

Police Scotland Independent Review Group (IRG)

Deep dive into Sex Equality and Tackling Misogyny and Violence Against Women and Girls

Foreword: a reflection on the process of compiling this report

1. The knowledge and expertise that informs this report comes from our years of experience supporting victims of VAWG crimes, as well as supporting the prosecution of VAWG crimes; creating VAWG policies; delivering training on equality; acting as community advisors to Police Scotland; campaigning and raising awareness of domestic abuse, sexual violence, child protection, commercial sexual exploitation and honour-based abuse in the community.
2. However, it is also important to note that we brought our personal experience into this report: both researchers are from Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, as well as from different religions and beliefs; we have first-hand experience of working in male-dominated environments, working through resistance to bring about sex and gender equality to our workplaces, our communities and society; and being in our middle years, we have also experienced migration, parenthood, sexism, sexual misconduct, misogyny, racism and other forms of discrimination.
3. We have made concerted efforts to make this report as inclusive as possible, striking a balance between highlighting the challenges and struggles women reported to us in the course of our research with tangible recommendations that can bring about measurable change.
4. VAWG, sexism and misogyny are areas of work that are currently in flux throughout Scotland, with a newly refreshed [Equally Safe strategy](#) released on 7 December 2023, and with activity currently undertaken to reform [criminal law to address misogyny](#), we acknowledge that this report will be a product of the point in time at which it was written (May 2024), and therefore not entirely complete
5. There have been further developments in Police Scotland which we have not been able to include in this report, including an analysis of Operation FUSTIC: Review by the Police Service of Northern Ireland. This was a conscious decision to enable us to adhere to reasonable timelines for submission for this report; simultaneously, recognising the volume of work that would be required to do justice to the Operation FUSTIC report, as well as owing to delays in obtaining the report, we feel that an analysis of Operation FUSTIC is better to have its own report.
6. Our intention is to be a 'critical friend' to Police Scotland in their efforts to address, prevent and eradicate sex inequality, misogyny, and violence against women and girls (VAWG). We hope this report serves as a first step towards achieving this goal.

Introduction:

7. Following a request for support by DCC Graham, as well as a request to assist in the development of Police Scotland's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy and the

Sex Equality and Tackling Misogyny workstream, this part of the report reflects a 'deep dive' into sexism, misogyny and VAWG within Police Scotland.

8. The murder of Sarah Everard by Wayne Couzens, a Metropolitan Police Officer, as well as the successful case raised by Rhona Malone against Police Scotland understandably shook public confidence in the Police throughout the country.
9. Further, additional investigations highlighted concerns in [Police culture and conduct in the Metropolitan Police Service](#), and made recommendations for improvement on [Complaints Handling, Investigations and Misconduct Issues in Relation to Policing](#).
10. At the same time, Police Scotland was also undertaking two important pieces of work: The creation of a Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, as well as a strategy and action plan on Sex Equality and Tackling Misogyny within the service.
11. In a historic statement on 25 May 2023, former Chief Constable Sir Iain Livingstone QPM "The right thing to do as chief constable is to clearly state that institutional racism, sexism, misogyny and discrimination exist. Police Scotland is institutionally racist and discriminatory. Publicly acknowledging these institutional issues exist is essential to our absolute commitment to championing equality and becoming an anti-racist service."
12. This statement, in the midst of considerable work to address sex inequality, misogyny and VAWG served to further consolidate the need for this work to take place. It further gave us, as IRG members, more solid ground on which to base this 'deep dive' on sex equality, misogyny and VAWG.
13. Our approach may seem like an 'inspection report' but our objective extends beyond understanding and analysing issues of sexism, misogyny, and VAWG. We strive to provide tangible and achievable recommendations that can foster change in the short, medium and long term.
14. However, our aim is not only to understand and analyse issues of sexism, misogyny and VAWG, but to also provide recommendations that are tangible and achievable, and likely to lead to change in the short, medium and long term.
15. This support stems from a firm belief in Police Scotland's ethos and values and in the genuine efforts of many within the service to deliver to the best of their ability for the people of Scotland.

Definitions

16. We feel it is important, before outlining our methodology, findings and recommendations, to apply some definitions and provide further explanation as to how we have approached sexism, misogyny and VAWG throughout this report:
 - a. The term 'sexism' implies discrimination on the basis of someone's sex.

- b. The term 'misogyny' has long been interpreted literally as 'a hatred of women'. However, for the purposes of the report, we have chosen to adopt a more modern and up-to-date definition of misogyny, as provided by the then Dame Helena Kennedy KC in her report on the Working Group on Misogyny and Criminal Justice: *"Misogyny is a way of thinking that upholds the primary status of men and a sense of male entitlement, while subordinating women and limiting their power and freedom. Conduct based on this thinking can include a range of abusive and controlling behaviours including rape, sexual offences, harassment and bullying, and domestic abuse."* This is not a legal definition, and explains that misogynist attitudes and behaviours do not aim to exclude women, but rather to only be inclusive of women on patriarchal terms.
 - c. The term VAWG describes any abuse or violence directed at women and girls because they are women and girls, and is predominantly carried out by men. It is an abuse of power, and both a cause and consequence of systemic and deep-rooted gender inequality in society. VAWG is both a cause and consequence of gender inequality: when victims of VAWG are demeaned, their accounts challenged and not taken seriously, this serves to perpetuate inequality, thus enabling more acts of VAWG to continue to be perpetrated.
17. The reason these definitions are important is because they are relevant to Police Scotland's work on sexism and tackling misogyny and VAWG. We understand that the Sex Equality and Tackling Misogyny (SETM) workstream is internally focused and promoting equality between the men and women employed within Police Scotland. The VAWG strategy is outward facing and applies universally to how Police Scotland intends to respond to VAWG crimes wherever they occur.
18. Although the SETM and the VAWG strategy were developed independently, the two are interconnected: the existence of sexism and misogyny within Police Scotland will inadvertently enable VAWG. And the existence of VAWG in Scotland and all the organisations and institutions that operate within it, stems from sexism and misogyny.
19. We have therefore chosen to refer to SETM work based on the assumption that this work is internal to Police Scotland, but also refer to the work on VAWG as applying both internally to Police Scotland as well as externally to the communities that Police Scotland serves. Our reasoning behind this decision is twofold:
- a. Given the interconnectedness between sexism, misogyny and VAWG, our experience tells us that it is impossible for one to exist without the other.
 - b. Based on our research and communication with officers and staff within Police Scotland, we were offered accounts of both sexist and misogynist behaviour, as well as accounts of VAWG.
20. This report further aims not to assess the Sex Equality and Tackling Misogyny and VAWG workstreams in isolation, but rather a broad overview of Police Scotland's culture in terms of

women's roles within the service, their experiences and what can be done to improve them. Consequently, we have chosen Police Scotland's culture and attitudes towards sex equality and VAWG as our starting point, with the two workstreams as potential vehicles for change.

