



**Scottish Women's Aid analysis of local authority
Single Outcome Agreements 2008**

Introduction

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

An important aspect of our work is ensuring that women and children with experience of domestic abuse get the services they need, both from local Women's Aid groups and from the agencies they are likely to contact.

Our members are local Women's Aid groups which provide specialist services to women, children and young people. These include safe refuge accommodation, information and support.

We provide advice, information, training and publications to members and non-members.

Background

In Scotland, the advent of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 heralded the start of significant progress to address domestic abuse. The Scottish Executive published a National Strategy to Address Domestic Abuse in 2000 and established a National Group to Address Domestic Abuse to oversee the implementation of the Strategy. (The Group's remit was broadened in 2003 to include all forms of violence against women.) The Domestic Abuse Service Development Fund significantly improved refuge accommodation provision in Scotland. More recent developments include specific funding for children's support services and the publication in 2008 of the National Domestic Abuse Delivery Plan for Children and Young People, with identified funding for its implementation over the next 3 years.

This strategic approach to addressing domestic abuse in Scotland has been recognised internationally. Recent 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 reason is simple; the Scottish Government is developing a strategic approach to addressing violence against women and has allocated ring-fenced funding for services".¹

¹ Map of Gaps: The Postcode Lottery of Violence Against Women Support Services published by End Violence Against Women in partnership with Equality and Human Rights Commission 2007.

The research report's findings conclude; "It is apparent that where government steers provision a more consistent geographical spread is possible. In contrast, where decisions are left to localised decision-making the postcode lottery is reinforced."

The direction taken by Scottish Government was also recognised by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in relation to the Gender Equality Duty;

"We welcome the Scottish Government's gendered approach to domestic abuse which recognises that this crime is committed predominantly by men against women, and that women's experience of violence is intrinsically different to that experienced by men. It is important that this approach is not diluted as local public bodies take this issue on."²

The election of a new administration in 2007 has brought about a new approach to government. This approach is set out in the Concordat³ between the Scottish Government and local authorities which "puts local government at the heart of governance in Scotland, sitting alongside national government as an equal partner."⁴

Local authorities now have greater freedom to determine their own priorities and allocate resources.

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 local indicators to measure performance against these local outcomes.

These recent changes have raised a number of concerns:

- That the impact of moving from national to local prioritisation will result in the loss of a coherent strategic approach and reduce the priority given in Scotland to tackling domestic abuse\violence against women.
- The absence of any indicators or targets that would provide local government with a meaningful framework in which to measure their performance in relation to addressing violence against women.
- The removal of ring fencing from a number of funding streams including Supporting People, which was the main source of funding for support services for vulnerable groups and was the major funding stream for the support provided by Women's Aid groups in Scotland. Faced with competing pressures this funding may be subsumed into mainstream budgets.

² 'Violence against Women, a Human Rights Issue', Morag Alexander, Scotland Commissioner for the Commission for Equality and Human Rights, at event held at Scottish Parliament December 2007

³ Concordat Scottish Government, COSLA

⁴ Moving Scotland Forward: The Government's Programme for Scotland 2008 - 09

Analysis

The analysis was carried out by SWA in August 2008 following the final agreement of each SOA with the Scottish Government. The analysis is based on reference to addressing domestic abuse within each of the SOAs and the priority given to addressing it within the SOA framework. In particular, we looked at:

- The local context for the national outcomes. This section in the SOA provides background information on the local area to assist in explaining the prioritisation of local outcomes, indicators and targets.
- The national outcome used by each local authority within which they situated domestic abuse.
- The local outcome - what the local authority sought to achieve in relation to tackling domestic abuse.
- The local indicator(s) chosen to measure performance against the outcome.
- The required actions\commitments by local partners for these outcomes.
- Whether the local authority required any action\commitment from the Scottish Government to support the delivery of the local outcome.

Findings

Of the 32 local authorities in Scotland, 9 local authorities had no reference to domestic abuse within the SOA. The priority given to domestic abuse within the remaining 23 local authorities varied considerably. The information drawn from these SOAs is presented below.

