

Agenda Item	<b>7</b>
Report No	<b>HCW-10-26</b>

## The Highland Council

**Committee:** Health, Social Care and Wellbeing

**Date:** 27 May 2026

**Report Title:** Update on Domestic Abuse Services

**Report By:** Assistant Chief Executive – People

### **1 Purpose/Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This report provides Members with an update on domestic abuse services in Highland, focusing on outreach provision, the ongoing review of refuge services, and arrangements for Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) funding.
- 1.2 Members have previously received a comprehensive report on domestic abuse services, including background, commissioning rationale, and governance arrangements, most recently at the meeting of this Committee on 4 February 2026 [LINK](#). This report should therefore be read as a focused update and does not repeat information already considered by Members.

### **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- i. Note the current position in relation to outreach provision, with specific reference to Highland Domestic Abuse Service (HDAS) South;
  - ii. Note progress with the review of refuge services;
  - iii. Note in relation to MARAC, the review work being undertaken to agree future delivery arrangements; and
  - iv. Note the continuation of existing arrangements during the review period for all services relating to domestic abuse.

### **3 Implications**

- 3.1 **Resource** - There are no new resource implications arising from this update. Approved funding arrangements remain in place for outreach, refuge and MARAC services while procurement activity and formal reviews are concluded.

- 3.2 **Legal** - Procurement and contract management activity continues to be undertaken in line with the Council's Contract Standing Orders and relevant procurement legislation. Live procurement limits the level of detail that can be provided to Members at this stage.
- 3.3 **Risk** - The principal risks relate to service continuity, workforce stability and safeguarding during periods of transition. These risks continue to be mitigated through interim arrangements, strengthened governance and ongoing operational oversight.
- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – No additional health and safety implications arise from this update.
- 3.5 **Gaelic** - No specific implications identified.

#### **4 Impacts**

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.
- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3 This is an update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required. However, depending on the findings and subsequent recommendations which will be detailed in the MARAC review and the refuge services review, impact assessments may be required in the future.

#### **5 Outreach Services**

- 5.1 Members will be aware from previous reports that new multi year outreach contracts under the Highland Domestic Abuse Service (HDAS) are in place for North, Mid and West Highland.
- 5.2 Procurement activity to secure a provider for HDAS South is currently live. As a result, this update is necessarily limited and cannot include information on bids, potential providers or detailed service design, as this would be commercially sensitive and could prejudice the procurement process.
- 5.3 Interim arrangements remain in place to ensure continuity of outreach support for service users in South Highland while procurement activity is ongoing.
- 5.4 A further update will be provided to Members upon completion of the procurement process. The tender closed on 7 May, with evaluation meetings scheduled for 21 May and contract offer issued thereafter. It is anticipated that the process will conclude by the end of June, at which point a full update will be provided.

## 6 Review of Refuge Services

- 6.1 A full review of refuge and safe accommodation services is currently underway. Commissioned refuge provision in Highland has not been comprehensively reviewed for over 12 years, during which time national policy, legal frameworks, population needs, and expectations relating to safety, quality and accessibility have evolved significantly.
- 6.2 The purpose of the review is to establish whether current refuge arrangements remain safe, high quality, accessible and sustainable, and whether they continue to meet the needs of adults and children experiencing domestic abuse across Highland's diverse geography. The review is being undertaken in line with the Council's strengthened commissioning and governance arrangements and reflects decisions previously agreed by Members.
- 6.3 The review is establishing a clear evidence base on existing provision, including the location and accessibility of accommodation, how adults and children are supported, length of stay, move on arrangements, and partnership working with housing, health, police, social work and third sector organisations. Particular consideration is being given to rural, remote and island communities and to survivors with additional or complex needs.
- 6.4 A formal options appraisal will be undertaken as part of the review. This will consider a range of potential service models, which may include communal refuge provision, dispersed or self contained accommodation and other approaches focused on improving safety, preventing homelessness and supporting recovery. No decisions have been taken at this stage, and the review remains open to all viable models.
- 6.5 It is anticipated that the review will conclude in July 2026 with the options appraisal being presented to the next meeting of this committee in August 2026. To ensure continuity of service and avoid disruption while the review is completed, existing refuge contracts have been extended to 30 September 2026, and providers understand that this can be extended if necessary. This agreed approach provides stability for service users and staff and allows sufficient time for evidence based recommendations to be developed and brought back to Members in a planned and transparent way.

## 7 MARAC Funding

- 7.1 MARAC arrangements continue to play a critical role in coordinating multi agency responses for individuals assessed as being at high risk of harm as a result of domestic abuse.
- 7.2 The Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Partnership triggered an initial summary review of MARAC activity with a draft report being written in early 2026 (**Appendix 1**). As part of the funding review of domestic abuse services initiated by Highland Council, it was agreed this initial draft report would help inform the wider review with a final report to be presented to the VAWG Partnership and then the Highland Chief Officer Group. (HCOG). This review was triggered in March 2026 and is expected to conclude in June 2026. As well as VAWG partners, Women's Aid will be represented within the review work.

7.3 The Council has confirmed continuation of MARAC funding while work is undertaken with partners to review demand, capacity and future delivery proposals.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - People  
Date: 11 May 2026

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Appendix HVAWP Report 24-25



ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

# HIGHLAND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT 2024-2025

**The purpose of this report:** To provide an overview of the work undertaken throughout the year by our partners, explore the most recent data and identify strengths and weaknesses.



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## CHAIRS INTRODUCTION

**As Chair of the Highland Violence Against Women Partnership, I am proud to present our annual report for April 2024 – March 2025. Domestic abuse and sexual trauma have profound and lasting effects on survivors—both adults and children—making partnership and collaborative working absolutely essential.**

Across Highland, statutory and third-sector organisations work together to support staff in this complex area of practice. This is evident through initiatives such as **MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences)** for the highest-risk domestic abuse cases and multi-agency training opportunities, including **Safe and Together**.

Aligned with the **Scottish Government’s Equally Safe Strategy**, the Highland Violence Against Women Partnership coordinates efforts to eradicate violence against women and girls in our region. This report highlights the significant work undertaken by our partners, their commitment to multi-agency collaboration, and progressing our 2024–2025 action plan, while addressing emerging trends throughout the year.

The report provides data on the prevalence of gender-based violence, service demand, and the complex nature of women’s experiences and needs from a gendered perspective. Services remain under considerable pressure due to the scale of offences against women and children, who often require long-term support to rebuild their lives and begin to address the trauma they have endured.

**Funding and resources continue to be a major challenge.** Specialist organisations often rely on short-term, project-based funding. We remain committed to identifying funding opportunities and supporting projects within the partnership to ensure that vital services are sustained.

Prevention and education are also key to reducing the impact of gender-based violence. This report documents some of the ongoing work in these areas. We continue to represent Highland at national forums and stakeholder groups to ensure our region’s unique location needs—spanning urban areas and vast remote rural communities—are reflected in policy and decision-making.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere thanks to all our partners for their unwavering commitment to this cause and tireless efforts to eradicate violence against women and girls. I also extend my gratitude to everyone involved in producing this important and informative report.



*Peter Mackenzie*

**Independent Chair - Highland  
Violence Against Women Partnership**

# HIGHLAND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY GROUP

## WHO ARE OUR PARTNERS?

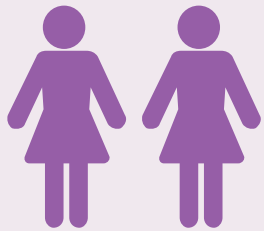
The Highland Violence Against Women Partnership is a group of services working together to prevent all forms of Violence Against Women, identify those affected and provide services & support that increase safety and well-being.



## KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

# Highland

**7<sup>th</sup>** Largest population in Scotland  
in mid-year 2024



### Females

**51%** - Females in Highland

**81.9** years - Female life expectancy

**48.3%** deaths were female in Highland

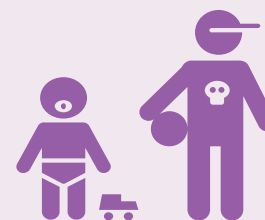


### Males

**49%** - Males in Highland

**77.4** years - Male life expectancy

**51.7%** deaths were male in Highland

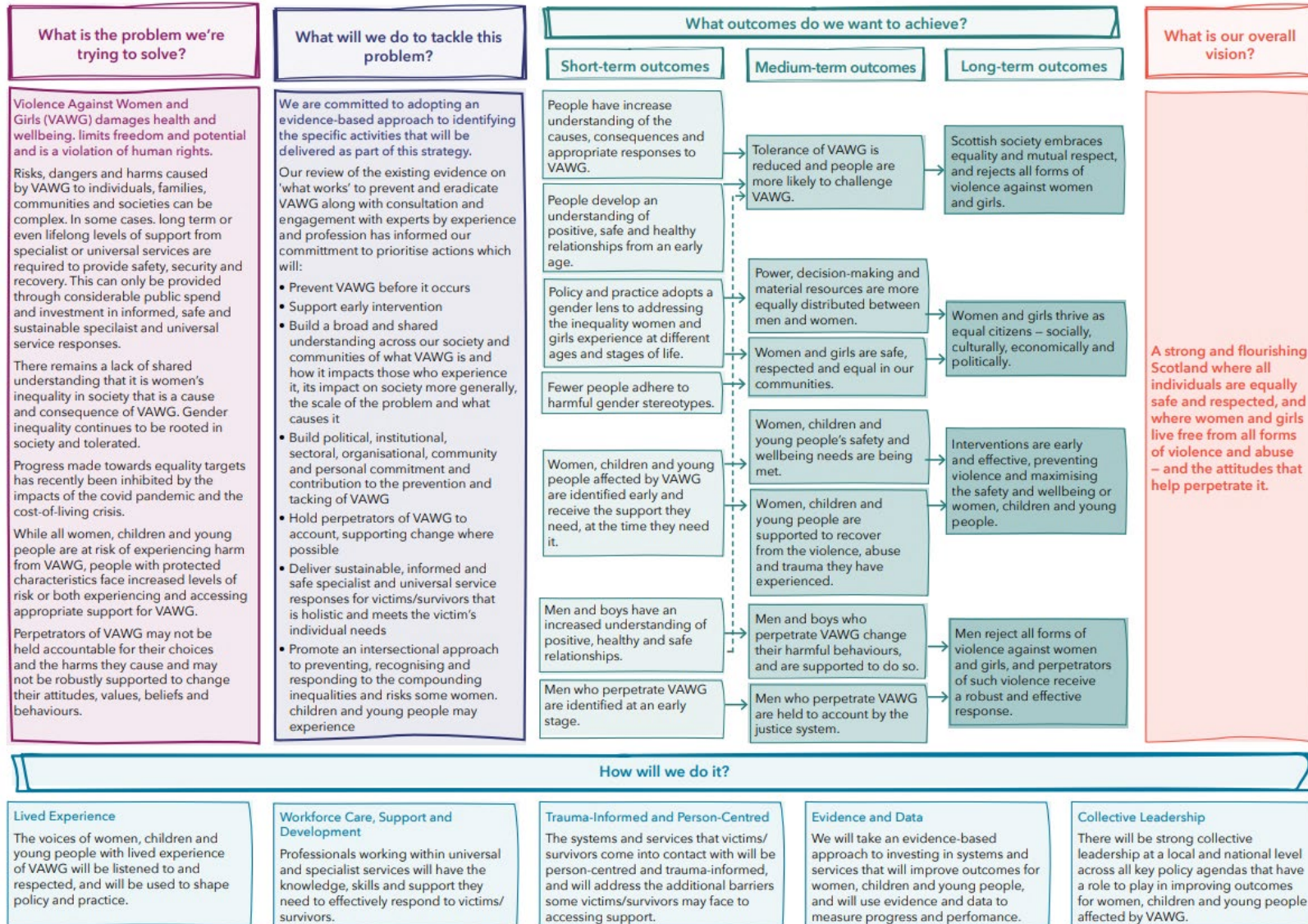


### Child poverty

**23.5%** children aged 0-15 live  
in poverty

**24.3%** Scottish average

# EQUALLY SAFE (ES) QUALITY STANDARDS AND PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK



Equally Safe Logic model - Supporting documents - (Scottish Government, 2023)

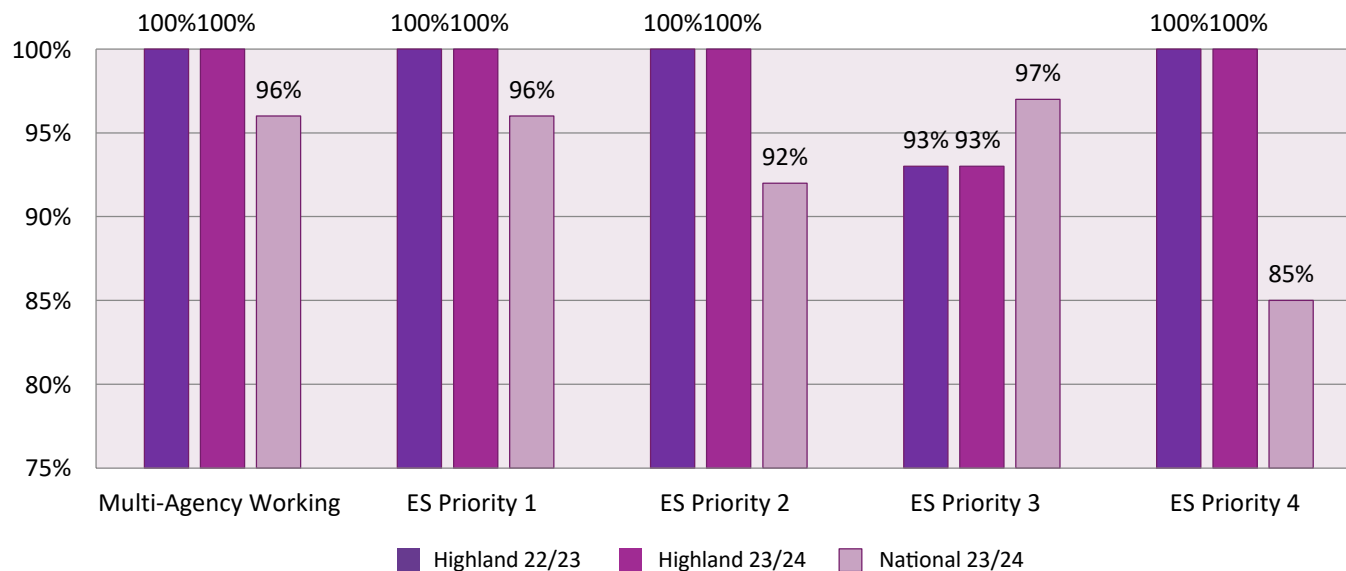
**Equally Safe Quality Standards and Performance Framework Report Highland 2023/24** is produced by Improvement Services on behalf of the Scottish Government, is intended to support Highland to identify where it currently is in terms of implementing the ambitions set out in Equally Safe at a local level, and to identify any priority areas for focus for the year ahead.

## HOW DID WE PERFORM

**Graph 1** provides a visual overview of our performance against each **ES priority** for the periods 2022-23 and 2023-24, allowing us to track **progress in Highland** and enabling us to compare against National figures and shape strategic plans for 24/25.

Highland is achieving **100% performance** across all Equally Safe priorities except for ES3, which is an impressive achievement given the geographical and rural challenges. The rural and dispersed nature of Highland creates unique barriers to implementation and monitoring, making these gaps understandable but still critical to address.

**Graph 1: Percentage of Quality Standards 'Met' by Highland/Nationally**



### Challenges Identified

- **Robust Public Sector Policies:** Difficulty in evidencing that all public sector policies comprehensively tackle all forms of VAWG.
- **Routine Enquiries:** Limited evidence that these are consistently carried out across the public sector.