Methodology

21. In order to carry out a 'deep dive' into sex equality, misogyny and violence against women in Police Scotland, we read a considerable number of documents internal to Police Scotland and spoke to a number of Police Officers and staff at the service to gather their views and to understand their work in this area.
22. Key documents that informed our understanding of Police Scotland's views and understanding of these issues included:
 - a. HMIS Thematic Inspection of Police Scotland Training and Development – Phase 1 (September 2020)
 - b. HMIS Thematic Inspection of Police Scotland Training and Development – Phase 2 (March 2021)
 - c. Police Scotland: 'Your Voice Matters Survey 2021' – Summary of Evidence and Insights
 - d. Police Scotland Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2023
 - e. SPA papers on Sex Equality and Tackling Misogyny (31 May 2023)
 - f. Police Scotland Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022-2026
 - g. Police Scotland: People Strategy – Empower, enable and develop our people (2018-2021)
 - h. An independent review into the standards of behaviour and internal culture of the Metropolitan Police Service. Baroness Casey of Blackstock DBE, CB (March 2023)
 - i. Improving the Management of Sexual Offence Cases: Final report from the Lord Justice Clerk's Review Group. Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service, March 2021
 - j. Independent Review of Complaints Handling, Investigations and Misconduct Issues in Relation to Policing. Final report: November 2020, the then Rt. Hon. Dame Elish Angiolini DBE QC, now Lady Elish Angiolini
 - k. HMIS Thematic Inspection of Police Scotland Training and Development – Phase 2 (October 2021)
23. We further read a number of internal documents as follows:
 - a. Message from Deputy Chief Constable Fiona Taylor QPM – Baroness Casey Review of the Met
 - b. Findings of Police Scotland's Sex Equality and Tackling Misogyny survey revealed
 - c. Exit interview survey
 - d. Institutional Discrimination Police Scotland Colleague Feedback
 - e. Understanding Sexism and Misogyny: Interim Findings. Strategy, Insight and Engagement, November 2022
 - f. Values Campaign, Phase one: Extended Leaders Toolkit
 - g. Competency and Values Framework (CVF) for Police Scotland (SPA)
 - h. Police Scotland Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan
 - i. Sexism and Tackling Misogyny Delivery Group Action Plan

24. We also communicated directly with officers and staff employed within Police Scotland, including:
- a. DCC Malcolm Graham, who was leading the work on Police Scotland's VAWG strategy
 - b. ACC Emma Bond MBE who is leading the work on Sex Equality and Tackling Misogyny
 - c. The Scottish Women's Development Forum
 - d. Informal anonymous interviews with women employed within Police Scotland. Five of those were Police Officers and 2 worked in corporate services. Of the 5 police officers interviewed, 2 worked in remote areas, 3 had worked in specialist crime units, and their ages ranged from late 20s to late 60s.
 - e. Formal and informal meetings with Police officers and staff as part of the IRG work plan
 - f. Attending EDI Training for Probationers at Police Scotland College Tulliallan
 - g. Attendance at the National Violence Against Women Network, also attended by the Scottish Government, Police Scotland, COSLA, the Improvement Service and VAWG Partnership Lead Officers from local authorities across Scotland
25. Lastly, both IRG members involved in this 'deep dive' are employed in roles that bring us into regular contact with different divisions within Police Scotland, some of which deal primarily with VAWG crimes.
26. The findings and recommendations in this report are an amalgam of professional experience, observation, research and study into Police Scotland's culture and strategy to combat sexism, misogyny and VAWG.

Findings

27. Following considerable reading and discussions with Police Officers and staff we believe that there is evidence of sexism, misogyny and VAW within Police Scotland, both at the institutional and individual level.
28. Although many of those who participated in informal interviews stated that they have seen progress in Police Scotland's culture and attitudes towards women over the years, unfortunately sexist and misogynist attitudes can still be felt, both explicitly and implicitly.
29. Although a number of these issues were raised to the SPA board at its meeting on 31 May 2023, we feel it is important to reiterate and summarise some of them in this report. This is not to belabour the point, but rather to do justice to the women in Police Scotland who took the time to meet with us to discuss these issues, and to highlight that these issues are still present, almost a year after the latest SPA board at which a progress report was presented.
30. The impact that these attitudes and behaviours have had, and continue to have, on the women we spoke to was evident through the level of emotion and distress expressed during our meetings. It was for this reason that the IRG members guaranteed participants' confidentiality and asked for openness, honesty and candidness.
31. We wish to make it abundantly clear that stating these findings is not a criticism or judgment on individuals, or on the senior officers leading the work on SETM and VAWG.

32. It is important to share the findings from our research to highlight the pervasiveness of sexism and misogyny within Police Scotland and society at large, and to call on further action to continue to be taken to eradicate these attitudes and behaviours from the service.

