Equality Impact Assessment:

**C&L/10 Violence Against Women: Women’s Aid**

**Purpose of the Equality Impact Assessment:**

The Equality Act 2010 introduced a [Public Sector Equality Duty](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/Scotland/PSED_in_Scotland/essential_guide_to_the_psed.doc) (PSED) requiring public bodies to give due regard to the need to:

* Eliminate unlawful discrimination
* Advance equality of opportunity
* Foster good relations

Consideration must be given to the protected characteristics covered by the Equality Act. Assessments should ‘consider relevant evidence relating to persons with relevant protected characteristics in relation to such assessments of impact’.

The purpose of an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) is to ensure that policies, functions, plans or decisions (hereafter referred to as ‘policy’ do not create unnecessary barriers for people protected under the Act, and that negative impacts are eliminated or minimised and opportunities for positive impact are maximised.

Screening is a short exercise to determine if a policy is relevant to equality and whether a full equality impact assessment (EQIA) should be carried out.

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| Title/description of the policy | **C&L.10 Services for Adults: Reduce budget for adult support services****Budget reduction to Women’s Aid Organisations** |
| Name of the person(s) carrying out the assessment? | Jacquelyn JennettArea Care and Learning Manager (North)Rosemary Mackinnon, Principal Policy Officer, Equality |
| Service and Department | Care and Learning, Adult Services |
| Date of assessment | 31st January 2018 |
| What are the aims and objectives of the policy/function/strategy? |
| The council currently funds 4 Women’s Aid groups in Highland (Caithness and Sutherland; Inverness; Lochaber; Ross-shire) to provide refuge and outreach support services for women and children across Highland. The funding helps run the refuges and to provide support to women to live safely in Highland communities.The saving proposal is a 10% reduction in this funding. The reduction will mean that Women’s Aid organisations will have to raise funds to maintain services at the same level or will have to reduce services to remain within budget. The saving is spread across 4 Women’s Aid groups.The proposed reduction in funding applies to housing support, but also to funding to the organisations to support women referred to MARAC; and to support from Children and Families area budgets to 2 of the Women’s Aid organisations to provide direct support to children affected by domestic abuse.Violence Against Women is defined in the Scottish Government’s Strategy, Equally Safe, as the violent and abusive behaviour carried out predominantly by men directed at women and girls precisely because of their gender. Behaviour that stems from systemic, deep-rooted women’s inequality, and which includes domestic abuse, rape, sexual assault, commercial sexual exploitation, and so called ‘honour based’ violence and harmful traditional practices like female genital mutilation and forced marriage. Violence against women and girls can have both an immediate and long-lasting impact on the women, children and young people directly involved.Equally Safe Strategy <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0049/00498256.pdf> |
| Who may be affected by the policy | 4 Women’s Aid groups across Highland and the women and children supported by their activities. All groups are part of the Highland Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference approach.The funding supports women and their children subjected to violence against women who are living in refuges and supports women in the community living in or escaping from violent relationships. |
| How have stakeholders been involved in the development of the policy? | Discussions have taken place to inform the 4 Women’s Aid Groups affected by the proposal. Further meetings have been arranged to keep the 4 groups fully up to date and to support them implement any savings. |

***Screening:*** *This can be copied over from screening sheets*

**Public Sector Equality Duty**

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| *Which parts of the public sector duty is the policy relevant to?* |
| 1. Eliminate unlawful discrimination
 | ✓ | Women’s Aid services address issues of discrimination, prejudice and stigma. |
| 1. Advance equality
 | ✓ | Opportunities to remove or minimise barriers or disadvantage, including steps to promote equality and meet different people’s needs. |
| 1. Promote good relations
 | ✓ | Services raise awareness of Violence Against Women issues between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. |

**Which of the protected characteristics is the policy relevant to?** Tick and briefly describe any likely equalities impact (positive/negative/neutral).

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| **Characteristic** | **Positive** | **Negative** | **Neutral** | **comments** |
| Gender |  | ✓ |  | Women’s Aid services are gender specific, but affect women of all ages, all faiths, all ethnicities and those affected by disability. |
| Age |  | ✓ |  |  |
| Disability |  | ✓ |  |  |
| Religion or Belief |  | ✓ |  |  |
| Race |  | ✓ |  |  |
| Sexual Orientation |  | ✓ |  |  |
| Gender reassignment |  | ✓ |  |  |
| Pregnancy/maternity |  | ✓ |  |  |
| Marriage and Civil Partnership\* |  |  | ✓ |  |