Local Context

We examined each local authority's description of their local context. These sections in the SOA provide; "background information on the local area, which helps set the scene in relation to the selection and prioritisation of local outcomes, local indicators and targets."⁵

Local Authority Contextual Information	Number of Local Authorities
No reference to domestic abuse or violence against women	12
Refer to increase in reporting of incidents	9
Refer to strategic plan to address domestic abuse or violence against women	5
Refer to domestic abuse or violence against women as a Community Safety Plan priority	4
Refer to a specific support service for women who have experienced domestic abuse	1
Contain a general statement on the unacceptability of domestic abuse	1
Total	32

⁵ Single Outcome Agreements Guidance, Format and Indicators for Scottish Local Government, February 2008

While 9 local authorities made no reference to domestic abuse in their SOA at all, a further 3 local authorities (12 in total) did not include any reference to domestic abuse or violence against women in the background information on the local area.

Only 5 local authorities expanded on the issue of domestic abuse as a priority in their area. These local authorities, Dundee, East Dunbartonshire, Fife, Scottish Borders and West Lothian all referred to local strategic plans and partnerships to address domestic abuse or violence against women. For example:

The Scottish Borders SOA provided the following background information:

“The Community Safety Partnership, in support of the Domestic Abuse Working Group, commissioned a Baseline Review of domestic abuse in the Scottish Borders, in order to provide a clearer picture of the nature and extent of the issue thus enabling a more effective and robust response. The Review highlighted gaps in service provision as well as strategic partnerships which require strengthening and reflects key national objectives shaping local delivery. The 62 recommendations from the Review will formulate the three year Domestic Abuse Strategy for the Scottish Borders in conjunction with a three year Domestic Abuse Training Strategy”.

National Outcomes

National Outcomes are defined in the SOA Guidance as the impacts or consequences for society of the activities of the whole public sector, a statement of what the Scottish Government in partnership with local government is trying to achieve. The Scottish Government agreed 15 National Outcomes with local government. The table below illustrates the range of National Outcomes under which local authorities referred to domestic abuse.

National Outcome		No of LAs referring to domestic abuse in this outcome.
6	We live longer, healthier lives	1
7	We have tackled the significant inequalities in Scottish society	1
8	We have improved the life chances for children, young people and families at risk	3
9	We live our lives safe from crime disorder and danger	15
11	We will have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others	1
	Referring to domestic abuse in both 7 and 9	1
	Referring to domestic abuse in both 8 and 9	1
	No reference to a National Outcome in relation to domestic abuse or violence against women.	9
	Total	32

The majority (15) placed tackling domestic abuse within the context of National Outcome 9 – We live our lives safe from crime disorder and danger.

Only two local authorities included addressing domestic abuse as contributing towards more than one national outcome. In the case of one local authority, East Dunbartonshire, making the link that addressing domestic abuse would have the outcome of both tackling the significant inequalities in Scottish society (National outcome 7) and living our lives safe from crime disorder and danger (National Outcome 9).

Local Outcomes

This section of the SOA refers to the activities of the local authority and its community planning partners, “a statement of what the local authority and its partners are trying to achieve.”⁶

Only 7 local authorities made a specific reference to reducing domestic abuse or violence against women as a local outcome. Examples included:

In East Dunbartonshire Council’s SOA, a local outcome is that “**Women and families benefit from joint approaches to tackling gender based violence**”.

In Fife Council’s SOA, a local outcome is that “**There will be less abuse of women and children**”.

In West Lothian Council’s SOA that “**The number of people (victims and offenders) affected by antisocial behaviour and domestic violence is reduced**”.

Local Indicators

This is a measure of performance against local outcomes. 20 local authorities used local indicator 37 from the menu of local indicators. This indicator refers to the rates of domestic abuse incidents per 100,000 of the population. This statistical information is collected by the eight Scottish police forces that record the incidents of domestic abuse coming to the attention of the police.

Although the majority of local authorities chose to use the same indicator, their choice of target to measure progress in relation to this indicator varied considerably and were contradictory, as can be seen in the table on the following page.

