



Councillor Maureen Chalmers
Community Wellbeing Spokesperson

19 November 2025

Collette Stevenson MSP
Convenor of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

By email: SJSS.committee@Parliament.Scot

Dear Collette Stevenson MSP,

COSLA welcomes the work of the Committee in its ongoing Inquiry into Financial Considerations When Leaving an Abusive Relationship. As outlined in the [COSLA Manifesto](#), an end to violence against women and girls (VAWG) and expanded access to high quality and accessible specialist services across Scotland for those who have experienced gender-based violence is a key priority for Local Government.

Local authorities are inextricably linked to the communities they serve and play a vital role in preventing VAWG, supporting victim/survivors, and holding perpetrators to account. As joint owners of the [Equally Safe Strategy](#) with the Scottish Government the work of Local Government continues to address gender-related barriers that impede the realisation of the human rights of women and girls in all their diversity, advance gender equality, and tackling all forms of violence against women and girls.

The Committee's report, published on 6 July 2025, contained a range of recommendations a number of which directly note the role of COSLA in ongoing work to end violence against women and girls. I have outlined below COSLA's response to the relevant recommendations in the report based on COSLA's existing positions:

Recommendation 44 and 80

COSLA remains firmly committed to preventing and addressing all forms of VAWG, including domestic abuse, coercive control, and financial abuse. We continue to work closely with partners across UK, Scottish, and Local Government to strengthen prevention efforts and improve support for victim-survivors. This forum must recognise the vital, everyday work carried out by local authorities to tackle VAWG.

Local government is operating under increasingly difficult financial conditions. Over the past decade, councils have faced:

- Real-terms reductions in core budgets
- Rising demand for services
- Inflationary pressures
- Workforce recruitment challenges

- The lasting effects of the cost-of-living crisis and COVID-19

Both the [*Independent Strategic Review of Funding and Commissioning of VAWG Services*](#) and the [*COSLA Landscape Report*](#) highlight the significant, often hidden, costs borne by local authorities in responding to VAWG. These harms are complex and resource-intensive, intersecting with multiple services, including:

- Child and adult protection
- Mental health
- Housing and homelessness
- Alcohol and drug services
- Community justice

These overlapping needs create compounded costs that are not reflected in traditional budgeting. The funding deficit and hidden financial burdens are clearly outlined in the findings of the Independent Review. Any recommendations or actions emerging from this forum must be backed by adequate and sustainable resources.

The success of *Equally Safe* - Scotland's strategy to eradicate VAWG through a whole-system public health approach - depends on the Scottish Government's implementation of the recommendations from the Independent Funding Review, where aligned with the principles of the Verity House Agreement.

This includes ensuring that local authorities, through their Violence Against Women Strategic Partnerships, are adequately funded and resourced to:

- Commission specialist VAWG services informed by local need, including those tackling financial abuse
- Support and develop mainstream workforces to deliver gendered, trauma-informed services
- Ensure appropriate signposting to specialist VAWG services wherever a victim-survivor seeks help

COSLA has consistently called for:

- A new funding model for specialist VAWG services that reflects the strategic importance of *Equally Safe*
- Direct investment in local government to support flexible, embedded, and locally responsive systems
- Recognition of real cost pressures, including the need for long-term, trauma-informed support for victim-survivors

Therefore, proposed additional responsibilities for the local authority workforce must be considered within the broader context of the Scottish Government's response to the recommendations from the Independent Review of Funding and Commissioning of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) services.

One current area of linked work is the development and testing of a local area VAWG Needs Assessment Framework. Subject to continued Scottish Government funding, this framework may provide Violence Against Women Partnerships with an opportunity to

assess the availability of financial guidance and support across local authority areas. It could also help explore the feasibility of the Committee's recommendation for a single point of contact—should additional resources be made available.

It is essential that any proposals for a single point of contact do not duplicate existing efforts by local authorities and partner organisations. These proposals must also take into account the significant pressures already facing the local government workforce.

Recommendation 84

COSLA believes all victims and survivors must be able to access support regardless of where they live. Our position on improving the Scottish Government's limited funding for local VAWG services is detailed in the *COSLA Landscape Report*. Empowering local authorities and their strategic community planning partners is key to achieving better outcomes.

One example of existing support is the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF), which plays a crucial role in assisting those experiencing financial abuse. However, accessibility concerns remain, and SWF budgets remain under unprecedented pressure. [Scottish Government statistics from July 2025](#) noted that local authorities overspent their budget in 2024/25 across Scotland, with local authorities topping up the SWF from increasingly under pressure core budgets. Since 2021/22, Scottish Government funding has remained unchanged at £35.5 million, with one-off additional funding of £17.5 million provided in 2024/25. This has come at a time of rising demand and increased costs for local authorities. As such, it is vital that one-off funding increases are replicated long-term, to allow local authorities to provide greater and more sustainable support. The SWF is just one of many services delivered by Local Government that supports victims and survivors. All future work to enhance support must consider this broader context and be matched with the necessary resources.

Recommendation 192

COSLA thanks the Committee for raising this issue. COSLA's understanding is that local authorities do not ask for rent deposits, though this may be the case with registered social landlords. COSLA is open for any further information to be provided on where this may be the case.

Recommendations 260 and 263

COSLA welcomes the Committee's recognition of local authority good practice when it comes to debt collection. COSLA is open to conducting further work with our local authorities and professional associations, and in conjunction with the Scottish Government, to assess how the needs of victims and survivors are currently accounted for and where areas for improvement may be.

Recommendation 261

COSLA is open to exploring the development of a Code of Conduct through joint work with the Scottish Government and our local authorities. COSLA is aware that considerable best practice already exists across local authorities on debt collection. COSLA is also keen to ensure that any potential future code of conduct maintains the existence of local flexibility, learns from best practice already in place across local authorities, and takes account of the needs of our local authorities to effectively recover debt where necessary while

meeting COSLA's existing commitments through the Equally Safe Strategy (as outlined above).

Recommendation 269

COSLA understands that on rent arrears and temporary accommodation the duty to provide temporary accommodation is unqualified and any rent arrears from a previous tenancy would not be taken into account. As a result, there are no situations where a former tenant's rent arrears would be a barrier to them taking up temporary accommodation. Additionally, it would not be taken into account in the allocation of a council home under homeless legislation, albeit a social landlord can suspend a mainstream application if there are arrears above a specified amount and no arrangement is in place to pay them down.

Recommendations 396 and 397

COSLA is supportive of early intervention for housing services to respond to the needs of victims/survivors of domestic abuse and is open to exploring further work with the Scottish Government on best practice. COSLA also notes that the "burden of proof" is a historic matter and the established local authority practice is that our member councils, as landlords, take domestic abuse extremely seriously and believe women when reporting abuse.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Maureen Chalmers
Community Wellbeing Spokesperson