**Sources of information:**

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| *What existing sources of information have you gathered to help identify how people covered by the protected characteristics may be affected by this policy or service?*E.g. Consultations, national or local data and/or research, complaints or customer feedback. Are there gaps in available data? |
| Research has found that where women and children are able to access the safety and support that they need, they are less likely to require as many, or as lengthy, interventions from other agencies such as the police, social services and health. A number of studies carried out in England, Wales and, more recently, in Scotland, analysed the costs and benefits of the Supporting People (SP) programmes, which were the main funding stream for a range of housing support services provided to different client groups. These studies repeatedly found that support services provided to women fleeing domestic abuse had one of the largest impacts in terms of saving money to other services, notably the health service, local authority housing departments and the police. A study commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister analysed the benefits of housing-related support in terms of reduced public spending for different client groups. The research found that support provided to women fleeing domestic violence provided financial benefits that were almost double the cost of the services. The cost-benefit for this group in reducing public spending is £110 million, or £19,000 per individual woman, twice the level of the cost of providing support. This does not take into account the individual benefit to the women and children in reduction of fear, physical harm and mental suffering. The research found that when women threatened by domestic violence were able to access support services and leave an abusive partner, the risk of further assaults was reduced by 80%.Highland Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) [MARAC Annual Report 2013](http://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/11892/marac_annual_report_2013)[Equally Safe](http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/03/7926), Scottish Government, 2016Greenan, [Violence Against Women: A Literature Review](http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2005/03/20895/55133) (2004), Scottish Government |

**Assessments:**

In relation to the protected characteristics the proposal; applies mainly to sex but also gender reassignment, race, disability and age. Violence Against Women is experienced by all social groups, but some circumstances may increase risk to women (or make them more vulnerable to other forms of it). This includes, age, alcohol or drug use, disability, mental ill health, homelessness, poverty, and being involved in prostitution. There may also be issues related to living in a rural community may make it more difficult for women to come forward.

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| *Is there any evidence of, or potential for, negative impact? Does the policy contribute positively to the promotion of equality on any particular group?* | **Gender-**  The proposal has potential for significant impact on women and children. Violence Against Women is an over-arching term, often also called ‘gender based violence’ that includes domestic abuse, and other forms of violence that predominately affect women and are most commonly perpetrated by men.The impact of this savings proposal would be that Women’s Aid would be likely to reduce services across the board, therefore a reduction in funding could result in women and children not getting access to safe housing where and when they require it. They may not get the support they need to make good choices for the future. Children may not get the support they require to recover from trauma experienced from living within a family where domestic abuse occurs. MARAC assures service delivery to very high risk women. Additional services to support children directly would be significantly affected given the already small scale of the service.**Age** - VAW affects women of any age. Impacts on families and children. Young women are at high risk of all forms of abuse, yet often this can be overlooked or minimised, particularly in their teenage years.In 2013, there were 504 children in households where high risk domestic abuse was reported in Highland.**Disability**- Disabled women may experience communication or physical barriers to getting help or away from an abuser, or be isolated because of their impairment.**Gender Reassignment**-There is limited information about transgender people's experiences of domestic abuse and other forms of gender based violence. However, transgender people are particularly at risk of violence and harassment, in both public spaces and the home.**Pregnancy/Maternity**- A third of domestic abuse begins or escalates during pregnancy.**Race**- Minority ethnic women may face barriers such as racism and language difficulties and may also fear being accused of bringing shame and dishonour upon the family. 5% of Highland MARAC referrals from a BME background (2013). **Religion and Belief**- Religious or associated cultural beliefs may present barriers to seeking support.**Sexual Orientation**- Women are also at risk in same sex relationships, For lesbian or gay women, it may be difficult to disclose abuse. |
| Justification – if negative impact is identified, can this be justified? | This is a savings proposal in line with previous reductions to third sector organisations. While it is unlikely that services would stop, there will be a reduction in refuge and support availability to some of Highland’s most vulnerable women and children.  |
| Mitigation - can the potential for negative impact on particular groups be removed or minimised? | None identified – Women’s Aid organisations are unable to identify specific impacts (eg possible reductions in out-of- hours services) until savings are confirmed, therefore it is not possible to identify any mitigation. |
| Are there actions identified to advance or promote equality? Please detail. | N/A |

Please provide details of arrangements to monitor and review the policy and any mitigating actions or actions to promote equality.

Please state where the EQIA will be published: The assessment will be published on the Council website.

**Equality Impact Assessment Sign off: For completion by Director or Head of Service**

1. Please check if you are satisfied that the following elements of the EQIA have been considered:

Gathering information
Consultation and involvement
Assessing impact for all protected characteristics
Mitigating actions identified (if required)
Opportunity to promote equality
Arrangements to monitor and review
Publication arrangements

2. a) Are you prepared to sign off the EQIA? YES

 b) If "NO" provide details of why and next steps

Name: Bill Alexander

Position: Director of Care & Learning Date: 13.02.18