⁶ Single Outcome Agreements Guidance, Format and Indicators for Scottish Local Government, February 2008

Local indicator – Number of domestic abuse incidents per 100,000 of the population

Local Target	Number of local authorities
Reduce	8
Increase until confidence in reporting levels reached	3
Increase	3
Maintain	1
Specific numerical target	3
No target	2
Total	20

Approximately half of the local authorities using this indicator set targets seeking to increase the number of reported incidents. While the other half set targets seeking to reduce the rate of incident reporting.

This is largely due to the problematic nature of using police incident recording as an effective indicator on its own. Police incident recording only records the number of incidents that come to the attention of the police; there are also “differences in police recording of domestic abuse incidents not recorded as a crime or offence”.⁷

The major problem with using this indicator is that measuring the number of domestic abuse incidents recorded by the police does not measure how well a local authority’s strategic approach to addressing the issue is working. It does not “provide a measure of performance against the desired outcome.”⁸

As this was the only relevant indicator provided in the menu of local indicators it may well be that local authorities are aware that it is an inadequate measure but lack suitable alternatives.

East Dunbartonshire Council highlighted that “the nature of abuse against women often means that it remains invisible and goes unreported and prevalence and incidence of abuse against women is not yet fully known. The need for a more systematic approach to the collection and analysis of such data is identified as a key objective within the Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women Strategy and Action Plan.”

A small number of local authorities (5) included additional local indicators and targets in relation to domestic abuse or violence against women. These are outlined below:

Dumfries and Galloway Council included as a local target “To improve reporting processes further in order to identify Domestic Abuse at an earlier stage in its lifecycle through greater accessibility for victims.”

⁷ Domestic Abuse Recorded by the Police in Scotland; A National Statistics Publication for Scotland 2007

⁸ Single Outcome Agreements Guidance, Format and Indicators for Scottish Local Government, February 2008

Fife Council has included as a local indicator the “Number of requests for support (excluding police) in relation to domestic abuse and sexual violence.”

Orkney Council included as a relevant indicator for children and young people experiencing domestic abuse “the numbers accessing support services.”

Scottish Borders Council included as a relevant indicator the ‘Number of Juvenile Liaison Officer referrals made with regards to children being present when police respond to a Domestic Abuse incident’ and set specific annual targets.

West Lothian Council included as local indicators the “Percentage of offenders charged with domestic abuse who are repeat offenders, the percentage of domestic abuse cases prosecuted and the percentage of convictions for domestic abuse.”

Required Actions\commitment by local partners

In this section of the SOA the local authority sets out the specific commitments they and their partners need to make to enable the delivery of the local outcomes they have identified.

Required actions by local partners	Number of local authorities
No reference to actions or commitments in relation to domestic abuse or violence against women	21
Reference to the implementation of Domestic Abuse or Violence Against Women Strategic Plans by local partnerships	5
Reference to the development of a domestic abuse or gender based violence strategy	3
The continued development of domestic abuse services	2
Reference to domestic abuse and Community Safety Partnership	1
Total	32

11 Councils included specific actions for the local authority and their partners in relation to domestic abuse or violence against women. For example, in Fife, the local authority included:

“A commitment by all partners to the actions included within the community safety strategy 2008 – 11 (draft) – Less Abuse of Women & Children: (1) Promote joint approaches to sexual & domestic abuse (2) Provide practical and emotional support for survivors (3) Promote joint approaches to child protection (4) Promote joint approaches to sex offender management”.

Required action\commitment by the Scottish Government to support the delivery of the local outcome

Only 3 local authorities identified specific commitments they required from the Scottish Government to support their work in addressing domestic abuse.

East Ayrshire Council requested from the Scottish Government: “increasing provision to tackle domestic violence.”

Fife Council’s required actions from the Scottish Government are to:

“Continue to prioritise the issue of violence against women – working with local multi-agency partnerships and organisations to address the impact on women, children and young people. A range of departments within the Scottish Government to support the aims of the Violence Against Women team. Develop a clear strategy on the broader issues of violence against women (in contrast to existing strategies focusing on domestic abuse) making the links between various forms of gender based abuse.”

Orkney Council identified the “Preservation of support for children and young people experiencing domestic abuse.”