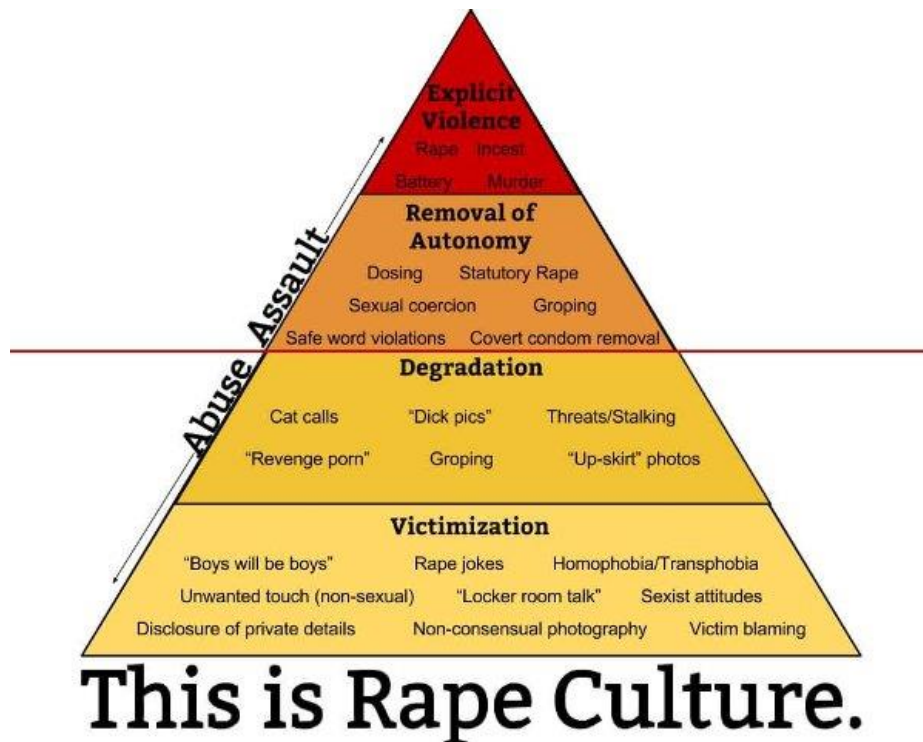
Institutional sexism and misogyny

33. Both the former and current Chief Constables of Police Scotland have acknowledged institutional sexism and misogyny. Addressing these issues at the institutional level is an accessible first step towards dismantling the patriarchal structures within the service. Institutional sexism and misogyny refer to the enabling history and context within which Police Scotland operates, built on patriarchal values that disadvantage women.
34. Many officers lack understanding of misogyny beyond its literal definition, leading to confusion between institutional and individual sexism. Efforts to explain this difference were often met with denial and defensiveness. Some women were unaware of sexism and misogyny in the service, instead describing examples of institutional disadvantage as 'women self-sabotaging,' which is actually internalized misogyny.
35. Accounts of internalized misogyny were frequent, with women facing hostility from other women, especially older or more senior female officers. Complaints about unfair treatment, intimidation, and bullying were common, with little support from senior management.
36. Women reported being asked to perform stereotypically gendered tasks and facing stigmatisation for ambition or part-time work. Complaints processes were seen as ineffective, and senior women role models were often invisible, particularly affecting women from minority ethnic backgrounds and older women.
37. A culture that does not serve women who are labelled as 'troublemakers' for raising concerns, diminishing their opportunities for promotion; unfair treatment, intimidation and bullying of those who raised a complaint, with little to no support from senior management or corporate services.
38. On the other hand, women who are ambitious, who work really hard to advance their careers within the service and who have chosen not to marry and have children are also stigmatised as 'ruthless careerists' – in a way that ambitious and career-driven men are not.

Elements of a 'toxic', 'boys' club' culture

40. Women described a 'toxic' culture resembling a 'boys' club,' with inappropriate jokes and comments, predatory behaviour by senior male officers, and an implicit understanding that women who complain face retaliation and hindered promotion prospects.
41. Across divisions, inappropriate 'jokes' and comments proliferate, often by male officers more senior to younger female officers on whom they were commenting. Victim-blaming language and collusion with perpetrators of sexist/misogynist acts often led women to reconsider clothing, makeup and hairstyle choices to avoid 'provoking' such comments and discouraged from raising concerns about male colleagues' behaviour.

42. Senior male officers often failed to address complaints of sexism or misogyny, and some were reported to collude with perpetrators. Inappropriate relationships between senior male officers and younger female officers were described as predatory.
43. Promotions to inappropriate positions, such as leading VAWG investigations by officers with complaints against them, were common. Female officers making formal complaints often faced retaliatory complaints against them, consuming time and resources
44. Junior male officers frequently disregarded instructions from senior female officers, seeking confirmation from senior males instead. While Police Scotland leads public protection processes for safeguarding women, similar initiatives are lacking internally to protect female employees.
45. Police Scotland further leads on a number of public protection processes to safeguard women and girls in Scotland's communities; however, we have encountered a lack of initiative to use the same processes internally to safeguard women employed within the service. For example, Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination meetings are used to disrupt perpetrators of VAWG in the community through ongoing monitoring, updating and information-sharing between agencies and partners. However, we repeatedly heard that perpetrators of VAW within Police Scotland are not treated as potential risks to the organisation, even following repeated complaints and concerns being raised by their colleagues, or reports to the PSD and the SPF. We have been informed that it is standard practice for the PSD to be alerted when an officer or staff member within Police Scotland has been complained against by a member of the public, and appropriate action is taken to protect both the Police Scotland employee as well as the member of the public. However, this contradicts information we heard about officers who had amassed a number of complaints and who were 'informally' known as both harbouring views and behaving in ways that were sexist and misogynistic, and who continued to work and receive promotions regardless of those complaints.
46. The reason why we find this extremely alarming is because VAW is not an isolated incident or incidents: it exists within a continuum. This was first described by Louise Kelly in 1988: VAWG includes a range of behaviours that vary in severity. There are some that are more innocuous behaviours like catcalling and sexual 'jokes', 'banter' or comments. However, excusing these behaviours gives license to more serious abuse such as groping, stalking, harassment, culminating in sexual coercion, sexual assault, rape and murder. The graphic below from '[11th principle: Consent!](#)' illustrates how 'Rape Culture', that is a culture where violence against women is trivialised and normalised includes a range of behaviours, some of which we have been informed are present within Police Scotland.



These are not isolated incidents. The attitudes and actions on the bottom tiers reinforce and excuse those on the upper. This is systematic.

**If this is to change, the culture must change.
Start the conversation today.**



47. The pyramid of rape culture demonstrates why even the 'lowest level' sexist or misogynist behaviour cannot be tolerated, as it creates fertile ground for VAW to thrive and for abusive behaviour to escalate. Sexist 'banter', 'jokes' or comments are never acceptable; and any behaviours within the pyramid requires a swift and effective response.

