

Domestic abuse in Edinburgh on the rise during lockdown

by Noa Hoffman Local Democracy Reporter

The Capital's largest domestic abuse support service has experienced a surge in women and children seeking care since lockdown ended, new figures reveal.

Referrals to Women's Aid Edinburgh during the first eleven weeks of lockdown ranged between eight and 19 per week, skewed to the lower end of the scale.

However, in the first week of restrictions easing the number of women seeking support more than tripled to 41.

During lockdown staff at the charity were concerned about the number of women potentially suffering abuse with no way of escaping. Last year average new referrals for the same period were between 10 and 19 per week, skewed to the middle of the scale.

Women's Aid say that leaving an abuser is the most dangerous time for women and children and is the time where there is the highest likelihood of them being seriously harmed or murdered. Under lockdown women in Edinburgh did not have the space or safety to be able to plan to leave.

Now, as schools in the Capital have begun to reopen, Women's Aid Edinburgh have at least 30 new women seeking support each week.

The charity expects this trend to continue and referral numbers to remain higher than normal.

At a meeting yesterday, members of the council's Finance and Resources Committee agreed to extend its contracts with

domestic abuse service providers by 12 months, in light of the coronavirus crisis.

Council contracts with Edinburgh Women's Aid as well as charities Four Square Scotland and Shakti Women's Aid, were due to expire on 1 April next year.

The council will now spend more than £1 million to keep the services running until March 31 2022, at which point a new tendering process will take place.

The 12-month extension will ensure stability for service users currently being supported, and those expected imminently.



Linda Rodgers, CEO of Women's Aid, said: "We continue to operate in a period of uncertainty and continue to make rapid changes to our service provision to meet the needs of women and children in Edinburgh.

"At this difficult time for women and children we are extremely grateful to both the City of Edinburgh Council and the Scottish Government for extending our funding and removing the need for us to go spend valuable time on a competitive application process to seek funds for these essential services."

A council spokesperson said: "The Covid-19 crisis and lockdown restrictions have exacerbated abusive situations for women, children and others and it has been a major priority for us and our partners Edinburgh Women's Aid, Shakti and Four Square to fast-track support for those in danger. This swift response helping people out of harm's way has been critical.

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