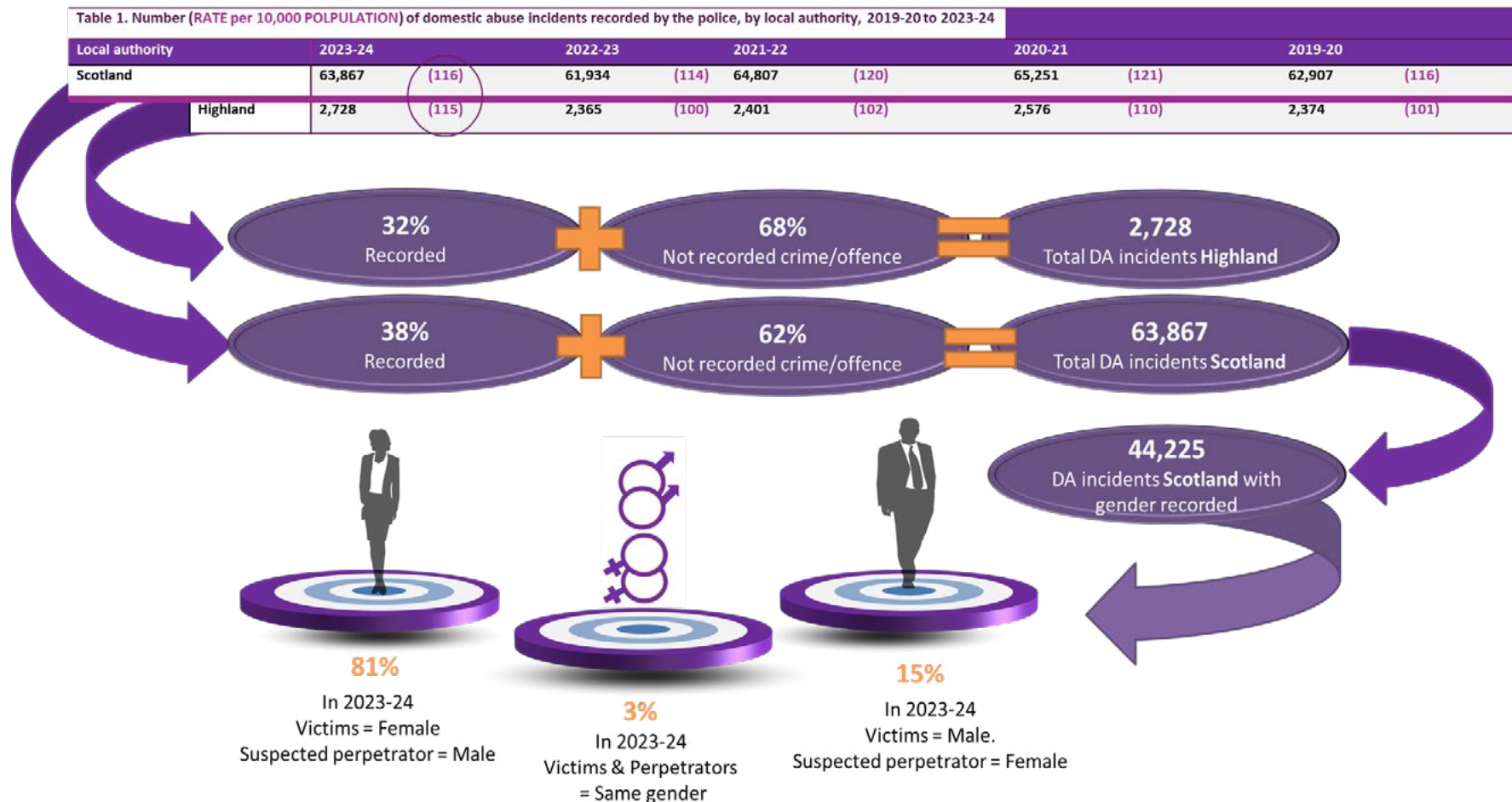
### Solutions in Progress

- Collaboration with the **Public Health Data Specialist** this year has already strengthened data collection and analysis.
- Proposal to employ a **temporary Data Specialist** will further enhance evidence gathering and create a robust, data-driven foundation for informed decision-making across all VAWG strategies.

## DATA SCOPING

### DOMESTIC ABUSE

Police Scotland report that dealing with incidents of **domestic abuse is their biggest demand on time** with one incident being reported every nine minutes. Table 1 is an adaptation from Police Scotland (2024) showing **recorded incidents of DA in Highland** from 2019-2024. It is noteworthy that in 2023-24 Highland rates of incident per 10,000 populations was 115, which is comparable with the incidents recorded in Scotland as a whole at 116.



## Recognising Domestic abuse crimes

VAWG and domestic abuse (DA) occur in many forms. Below is an overview of crimes and offences recorded by Police Scotland as part of domestic abuse incidents where a crime or offence was recorded in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2024a), including the Highlands (Police Scotland, 2024), between 2016–2024. The top three most frequently occurring are marked with percentage totals.



## MARAC high risk domestic abuse cases

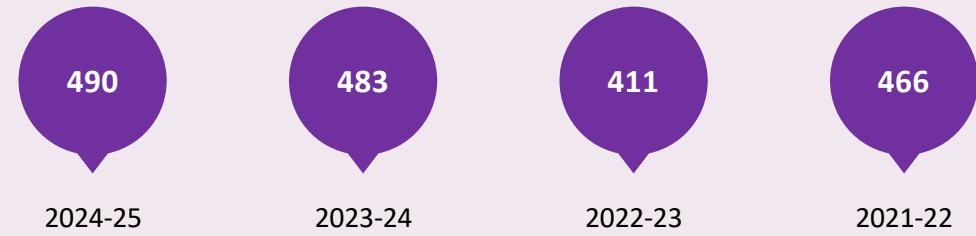
**Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs)** provide a structured response for victims at the highest risk of serious harm or homicide due to domestic abuse. These meetings enable agencies to share relevant and proportionate information to assess risk and agree on action plans.

Over the past five years, MARAC cases in the Highlands and Islands (H&I) have risen significantly. After a dip in 2022–23, cases increased by **17.5%**, reaching an all-time high of **490 cases in 2024–25**. This trend is concerning, and several factors may contribute to these high numbers.

### Reasons for increase:

- Increased violent incidents
- Greater willingness of victims to report
- Improved availability of reporting services in H&I
- Enhanced professional training and awareness
- Better understanding of referral processes

### Number of MARAC Cases heard over the past 4 years



## Procurator Fiscal Office Location of charges with a domestic abuse identifier in 2024-25, Highlands and Islands.

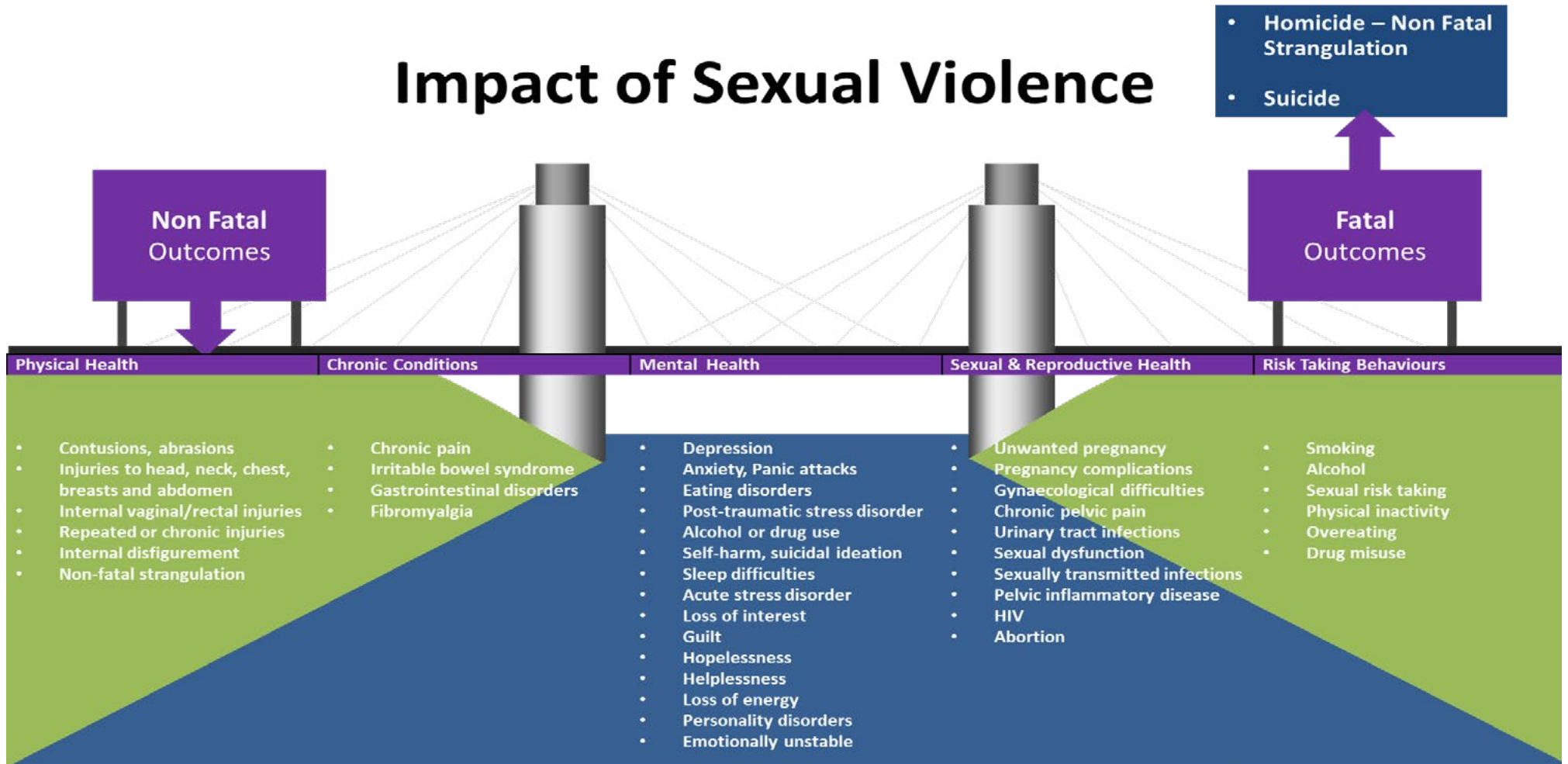


### Procurator Fiscal cases

In 2024–25, **1,258 charges with a domestic abuse identifier** were recorded across H&I (Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, 2025). Mapping these charges highlights that domestic abuse occurs in every corner of our communities and beyond, **across an extensive geographical region.**

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Sexual violence has devastating consequences, including fatal and non-fatal outcomes for survivors (*image adapted from MacDonald 2024, p. 8*)



