have a new relationship, based on the mutual pursuit of shared outcomes. The approach to violence against women exemplifies that relationship.”

Our analysis of SOAs continues to raise the question - what happens in this new relationship when the commitment to pursue an outcome does not appear to be shared - as it is unclear how the implementation of national policy at a local level is led, monitored and evaluated or how local authorities and their Community Planning Partners are now held to account.

### **References**

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