

Greater Manchester Women and Girls Panel

Six Month Report July 2021

1. Introduction

Launched in December 2020, the Women & Girls' Equality Panel brings together a diverse group of 20 well informed women from across our ten boroughs with the aim of accelerating gender equality, enabling women and girls to have their best life in Greater Manchester.

Panel members were appointed following an open recruitment process which attracted 138 applications. Those who were unsuccessful in joining the panel were invited to join and Allies Network to remain informed, with plans to further engage them in the work of the panel in the coming year.

Enthusiasm and commitment from the panel members has been excellent, providing a valuable voice to a breadth of views and experiences of women and girls across Greater Manchester.

2. Aims and objectives

The panel is working to understand the issues and inequalities affecting women and girls' lives and recognise their particular experience of COVID.

Through shaping and informing responses to those issues, the Panel is advising on new policies and activities, ensuring that gender equality is actively considered by Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and public services in decisions made to help make the city-region a better place to live, work, study and do business

The Panel wants all women and girls, across the ten boroughs of Greater Manchester, to have equality of opportunity to start well, live well and age well, and ensure that a differentiated approach is adopted where appropriate.

3. Activity

A series of 1-to-1 discussions were held with all panel members prior to the first meeting of the full panel in December. Nineteen priorities were initially flagged, and following discussion at the meeting it was agreed to initially focus on two key areas:

- Education, Skills & Employment; and
- Gender Based Abuse.

These were among the issues most often cited by panel members as priorities and tie in with the emerging areas of COVID impact.

Two working groups were subsequently set up to take forward key lines of enquiry related to each area, with members of the Panel self-nominating which group they wanted to sit on.

i) Education, Skills & Employment Working Group

The working group identified key lines of enquiry and has subsequently held five meetings each focusing on one of the following areas:

- Foundation Economy
- Childcare
- Education and Skills Pathways
- Good Employment
- Co-operatives, Entrepreneurship and Self Employment

Meetings have involved policymakers providing contextual evidence and insight into delivery with subsequent discussion helping to identify gendered issues including gaps in provision.

Discussion from the meetings is being used to produce a report setting out key issues and recommendations of the working group which it is hoped can be used to help shape policy and provision going forward. Examples of some the issues identified include: addressing language and cultural barriers to accessing childcare provision; the cost of childcare being a major barrier to accessing and maintaining employment and training and the need for Government to consider increasing the amount of hours included in the statutory early year's childcare entitlement to over 30 hours a week; the importance of family friendly working practices; childcare provision for children with special education needs and disabilities; and the need to limit the impact COVID-19 has on the progress of gender equality in the labour market.

The group plans to hold a further meeting on procurement, picking up on work being done within GMCA, and in addition the co-chairs of the working group are due to meet with policy leads within GMCA to discuss reskilling.

ii) Violence Against Women and Girls Working Group

The working group identified the following key lines of enquiry:

- Gender Based Violence
- Women's safety in public spaces
- GMP and Operation Mantle
- Victim support / victims Law
- Migrant women and No Recourse to Public Funds
- Wider issues facing the women's sector

Meetings have involved discussion and debate with policymakers, Greater Manchester Police (GMP) and a number of support organisations. Discussion from the meeting is being used to produce a report setting out key issues and recommendations of the working group which it is hoped will help shape policy and provision going forward.

The working group has already played a significant role in shaping the Greater Manchester Gender Based Violence Strategy and will continue influencing this as the strategy is finalised and implemented.

In addition to shaping and influencing the strategy, the working group are also:

- Providing input to bids to the Home Office Safer Streets Fund and Night-time Economy Fund. Linked to this, the group are also keen to undertake a Greater Manchester wide awareness raising campaign on public spaces and public

transport safety/harassment/sexual violence and abuse, with men and boys as allies/driving this campaign

- Exploring how the Panel can work with GMP on Operation Mantle and the disruption of predatory sexual behaviour
- Considering how the working group can support migrant women with No Recourse to Public Funds
- Looking at the development of appropriate standards for victim support across the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector as well as statutory services
- Keen to develop effective approaches to co-design with survivors

The working group are also looking at wider issues facing the women's sector in Greater Manchester and how the Panel can use its collective voice to influence these issues. These issues include underfunding, capacity, current political and media narratives and government policies, workforce overwhelm and barriers to access for women from gatekeepers, urgent lack of safe, appropriate accommodation.

4. Forward Plan

After just over six months of being operational, the Panel recently held a special meeting to review its operation and ways of working. Actions from the meeting, including developing a flexible forward plan; picking up both current activity the panel can positively influence as well as horizon scanning, will help shape the operation of the panel going forward and will be overseen by the new convening organisation, The Pankhurst Trust (Incorporating Manchester Women's Aid).