



12 May 2020

Dear Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester,

We can do better!

Who are we?

[GM4Women](#) is a coalition of change-makers committed to seeing a better future for all the women and girls of Greater Manchester. We are a growing movement of women working together from across our diverse communities and as representatives from all sectors including the business sector; voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors; academia; our public services including education, health, care, transport, housing and safety; and our political institutions.

The need for a gendered lens on Covid

We know that more men than women are dying from Coronavirus and that many more women than men are being exposed and affected by it because the implications of lockdown are also gendered. The impacts are massive and not just in the short run. For example:

- With schools and nurseries closed, women are taking on most of the **unpaid care and home schooling work**, reducing their hours or giving up paid work, turning the clock back on gender equality.
- Many women are on the frontline, delivering essential services, usually the **lowest paid** or most insecure work.
- Many women are trapped in their homes, **self-isolating with an abusive partner**.
- Women are also more likely to be **caring for older or disabled relatives and neighbours**.

We are finding that groups of women already disadvantaged by our society are struggling the most. This includes disabled women, black, Asian and ethnic minority women, women in unsuitable housing and migrant women with 'no recourse' or rights to public funds. An intersectional lens and approach to our response to the pandemic is therefore essential.

GM4Women have continued to convene over the last two months, with online meetings, providing a space and mechanism to collate insight from different groups and people on the specific ways Covid is impacting women and girls in Greater Manchester.

In early April, emerging key priorities were fed into the Humanitarian cell at GMCA, via Councillor Eve Holt, to help inform the initial response. But there is more we can do to ensure that women



and girls in all their diversity are seen and heard in Greater Manchester policy-making. This letter sets out a fuller overview and summary recommendations on next steps.

As a region that has always led the way and flown the flag for women's rights, we want to see Greater Manchester leading the charge to bring progress and accountability for women's rights post Covid.

Our key asks for Greater Manchester:

- We invite you to **join us at one of our future virtual meetings** so we can discuss the way forward.
- **Read and circulate the [On Gender](#) and '[Mind the Gap](#)' publications** which provide practical guidance on ways to ensure women's voices are heard in policy making and why this matters.
- **Establish the GMCA Women and Girls Panel as a matter of urgency.** This provides a much needed forum for insight and challenge to help ensure women and girls are visible in the response and recovery planning.
- **Support the GM4Women Coalition with core funding** to strengthen the resilience of an established, committed, diverse and inclusive body. This is particularly urgent given the university spending freezes which means that our funding is affected.
- **Convene the different Greater Manchester equalities panels** to share learning on the way forward and agree how best to ensure the voices are heard of citizens who face multiple and intersecting disadvantages.
- **Join GM4Women, Fawcett and organisations across the UK in our joint call to action to the UK government** - [available here](#).

Pre-covid data in Greater Manchester

Since 2018 we have been collecting data on the situation for women and girls in Greater Manchester. You can see more on this here:

- The [On Gender publication](#) by GM4Women members and colleagues at the University of Manchester in response to our Participation working group, highlighting some of the pre-covid gender equality gaps in Greater Manchester and the need to apply a gendered lens in policy making.
- The [latest GM4Women Gender Scorecard](#), published on 6 February. This is an easy to communicate snapshot that is committed to tracking and helping to address gender inequality in GM over ten years to 2028 - the centenary of equal franchise . There are many gaps in the data available - itself an important point and unfortunately, a number of indicators suggest that on a number of fronts progress on gender equality even pre-Covid was crawling, stalling and falling. For example:



- Voices of Survivors Report in 2018 showed 56% of gender based violence in GM did not access support and 47% of women without recourse were refused a refuge. Lack of data for 2019-20.
- Whilst the gender pay gap in GM narrowed by 1% to 13% from 2018-19, the gender employment rate gap in GM rose by 2% from 9% to 11%

Responding to needs of women and girls in Greater Manchester during the Covid Crisis

The following is by no means exhaustive but serves as a summary of the key priorities that have emerged from our conversations and task groups over the last two months:

- **Safety** - Domestic violence services and addressing the prevalence of gender based violence. Urgent need to support women with insecure immigration status/ no recourse to public funds. Urgent need to also ensure services are resourced enough so they are accessible to all ... disabled women will be particularly in need of support from DV services during this lockdown period.
- **Health & care** - Lack of data for care homes, of which women make the majority of residents and staff. Sport England data shows a growing gender gap in levels of physical activity during lockdown with women carrying the bulk of caring responsibilities at home, in the community and at work. A lack of planning for older and disabled women regarding meeting their care needs under lockdown and having fair access to hospital service and critical care (as highlighted by the Greater Manchester Disabled People's Panel. Lack of well-fitting PPE for women, highlights how invisible women remain despite making up the majority of key workers in the health and care sector.
- **Work and employment** - Continued concerns about women on maternity leave who have been told they no longer have a job and are at risk of missing the short deadline for tribunal cases. Disaggregated data is needed to provide a clear picture of impact on women's employment and income and how to build back better.
- **Education** - Address concerns around collapse of nurseries and losses suffered by childminders and impact this will have on women employed in these sectors, child development and ability of parents to remain in employment.
- **Participation & representation** - How are women and girls heard and included in recovery planning? We welcome the appointment of Councillor Elise Wilson as GM Economy Lead. It's a start but more action is needed to address the underrepresentation of women on GMCA Cabinet, the lack of an established GM Women and Girls panel, the absence of a funded Women and Girl's infrastructure body/network in Greater Manchester.

We can do better - building back better - for women and girls in Greater Manchester

Quite simply, there is real work to be done, and quickly, if we are to enable those closer to the ground to be the ones steering our future and we have to do this together.



To date, we have relied upon women to give their time voluntarily to drive forward the GM4Women network with some core support from MMU and University of Manchester who have generously provided secretarial, administrative and research support and space to meet. This is not sustainable and with the added pressures on the women and girls sector there is an urgent need to establish a more sustainable model if the voices of women and girls, their concerns and their solutions, are to be heard in their diversity.

In summary, our key asks are for you to join us at one of our future meetings; to support us with core funding; to establish the GMCA Women and Girls Panel as a matter of urgency; to read and circulate the [On Gender](#) and [‘Mind the Gap’](#) publications; to convene the different Greater Manchester equalities panels; and to join us in our joint calls on the Government.

There is an urgent need to establish robust mechanisms for women’s voice and ensure equal representation of women to inform plans for how we build back better. We look forward to working with you on this.

Yours sincerely,

This urgent call to action is signed by Helen Pankhurst on behalf of Francesca Gains (University of Manchester), Gail Heath (The Pankhurst Trust/Manchester Women’s Aid), Cllr Eve Holt (GM Moving & HappenTogether CIC), Sarah Mohammad-Qureshi (University of Manchester), Francine Morris (Salford University), Gemma Nash (Artist and Community Co-investigator), Caroline Pankhurst (Be Braver), Claire Pattison (Manchester Metropolitan University), Sally Penni (Women in the Law UK) Julia Rouse (Manchester Metropolitan University), Jill Rubery (University of Manchester) Sandhya Sharma (Safety4Sisters) and **GM4Women** more broadly, with input from:

cc,

Bev Hughes, Deputy Mayor of Greater Manchester

Cllr Brenda Warrington, Portfolio Lead for Equalities and Communities

Pam Smith, Chief Executive of Stockport and Portfolio Lead for Equalities and Communities

Amy Foots,



OUR VALUES



GM4WOMEN
2028