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**TO:** Communities, Housing and Planning Policy Board

**ON:** 12 March 2019

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**REPORT BY:** Director of Communities, Housing and Planning Services

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**HEADING:** Scottish Government Consultation on Improving Multi-agency Risk Assessment and Interventions for Victims of Domestic Abuse

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**1. Summary**

- 1.1 In November 2018 the Scottish Government announced the appointment of an independent review, seeking views on strengthening multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC) and interventions for victims at high risk of domestic abuse in Scotland. The review is being led by Christina McKelvie, Minister for Older People and Equalities.
- 1.2 To assist in the review, the Scottish Government published a consultation regarding MARAC on 30 November 2018. The consultation document can be found at:  
<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/consultation-paper/2018/11/improving-multi-agency-risk-assessment-interventions-victims-domestic-abuse/documents/00543496-pdf/00543496-pdf/govscot%3Adocument>
- 1.3 The Renfrewshire MARAC currently meets monthly to discuss the interventions for victims at high risk of domestic abuse in Scotland and is Chaired by Police Scotland.
- 1.4 Renfrewshire Council, Communities and Public Protection, administers and coordinates the Renfrewshire MARAC and has led the development of integrated and effective partnership approaches to raise awareness and respond to the highest risk cases of domestic abuse.
- 1.5 The consultation paper was discussed at the quarterly Renfrewshire Gender Based Violence Strategy Group in January 2019, to agree a collective response which was submitted with the views of all relevant partners.

- 1.6 The closing date for the consultation was 2 March 2019 and the Renfrewshire Gender Based Violence Strategy Group submitted their response within the timescales given by the Scottish Government. The response is attached as Appendix 1 for the interest of Members.
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## 2. **Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Communities, Housing and Planning Policy Board:
- (a) note the approach to tackling domestic abuse in Renfrewshire and the development of best practice approaches that are receiving recognition nationally and internationally; and
  - (b) note the multi-agency response provided to the Scottish Government through the Renfrewshire Gender Based Violence Strategy Group.
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## 3. **Background**

- 3.1 In November 2018, the Scottish Government announced the appointment of an independent review into seeking views on strengthening multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC) and intervention for victims at high risk of domestic abuse in Scotland with the review being led by Christina McKelvie, Minister for Older People and Equalities.
- 3.2 As detailed in the consultation, violence, in particular against women and girls, in any form, has no place in our vision for a safe, strong, successful Scotland. It damages health and wellbeing, limits freedom and potential, and is a violation of the most fundamental human rights. Domestic abuse is one of the many ways in which this violence manifests itself in our communities.
- 3.3 The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 has created a new criminal offence of domestic abuse. This is now a key part of the response to tackling the issues of domestic abuse and gives Councils and partners the appropriate powers they need to tackle perpetrators and protect victims.
- 3.4 Overseeing this work, Equally Safe is Scotland's strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls, developed jointly with CoSLA and in association with a wide range of partners from public and third sector organisations. Its delivery plan sets out 118 actions over 2017-2021 to help to make the vision of Equally Safe a reality. These actions are grouped under the four strategic priorities of Equally Safe, with the work to improve the multi-agency risk assessment process and support for victims of domestic abuse sitting within the following 2 priorities:
- Priority 3 - Interventions are early and effective, preventing violence and maximising the safety and wellbeing of women, children and young people.

- Priority 4 - Men desist from all forms of violence against women and girls and perpetrators of such violence receive a robust and effective response.
- 3.5 Over the years it has become increasingly clear that effective responses to domestic abuse require a consistent multi-agency approach. Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) are one factor to help ensure that this is delivered. MARACs can ensure that individuals at greatest risk from domestic abuse are supported through safe, relevant and proportionate information sharing, and the development of an effective multi-agency action plan to increase their safety.
- 3.6 Since the MARAC approach first came into being in 2005 they have continued to evolve and are now a well-recognised feature of the multi-agency response to domestic abuse. They are operating in several Local Authority areas across Scotland.
- 3.7 In Renfrewshire, since the MARAC process has been administered and led by the Communities and Public Protection Service from within the Community Safety Partnership Hub there has been the development of a focus and area of expertise that is now being recognised as best practice across the UK and increasingly internationally. This includes the training of relevant officers as independent domestic abuse advocates (IDAA qualified) and a significant programme of training and awareness raising that is targeted at public sector employees that are most likely to be in the position to come into contact with and identify victims of domestic abuse and has extended to employees of local MP's and MSP's and partner agencies. The approach in Renfrewshire has recently been highlighted at the Scottish Parliament and at Westminster and most recently in the New South Wales Parliament in Australia.
- 3.8 A proper multi-agency focused meeting recognises that many factors are involved in cases of domestic abuse and that the effective sharing of information about individuals is vital to identify and mitigate the risk of serious harm. The development of robust safety plans that meet the objective of increasing the safety and well-being of those affected and that contribute to improving agency accountability are also essential. One of the key factors in the success of the approach now developed in Renfrewshire is the consistent high level of engagement at MARAC meetings by all relevant agencies that actively contribute to the development and delivery of these objectives.
- 3.9 The Scottish Government consultation seeks to improve the multi-agency risk assessment process for victims of domestic abuse across Scotland and ensure a more consistent approach. It recognises the importance of a multi-agency approach to protecting victims at high risk from domestic abuse and explores how best to strengthen local arrangements to support the objectives of Equally Safe.

3.10 The Scottish Government is looking at:

- Models of risk assessment
- Information sharing
- Safety planning
- Relevant partners
- Guidance
- Provision in statute for effective arrangements

3.11 The consultation has been sent to all relevant agencies/sectors involved in developing the Scottish Government approach to this work including:

- Police Scotland
- Independent Domestic Abuse Advocates (IDAAs)
- Education
- Children and Families Social Work
- Criminal Justice Social Work
- Adult Protection
- NHS Scotland (physical and mental health representatives)
- Drug and Alcohol Services
- Local authority housing services which may include Scottish Federation of Housing Authorities (SFHA) and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs)
- Scottish Prison Service
- Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
- Specialist domestic abuse and children's support service
- Violence Against Women Partnerships

3.12 Many of the organisations are represented at the Gender Based Violence Working Group and for this reason it was deemed appropriate that a joint response was an effective way to contribute to this consultation.

3.13 The response submitted and attached as Appendix 1 highlights the good work being taken forward in Renfrewshire and the strength of commitment to tackling this issue locally.

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### **Implications of the Report**

1. **Financial** – None

2. **HR & Organisational Development** – None

3. **Community Planning**

**Renfrewshire is Safe** - The work undertaken as part of the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference ensures that high risk victims of domestic abuse are discussed, and appropriate interventions put in place.

4. **Legal** – None
  5. **Property/Assets** – None
  6. **Information Technology** – None
  7. **Equality & Human Rights**
    - (a) The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website
  8. **Health & Safety** – None
  9. **Procurement** – None
  10. **Risk** – None
  11. **Privacy Impact** – None
  12. **CoSLA Policy Position** – Not applicable
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### **List of Background Papers**

None

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OR  
13 February 2019

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## **Improving Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Centres (MARAC) for victims at high risk of domestic abuse: A Scottish Government consultation**

### **RESPONDENT INFORMATION FORM**

**Please Note** this form **must** be completed and returned with your response.

To find out how we handle your personal data, please see our privacy policy:

<https://beta.gov.scot/privacy/>

Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

☐

Individual

☒

Organisation

Full name or organisation's name

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The Scottish Government would like your permission to publish your consultation response. Please indicate your publishing preference:

#### **Information for organisations:**

The option 'Publish response only (without name)' is available for individual respondents only. If this option is selected, the organisation name will still be published.

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Improving Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and interventions for victims of domestic abuse –  
A Scottish Government Consultation

**Effective working, risk identification and referral pathways**

1. How can we ensure training on domestic abuse and appropriate risk assessment tools for public bodies, agencies and services staff?

“Staff are equipped to identify and respond to GBV” is 1 of 4 outcomes outlined in Equally Safe in Renfrewshire: Renfrewshire’s <sup>no to</sup> Gender Based Violence Strategy 2018-2021. Local Priority 3 of the plan states that we will “Improve the knowledge, skills and behaviour of local workers around the topic of GBV through training and awareness raising activity”. The commitment of our statutory and local voluntary organisations who have committed to our local strategy has ensured that this priority is reflected in organisation/service strategic plans and/or service improvement plans. This prioritises senior managers’ commitment to releasing staff.

We have established a Multi-Agency Training Consortium which enables us to pool resources to ensure training across the breadth of GBV is available to local staff. The training on offer ranges from awareness raising to skills based training to support the implementation of key programmes such as: sensitive routine enquiry in key health settings; Safe and Together; and the implementation of Renfrewshire Council’s ‘Make a Stand Pledge’ in conjunction with the Chartered Institute of Housing.

It is vital that local data is used to identify priority staff groups for training. Locally our MARAC referral sources are closely monitored to identify gaps in referral agencies. This provided evidence to roll out risk identification checklist and MARAC training to Mental Health Services and Health Visitors/Family Nurses.

To ensure continual provision of training, funding must be available for regular training for trainer courses to ensure availability of qualified trainers.

2. In your view, what is the best model of multi-agency working for ensuring effective and early interventions for victims of domestic abuse?

