The Highland Council

Agenda Item	10
Report No	HCW/28/26

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

Date: **11 November 2026**

Report Title: **Refuge Services and MARAC Review Update**

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

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides an update on progress with the review of the domestic abuse refuge services and MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference).

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

i. **Note** the progress made with the reviews of refuge provision and MARAC.
ii. **Note** that the final report will be presented to the February 2027 Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee.

3. Implications

3.1 **Resource –** The Council has paid £81,182 and £76,570 to Inverness and Ross-shire Women's Aid respectively for the provision of Refuge services in 2026/2027. In addition, they have received £66,478.86 and £54,821.10 in housing benefit for clients resident in the Inverness and Ross-shire/ Skye refuges.

Highland Council has allocated funds to MARAC to the end of this financial year.

3.2 **Legal** –The Scottish legislative framework provides protective powers such as Domestic Abuse Protection Notices and Orders, which are issued by police and courts. These measures do not create obligations on councils to commission or deliver domestic abuse support services.

Part 2 of the Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Act 2021 came into effect on 01/08/2026. This allows social landlords, in certain circumstances, to apply for a court order on domestic abuse grounds to end an abuser's tenancy.

3.3 **Risk –** There are no implications from this update report.

3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plan, equipment, process or people)** – There are no implications from this update report.

3.5 **Gaelic –** No implications for this report.

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, full impact assessments will need to be completed as part of these reviews.

5. Refuge Review

5.1 This review has been completed, and a draft report has been prepared. However, this needs to be subject to an impact assessment, and financial assessment. This will also need to be agreed by senior management and signed off by the Corporate Management Team before it can go to Committee for approval on 03/02/2027.

5.2 The work undertaken has involved the following:

Gathering information from Inverness and Ross-shire Women's Aid in areas such as:

- Service information – including the number of requests for assistance received/ approved, number of hours support provided refuge occupancy details, leaver destinations.
- Staff information - staff numbers and hours provided for refuge services, staff policy and procedures including training provided.
- Visits were also undertaken to the refuges in Inverness and Dingwall as part of the fact-finding exercise.

Meetings have been held with officers from the Council's Housing Service in order to establish the approach taken in Council areas where there is no refuge facility or where admission to a refuge was refused. Liaison with the Inverness and Ross-shire Women's Aid groups was also examined given the importance of housing solutions in order that victim-survivors can move on safely from refuge accommodation.

Details of the approach in other Council areas have also been considered in order to inform the review findings.

5.3 To maintain continuity of service whilst the review is being completed a Memorandum of Understanding was issued to both Women's Aid organisations in June 2026 extending their funding until 31/03/2027. The current contract arrangements include a three-month notice period, and this will need to be factored in beyond March 2027 as part of any changes which Committee may agree in February 2027.

6. MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) Review

6.1 The MARAC review is being chaired by Police Scotland with all partners involved. Due to the different strands involved in this process, tasks have been allocated to members of the review group to take forward.

6.2 Securing a smaller number of MARAC chairs is a key focus as it is clear that the current high number is having a negative impact on consistency.

6.3 The MARAC co-ordinator role and the administrative support required is another strand being reviewed.

6.4 Improving demand management and options available will be a key finding within the review. This includes a review of the needs of Highland alongside the national Safe Lives guidance.

6.5 The MARAC review is expected to be completed by the end of November, with the agreed process to report to The Highland Violence Against Women Partnership, then into Highland Chief Officers Group, prior to coming back to Committee.

Designation:	Assistant Chief Executive – People
Date:	30 October 2026
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Background Papers:	N/A
Appendix:	N/A