VAWG inside and outside Police Scotland

48. When we asked women about how they felt that the misogyny and sexism they had witnessed or experienced within Police Scotland affected how the service responded to the needs of the community they served, we received an interesting mix of responses.
49. Many women responded that police officers treat the public considerably better than they treat each other. This is owed to the perceived 'culture of impunity' within the organisation – when officers feel that there is no point complaining against each other, they treat each other much worse than they treat the public.
50. Others explicitly linked Police Scotland's internal culture with how crimes are responded to in the community. Some went as far as to state that some units and divisions actively stalled investigations of gendered crime or did not act in accordance to what was expected because of the pervasiveness of sexist and misogynist attitudes they collectively held.

51. Worse still was the impact of Police Scotland's culture on female officers and staff directly affected by internal sexism and misogyny, whose experience was further aggravated by sexism and misogyny in the communities they served.

Comments on Police Scotland's VAWG strategy and the SETM Action Plan

52. In compiling this report, a thorough perusal and understanding of Police Scotland's VAWG strategy and SETM Action Plan were essential.
53. Both documents clearly set out Police Scotland's commitment and resolution to prevent and eradicate sexism, misogyny and VAWG – both within the service as well as in the communities Police Scotland serves.
54. We were impressed by the extensive links between the VAWG strategy and numerous national and international strategies and commitments to promote gender equality and eradicate discrimination, abuse and violence against women. The document further clearly sets out the extensive consultation process with survivors of VAWG and specialist organisations and services who offered direct input in the development of the strategy.
55. The links between the VAWG strategy and the SETM action plan are also clear, with the success indicators clearly linked with specific actions. It is clear that the SETM action plan is aiming at a whole-system approach using all tools available at Police Scotland's disposal to eradicate sexism and misogyny and to monitor progress against agreed goals.
56. Our one criticism of the VAWG strategy is that, although the definition of VAWG includes Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE) which includes stripping, lap dancing, prostitution, escorting and human trafficking (according to the Equally Safe Strategy) this is not mentioned in Outcome 2: Preventing Harm and Securing Justice. We appreciate that the legal context in Scotland around CSE is currently under review, and this is acknowledged within the VAWG strategy. However, we believe that a stronger commitment could be made in the strategy to prevent CSE by targeting men who pay for sex and sexual entertainment from women. At this stage, legal action cannot be taken against them; however, their behaviour and attitudes can be addressed through campaigns and information.
57. Similarly, women affected by CSE will be one of the most highly marginalised groups who have little to no trust in Police Scotland. Efforts need to be made to build trust and reporting structures and mechanisms for women affected by CSE without the fear of being criminalised or dismissed for reporting sexual, or other forms of violence.
58. The VAWG strategy mentions working together with the Security Industry Association (SIA) to create safe spaces for women in the nighttime economy. Although this is an excellent example of the breadth of Police Scotland's thinking about women's safety, there are still question marks about the vetting procedures employed by partner agencies responsible for women's safety in those venues such as, for example, the SIA.
59. Lastly, the VAWG strategy mentions the important role the Domestic Abuse Matters training has played in raising awareness of the insidious forms abuse can take. It mentions that this is

something that will continue- however we are aware, at the time of writing this report, that these plans are still under consideration.

60. Alongside the VAWG strategy, we reviewed the SETM action plan, as well as the report to the SPA Board's People Committee dated 31 May 2023 and 27 November 2023. We were encouraged to see that the issues highlighted by the SETM delivery group and the internal sexism and misogyny survey were largely consistent, as were the recommendations for further actions.
61. The only question we would pose as far as the SETM action plan is concerned is that, although considerable activity is planned and/or underway, there is still the issue we came across around denial and/or resistance to the existence of sexism and misogyny in the first place. This was recounted to us by the overwhelming majority of women we interviewed alongside fatigue from having to explain to those who resisted the Chief Constables' statements what misogyny is and how it is expressed.
62. The SETM sets out actions to raise awareness of sexism and misogyny as well as to equip leaders with skills and training on how to identify and challenge them in the workplace. We would argue that without a good understanding of what sexism and misogyny actually are and acceptance that they exist within Police Scotland, steps to provide tools for addressing them are unlikely to be effective. Our recommendations around the adoption of a formal definition of sexism and misogyny, training on gender inequality and its links to VAWG combined with real-life examples of how they can manifest in daily work are aimed to address this very issue.
63. We fully support action 1.3 of the SETM around increasing the visibility of female leadership, as this is something we heard that women in Police Scotland are currently missing. This action involves, as performance measures, detailed data analysis of service, recruitment profile, leavers' profiles, and pay gaps by gender and other protected characteristics. We believe that this will be an effective way of recognising trends in those areas. However, we would also urge the need for a contextual gender analysis to provide a more thorough understanding of what the data is actually conveying. For example, we know that women tend to be promoted earlier, more frequently and at a faster rate than men; however, what is not mentioned is that these promotions tend to become fewer and further between once women reach middle management level, or following marriage, pregnancy and maternity.
64. Lastly, we appreciate that the SETM action plan is still in development, with reporting structures and mechanisms still in formative stages. Similarly, there has not been enough time for the VAWG Strategy's implementation for us to be able to formally look at evidence and comment on their effectiveness. However, we believe that they both offer a concrete framework accompanied by a set of actions likely to lead to tangible change for Police Scotland over time.

Drivers for change

65. In the coming sections we explore both drivers and opportunities for change, as well as challenges that need to be overcome for Police Scotland to eradicate sexism, misogyny and VAWG.

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66. There is sound commitment by senior leadership on addressing misogyny, sexism and VAWG. Police Scotland can demonstrate a clear VAWG strategy, which addresses both the response to and prevention of crimes committed against women and girls in the community. There is also an internal commitment to ensuring that sex inequality and misogyny, which underlie and enable VAWG, are effectively addressed within Police Scotland as a service.
67. Our discussions with the Professional Standards Department (PSD) gathered that there is an appetite for ongoing improvement on how complaints are handled-both those originating from members of the public, and from personnel within the service.
68. There is also a keen interest in how the practices and outcomes of the PSD can be made more transparent with a view to increasing confidence with the public, and within officers and staff to come forward and raise concerns and complaints.
69. There is a further keen interest by the PSD to make investigation processes and outcomes more transparent, with a view to encouraging more members of the public and more Police Scotland employees to come forward.
70. This appetite to engage with and eradicate sexism, misogyny and VAWG is reflected in the accounts of many police officers from different divisions and ranks, and staff whom we consulted while researching this report.
71. It is our assessment that Police Scotland demonstrates a clear commitment at a strategic level to ensuring that women are safe and treated equally within the service, and that VAWG and misogyny are addressed in Scotland's communities.
72. There is ongoing engagement with Close the Gap, with a view to adopting their programme of work on [Equally Safe At Work \(ESAW\)](#), promoting gender equality at work and preventing sex/gender discrimination and acts of VAW within the service.
73. Ongoing work on sex discrimination and misogyny has provided the opportunity for more open dialogue. Although our professional experience and accounts by Police officers and staff indicate that this is not always welcome and has been met with some resistance, it is a necessary first step towards realising change.
74. Research carried out internally by Police Scotland on sexism and misogyny has shed further light on the problem and highlighted its extent, prompting more urgent action to address it.
75. Work is currently undertaken to 'weed out' people with harmful sexist and misogynist attitudes or those who have caused harm or committed acts of VAWG
76. Commitment to organisational change across all protected characteristics will drive improvement towards addressing intersectional inequalities for women in Police Scotland

Barriers to overcome

77. We are reassured that at the most senior level, there is a steadfast commitment to ending sex discrimination, misogyny and VAWG. However, from direct engagement with women in Police

Scotland, we feel that there is considerable work still needed for implementation. This work needs to begin with a concerted effort in raising awareness of what institutional sexism and misogyny actually are (as well as internalised sexism and misogyny), together with sex-disaggregated data on trends in women's careers in the service.

78. We are aware that there are departments within Police Scotland that are overwhelmingly staffed by women, as well as that women are promoted to a larger scale and faster than men. However, we found that there was a lack of understanding of the nuances underlying this information: the number of women within a division or department does not automatically 'cancel out' institutional, individual or internalised sexism and misogyny, and women's rate and number of promotions can perpetuate inequality if the women promoted to middle management are then unable to progress further following pregnancy and maternity.
79. Specifically, we are concerned that, given the evidence of a sexist and misogynist culture within Police Scotland (which varies in degree and severity in different divisions, specialist units and areas of work), this culture is likely to hinder the progress of implementing the VAWG strategy. When officers and staff demonstrate sexist and misogynist views and behaviours within the service, we have serious concerns around the impact this will have on responding to VAWG in the community.
80. Although we commend the commitment to "*...take every opportunity available to us to deliver a robust response, ensuring we rid policing of those who demonstrate discriminatory beliefs or have committed acts of violence or other forms of harm*" (Policing Together, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022-2026 p.12), it is also important to highlight that acts and attitudes of misogyny and sex discrimination are also carried out by women- either due to internalised misogyny, or due to an environment hostile towards women, which reinforces, prolongs and at times encourages misogynistic views and behaviours. When misogyny is internalised, it can lead to women victimising or discriminating against other women, or to women self-excluding, passing up opportunities for promotion, preventing themselves from raising concerns or complaints or feeling unable to "*flourish and thrive with the knowledge they are welcome and valued for their true and authentic selves*" (Policing Together, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022-2026 p.4).
81. Beyond the actions identified in the Sexism and Tackling Misogyny Delivery Group Action Plan, we believe there is a key action missing, regarding the provision of equipment required that is suitable for use by women. The majority of uniforms and equipment provided to Police Officers worldwide has been designed for male bodies, which results in women being ill-equipped to perform their duties. We feel that this is a basic task that will support the implementation of the SETM.
82. We repeatedly heard that the Professional Standards Department has not provided a clear complaints or whistleblowing procedure on misogynistic behaviour; and when the existing complaints process was followed, there was no resolution but the issue being returned to the local division which subsequently failed to act on it due to a lack of HR support. Similarly, resorting to the Scottish Police Federation has not been fruitful for some women, who termed the SPF 'unhelpful' at best and 'obstructive' at worst. It is our professional view that in spite of best efforts at a strategic level to tackle misogyny, sex inequality and VAWG, there is still firm resistance from within the organisation by many who, out of a lack of understanding or due to

status implications, are intent on maintaining the status quo. For progress to be achieved, this resistance needs to be addressed and eradicated.

83. As per the previous section above, we are aware that the amount of time and resources required to effectively tackle misogyny, sex inequality and VAWG might not be currently possible for Police Scotland. We are concerned that this might considerably delay progress or hinder it altogether.
84. Our research identified that there is commitment by senior leadership to change Police Scotland's culture to promote sex equality and address misogyny and VAWG. However, this commitment appears to wane the further we explore the realities of being a lower-ranking officer, with repeated accounts of everyday sexism that go unchallenged by middle managers. This leaves junior or younger officers feeling unsupported, invisible and despondent. Most concerning were the accounts by, or on behalf of, younger/newer female officers who are particularly vulnerable to misogyny, sexism and abuse. We are especially alarmed at reports of younger/newer female officers being 'preyed on' by more senior male officers; who are discouraged from raising complaints for fear of being labelled a 'troublemaker' and effectively sabotaging their own careers; and in this way internalising sexist and misogynist attitudes that can effectively contribute and perpetuate the current problematic culture.
85. We fully support all the actions identified within the plan and wish to endorse it wholeheartedly, as we can see it making a tangible difference to women within Police Scotland – however we remain concerned about the level of investment and resourcing this work requires and Police Scotland's capability to provide this at this time. The amount of work required to fully implement the Sexism and Tackling Misogyny Delivery Group Action Plan is expected to be extremely time consuming and resource-intensive.
86. Although senior leadership remains committed to tackling sex inequality, misogyny and VAWG, this commitment needs to be more widespread and throughout all ranks. We heard mixed reviews about the 'Truth to Power' sessions, which many welcomed, but many saw as retraumatising and needless – stating that the issues they discussed during those sessions had been raised by officers for many years. More attention needs to be paid to issues consistently raised by women in Police Scotland as a matter of urgency. Once these issues are raised, both middle and senior management need to attend to them and provide support and a swift response both to the women affected, as well as to the perpetrators of such behaviours.
87. Ongoing resistance to the Chief Constables' statements and disbelief that sexism, misogyny and VAWG is an issue within the service. The feedback from Police Scotland employees on this issue is telling of the challenges still to overcome (positive and productive conversations, addressing disclosures, understanding what steps need to be taken towards improvement, accepting the existence of institutional discrimination)
88. Police Scotland continues to be an overwhelmingly male dominated environment, with sexist and misogynist attitudes firmly embedded in its culture
89. There appears to be a lack of understanding of women's vulnerability and specific needs – particularly women who are younger, older, newer in the service, from different ethnic, religious and/or cultural backgrounds, or those with other intersecting protected characteristics

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- a. We also heard of an absence of policies, procedures and an overall culture that not only combats misogyny, sexism and VAWG, but that also support a healthy work-life balance and career progression opportunities for women. These need to take into account women's specific health needs, pregnancy, maternity/paternity/adoption/carer's/shared parental leave, and menopause/menstrual health.
- b. Ongoing patriarchal views around women's capability for promotion within Police Scotland, as well as their capacity to take on more senior roles following marriage and pregnancy/ maternity.
- c. Lack of a clear definition and demonstrable and measurable understanding of sexism and misogyny across all levels, ranks and departments of the organisation, as well as individual actions that prevent and combat sexism, misogyny and VAW
- d. Unclear complaints process, particularly as far as complaints of sexism, misogyny and VAWG are concerned. Current process has been reported as 'inconsistent', and at worst, 'ineffective'.
- e. An apparent lack of follow-up or repercussions for perpetrators of VAWG or those who have been complained against for sexism/misogyny, even after such issues/complaints have been raised repeatedly
- f. Although this does not make explicit mention of *Equally Safe: Scotland's Strategy for Preventing and Eradicating Violence Against Women and Girls*, the ethos, principles and language within Police Scotland's VAWG strategy is entirely consistent with it.
- g. Lack of HR support to local divisions to support the resolution of grievances and complaints on VAWG/sexism/misogyny
- h. Very few visible senior women role models in Police Scotland. This is particularly felt in Specialist Units, and the absence of diverse women in senior ranks/roles is especially felt by most women within the service
- i. An absence of visible and clear language around the positive contributions of women to Police Scotland, and the specific skills and qualities that women can bring to the service. Currently, all signage, publicity and language used is 'gender-neutral'. This does not have the desired effect as gender neutrality overwhelmingly defers to male standards and experiences and does not 'speak to' women specifically (or to girls/women considering careers in policing).
- j. Outdated beliefs, attitudes and behaviours regarding women and gender roles more widely (for example women being asked to make tea and coffee for meetings or to take minutes)
- k. Low levels of meaningful engagement/opportunities for the Scottish Women's Development Forum to contribute to ideas for change and to implement small changes
- l. A sense that if a plan/action is not strategic or does not address cultural change then it will not be implemented- there needs to be an understanding that small changes

and 'quick wins' can make a significant difference in boosting women's morale and empower them to perform at their best across the organisation.

- m. The attitude and response of the Professional Standards Department and the Scottish Police Federation has been termed 'unhelpful and obstructive' by the women we spoke to on matters of sexism, misogyny and VAW. This actively prevents women from reporting such attitudes and VAWG incidents.
90. Similar to preventing and responding to VAWG, tackling sex inequality and misogyny requires significant cultural and attitudinal change. However, small, focused actions that can be implemented locally or nationally can also make a big difference. This recommendation is specifically to ensure that women employed by Police Scotland feel heard, understood and empowered in terms of the issues they have already highlighted, both within the organisation, as well as with the IRG members conducting this work

Recommendations

- 91. Based on our findings, we have several recommendations which we have broken down into different areas, with different priority levels and, where appropriate, for different departments within Police Scotland.
- 92. In line with the main IRG report, we have identified actions that need to be taken across four of the seven areas of the main report:
 - a. Complaints
 - b. Policies and Practices
 - c. Learning, Training and Development
 - d. Recruitment, retention and promotion and vetting.
- 93. In the list below, we have categorised recommendations into 'urgent', 'medium-term' and 'long term'. These terms are used to describe respectively: within the next 12 months (2025), within 1-3 years (2025-2027), and 5 years from now (by 2029).

General Recommendations

Urgent recommendations:

- 94. In spite of considerable research and interviews, we were unable to find a definition of misogyny adopted by Police Scotland. We recommend that Police Scotland adopt the deliberately non-legal definition by the then Baroness Kennedy KT KC: *"Misogyny is a way of thinking that upholds the primary status of men and a sense of male entitlement, while subordinating women and limiting their power and freedom. Conduct based on this thinking can include a range of abusive and controlling behaviours including rape, sexual offences, harassment and bullying and domestic abuse"*. Once adopted, a definition of misogyny needs to be widely communicated throughout Police Scotland to ensure a universal understanding of the concept. We believe that taking this step will consolidate a universal understanding across the service and materially support work towards implementing the SETM and the VAWG Strategy

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95. High quality, trauma recovery support must be made available to all police officers across all levels consistently.
96. The Scottish Women's Development Forum provides an excellent source of information on women's experience in Police Scotland; however, it was pointed out to us that engagement with them as a diversity association is limited. We recommend that there is more focused and targeted engagement with the SWDF who can both act as representatives of the voices of women in Police Scotland, as well as advisors for new/amended policies and processes to be introduced into the service.
97. We recommend a review of uniforms and equipment provided to female officers to ensure that it is fit for purpose, safe, and suitable; where it is deemed not so, we urge Police Scotland to invest in new equipment to enable female officers to carry out their duties.

Medium-term general recommendations

98. We were delighted to hear that Police Scotland has linked with Close the Gap with a view to becoming an Equally Safe At Work (ESAW) accredited employer. This has not been achieved yet due to capacity issues within Close The Gap. However, we commend Police Scotland and recommend that efforts continue for the service to register with the scheme.
99. Continuous engagement with the National VAWG Network and other national VAWG Stakeholders to act as a group of expert advisors to provide ongoing support to Police Scotland's efforts to eradicate sexism, misogyny and VAWG and to promote sex and gender equality.
100. Women we spoke to disclosed to us that they felt more comfortable speaking to us as external IRG members than they felt speaking to senior officers or management. They stated that this allowed them to be candid and open in a way that speaking to a senior staff member or Police Officer did not allow. We therefore recommend the creation of 'safe spaces' for women within Police Scotland in each division/police station/service area where a 'lead' of each group can act as a conduit for information between officers and staff who have experienced sexism, misogyny or violence and acts as a support and source of information for women who choose to move forward with a formal complaint. We propose that a 'lead' for such a group be elected by women from the relevant division/police station/service area rather than appointed by a more senior officer or staff member.