## Sex crimes

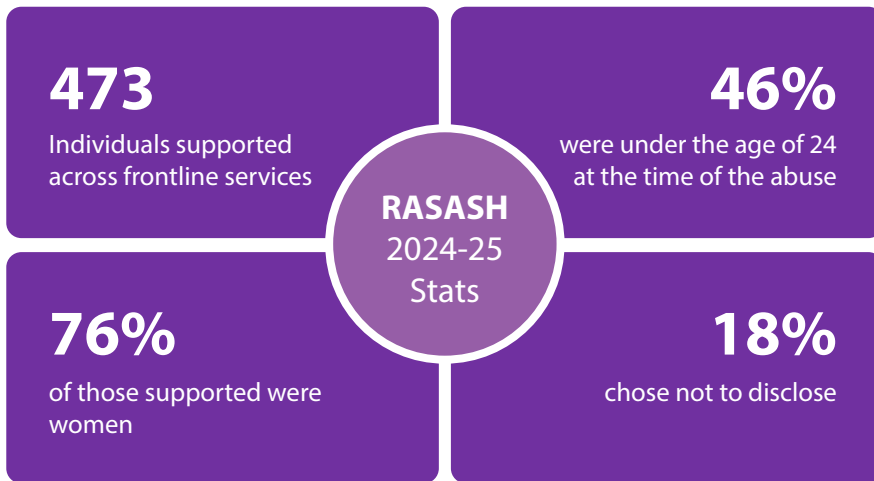
In Highland we are fortunate to have strong support services for survivors of sexual violence, including:

- **Police Scotland’s dedicated Rape Investigation Unit**, supported by the National Rape Task Force.
- **RASASH (Rape and Sexual Abuse Service Highland)**, providing free, confidential therapeutic support and advocacy for survivors aged 13+.
- **SARCS (Sexual Assault Response Coordination Service)**, offering healthcare and forensic support immediately after an assault.

Between 2023–24 and 2024–25, sexual crimes in Scotland increased by **3%**, while Highland saw a **1.2% decrease** (Table 2). However, these figures remain the highest recorded since data collection began in 1971 (Scottish Government, 2024c).

Local Authority	Sexual Crimes	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21
Scotland	<b>Total</b>	<b>14,892</b>	<b>14,484</b>	<b>14,602</b>	<b>15,049</b>	<b>13,131</b>
Highland	<b>Total</b>	<b>661</b>	<b>669</b>	<b>744</b>	<b>550</b>	<b>479</b>
	Rape & attempted rape	149	135	144	120	148
	Sexual assault	227	228	248	162	129
	Causing to view sexual activity or images	88	80	108	74	58
	Communicating indecently	44	55	75	50	43
	Threatening to or disclosing intimate images	34	39	29	27	22
	Indecent photos of children	52	52	53	25	22
	Crimes associated with prostitution	1	1	1	0	0
	Other sexual crimes	66	79	86	92	57

## Rape & Sexual Assault



### RASASH statistics 2024-25:

- Over **1,790 referrals** since inception
- **473 individuals supported in 2024–25**
- Prevention workshops delivered to **thousands** of young people

The RASASH advocacy service seeks to empower survivors to exercise their rights. They can provide information about the criminal justice system and, if someone decides to report, they can support them throughout this process.

**SARCS** is an NHS service dedicated to providing healthcare and support in the days following an assault. Their highly sensitive work is vital within Highland, offering a safe and responsive environment for those affected.

Table 3 was adapted from *MacDonald (2024)* using updated raw data ending 2025 and illustrates the number of **adult referrals for rape and sexual assault** received by SARCS, and the number of **Forensic Medical Examinations (FME)** completed. The referrals over the years have notably increased.

### These increases may reflect:

- **More crimes** committed
- Greater **victim confidence** in reporting
- Improved agency **training** and referral processes
- Expanded **service availability**

Timelines (Oct 2020 – Mar 2025)	Rape & Sexual Assault - Adults referred	
	Referrals incl. Forensic Triage	FME completed
20202021 (No forensic triage included)	30	30
20212022 (forensic triage commenced 27/06/22)	37	31
June 2022 – March 2023	78	35
April 2023 – March 2024	66	43
April 2024 – March 2025	86	44

**RASASH and SARCS have co-facilitated a training** session highlighting the **joined-up approach** within our partnership. This collaboration **strengthens the quality** and consistency of support across services.

Police Scotland reports a combined **376 total** of **rapes (149)** and **sexual assault (227)** crimes in 2024-25 in Highland. In the same time period, **SARCS have supported 130** adults and **RASASH has supported 473** individuals across frontline services.

## CHILD PROTECTION

### Child protection in Highlands 2024

- **243** Inter-Agency Discussions
- **393** Investigations
- **116** Child Protection Register

### Childhood sexual exploitation

Children and young people affected by childhood sexual exploitation are supported by SARCS and the forensic medical examination teams.

Between 2022/23 and 2023/34, referrals for CYP examinations have decreased by **43%** which can be seen in table 4 (*MacDonald, 2024*).

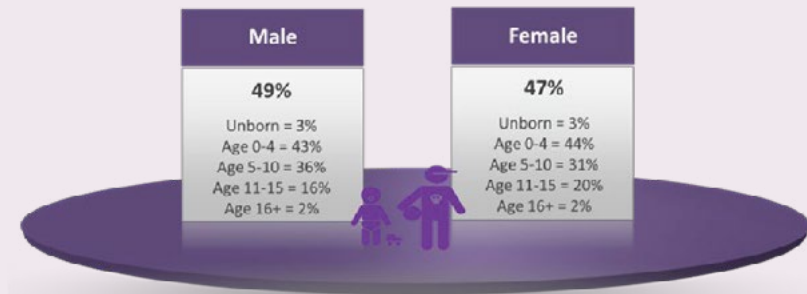
**Table 4. Number of cases of children and young people (CYP) supported by Highland SARCS & Forensic Medical Examination team:**

Activities	Jan – Jul 2024	Jan - Dec 2023	Jan– Dec 2022	Jan – Dec 2021	Jan – Dec 2020
CYP FME’s at SARCS	<b>17</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>26</b>
SARCS CYP with Forensic Nurse Coordinator	<b>33</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>1 (Data from Dec)</b>	<b>No data recorded</b>
Joint Interview Video recording at SARCS * transferred to Bairn’s Hoose in Aug 2024	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>No data recorded</b>

### The Child Protection Register

In Scotland the highest percentage of children placed on the Child Protection Register are ages 0-4, the age where 90% of a child’s brain growth and development happens (*NHS, 2025*).

Percentage of children in Scotland 2024 on the Child Protection Register by gender



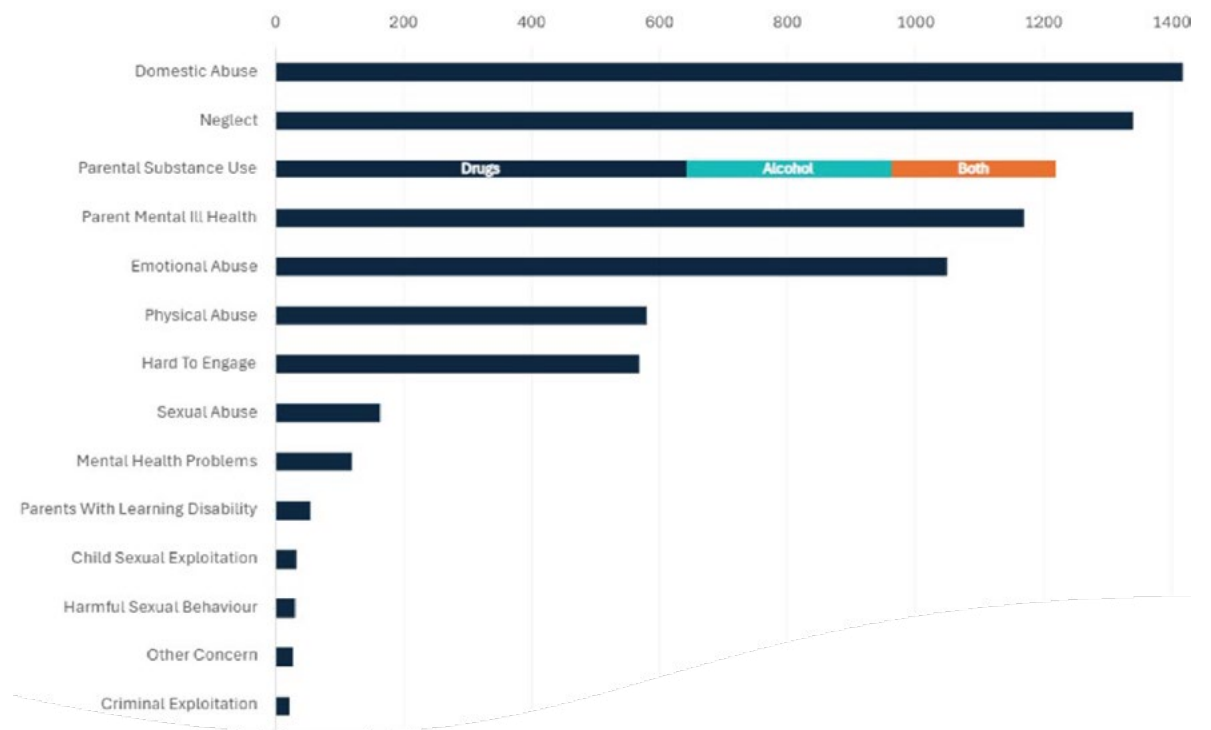
**Table 5. Number and rate per 1,000 children (017yrs) on the Child Protection Register 2013-2024**

Local Authority	2024		2023		2014	
	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate
Highland	116	2.8	128	3.0	106	2.4
Scotland	2,129	2.1	2,077	2.0	2,877	2.8

The **Child Protection Register** shows Highland consistently has a higher rate of children registered compared to the national average. In 2024, **116 children** were registered (rate: 2.8 per 1,000), compared to Scotland's rate of 2.1 (Table 5).

