



**SAFE, SUSTAINABLE, STRONG**  
**WAEML Strategic Plan 2026-2030**

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## Executive Summary

Women's Aid East and Midlothian (WAEML) is a charity and company limited by guarantee to provide support, information, advocacy and temporary accommodation to all women, children and young people who have been subjected to domestic abuse.

We are excited to set out our vision and plan for 2026-30. We believe the following strategy will support us to be a strong, safe and sustainable organisation despite the wider challenging environment.

It outlines the key priorities and actions we will take to deepen our impact, strengthen our organisation, and respond to the changing needs of women, children and young people who have been subjected to domestic abuse.

## Our Vision, Mission and Purpose

<b>Our Vision</b>	<b>Women and children are free from domestic abuse and the attitudes that help perpetuate it. They enjoy all their human rights and have equal opportunity to explore their ambitions and aspirations.</b>
<b>Our Mission</b>	To lead in the delivery of local quality, specialist domestic abuse support that transforms the lives of women, children and young people who have been subjected to domestic abuse.
<b>Our Purpose</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To change lives.</li><li>• To challenge attitudes.</li><li>• To end domestic abuse.</li></ul>

## Values

We are a feminist organisation rooted in women's rights and empowerment. We listen to lived experience, learn together, and lead with care and integrity. We challenge inequality in all its forms and create spaces where women are heard, valued, and supported to thrive. We are a learning organisation that grows through reflection, compassion, and accountability. We uphold fair work, good governance, and collective leadership to ensure our work is ethical, transparent, and sustainable — for women, by women, and with women.

See our values appendix, to learn how we bring our values into practice in our work.

## Update on our previous strategy

Our previous strategic plan laid the foundations for bold, lasting change. Despite global and local challenges, we strengthened our commitment to specialist, inclusive, and justice-centred practice. Key highlights include:

**Re-location and expansion:** In East Lothian, we moved our support services into new accessible premises and refuge accommodation. In Midlothian, we proudly launched our Women's and Children's Empowerment Centre, a transformative space designed to provide holistic, trauma-informed support, that fosters community healing and empowerment.

**Workplace wellbeing:** We improved conditions for all our staff, through living wage accreditation, enhanced day-one rights, and dedicated wellbeing days recognising that feminist change must also be felt internally. We continue to offer opportunities for learning and development for all staff.

**Inclusive practice:** We deepened our commitment to anti-discriminatory inclusive approaches, launching new staff health and wellbeing policies, and created accessible, flexible working environments for a diverse workforce. We also achieved equality charter awards including the LGBT silver award and Disability Champion levels.

**Young people's empowerment:** We launched RISE, our new framework to support young women, and introduced our young person's shadow board, ensuring youth voice shapes participatory practice now and into the future. A member of the youth board sits on the WAEML board to represent the shadow board.

**Eco-feminism and environmental healing:** We established nature-based therapeutic projects, developed a healing meadow, and green spaces for recovery and education.

**Strategic collaborations:** We co-created and delivered innovative responses with justice and mental health partners including the Caledonian women's service, Women's Supper, Spring, Connect, and Safe Space (East Lothian).

We faced significant capacity challenges, specifically the global coronavirus pandemic and cost of living crisis which placed intense strain on our services. These significant events saw growing demand on our service without proportional resource expansion and left us with a legacy of waiting lists across all projects. These pressures promoted deep reflection.

We critically re-evaluated our leadership, workforce diversity, succession planning and overall sustainability of our service model.

Our learning fuelled by the legacy of all we've achieved, has identified the core areas for development that directly inform our strategic priorities for 2026–2030.

# The context we are working in

*Current context factors we want to mention:*

**Continued tight funding environment.** Whilst we continue to receive funding from the local authorities and Scottish Government, this does not take account of rising costs and wages.

**Cost of living is now a chronic crisis** and still impacting many of the women we support, and staff members in different ways. We could be offering more support to address this.

**Our model of refuge is outdated.** Our refuge model was designed in the 1970's based on the norm then of women being financially dependent on their partners and on a women and children model. The reality today is that many women have jobs, more have no children, and we are supporting a wider diversity of women. We will rethink the refuge model and innovate new ways of providing practical support and housing that reflect these current trends.