Until August 2015 Renfrewshire MARAC was chaired by ASSIST, a specialist domestic abuse support and advocacy service. At this point ASSIST notified all members that they could no longer continue resourcing MARAC meetings. Renfrewshire Council agreed to make their own arrangements for MARAC meetings, with Community

Resources taking the lead role as MARAC Co-ordinator and administrator. The first MARAC meeting led by Renfrewshire Council was in October 2015.

The MARAC has developed over the last 3 years and is an excellent model of multi-agency working. To date 363 referrals have been made to Renfrewshire MARAC since the co-ordination and administration was transferred to Renfrewshire Council and 500 children have been discussed. An observation of the local MARAC meeting by SafeLives in October 2016 established it as a model of best practice across Scotland. There are a number of key elements that are vital to its effectiveness:

- The range of partners in attendance: Police, IDAA , Women's Aid, Children & Families Social Work, Criminal Justice Social Work, Adult support and protection, Housing, Substance misuse services, Mental Health, Education, Acute service, Health visiting, Adult Services Social Work, Public Protection, Barnardos and Women's Aid.
- A robust MARAC Operating Protocol (MOP) that is reviewed annually and has been endorsed by relevant Directors/Chief Officers/Heads of Service.
- Use of referral data to identify gaps in referral agencies and a commitment to train relevant services to assess risk and refer.

3. In your view, what is the best model for professionals assessing risk in relation to domestic abuse?

Sensitive Routine Enquiry across key priority settings provides a universal approach to enquiring about a service users past or present experience of abuse. The SafeLives DASH RIC provides an evidence based standardised approach to assessing risk in relation to domestic abuse. We have endorsed this approach in Renfrewshire and have incorporated the development of skills in relation to this in our local training plan. Although the completion of the DASH RIC is advocated in assessing risk we ensure that staff feel empowered to use their own professional judgement and encourage referrals to MARAC on that basis. As well as developing the wider workforce, priority staff groups have been identified. The completion of the DASH RIC and referral to MARAC is now routinely delivered in combination with routine enquiry training in key settings in Renfrewshire.

4. In your view, who are the key partners that should be involved in multi-agency working to support victims of domestic abuse?

The Renfrewshire MARAC Operating Protocol (MOP) provides a strategic overview of information and guidance in relation to the role and administration of a MARAC. It is



clear that agencies must appoint a MARAC representative who will be the most appropriate senior member of the agency and have a coordinating and authorising role. A deputy must also be appointed to carry out the MARAC role in the event of absence of the main representative. Those attending MARAC must have the authority within their agencies to prioritise the actions that arise from the MARAC and be able to make an immediate commitment of resources to those actions.

To ensure an alignment with Safe Lives Best Practice it is vital that the following agencies who are committed to Renfrewshire MARAC are in attendance: Police, IDAA, Women's Aid, Children & Families social work, Criminal Justice social work, Adult support and protection, Housing, Substance misuse services, Mental Health, Education, Acute service, Health visiting, Adult Services Social Work, Public Protection, Barnardos and Women's Aid.

Primary Care must also be represented at MARAC. For many victims at high risk, GPs will be their only gateway into MARAC, or can help them get there much sooner.

5. In your view, what guidance is required to support and embed effective multi-agency working for victims of domestic abuse?

A local GBV strategy in which multi-agency working underpins the local priorities is required to ensure the commitment of key partner agencies. This strategy must be reflective of the direction laid out in the Scottish Government's Equally Safe Strategy and the subsequent Delivery Plan and Performance Framework and Quality Standards.

A robust MARAC Operating Protocol (MOP) must be available locally to outline the roles and responsibilities of partner agencies. This must provide clear information and guidance on: designated representatives, information sharing, the role of the MARAC, the role of IDAA's within MARAC as well as performance management and the Governance that will be provided. This allows consistent standards to be incorporated into Service Improvement/Delivery Plans across partner agencies.

### **Information Sharing**

6. What protocols need to be put in place to ensure effective information sharing between agencies?

A robust MARAC Operating Protocol (MOP) must provide direction as to the

requirement to only share information with MARAC partners that is proportionate, relevant and necessary in relation to the safeguarding of women and children. It must ensure that only information relating to immediate risk is shared and discussed. This must align with information sharing protocol within individual services. Directors/Chief Officers of partner agencies are required to sign up to this.

Primary Care should be supported and encouraged to share information in line with the Caldicott Principles namely “The duty to share information can be as important as the duty to protect patient confidentiality”.

### **Effective underpinning through statute**

7. Do you think that multi-agency arrangements for protecting victims of domestic abuse should be placed on a statutory footing?

There should be a statutory duty for each local authority to make their own arrangements to ensure they have a local MARAC. In order to prevent significant harm and save the lives of high risk victims it is vital that a multi-agency response is provided to enable a wrap around response to safeguarding. Despite this there continues to be an inconsistent approach across Scotland to the duty of care provided to victims and children affected by domestic abuse. A statutory footing should ensure this is aligned.