In Scotland domestic abuse remains one of the leading concerns for children placed on the register. Graph 2 illustrates the various concerns identified and discussed at case conferences in 2022-23. Multiple concerns may be recorded per one child therefore the figures will outnumber the number of cases registered (*Scottish Government, 2025a*).

For further information visit [www.hcpc.scot](http://www.hcpc.scot)

**Graph 2. Number of concerns identified at case conferences between 2022-23**

## The Bairn's Hoose

The Bairn's Hoose is a child friendly environment with an emphasis on being trauma-informed, with the aim to support children who have been victims or witnesses of abuse or are under the age of criminal responsibility whose behaviour has caused harm. Inspired by the European Barnhaus (child house) Model, it integrates child protection, justice, health, and recovery services into a single setting to prevent re-traumatisation and improve outcomes for children.

### Key Features of Bairns' Hoose:

- **Holistic support:** Provides consistent and **specialist services** to help children recover.
- **Child-Friendly environment:** Designed to be **comfortable and welcoming** to reduce stress.
- **Justice process improvement:** Ensures children can give evidence in a **safe and supportive** setting
- **Multidisciplinary approach:** Professionals from different sectors work together to uphold children's rights.
- **National rollout plan:** Implemented in **three phases** - Pathfinder, Pilot, and Full Rollout.



# FORCED MARRIAGE & FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

## Key Statistics from 2024



### Referral Locations:

- 82% of victims were in the UK.
- 6% had no overseas component, suggesting forced marriage may have occurred inside the UK.

Referrals came from **services, family, friends, colleagues, and victims**  
 → 34 countries involved (**Pakistan** highest involvement 45% cases (107)).



### Local Insights

- Majority of FMU-supported cases were **British nationals (178)** (Graph 3), including some cases in Scotland
- Police Scotland recorded 5 cases of forced marriage in 2024–25** (Police Scotland, 2024).
- Data gap:** Neither the FMU nor Police Scotland provide a regional breakdown so it's unclear if Highland is represented.  
 → there is a need for **further assessment and localised data collection** to understand prevalence in Highland.

### FMU cases supported in 2024 (Table 6):

- 240 cases** received direct advice/support.
  - 572 cases** were signposted (without continuous FMU involvement)
- Overall trend: **decrease in cases over past 4 years – this could indicate,**  
 → Under-reporting,  
 → Hidden cases,  
 → Limited FMU services/funding available?

**Table 6. Number of cases supported by FMU 2021-24** (Adapted from UK Government, (2025).

Date	Number of cases supported by FMU	Number of enquires signposted without continuous action of support by FMU	Number of FGM cases
2024	240	572	11
2023	283	519	3
2022	302	Not available	Not available
2021	337	Not available	Not available

### Key Concerns

- High number of signposted cases indicates significant demand for help for issues relating to forced marriage and FGM.
- FM and FGM risks remain prevalent, especially linked to Pakistan.
- Mental Health issues and UK-based cases highlight a complex safeguarding needs



## TECHNOLOGY FACILITATED GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (TFGBV)

TFGBV is a prevalent form of cybercrime using online platforms to cause abuse and harm, aimed mainly at women and girls.

### Examples include:



#### REVENGE PORN / NON-CONSENSUAL IMAGE SHARING

Sharing intimate images without consent often as retaliation or coercion.



#### DEEPPFAKE ABUSE

AI-generated explicit or compromising images/videos, often used for humiliation or blackmail



#### CYBERSTALKING

Persistent online monitoring, harassment, or threats



#### DOXXING

Publishing private information (address, phone number, workplace) to incite harm



#### SEXTORTION

Threatening to release intimate content unless demands (money, more images) are met



#### ONLINE HARASSMENT & HATE SPEECH

Targeted abuse, misogynistic language, and coordinated attacks

### Crime statistics:

27%

Cyber-enabled sexual crimes now account for **27% of sexual crimes in Scotland** (2024–25) (Scottish Government, 2025c).

The available data for Scotland on cyber-crime is not broken down by gender or regionally therefore gaining an insight to cyber/tech crimes in Highland is currently not available. The magnitude of cyber offenses is difficult to unravel, and it would appear that many of these crimes are initially dealt with and/or minimised by the victim.

TFGBV enables perpetrators to reach victims, including children, boundlessly.

Cyber-crime statistics is ultimately in its infancy and stringent safety measures, clearer user guidelines, and robust enforcement are urgently needed to protect women and girls. The emphasis on the detrimental effects caused by these crimes also requires more support and statistical exploration.

**Members of the HVAWP** attend the newly formed VAWG digital inclusion network meetings hosted by the Mhor Collective in order to be informed, involved and take action with the current concerns.

## DATA SCOPING: KEY POINTS

- **MARAC Cases:** Sharp rise to 490 in 2024–25
- **Sexual Crimes in Highland:** Slight decrease from 2023–24 but still historically high
- **SARCS Referrals:** Increased to 86 in 2024–25
- **Child Protection Rate:** Highland (2.8 per 1,000) vs Scotland (2.1 per 1,000)
- **Forced Marriage & FGM:** A vast need for localised statistics, plus early detection and prevention, in Scotland/Highland.
- **Cyber-Crime:** Accounts for 27% of sexual crimes

## KEY STRATEGIC RESPONSE

### Highland focus

- HVAWP strategy is reviewed annually by partners with **improved alignment with other key strategies** such as the local Highland Improvement Plan, the Istanbul Convention and Equally Safe Delivery Plan objectives.
- **Actions are implemented by the Delivery Groups**, whose members bring key skills and knowledge. Delivery groups report to the strategic group quarterly on all HVAWP priorities to both ensure work continues within agreed strategic parameters and to ensure a good working link in all levels of the partners performance.
- Strive to **ensure funding of local front line services**, a crucial element of both our prevention and support work in some of our most remote and rural areas.
- Improvements in evidence based strategic development and delivery of priorities via the **HVAWP Data Project** collating all available data on Gender Based Violence.
- **Highland Safe Transport Group collaboration** with service providers and users of public transport in Highlands.
- **Working across Public Protection committees** to avoid silo working leading to the joint Safe & Together project with the Child Protection Committee and the Data review project with all Public Protection Committees.
- Work to **increase efficiencies, maximize resources**, and use all our skills and knowledge to enhance the overall Highland performance of the partnership.
- **Development Day and training opportunities** ensuring continuing partnership learning
- Governance strengthening through the **development of financial governance documentation, local SLAs**, and essential support from our NHS Finance Department colleagues.
- **Reports to the Highland Public Protection Chief Officers Group** provide updates on progress against priorities, highlighting key issues, risks and required action and opportunities for the coordination of public protection priorities.

### National Focus

- **Equally Safe Delivery Plan 24-26 implementation**
- **National Sustainable Funding Review meetings** with the Government and COSLA
- Development of Scotland's ***Strategy Challenging and deterring men's demand for prostitution*** and supporting the recovery and sustainable exists for those involved.
- **National Early Release from Prison Programme and the Prisoners (Early Release) (Scotland) Bill** was agreed by Parliament on 26 November 2024. The Bill will change the release point of most people serving short-term sentences, going from 50% of their sentence, to 40% of their sentence. However, those serving all, or part, of their sentence for sexual assault or domestic offences are excluded from this change .
- Meetings on the national development of the **Domestic Abuse Homicide Strategy**.
- Participation in **national development forums** such as the VAWP Chairs and Lead Officers Group meetings.
- **Supporting local councillors to represent Highland VAWG interests at the national COSLA Wellbeing Committee.**

## ADDRESSING PERPETRATORS DELIVERY GROUP

The groups' key aim is to hold Highland perpetrators of violence against women responsible for their conduct. We provide information and training for professionals and support key organisations to have appropriate policies in place. We work with other forums such as MATAAC (Multi Agency Tasking and Coordinator Domestic Abuse Programme) which aims to reduce re-offending by identifying perpetrators of abuse and providing intervention, MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences) for high risk victims of domestic abuse, assessing risk and sharing information for appropriate action planning and MAPPA (Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements) offering a forum for the successful management of violent and sexual offenders. We raise victims' awareness of legal measures open to them and support both court and non-court mandatory programmes for perpetrators.