Long-term general recommendations

101. Sex disaggregated data to be made publicly available on an annual basis beyond the gender pay gap (such as analyses of complaints, grievances, exit interview data, etc.), as well as intersectional data on sex and other protected characteristics.
102. Police Scotland implement annual surveys on the public's confidence in the service specifically targeted at women and girls, with a particular focus on gendered crime such as domestic abuse, sexual violence, honour-based abuse, commercial sexual exploitation and sexual harassment and assault.

Learning, Training and Development

Urgent Recommendations:

103. Police Scotland to make a suite of compulsory training available to officers and staff at all levels on sexism, misogyny and VAWG with a three-month deadline to complete. There also need to be modules on structural and institutional vs. individual sexism and misogyny and their relationship to VAWG as part of this suite of training. This needs to be followed up and strictly enforced, similar to the enforcement of the Domestic Abuse Matters training in 2016. We urge the adoption of existing material such as [Equally Safe in Practice](#), the [Duluth Wheels of Power and Control](#), the [Rape Culture Pyramid](#) and principles of the [Safe & Together](#) model which emphasises domestic abuse and acts of VAWG as parenting/behavioural choices that lie solely with perpetrators of such behaviours and crimes.

Medium/long-term recommendations:

104. Police Scotland to review the availability of VAWG training for probationers and to adopt aspects of Trauma-Informed Practice as defined in the [National Trauma Transformation Programme](#). We also strongly recommend an introduction to institutional and individual sexism and misogyny at probationer training.
105. We further strongly recommend the adoption of elements of [Safe & Together](#) domestic abuse response training for officers at all levels, particularly probationers, senior officers and DAU officers. In line with this training, it is also vital that all responding officers receive additional training on note-taking when responding to VAWG incidents/crimes in the community. Notes on an incident response that can provide valuable context to a crime not only respond to recent legislative changes and can support prosecutions (for example the recent [overturn of the Smith v. Lees ruling](#) in the autumn of 2023) but they can also aid inter-agency communication ensuring that the victim(s) receives appropriate support following an incident or crime by, for example, health or social work professionals.

Recruitment, Retention, Promotion and Vetting

106. Police Scotland to implement enhanced vetting processes for those who might hold sexist/misogynist attitudes and for potential perpetrators of VAWG. These can include existing tools such as the Harvard Implicit Association Test (available for free in the [Harvard website](#) and on the [IDR Labs](#) website) or tailored tools based on existing assessment checklists such as the [Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour-Based Abuse Risk Identification Checklist](#) (DASH-RIC) and the Relationship Dynamics Assessment (available on pp. 41-42 of the [Respect Toolkit for Work with Male Victims of Domestic Abuse](#)). These assessments should be applied both to prospective trainees within Police Scotland, as well as existing employees, regardless of rank or length of service.
107. We would like to see positive action to encourage more women to apply for promotions and for training and career development opportunities
108. Secure a minimum of 2 spaces in each specialist division specifically for women by the middle of 2026 and actively encourage women to apply for these positions.
109. Ensure that at least two women are members of the Scottish Police Federation.

Policies and Practices

110. Police Scotland to employ a gender analysis on all policies and procedures within the organisation. To achieve this, we encourage Police Scotland to strengthen mutually supportive relationships with key VAWG partners that can provide expert advice on gendering policies and procedures and who can act as lay community advisors for both internal and external VAWG investigations. Partnership work with the National VAWG Network, Engender and the Women's Support Project would be particularly valuable in this area.

Recommendations for the PSD

Urgent recommendations:

111. Clear messaging needs to be circulated and reinforced across the organisation around the use of social media and communications platforms, clarifying that not only are sexually inappropriate comments and behaviours unacceptable across the board, but this conduct is unacceptable between officers and staff. Whether verbally in 'office banter' or in writing, on online or mobile communications platforms, such communication is abusive, and only serves to reinforce stereotypes, alienate women (and men who do not share such views) and create a 'boys' club' culture that promotes inequality and exclusion.
112. Alongside this message, information needs to be disseminated on how officers and staff can anonymously report such instances of inappropriate and/or abusive conduct and what evidence they can use (for example screenshots, a log of inappropriate communications, who might have witnessed them, etc.)
113. The PSD currently has four teams investigating complaints, each focusing on different types of complaints. We recommend that a minimum of 50% of officers and staff on each team receive specialist gender equality and VAW training to improve their understanding of the relationship between sexism, misogyny and VAW to enable such complaints to be investigated more thoroughly, with appropriate care provided both to the person making the complaint and the person against whom the complaint is made.
114. This training, and subsequent investigation of sexism/misogyny or VAWG complaints should also dictate how officers and staff accused of sexism, misogyny and/or VAWG are followed up on, including the imposition of restrictions or suspension.
115. We further recommend that the PSD create a standard protocol whereby whenever a complaint of sexism, misogyny and/or VAWG is reported, the officer or staff against whom the complaint was made is checked against the national Scottish Intelligence Database and the iVPD database. We recognise that currently the PSD relies on officers self-reporting any convictions that may not be known to Police Scotland. Although we were informed that a previous exercise revealed that all officers and staff had disclosed any and all convictions to the PSD as was expected of them, we believe that this is an exercise that should be carried out any time a complaint of sexism, misogyny and/or VAWG is made.
116. In addition to the previous recommendation, we further recommend the creation of specific processes for following up with families of officers who are suspended or dismissed as a result of sexual misconduct, misogynist attitudes/behaviours or VAWG. Evidence suggests

that when anyone holds views or behaves in sexist/misogynist ways, there is a very high probability that they have also carried out VAWG acts against their immediate family. An investigation and offer of support to the family members of any officers or staff who have been found to behave in such ways at work should be made part of the PSD's strategy for addressing such complaints, in line with Police Scotland's VAWG strategy, as well as its duty of care to the community.

117. There needs to be closer communication between SIOs tasked with investigating complaints by the PSD and those who have lodged a complaint. There have been numerous reports of staff and officers not receiving information about the progress of their complaint or the investigation being carried out and its eventual outcome. A lack of communication has a detrimental impact on complainers' mental health and their capacity to carry out their duties. Although we are aware that the PSD has clear processes outlined around this, reports we received indicate that this is done very inconsistently at the moment.
118. HR support needs to be made available to local divisions to assist them in resolving complaints and grievances – especially where those have been referred to the PSD but returned for resolution at a local level.

Medium-term recommendations

119. The PSD has a critical role to play in creating a culture of transparency and accountability that encourages officers and staff to speak up against sexism and misogyny, and we were very pleased to hear that the Department itself is eager to promote this culture. We repeatedly heard accounts of women who did not raise a formal complaint against a colleague for fear of being labelled a 'troublemaker' and sabotaging opportunities for future promotion. We thus recommend that the PSD develop clear procedures to enable officers and staff to report concerns and complaints, as well as procedures that enable an investigation to be carried out discreetly and anonymously. In this way, information can be collected without breaching the confidentiality of the complainer, while a more holistic picture can be compiled of the conduct of the officer or staff member against whom the complaint was made.
120. One of the comments repeatedly made to us relates to a lack of clarity and effectiveness of the current complaints policy and procedures. We believe that this confusion caused by the policy indicates that a review is required to make it more specific and accessible to all officers and staff across the service. Specifically, the policy needs to clearly state:
 - a. How complaints are handled;
 - b. The structure of the PSD and the process for shortlisting and assigning complaints investigations- either by the Crown or specialist team(s) within the Department;
 - c. The timelines within which investigations are expected to take place;
 - d. What they can expect from PSD in terms of follow-up and ongoing support while the investigation is ongoing (regardless of whether they have raised the complaint or a complaint has been raised against them)
 - e. What the relevant team investigating the complaint (either internally or externally to Police Scotland) can expect from them
 - f. What support will be available to them during the investigation and following its resolution
 - g. How to appeal a decision that they find unsatisfactory or inadequately investigated

121. A clear statement needs to be included within the complaints policy and procedure around the handling of vexatious complaints by and against Police Scotland officers and staff. We heard numerous accounts of the complaints process being abused by (particularly male) officers and staff against whom a (usually female) officer or staff member has made a complaint on the grounds of sexist or misogynist conduct. We heard that this has happened repeatedly when a senior female officer disciplines or complains against a younger male officer, or one she is line managing. A process for addressing such complaints needs to be consolidated within PSD and communicated across Police Scotland.
122. Notes to be made in personnel files of officers against whom reports of inappropriate/illegal conduct have been made. These need to be communicated across areas and departments and to be taken into consideration in performance reviews to identify potential patterns of behaviour.
123. Clarify the role, remit and responsibility of the PSD and the SPF, in investigating and resolving complaints and in upholding the reputation of Police Scotland, ensuring that both receive training on both individual and institutional sexism, misogyny and VAWG and its financial and reputational implications.

Indicators for change/success

124. In defining success, we have agreed on a number of indicators that we are hoping to see in Police Scotland following the implementation of recommendations within the next 5 years and beyond. Success will be demonstrated when:
 - a. Police Scotland has developed mechanisms both on an operational and a Human Resources basis, to monitor complaints against its employees, and an action plan on addressing those concerns. Clear actions need to be outlined for the implications of repeated complaints being made against a Police Scotland employee (ie. More than two). If necessary, additional interventions to be implemented to disrupt sexist/misogynist or other harmful behaviour by employees based on those currently used in the community, such as the MATAAC. In line with Equally Safe's commitment that *"perpetrators will receive a swift and effective response"*, prosecution of VAWG crimes committed by Police Scotland employees should always remain an option to safeguard both Police Scotland staff as well as women and girls in the community.
 - b. Measurable improvement in Police Scotland Staffing across all divisions and areas reflecting the population of the communities they serve. The current male to female ratio in the population is 49% to 51%. We are aware that there are departments where this ratio is considerably skewed in favour of women (with 70% of some departments staffed by women) – however we want to stress the importance that this should not be considered in the total gender percentage breakdown to avoid misrepresenting the status quo in divisions and departments where women are considerably underrepresented.
 - c. The Sex Equality and Tackling Misogyny Action Plan has been completed and updated with a view to ongoing long-term work in this area.

- d. The public (especially women and girls) report increased trust in Police Scotland in specialist surveys exploring the public's view of police response to gendered incidents and crime
- e. Reduced complaints of sex discrimination and misogyny – no more than 20% of all complaints and grievances received across the service
- f. Specialist VAWG training for employees at all levels, as well as Safe & Together half-day training for officers and probationers
- g. Police Scotland can demonstrate increased resolution rates for complaints relating to sexually inappropriate conduct, sexist or misogynist behaviour and prosecution of those within the service who commit crimes of VAWG
- h. Additional vetting tools assessing attitudes on sex and gender equality are administered to all prospective Police Scotland employees, and routinely to all staff every five years
- i. Annual sex disaggregated statistics are published which include the gender pay gap breakdown, an analysis of complaints and grievances and exit interview data.
- j. 50% of senior positions within Police Scotland are held by women, who also act as role models for newer/younger women coming in to the service
- k. Police Scotland can demonstrate a suite of policies and procedures specifically on women's needs, and all policies and procedures have been assessed as sufficiently gendered by expert national stakeholders through Equalities Impact Assessments

Conclusion

- 125. In the process of writing this report, we were often moved by the accounts we heard from officers and staff within Police Scotland. This includes those officers and staff members who gave us their frequently shocking accounts of sexism, misogyny and violence they had either experienced or witnessed in the service, as well as senior officers and staff who are steadfast in their commitment to deliver the SETM action plan, the VAWG strategy and achieve gender equality within the service.
- 126. We recognise that Police Scotland is committed to preventing and eradicating sexism, misogyny and VAWG, and this involves eradicating the patriarchal and discriminatory attitudes and gender inequality that enable them to continue.
- 127. We appreciate that the recommendations we have made in this report are extremely ambitious and demanding of an already under-resourced service, and recognise that some of the challenges might appear insurmountable.
- 128. However, we also recognise that many of the recommendations we have made in this report are consistent with the recommendations made by the Operation FUSTIC report by the PSNI – particularly with regards to handling complaints and grievance processes.

129. Gender equality and the eradication of VAWG are necessary for an efficient and effective service, which in turn makes for a service that can respond to the needs of Scotland's public. Realising equality for women both within and outside Police Scotland means realising equality for the majority of the population.