Conclusion

It is important to acknowledge that the Single Outcome Agreements are new for both national and local government and this is a process still in development. The timescale for the completion of SOAs by local authorities was limited and consequently restricted the consultation process with local partners and within local communities. It is anticipated that the next stage of SOA development will ensure the involvement of Community Planning Partners. We look forward to wider community planning involvement and in particular to the involvement of local multi-agency partnerships to address domestic abuse\violence against women.

The main findings of our analysis of the 32 SOAs are:

- 9 local authorities made no reference to domestic abuse or violence against women at all within their SOA.
- Only 5 local authorities in Scotland made specific reference to domestic abuse as a priority within their SOA, had developed outcomes they wanted to achieve and set out how they would achieve these through the implementation of their strategy, action plans and partnerships.
- On its own the indicator of number of domestic abuse incidents per 100,000 of the population is an ineffective measure. Most of the SOAs had no outcome to measure performance against. Targets set were contradictory and were not related to how any change is to be achieved.

As the SOA guidance states; “When setting targets, it is not enough to just consider IF performance can be improved but HOW.”⁹

- 21 local authorities made no specific commitment to addressing domestic abuse with their local partnerships. Given the existing framework of local multi-agency partnerships to address domestic abuse\violence against women, it is disappointing that their work is not strategically recognised or linked to relevant local strategies.

An overall concern is the absence within SOAs of local authorities’ recognition of their responsibilities to meet their legal obligations under the Gender Equality Duty.

As Morag Alexander, the Scotland Commissioner, for the Commission for Equality and Human Rights has stated:

“Equality for women has been fought for in the workplace, in public life and at home yet violence [against women] persists. Violence has proven itself to be a long standing enemy and remains a key indicator of women’s inequality.”¹⁰

There was very limited recognition in SOAs of the link between violence against women and gender inequality and subsequently a lack of a strategic approach by local authorities as to how they will meet their legal obligations under the Gender Equality Duty.

Our analysis of the 32 Single Outcome Agreements has underlined our concerns set out earlier in this report. It is apparent from reading the SOAs that where there is a clear national lead on key government priorities such as the economy or alcohol, this lead is followed by local authorities prioritising these issues within the context of their own areas.

Scottish Women’s Aid will continue to monitor both SOAs as they are developed for next year and the implications of the removal of ring fenced funding. In 2008, Scottish Women’s Aid carried out a benchmarking exercise of funding provided to Women’s Aid groups in Scotland for the financial year 2007/08, prior to the removal of ring fencing. We will repeat this survey over the next 3 years to assess any changes to the level of funding for support services provided by Women’s Aid groups.

⁹ Single Outcome Agreements Guidance, Format and Indicators for Scottish Local Government, February 2008

¹⁰ ‘Violence against Women, a Human Rights Issue’, Morag Alexander, Scotland Commissioner for the Commission for Equality and Human Rights, at event held at Scottish Parliament December 2007

Recommendations

Recommendations for the Scottish Government

The Scottish Government should continue to provide a clear national lead to local authorities on the prevention of violence against women by:

- Developing the National Violence Against Women Framework to give a clear steer to local authorities that this is a priority.
- Establishing key indicators to measure the scope, prevalence and incidence of violence against women¹¹ and the impact of policy initiatives on its reduction. This work could be carried out by the National Group to Address Violence Against Women's data collection working group.
- Including Violence Against Women as one of the Scottish Government's Ministerial Duties under the Gender Equality Duty.
- Monitoring the performance of local authorities in relation to violence against women in SOAs.

Recommendations for Local Government:

- Local authorities need to fully recognise their legal obligations under the Gender Equality Duty. This includes identifying violence against women as a key indicator of women's inequality.
- Develop and implement Domestic Abuse\Violence Against Women strategic plans linked to all relevant local area plans; for example Health Improvement Plans, Children's Service Plans, Community Safety, local housing plans, etc
- Ensure local, multi-agency partnerships on domestic abuse\violence against women have an input into the development of future SOAs.
- Local authorities should share the good practice that has been developed in a number of areas to address violence against women. This good practice should include the development of appropriate indicators to measure violence against women and the progress made in Scotland towards its prevention.

¹¹ Sylvia Walby, Indicators to Measure violence Against Women, United Nations Statistical Commission and Economic Commission for Europe 2007.