### This year the delivery group has:

- Monitored the **Scottish Governments Early Release programme** to ensure perpetrators of Domestic Abuse are not part of the process to continue to protect high risk victims and children.
- Continued promoting the **DSDAS scheme** (Disclosure Scheme for Domestic Abuse Scotland) so that victims of domestic abuse could apply for background information on perpetrators/suspected perpetrators.
- Worked closely with the Procurator Fiscals Office to confirm that the courts have a strong default position in **DA Convictions** - that an NHO (None Harrassment Order) is granted to protect victims.
- Reviewed child contact arrangements when they go through court proceedings to ensure that **perpetrators do not abuse the court contact arrangement system**. For example, persuade a witness to retract their statement or change their position in relation to a criminal case or use contat arranamgent to further abuse the mother.
- Justice Social work have been running their **Court Mandatory Perpetrator programme** through the year.
- Carried out review of membership, structure and **refreshed priorities**.

## LEARNING, DEVELOPMENT AND PREVENTION DELIVERY GROUP

To create an understanding of Gender Based Violence via the delivery of learning opportunities and the promotion of the awareness of GBV issues across Highlands. The group also sources and promotes a wide range of training on specialist VAWG issues provided by national and local forums.

### Total HVAWP training attendees during the year in Highlands 2024/25



### This year the delivery group has:

- Trial transfer of the **HVAWP GBV Level 1 training delivery** to Public Health Scotland, this is to provide more experienced trainers and back up for this important GBV basic training level for professionals.
- Regularly report and discuss the training and awareness raising delivered by a wide range of partners who access organisations in person and online across all of Highlands. The aim is to ensure all professionals receive GBV specialist training, especially in remote and rural areas where they may be one of just a few professionals. Many partners also deliver a variety of schools based programmes across Highlands aimed at raising awareness of gender issues and promoting healthy relationships.
- Organised a Highland wide publicity campaign during the whole of the national “16 days of activism” promoting statistics, information and training across a wide range of VAWG issues. Local events were held by partners including UHI and group members represented by Highland at the Moray Reclaim the Night March.
- The 16 days campaign, “Imagine” video and poem was nominated for the best campaign in Scotland.
- The Highland Council have been working towards the Equally Safe at Work Bronze Status this past year.
- The new national Equally Safe in Practice framework, was launched in this period, which aims to equip the Scottish workforce with knowledge, understanding and the tools necessary to improve responses to VAWG.

## TRAINING IN THE HIGHLANDS

### Gender Based Violence (Level 1) - HVAWP Training

This course helps you understand **Violence Against Women (VAW)** and how to respond effectively. By the end, you will:

- Learn **why VAW happens** and how it is linked to **gender inequality**.
- Explore the **different forms of VAW** and how they are connected.
- Understand the **impact** of experiencing VAW on individuals.
- Discover **policies and practical steps** to support staff in responding to VAW.
- Recognize **your role** and the role of other organisations in helping those affected.
- Build confidence to **ask about VAW issues**, including routine enquiry and when you suspect abuse.
- Practice **supportive responses** when someone discloses abuse.
- Analyse how some service responses can **increase risk**—and learn how to **reduce that risk**.



→ Using the **Spider in the Glass** (see appendix 2 for more info) analogy throughout the course. This simple image—a spider trapped inside a glass—helps explain the feeling of being trapped in an abusive relationship and makes the concept relatable for everyone.

### Gender-Based Violence: Spider in the Glass – Trauma and the Abusive Relationship - NHSH Training

#### This course will help you:

- Understand the characteristics of an abusive relationship.
- Learn how these characteristics can create trauma.
- Use this understanding to develop trauma-informed responses when supporting individuals affected by abuse.

## Caithness and Sutherland Women's Aid (CASWA) Group Activities Programme

Over the past year, CASWA has continued to grow and diversify their Group Activities Programme, offering a range of creative, therapeutic, and educational opportunities designed to support women in their recovery and empowerment journeys.

### Purpose

- Diversified programme offering creative, therapeutic, and educational activities.
- Supports recovery and empowerment for women.
- Provides safe spaces for connection, reflection, and personal development.
- Helps reduce demand on one-to-one support services.

### Key Benefits

- Fosters peer connections and mutual support.
- Builds confidence and sustainable networks.
- Reduces isolation and promotes community.

### Participant Feedback

- "It really overcomes that feeling of isolation." – Online Own My Life.
- "Fantastic for confidence building and making friends." – CAIR participant.
- "There's no focus on trauma. A safe space to doodle, paint, laugh and chat." – Doodling participant.
- "It means a lot to me to be able to connect. It's just been perfect." – Online Own My Life
- "More events please! I've really enjoyed being around people who understand." – Glass Fusion Spring 2024.
- "I got something out of every single session." – Own My Life Autumn 2024.



### Group Activities Programme Delivered in the Past Year

- Community Artist In Residence - with Lyth Arts Centre
- Own My Life - 2 in-person courses
- Own My Life - 1 online course
- Doodling and Drawing Workshop
- Charmed Life Therapy sessions
- CASWA Coffees - informal peer support gatherings

## Lochaber Women's Aid – Awareness-Raising Programme

Delivered sessions to young persons in schools to help promote healthy relationships, recognise abuse and challenge harmful attitudes.

### Participants

#### Delivered sessions across five schools:

- Ardnamurchan, Mallaig, Kilchuimen, Kinlochleven, Lochaber High.
  - Year groups: S1–S5
  - Approx. 850 pupils reached in the past year

### Positive Feedback

- Teachers: → sessions equip pupils with knowledge and confidence.
- Pupils find sessions engaging and useful. One student shared:
  - “This lesson has made me learn more about what happened to my mum. This knowledge should help me in my first relationship, and I know what to do if this happens. Thanks, this has helped a lot.” – Student



### The programme delivers age-appropriate learning across different school stages:

- **S1:** Pupils engage in an interactive **domestic abuse quiz via Kahoot**, followed by scenario-based discussions to help them identify different types of abuse and early warning signs.
- **S2:** Activities such as the **Stickman exercise** and Building Our Perfect Partner encourage pupils to reflect on the importance of personality and respect over appearance.
- **S3:** We introduce a session on **misogyny**, supporting pupils to explore the difference between sexism and misogyny, understand how challenging harmful behaviour (even at low levels) can prevent escalation, and critically analyse examples from social media.
- **S5 (Senior Pupils):** Focus shifts to **life after school**—leaving home, building healthy relationships, recognising red flags, and knowing how to support themselves and others, including where to access help.

## RASASH – Annual Highlights (2024–25)

### Training Delivery

Delivered 191 workshops to 3,418 secondary students across Highland (double previous year).  
National Rape Crisis Scotland prevention programme Workshops cover:

#### ***Power, Consent, Understanding Sexual Violence, Pornography***

→ **Aim:** Promote healthy relationships, challenge harmful attitudes, and explain support options.  
Relaunched StandUp Youth Ambassador Group – now 6 ambassadors.



### Training Service Growth

#### **Delivered presentations/training this past year to:**

- Waverley Care
- Dounreay (Caithness)
- Mikeysline
- Aberlour
- Fort George Military Base
- Inverness Sexual Assault Response Coordination Service
- Public RASASH event for 16 Days of Activism Against GBV

### Fundraising & Communications impact

- Developed trauma-informed fundraising policies.
- Innovative fundraising policies that look to ensure a robust ethical framework and safeguard all involved.
- Improved branding and messaging consistency.
- Increased social media presence through campaigns such as Big Give and Charity awards recognition.

### Access & Inclusion Project

- increase access to support for survivors of sexual violence in Highland.
- ensure RASASH's services are as inclusive as possible.
- evolved with the needs of the organisation as well as community response.

#### **Rolled out No More! A learning disability resource:**

- Delivered at L'Arche Highland (adults with learning disabilities).
- Delivered at Lochaber High School (young people with ASN).
- Plans for Skye and future follow-up sessions.

#### **Afghan refugee women programme:**

For Afghan refugee women living in Inverness in conjunction with Cameron Barracks and Cat Meighan (local activist artist).

- Six-week artistic group work programme in Inverness.
- Led to translation of RASASH info into Dari & Pashto.
- Training session for Cameron Barracks staff.

## MARAC DELIVERY GROUP

The Delivery Group provides governance for the MARAC process in Highlands and administrative support to the Island MARACs.

**Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs)** are a process established to respond to victims at highest risk of serious harm or murder due to domestic abuse. The meetings provide a structured response via action planning based on agencies sharing relevant and proportionate information to assess risks.