**New building with opportunities.** We have achieved our aim of opening our own building with opportunities for wider support and potential for income generation. Even although this is not exactly how we had set out our ambition, our strategy reflects the new opportunities that the building brings.

**Delivery partner for national and local government priorities and agenda on violence against women.** We continue to help national and local government deliver on their agenda for reducing violence against women and we hold a strong position. However, there will be Scottish Parliament elections in 2026 and the landscape and commitment to violence against women and girls may shift.

**The digital revolution.** Technology has created opportunities and challenges. Digital inequalities have a big impact on the women we support, and our staff need further training and support to continue to keep up with the pace of change. Voice cloning and other innovations have created new tech-facilitated ways for abusers to continue to harm women.

All of these contextual factors point to rethinking our current ways of delivering and funding our services. Our strategy for this period sets out how we hope to achieve these strategic goals.

# Our strategic goals: overview

<b>1. Service</b>	Continue to provide high quality support for women and children subjected to domestic abuse in East Lothian and Midlothian.
<b>2. Finance</b>	Develop our financial model to be more financially secure and independent and to continue to develop a strong service so that we can continue to be a fair employer.
<b>3. Housing</b>	Develop a new model of refuge housing that delivers better value, longer term security and a better service for the women and children who need it.
<b>4. Volunteers</b>	To develop a team of volunteers that complement our staffing and provide new services and support.
<b>5. Ongoing support</b>	To investigate our role in providing support for survivors into employment, entrepreneurship, education and training or other ambitions for their lives.
<b>6. Sustainability</b>	To ensure staff have the skills, resources, tools and equipment they need, and that we have succession planning in place, and are forward looking in environmental awareness and practice.

# Our priority areas for action

From the list on the previous page, we have identified some areas as ‘business as usual’, and others as having specific strategic priority in this 5-year plan. Goals 1 and 2 will be ongoing priorities and managed by the operational team with support from the board. Goals 3-6 will be led by the board. All will be overseen by the board as set out in the monitoring and evaluation section (page 9).

## Business as usual:

### Goal 1: Service



- a) We deliver an excellent service for women and children:
  - Assuring quality in line with Scottish Women’s Aid national standards.
  - Including women’s views as survivors
  
- b) Children and young people’s views inform our direction and delivery:
  - We continue and deepen our work with children and young people.
  - We develop a new way of including the views of very young children.
  
- c) Our staff feel valued, rewarded, supported and have the opportunities to develop, grow and remain with us:
  - We are a good employer and provide staff with sustainable opportunities for development including training and leadership development.
  - We have a more diverse staff team and we address unconscious bias across the organisation.

### Goal 2: Finance



We are financially secure and independent:

- We have a sustainable income stream.
- Improved financial independence and security to reduce our reliance on government funding e.g. through housing model.
- We are less reliant on grant funding.

## Strategic priorities for 2026-2030

### Goal 3: Housing



We have developed a new housing model and are innovative leaders in service provision:

- We offer long term affordable housing options
- Every woman who interacts with our service has a decent, permanent and safe roof over her head.
- We generate income through housing provision.

### Goal 4: Volunteers



Volunteers are contributing to our services and mission:

- We have a strong, robust and effective volunteering strategy.
- We provide well managed and meaningful opportunities for volunteers to contribute to our mission.
- We are a valued provider of volunteering opportunities.

### Goal 5: Ongoing Support (from 2028 onwards)



We support women into new employment, development and educational opportunities:

- Women and children have access to a fully accessible and trauma informed space.
- We offer employment, training and legal support guidance.
- There is an effective programme in place to help women move forward and rebuild their lives.

### Goal 6: Sustainability



- a) We have succession planning in place to reduce key person dependency.
- b) WAEML is an innovative organisation making the most of digital development:
  - We use tech to make the organisation more efficient and effective, whilst balancing concerns about workload and reducing personalisation.
  - WE reduce time-consuming processes through tech.
  - We support staff to be digital champions.
  - We are able to address digital inequalities and dangers posed by digital innovation.
- c) We lead the way in our sector and geographical area in environmental awareness and practice:
  - We make our contribution to net zero targets through streamlining operations and adopting environment innovations.
  - Our housing model is eco-friendly.

## Monitoring and evaluation

This strategy is a dynamic document. To ensure that we keep on track and are responsive to changing circumstances and learning, it will be formally reviewed by the Board of Trustees every 6 months to assess progress towards goals and make any adjustments to the plans that contribute to achieving them.

Our reviews will be light touch and informed by critical appraisal of the available impact, monitoring and self-evaluation data, including feedback from staff and service users and a report from the CEO. Where appropriate we will identify helpful targets and indicators/measures of progress that will help us consider the extent to which plans and activities are contributing towards achievement of our strategic goals. Staff feedback will continue to shape strategic reviews.

## Managing Risk and Change

WAEML's CEO maintains an up-to-date organisational risk register. All projects carry out regular risk assessments, which consider both the charity's principal risks and those specific to their operational areas. This ensures a consistent and integrated approach to risk assessment across the organisation, whilst also allowing a bottom-up perspective to inform the overall risk profile.

The contents of individual and organisational risk registers are regularly discussed in meetings between the CEO and service managers. The organisational risk register is updated by the CEO and reviewed by Trustees every six months, providing a robust and systematic review of risks that could significantly affect the charity's performance, reputation, strategic priorities or ability to delivery services.

A business continuity plan is also in place and reviewed regularly by the CEO and Board of Trustees. Key areas of organisational risk are tested at least annually to ensure preparedness and resilience. Staff will be supported through any periods of change.

Procedures are in place to ensure compliance with health, security and safety regulations, and to safeguard the wellbeing of service users, staff, volunteers and visitors. All staff operate in accordance with the SSSC Codes of Practice. The organisation also adheres to service level agreements and the Health and Social Care Standards. Appropriate insurance cover is always maintained.

We continue to monitor the risks that the digital revolution poses to the organisation, staff and service-users. This includes monitoring the impact of AI, ensuring privacy, data protection, the potential for digital breach or hacking, and the environmental impacts of our digital strategy.

We recognise that many of the risks we face are systemic, reflecting wider societal and political conditions that disproportionately affect women. As a feminist organisation, we approach risk management not only through compliance, but also through campaigning, collaboration and creativity.

## Governance and accountability

Our Board of Trustees will oversee the implementation of this strategy, ensuring alignment with our mission and prudent stewardship of our resources. We will report annually on our progress and update our plans as needed.

Due to the changes outlined in this strategy we will run the following sub-groups of the board to take responsibility for the goals outlined above:

- Finance
- Communications
- People (including oversight of Volunteer strategy, staff development and succession planning )
- New housing model

The following strategic areas will fall under the responsibility of the management team:

- Service
- Volunteers
- Sustainability

# Appendix



## OUR VALUES

<b>Choice, respect, dignity</b>	We keep survivors' voices at the centre of our work to guide our response paying particular attention to someone's privacy, their emotional, physical and cultural needs.
<b>Collaboration</b>	We are committed to working together with survivors and with external partners, sharing knowledge and expertise to maximise every opportunity to make progress towards our vision.
<b>Compassion</b>	We recognise and address the unique experiences, needs and struggles of victims/survivors of domestic abuse. Our practice involves collective action and solidarity with victims/survivors using an approach of listening to and validating their experiences, centring their voices and needs and taking action to address systemic injustices. Our practice also encompasses self-compassion, recognising the need for and importance of care and wellbeing for our staff in order to sustain efforts for social change.
<b>Empowerment</b>	We advocate a human rights-based approach and create a context in which women and children can achieve self-determination and empowerment so they can flourish and reach their full potential.
<b>Excellence</b>	We are committed to ensuring that we deliver the best we can possibly achieve.
<b>Feminism</b>	We work within a feminist ethos as active participants in the movement of social justice, advocating and proactively promoting women's and children's rights on the grounds of political, social and economic equality. Our work emphasises that domestic abuse is a cause and consequence of women's inequality and that perpetrators should always be held to account.
<b>Innovative</b>	Our service evolves in response to emerging needs, changing populations and new/revised ways of thinking about violence against women and children.
<b>Trauma Competence</b>	<p>Our service strives to create safe and supportive environments where those who have experienced domestic abuse can feel heard, understood and validated.</p> <p>Our practice is based on evidence-based frameworks that are employed by staff using empathic communication to facilitate healing processes and promote resilience. We strive to be culturally sensitive and address the diverse needs of service users and our staff.</p>

## How to contact us

**Women's Support Line:  
0131 561 5800**

(Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm)

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