

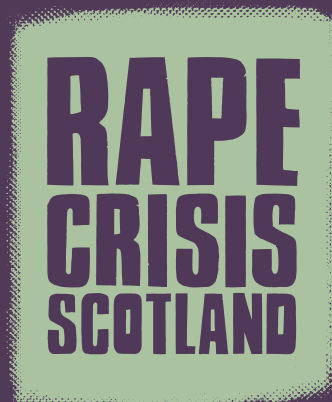


# RESPONSE

**Independent Strategic Review  
of Funding and Commissioning  
of VAWG Services in Scotland**

**Response from Rape Crisis  
Scotland and 16 member Rape  
Crisis Centres**

**October 2023**



# Independent Strategic Review of Funding and Commissioning of VAWG Services in Scotland

## Response from Rape Crisis Scotland and 16 member Rape Crisis Centres October 2023

When we talk about services focused on violence against women and girls, we must remember that we're talking about truly lifesaving services. The new [Independent Strategic Review of Funding and Commissioning of VAWG Services in Scotland](#) makes some important recommendations for how these services are funded and delivered, many of which we welcome.

This review states that there should be a legal right in Scotland to these services, and that such a legal right being in place would mean that services would no longer rely on short term funding routes. This would be a hugely welcome, and urgently needed, change. Our sector's forced reliance on such short term, competitive funding routes has a damaging impact on service delivery. Short term funding means that highly trained specialist staff are left on precarious contracts, and we are unable to guarantee the long-term provision of life saving sexual violence support services. This will only work, however, if sufficient funding is put in place to support it.

We welcome the recognition of the [Rape Crisis National Service Standards](#) as a marker for ensuring consistency and high-quality services for survivors of sexual violence and are supportive of this being the basis for any future funding models.

We also welcome the recognition that urgent action requires to be taken in relation to waiting lists: current Scottish Government emergency funding to tackle waiting list ends in March 2024. If this funding isn't continued, Rape Crisis services across Scotland will be decimated, with 28 specialist Rape Crisis workers losing their jobs.

We do, however, have a number of significant concerns about the impact of the review's recommendations on services for survivors of sexual violence in Scotland. We have outlined our concerns below:

### **1. The introduction of commissioning for Rape Crisis Centres**

The proposed new model of funding would introduce commissioning for the first time for Rape Crisis Centres. There is no evidence set out in the report as to why introducing commissioning is necessary or would improve survivors' ability to access support. The review recommends a diversity of providers of support services for rape but doesn't set out why this is being recommended for Rape Crisis services but not for refuge provision, or how this will be funded. Currently, no Rape Crisis Centre is funded to a level that enables demand to be met. Most centres are forced to operate, often lengthy, waiting lists. The level of funding that would be required to not only fund existing services to meet demand, but to also fund additional services for survivors of sexual violence which might be commissioned under the new model would be astronomical. It is vital that each local area acknowledges

and understands these costs in order to recognise the level of funding through commissioning that would be required to sustain essential Rape Crisis services across Scotland.

Across Scotland there is significant variance in the ways VAWG partnerships operate, sustain relationships with third sector services, and determine priorities; there is considerable variance in the visibility of sexual violence within the work of partnerships across Scotland. We have concerns about their ability to achieve standard service provision that ensures 'postcode lottery' provision is avoided.

We welcome the acknowledgement of a need for an intersectional gendered analysis for the funding of services for survivors of sexual violence and the development of 'by and for' services for communities with protected characteristics where this is grounded in the voices of these communities, for example services for survivors of colour. However, we are concerned about how this approach will be actualised within a localised commissioning model, particularly within rural areas. It is crucial that the development of any new commissioning model considers the complexities of intersectionalities, is routed in the voices of survivors, and doesn't unintentionally reinforce 'otherness' within local services.

## **2. A move away from national funding for Rape Crisis Centres**

While significant gaps in capacity exist, national funding has transformed Rape Crisis services in Scotland. Prior to the introduction of national funding, there were only 7 Rape Crisis Centres in Scotland, leaving huge geographical gaps in provision. The services that did exist were uniformly poorly funded by local authorities - the Rape Crisis Centre in Aberdeen received a total of £5,000 per annum from the local authority. National funding has not only improved the levels of funding for survivors of rape and sexual violence but has allowed a national approach to identifying gaps in provision across Scotland.

We have grave concerns that under pressure, local authorities will struggle to prioritise funding for Rape Crisis Centres. The report envisions a key role for multi-agency VAWG partnerships, however many of these partnerships originated as domestic abuse partnerships and many continue to focus primarily on domestic abuse. Rape Crisis Centres can struggle to ensure that sexual violence is fully on the agenda within the work of partnerships, and we have significant concerns about what this means for services for survivors of sexual violence under a new localised funding model.

The only way we can see a move to localised funding working is if funding for Rape Crisis Centres is ring fenced within a broader VAWG services budget.

Consideration also needs to be given to appropriate funding needs assessment for rural areas, particularly given the challenges of low reporting rates, limited services and local data, and geographical spread. Population alone is an inadequate measure to determine funding need – funding provisions must account for the high mileage/travel costs to deliver

services in rural communities. Funding only part-time posts cause particularly difficulties for smaller, more remote rape crisis centres.

### **3. Implications for nationally funded projects such as the National Advocacy Project and National Prevention Programme**

Rape Crisis Scotland co-ordinates two externally evaluated national projects: the National Advocacy Project (NAP) and the National Prevention Programme.

The National Advocacy Project (NAP) aims to improve the support available to survivors of rape and serious sexual crime; improve their experience of the criminal justice process and the development of a better understanding of survivors' decision to proceed or not in their engagement with the criminal justice process. The NAP provides advocacy support to anyone considering reporting or going through the criminal justice process following rape or sexual abuse. In 2022/23 the project supported just over 3,764 survivors across Scotland. Support is provided throughout the justice process and beyond, from talking through whether to report to the police, to support at and post court (where the case gets this far). The project was [externally evaluated by the Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research](#), who found that it provided a 'life-changing' service. Comments from survivors include:

***“Having that reassurance and someone to speak to when you’ve had your voice kicked out of you how many times, the difference it can make to you is phenomenal.”***

***“...just being informed I think is really, really important at every stage. It just allows you to feel a bit more in control, I guess, because everything’s been out of control for so long.”***

***“I don’t think anybody can get through a court case without these [Advocacy Workers], you know, if it’s that type of court case...”***

National co-ordination supports the delivery of best practice, trauma informed and specialist responses, tailored to individual survivor needs. Learning from the NAP directly informs RCS justice sector training and policy positions, ensuring both are centred around survivors' lived experience. The Victims, Witnesses and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill, presents a unique opportunity to impact on the justice process and it is essential that learning from the NAP continues to shape these reforms and influence practice.

Through our National Prevention Programme, which last year worked with 35,058 young people in over 200 secondary schools, schools can access a programme of workshops on consent and healthy sexual relationships. Rape Crisis Scotland provides national coordination to ensure a consistent approach and support best practice across the country, and specialist prevention workers at Rape Crisis Centres deliver the programme in partnership with their local schools and partnerships to meet the needs of their local context. Rape Crisis Scotland also ensures effective linkages and coordination with national partners such as the Education Scotland Mentors in Violence Prevention team and the Scottish Government Learning Directorate to advance sector-wide progress in addressing VAWG in line with Equally Safe. The Equally Safe at School (ESAS) intervention builds on the Prevention Programme, offering schools a suite of tools and resources to enable them to

implement a whole school approach to tackling gender-based violence. As part of ESAS, schools can access staff training delivered by their local Rape Crisis Centre to complement the prevention programme delivery.

There are significant benefits to the approach in Scotland of prevention and advocacy support being co-ordinated nationally, unlike in the rest of the UK. It ensures a consistent approach across the country, while still allowing for local centres to adapt how they deliver the service or programme to suit their local area. It facilitates a model of praxis – where issues on the ground are directly fed into national policy and strategy and these are in turn fed into local provision. It enables the implementation of national feedback processes, for example the RCS/COPFS feedback protocol, where sexual offence survivors being supported by local advocacy workers complete a national survey on their experience of the justice process, with monthly reports being submitted by RCS to COPFS detailing this feedback. This feedback is then used to inform practice within COPFS. The Gillen Review in Northern Ireland recommended a similar approach is adopted in relation to the provision of justice advocacy services as we have in Scotland.

The review is critical of nationally funded projects without any reference to the positive external evaluations of both projects. There is no basis given for this criticism and no discussion on any concerns took place with Rape Crisis Scotland or its member centres prior to the publication of the review. It would be a deeply regressive move if these successful projects are dismantled or have their effectiveness reduced as a result of the funding review.

#### **4. A move to a single VAWG helpline**

Currently there are two national helplines in Scotland – the Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline, run by Scottish Women’s Aid, and the National Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline, run by Rape Crisis Scotland. The Domestic Abuse & Forced Marriage helpline operates 24/7, whereas the National Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline operates daily from 5pm – midnight.

The funding review recommends the review of both national helplines and the development of a single helpline.

We welcome a move to expand the provision of the National Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline so survivors of rape and sexual violence in Scotland have parity of support with survivors of domestic violence.

However, the review does not set out evidence for why it is recommending a single helpline. Whilst the review references the Istanbul Convention requirement of the provision of 24/7 telephone helpline to support survivors, the Convention does not specify that this is best provided by a single helpline.

We believe that moving away from a specialised helpline would be a deeply regressive move for survivors of sexual violence in Scotland and may lead to fewer survivors feeling able to access appropriate support. Sexual violence requires a specialised response which we believe would be lost through the provision of a more generic service. Feedback gathered

from survivors tells us that, for many, contacting the National Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline has been a vital part of their healing journey from sexual violence. It is our experience that due to the high levels of stigma around sexual violence, many survivors only feel safe to disclose their experiences within a specialist service and we have concerns that amalgamating the two national helplines into a more generic VAGW helpline would further silence survivors of rape and sexual violence.

In addition, as part of the network of Rape Crisis Centres across Scotland, the National Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline is uniquely positioned to offer survivors access to short-term and crisis support through the helpline service, while also supporting access to longer term advocacy and emotional support through their local Rape Crisis Centre. There are currently 17 Rape Crisis Centres across Scotland, providing support to survivors across all but one local authority areas in the country. Through the National Helpline, survivors are not only accessing immediate support, but they can also be referred to specialist, high quality support in their local area. We are concerned that the creation of a generic single helpline would lose these strong referral pathways and again disadvantage survivors of sexual violence.

Furthermore, the National Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline currently provides support to anyone over the age of 13 affected by sexual violence. This includes women, men and non-binary survivors, as well as family, friends and workers of all genders who are supporting survivors. The review is entirely silent about where these survivors will go if the existing National Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline is replaced by one single VAWG helpline. We believe that supporting survivors of all genders is a vital part of a gendered analysis of sexual violence.

Rape Crisis Scotland is committed to working collaboratively with Scottish Women's Aid and specialist organisations across Scotland to address any gaps in services which exist for survivors. For example, [we recently commissioned Talat Yaqoob to carry out research with survivors of colour to inform how rape crisis services can better meet their needs.](#)

The feedback from survivors who have used the national rape crisis helpline is that it is a lifesaving service.

**“I had never told anyone about my experience of childhood sexual abuse before, and the [Support Worker] I spoke to quite literally could not have made me feel more comfortable. It was hard to open up of course, but had I not been made to feel so heard and valued from the moment she picked up the phone, it would have been a million times harder. Thank you so much - this one phone call felt like I opened a door to be able to talk about my experience for the first time and under the circumstances it could not have been a better experience.”**

**“I can't thank her enough... she stayed on the phone with me for almost an hour trying to ground me and stop the flashback. She really was amazing and patient. She done breathing with me, asked me to find things around me and describe them to her and stayed in the phone until she knew I was okay.”**

**“I was hesitant to phone but... I felt I needed to reach out. I didn’t have much to say as I’m exhausted but just talking to someone about the experience helped as I never really talk about it at all. The woman I spoke with was so down to earth and it felt more like a conversation with a friend than a service which helped massively. Thankyou.”**

**"It is fundamental that there is recognition of the need for specialised sexual violence helplines. Without them, many people (myself included) wouldn't have known where felt appropriate to turn."**

## **5. Potential unintended consequences of the move to make VAWG services a statutory right**

A statutory duty will only work if sufficient funding is put in place to fully cover costs as otherwise it could impede Rape Crisis Centres from being able to secure additional funding elsewhere. A number of key charitable funders specifically exclude applications from organisations where there is a statutory obligation to provide the service, and we have some concerns about unintended consequences should this duty be implemented without sufficient funding being made available. One rape crisis centre has indicated that if there was a statutory duty to provide rape crisis services they would be ineligible for the charitable funding that currently makes up 30% of their income. This means that unless there is a considerable increase in the funding available under the proposed commissioning model, the availability of rape crisis services for survivors would be significantly reduced.

## **6. Impact of resourcing the infrastructure required to implement the recommendations of the strategic funding review**

Significant resource will require to be allocated to local MAPs to enable them to develop the infrastructure to implement the funding review recommendations. At a time of very restricted available public funds, we are concerned that money that could be spent on direct service provision to frontline services will instead be diverted to infrastructure projects.

### **Summary**

Although there are significant capacity issues within Rape Crisis services across Scotland, today many, many more survivors of sexual violence have access to the lifesaving support that Rape Crisis provides, thanks in large part to protected national funding. We have grave concerns about the potential for a move to localised funding under a commissioning model to worsen the situation for sexual violence survivors in Scotland. The only way to protect Rape Crisis services is by ring fencing funding specifically for these services.

### **Recommendations:**

- **Ring fence funding for Rape Crisis Centres and don’t impose a commissioning model upon them;**
- **Continue to fund national projects such as the National Advocacy Project and the Prevention Programme, while allowing for additional resources to be allocated locally where needed or appropriate;**

- Continue to fund the Rape Crisis Scotland National Helpline for anyone affected by sexual violence, and enhance the funding to enable an expansion of opening hours;
- Extend emergency waiting list funding beyond March 2024 and save 28 specialist Rape Crisis posts across Scotland;
- Urgently clarify the position in relation to introducing a statutory duty to provide services and the ability of these services to apply for charitable funding

**Signatories:**

1. Argyll & Bute Rape Crisis Centre
2. Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre
3. Lanarkshire Rape Crisis Centre
4. Fife Rape & Sexual Assault Centre
5. Forth Valley Rape Crisis Centre
6. Moray Rape Crisis Centre
7. Orkney Rape & Sexual Assault Service
8. Rape Crisis Dumfries & Galloway
9. Rape Crisis Scotland
10. Rape Crisis Grampian
11. Rape & Sexual Abuse Service Highland
12. Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre, Perth & Kinross
13. Scottish Borders Rape Crisis Centre
14. The Compass Centre, Shetland
15. The Star Centre, Ayrshire
16. Western Isles Rape Crisis Centre
17. Women's Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre, Dundee & Angus