There are **7 MARACs** operating in Highlands and Islands, these are supported by a MARAC co-ordinator, the HVAWP and NHS Public Health Department trained personnel. The Delivery group provides governance and leadership of the MARAC process in Highland.



### Cases heard at MARAC:



### MARAC aims to:

- safeguard victims of domestic abuse,
- manage perpetrators' behaviour,
- safeguard professionals, and
- make links with all other safeguarding processes.

### Delivery group aims:

- Provides effective **governance and leadership** of the MARAC process in Highlands.
- **Support and develop** 4 Highland MARACs and support 3 Island MARAC processes. **This is 7 MARACs out of the 35 in place across Scotland.**
- There is a full-time Co-ordinator who supports the 7 MARACs operating in the Highlands and Islands.  
→ Further administration is provided by the HVAWP support team and trained personnel from the NHS Public Health Department.
- MARACs regularly takes place following the "[10 principles for an effective MARAC](#)" and the delivery group ensure issues are addressed and gaps are identified and resolved.
- **SafeLives, the national support organisations for MARACs, recommends at least two full time coordinators** for the numbers of cases discussed in the Highlands & Islands. Financially this cannot be implemented currently, so efficiencies have been implemented throughout the year and the temporary additional part time HVAWP administrator has helped to ease the workload.

## This year the delivery group and support team have:

- **Implemented online referrals** in May 2024 which has enabled an improved, streamlined referral process of cases into MARAC from professionals across Highlands and Islands.
- Supported a **significant increase in referrals** in quarter three (Q3) 2024/25 which was 43% higher than Q3 2023/24.
- **Reduced MARAC Minutes** have been successfully trialled and approved for implementation in Highland from April 2025. This has significantly reduced the time administrators spend on this task and has increased capacity to support MARAC Chairs. This has improved risk assessment and action planning at MARAC meetings.
- Updated the MARAC pages on the new HVAWP website to provide **up to date information on MARAC** and its processes.
- **4 out of 7 MARACs met SafeLives' recommendation** of 40 cases per 10,000 adult female population as of December 2024: Lochaber (46), Ross-shire & Skye (44), Orkney (41) and Inverness (40). Caithness & Sutherland was just short of the recommendation at 39, Western Isles (20) and Shetland (18) were below the recommendation.
- **Joint working with MAPPAs** (Multi agency Public Protection Agreement Meetings) and **MATACs** (Multi Agency Tasking and Coordination meetings) who represent Highlands at National meetings.
- The MARAC Coordinator took part in an **audit of the Shetland MARAC**, which was carried out by SafeLives. The MARAC Coordinator attended a Development Day in Lerwick and provided an informative session on MARAC to local partners.
- Updated sections of the **MARAC operating procedures** to respond to required changes, deal with issues, improve communications and ensure compliance with national guidance.
- **Local training for MARAC Chairs** was developed and implemented in September 2024. This has increased support for MARAC Chair's and has helped with consistency across Highland & Islands MARACs.
- **Local training for MARAC Representatives and Independent Domestic Abuse Advocates (IDAAs)** is being developed with implementation expected in 2025/26.
- **Significant increase in MARAC learners** in 2024/25 (104) compared to 2023/24 (35).

## SERVICE DELIVERY GROUP

Aims to ensure that those needing support services for gender based violence have access to it. It works to ensure that funding is available for local services and that services are well promoted across Highlands through a variety of mediums and methods. We support all victims of GBV, particularly ensuring that those with protected characteristics and/or additional vulnerabilities can also access appropriate support to meet their needs. The group also supports and promotes the provision of routine enquiries by professionals so that women, when in safe spaces such as routine private medical appointments, have the opportunity to seek help.

### Total Number of Children and Young People supported by Highland front line services during 24/25.

\*RWA have had no children's service since August 24 & RASASH supported children age 13-17yrs.



### Total Number of Women supported by Highland front line services during 24/25



### This year the delivery group and support team have:

- HVAWP members attend national meetings on the VAWG funding review ensuring **Highland interests are represented and funding for services continues and is enhanced.**
- **To promote Highland needs there are a wide variety of other national groups** attended including strategic forums, national HVAWP Chairs and Leads meetings, 16 Days of Action planning group and many more.
- We are part of the strategic board implementing **Bairns Hoose in Highlands (see page 16)**. This is a specialist interview process in place for **young people** who have experienced or witnessed abuse or are under the age of criminal responsibility and have caused harm.
- HVAWP members are on national forums for the implementation of the Governments Strategy to **tackle Commercial Sexual Exploitation.**
- **The HVAWP Data Project** has taken shape throughout the year. With the help of Health Improvement Specialists we have now compiled a full report of all available sources of information to formulate and evidence our strategic and operational decision making. The work is now being progressed under this delivery group to develop an easy data gathering mechanism which will self generate key data for meetings and provide a reference library of **up to date key research for partners and professionals.**

## SAFE & TOGETHER PROGRAMME

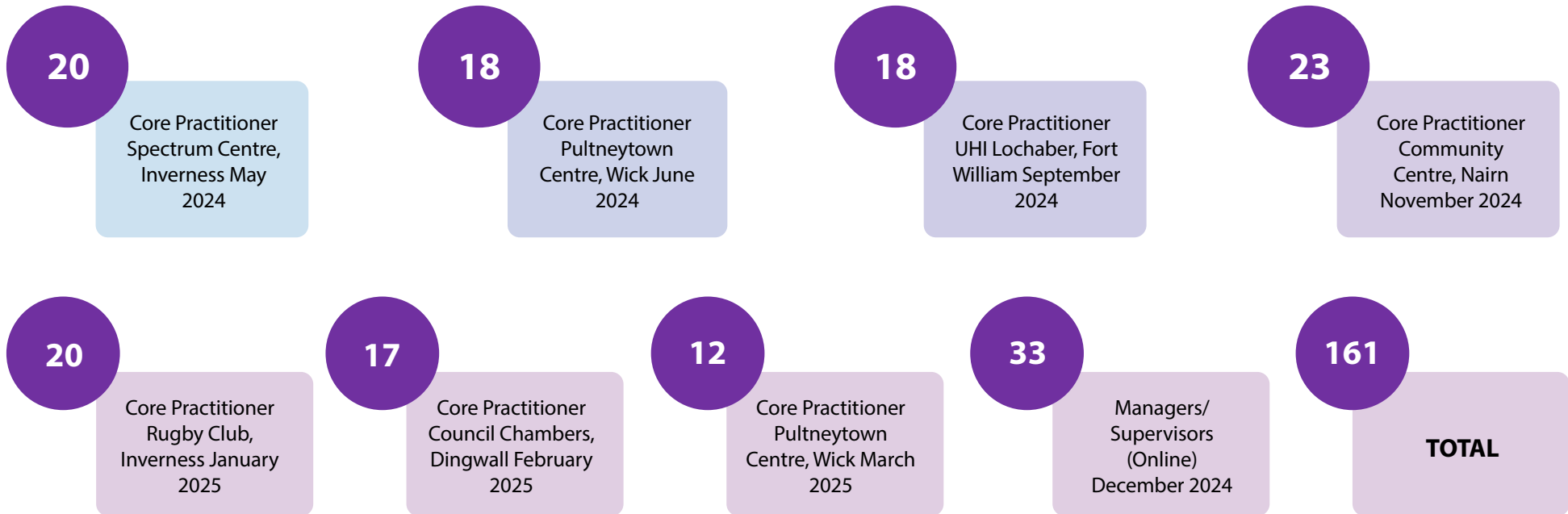


The Scottish Government through the Delivering Equally Safe (DES) initiative is supporting the implementation of the Safe & Together practice model across Scotland.

Safe and Together is a model of inter-agency practice that aims to improve how child protection systems and frontline staff respond to the issue of domestic abuse. It provides a common framework for staff and services to consider and discuss concerns, challenges and solutions for families experiencing domestic abuse.

Highland has taken a multi-agency approach to the roll out of Safe & Together, with all training programmes being offered to all frontline staff working with families affected by domestic abuse. Programmes are being delivered in person in localities across the Highland Region.

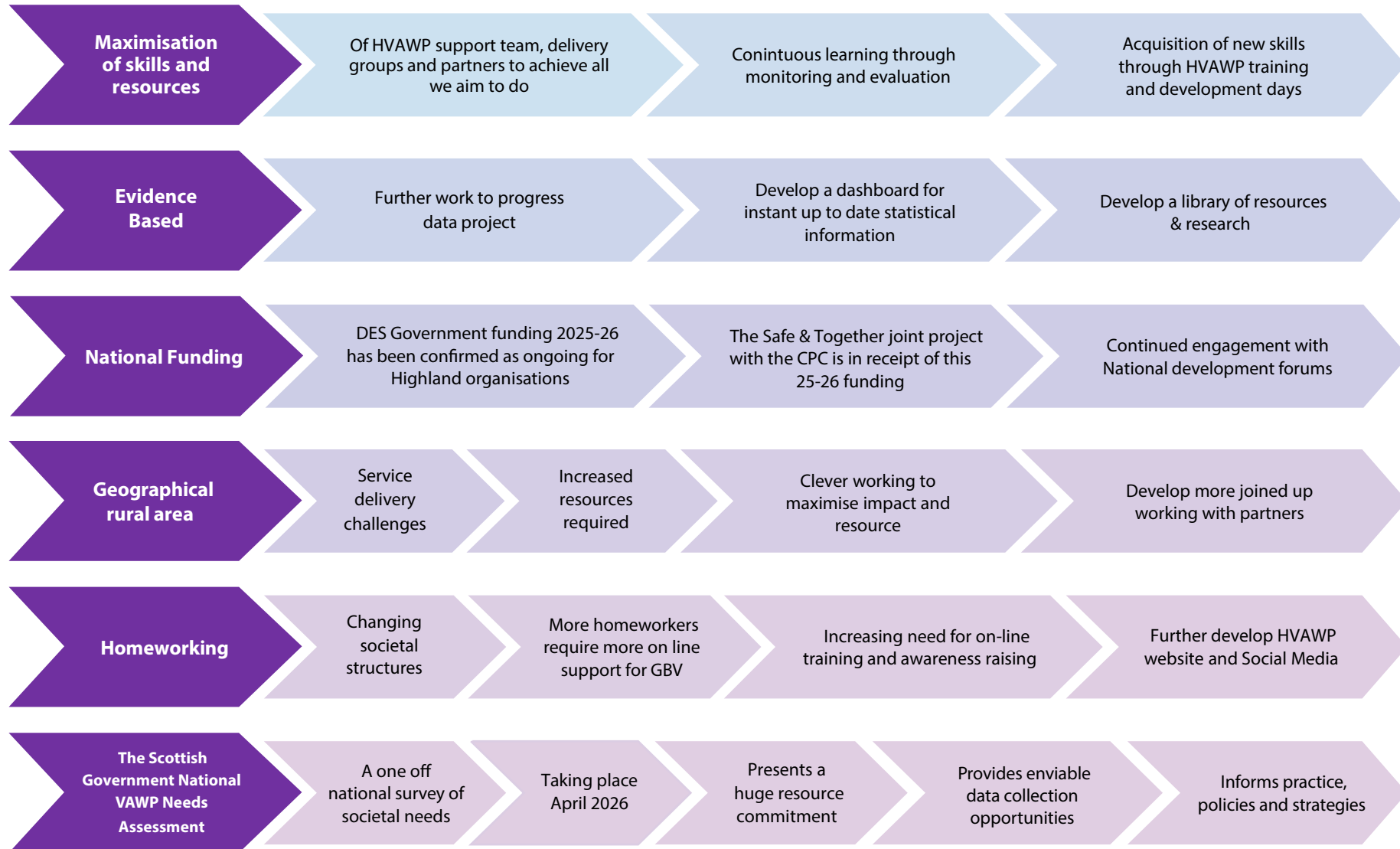
### Training Delivered in 2024/25 per individual S&T Course



**In addition, this year the Safe & together Programme has:**

- Delivered **bespoke workshops** for teams and services.
- Undertaken **case consultations** and provided practice advice to Lead Professionals working on **Domestic Abuse Child Plans**.
- Undertaken an **analysis of Child Protection data** and links to instances of domestic abuse.
- Formed a **Collaborative with** colleagues across the North of Scotland to share resources including access to training programmes for those in Highlands.
- Hosted staff from the office of the **Domestic Abuse Commissioner (DAC)** England & Wales on a **fact finding visit to Highlands**.

## AIMS FOR 25-26



## GOOD NEWS STORIES



### RASASH AWARDS

Shortlisted as a finalist for Charity of the Year at the **2025 Scottish Charity Awards, hosted by SCVO**

Also in the running for the **People's Choice Award 2025**



### HVAWP/PH

Myra Ross was Invited to the **Scottish Parliament's 25th Anniversary** to celebrate being nominated as a local hero for contributions to VAWG and Met Queen Camilla

*(Photographed with Emma Roddick)*



### SARCS/NHSH

Invited to Buckingham Palace and met Queen Camilla

Photo of Laura Bain (Clinical Nurse Manager for Custody and SARCS) and Mhairi MacDonald (Forensic Nurse Coordinator)



### WASHBAG PROJECT

Delivered washbags to SARCS

Happily received by Mhairi MacDonald & Susan Murray (Forensic team)

**ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- **Premier Digital** – website and social media design work
- **NHSH** – Financial support and accountancy advice
- **NHSH** - Medical Illustrations
- **Sarah Griffiths** – Health Improvement Specialist
- **Myra Ross** – Creating and sharing “The Spider In The Glass” and writing poetry for HVAWP
- **Laura Anne Middlemiss** – Artwork for Spider in the Glass used in HVAWP training
- **Heads of various forums/groups** – for their information to contribute to the content of this publication

**Authors:** E. Lyall & C. Russell

Completed: Dec 2025

## APPENDIX 1 - TRAINING BEYOND THE HIGHLANDS

### TRAINING BEYOND THE HIGHLANDS

#### National - Spider In The Glass

Domestic Violence is a national and **global issue**. With the Highlands of Scotland's diverse geographical location accounting for many remote and rural communities, NHS Public Health Department wanted to reach a wider audience using national networks.



- **Webinars** granted this access.
- Supported by a number of colleagues and partner agencies by collaborating with NES Remote and Rural, SARCS Teams (Tay North of Scotland and National teams), and Improvement Services.

→ Spider In the Glass webinars has now reached an excess of **3000 people, across Scotland**, from varying professions.

#### High demand for more webinars resulted in;

- NHS Highland delivering Parts 1 & 2 of **The Spider in the Glass for national partners**, at Town Hall Teams events.
- **Future dates** for training webinars are currently in the diary.
- Key **webinars delivered over The 16 Days of Activism** Against Violence Against Women and Girls.

#### Highland Safe & Together

- **Conferences:**
  - International Safe & Together conference - presented a **live interactive workshop, highlighting the work in the Highlands**.
  - Recorded a **Highland workshop** for presentation at a **Scottish Government/Improvement Service conference**.
- **Highland Case Studies:**
  - included in a **DAC Report** presented to the **Westminster Parliament**.
  - included in **DES and Improvement Service Reports** to Scottish Government.
- Co-facilitates an **online National Practitioner Forum to benefit the Highland Project**.
- Contributed to the development of new **UK/Scotland relevant material** for S&T Programmes.



## APPENDIX 2 - Additional Background Information

### THE STORY OF THE SPIDER IN THE GLASS

**Myra Ross (Creator of the Spider in the Glass)** whilst employed as the HVAWP Training Officer, was tasked with developing and delivering GBV learning across Highland. She had previously written poetry which was shared through technology and also in traditional poster form, writing poems such as 'How Are You?' (Routine Enquiry) the last line of which is "Set this silly little spider free and safe again".

Myra had been searching for a way to answer the question asked by many which is "Why does she not just leave?" After considering the issue at length she realised that spiders are at one point wandering free, and then all of a sudden are quite unexpectedly trapped. They are stuck within the confines of rigid boundaries that someone else has put in place for them, they are constantly monitored within the confines of their glass cage, the walls of which are invisible to all, but those who seek to breach their borders.

Myra felt there was more to be done with this simple analogy and so she sought to develop the work independently. She collaborated with local artist Laura Anne Middlemiss and during the summer of 2023, they wrote a story and created some artwork to illustrate it.

It was agreed the HVAWP could use the materials that Myra and Laura had created and with the assistance of Medical Illustrations at NHH, a leaflet was created which introduced the story, detailed the Spider In The Glass concept, and gave details of Highland VAWG Service partners. It was piloted with the SARCS and Police Scotland DSDAS Team in the spring of 2024.

Further support was provided when Myra moved into Health Improvement with NHS Highland and she was supported with the delivery of specific Spider in the Glass courses. This started with small groups, with in-depth evaluation, which allowed the course to be developed and improved.

Training was initially delivered through TURAS, but due to the impact of GBV being enormous and that domestic abuse is a pandemic in itself where women die and children's lives are destroyed, it was decided that a wider audience should be addressed.

In the spring of 2025, a move to webinars commenced in collaboration with NES Remote and Rural, the Tay North of Scotland SARCS Team, The national SARC team and eventually Improvement Services. As a result of this in excess of 3000 people from across Scotland and also from a wide variety of professions, have been able to undertake the 'Spider In The Glass' training.

The response and demand for webinars continue to be overwhelming and NHS Highland will deliver Parts 1 and 2 of The Spider In The Glass for national partners, at Town Hall teams events.

**The story does not end there and already the next chapters of the Spider have been commenced, highlighting the intersectionality of Gender Based Violence and its connection to all areas of Public Protection.**





ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN