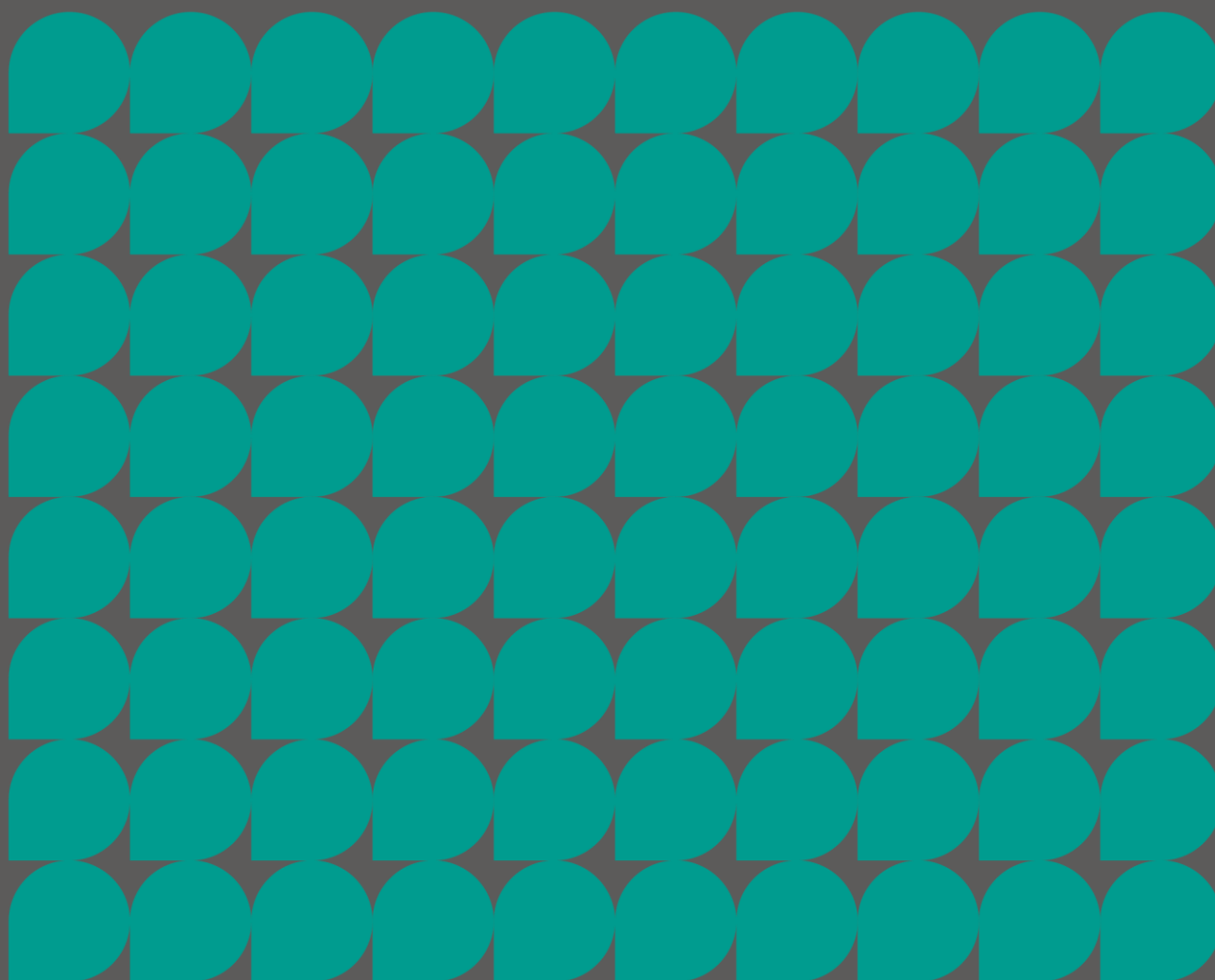


**WOMEN
& GIRLS
EQUALITY
PANEL**

**DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY
FOR GREATER MANCHESTER**

Greater Manchester Women and Girls' Equality Panel Annual Report 2024- 2025



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1. Message from the Chairs

We deeply thank the Women and Girls' Equality Panel members for their commitment and drive to ensure that the lives of girls and young women across Greater Manchester continually yield better outcomes and give thanks to our panel members who have stepped down over the last 12 months.

This work is never easy; we face multiple, interconnected inequalities daily. In a world that seems evermore in turmoil and conflict, these global concerns have a local impact.

The emotional labour undertaken by Panel members is clear when we share and strive to position our lived experiences in the policy and strategy developments across Greater Manchester. We have worked with other Equality Panels to ensure that overlapping intersectional and cultural factors affecting the health and opportunities of women and girls in Greater Manchester are central in all stages of development.

This report celebrates our collective achievements, working alongside incredible colleagues in Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Transport for Greater Manchester, GM4Women, and many more. We take a system-led approach to look at addressing Violence Against Women and Girls, bettering health outcomes, and improving work and employment.

We are proud to have influenced the focus on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in the Good Employment Charter and thank our women for their outstanding work during Good Employment Week.

We support the continuous accountability that the Baird Report highlighted in addressing Violence Against Women and Girls and the responsibility of Greater Manchester Police to do better.

We rejoice in our joint work with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority in championing and developing a Gender Mainstreaming approach to policy and strategy development. The first port of call is the Greater Manchester Baccalaureate (the MBacc), which has brought our Panel into closer collaboration with the Youth Combined Authority, ensuring that youth voice is integral to our thinking and actions.

The uncertainty of the world around us poses many challenges. Together as a Panel, we draw strength and support to continue our work and influence the changes we need to see so that Girls and Women across Greater Manchester can have the best start in life, live well, be safe, and have a more positive later life.

Emma Persand RGN QN and Sally Carr MBE, Panel Co-Chairs

2. Welcome to the panel

The Women and Girls' Equality Panel was established in December 2020 to address gender inequality in Greater Manchester. The role of the panel is to advise, support and challenge political and system leaders, namely the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), to tackle prejudice and discrimination against women and girls. The panel works with GMCA and the wider Greater Manchester system to ensure that equality, including the unique needs and risks of women and girls, is actively considered in decision making to help make the city-region a better place for women and girls to live, work, study and do business.

The panel is convened by the Pankhurst Trust (Incorporating Manchester Women's Aid), in partnership with GM4Women2028, a charity focused on promoting equality and diversity for women and girls in Greater Manchester. The panel meets every month, alongside its three working groups on: Education Work and Skills, ending Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), and Health.

The panel is made up of a diverse group of individuals and organisations from across the ten boroughs who are committed to ensuring that the viewpoints of women and girls from a cross-section of society are represented. To find out more about the panel and its members, please visit: [Greater Manchester's W&GS' Equality Panel Information](#).

“Being on the Panel has changed the way I think. That and perhaps turning 40. I'm quite well versed in the way women are failed by healthcare, but I've started to naturally apply a 'gendered lens' in my everyday actions and experiences.

My husband who is a construction auditor was talking to me about the challenges of getting young people interested about going into construction. He works internationally and was explaining some of the different methods other countries have used. My first thoughts were of the Manchester Baccalaureate. I asked him about what he thinks the challenges are for women and girls in his industry.

In my role as Maternity and Neonatal voices Lead for Bolton I've started to think of myself as responsible for applying a 'service user lens' to strategy.”

- Amy Rothwell, Panel member

3. Influencing policymakers: the past year's highlights

A key focus for the panel this year has been the push to integrate a gendered perspective into GMCA policies and practices. As a result, policymakers and staff have undertaken training on Gender Mainstreaming to strengthen their capacity in this area and test the approach to implementation of the Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc).

In November 2024, we held our annual in-person meeting with the Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham where we reiterated our strong desire to be more effectively integrated into GMCA's decision-making processes and to support a gender and sex lens on initiatives. We received a positive response to our three 'asks':

- A commitment to a firewall between Greater Manchester Police and immigration enforcement to allow for safer reporting of domestic violence.
- Continued engagement with the Equality Panels to ensure that the Good Employment Charter is an effective tool in improving employment conditions for women and girls.

- GMCA to support and resource trialling gender mainstreaming in the development of MBacc. The Chairs subsequently met with Caroline Simpson, Chief Executive of GMCA, to further agree to this.

3.1 Health

The newly established Health Task and Finish Group will be looking at how to support the aims of the Greater Manchester Women's Health Strategy (GMWHS). It was agreed that the focus would be aligned with the Strategy's priority of 'improving the quality and accessibility of information and education on women's health.'

The Strategy details that this include that 'all women, whatever their background, (are able to) access trusted, accessible, timely and comprehensive health and care information', and that 'professionals and services are equipped with the right information to provide high-quality advice and care around women's health.'

Since this group within the panel was formed, circumstances across the healthcare landscape have slowed the momentum of the GMWHS. The group is aiming to maintain its initial agreed upon priorities, whilst adapting to shift its immediate focus to the health aspects of the Live Well programme. This will hopefully place the group in a stronger position to productively work with those designing and delivering services.

3.2 Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

In April 2025 we met with Kate Green, Deputy Mayor of Greater Manchester, and received an update on the implementation of a firewall between Greater Manchester Police (GMP) and immigration enforcement to allow for safer reporting of domestic abuse. We called for improved data collection and sharing from GMP and GMCA, to foster a whole-system approach to tackling Violence Against Women and Girls. We will continue to work with GMCA on this issue in 2025-2026.

With reference to the #IsThisOkay Campaign in particular, we emphasised the need for iterative dialogue with Panel be considered integral step in any strategy, initiative or campaign related to VAWG in GMCA, and that we be provided with feedback on how our input has been acted upon.

In September 2024 we contributed to the Equality Panel-wide engagement session on the Police Crime and Safety Plan, highlighting the need to divert female offenders away prison, community led prevention initiatives, and addressing the root cause of crime.

3.3 Education, Skills, and Employment

For Greater Manchester Good Employment Week, the panel hosted a Forum Theatre inspired event, bringing together employees, employers, advocates, and policymakers. Using real-life workplace challenges faced by women across the life course as starting points, we explored practical solutions through dynamic and engaging theatre methods. A key theme during the engagement event was women not feeling valued and heard in the workplace.

The event allowed participants to engage directly with the barriers women face in employment and co-create solutions. The outcomes of this event have been distilled into actionable recommendations for the Charter, some of which are included below:

Accountability, Transparency and Engagement:

- Visible Commitments: Employers must visibly display their commitments to the Charter in the workplace, ensuring that employees understand how these differ from legal rights.
- The Charter as a Key Performance Indicator (KPI): performance against the Charter should be embedded as a KPI for employers, with resources allocated in their annual budget to fulfil its requirements.
- Clear recourse for employees: employees should have clear channels for addressing non-compliance with the Charter, with designated points of contact within the organisation and externally for addressing any concerns.
- Audit/review process: We recommend that the Charter carry out audits frequently of the employer, not just at point of membership. Employees should be given an opportunity to contribute to the initial assessment of an organisation's application, as well as be involved in audits/reviews of implementation of these commitments. Staff surveys should form part of this review process.

Health and Wellbeing:

- Comprehensive health training: employers should provide training on menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause, which covers symptoms, knowing your rights in the workplace, and expectations for how managers can provide support. Menopause and menstruation champions should be appointed, and this additional responsibility should be reflected in their pay.

- Health concerns: the Charter encourages supporting employees at different life stages such as menopause, but it does not say how, leaving this vulnerable to inaction. It also does not address specific health needs such as menstrual pain and other symptoms, or chronic conditions that may not meet the legal threshold for disability.
- Miscarriage: policies regarding baby loss before 24 weeks or fertility treatments are vague and often fall under general compassionate leave, which does not adequately recognise the physical and emotional impact of the situation and its aftermath. This should be rectified.
- Disability: the Charter describes supporting staff as “including reasonable adjustments for people with long term conditions and disabilities.” It is unclear how this differs from minimal legal obligations. The Charter should be explicitly clear on how its requirements are above existing employment rights.

Flexible Working:

- Policies: employers need to have and share their flexible working policy with staff. These policies should be developed collaboratively with staff and should be explicitly inclusive of employees experiencing conditions such as menopause or chronic health issues.
- Medical appointments: attendees shared the negative effects of having to take unpaid leave to cover medical appointments, including mandated appointments for women such as smear tests and mammograms. Provisions should be included in the Charter to address this as well as how employers should support staff to seek medical care for any health issues.

Recruitment and diversity:

- Proactive recruitment: the Charter should be prescriptive with how to recruit more women into in men-dominated industries, with a focus on outreach with women and girls and guidance on where and how to advertise job openings to increase diversity.
- Cultural assessments: employers should be required to conduct intersectional assessments to address unconscious bias and deep-rooted norms that disadvantage women and other marginalised people in the workplace.

Our two youngest panel members worked with the Greater Manchester Apprenticeship and Careers Service to write blogs on [What are my rights in the workplace? - Curriculum for Life](#) and [Know your rights: a guide for young people in Greater Manchester](#) for the Curriculum for Life site that provides guidance on a range of topics for young people.

Over the next year, we will work with GMCA to integrate a gender mainstreaming lens into the development of the MBacc.

3.4 Transport

In March we met with the Access for All team at Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) to support with the design of gender responsive and accessible rail stations. Feedback from panel members included considerations for women and girls' safety in the surrounding areas of stations which can be dark and isolated, such as working with landowners to increase visible CCTV.

We shared our engagement form for the first time with TfGM in response to a consultation request on rail accessibility. This asks those wishing to meet with the panel what stage of the policy cycle they are at, what sex and gender data they have used thus far to design their policy/project, what they are looking for as a result of engaging with the panel, and how they will keep us informed of how our insights are applied.

We will hold a further engagement session with TfGM to provide input into phase 2 of updating the Local Transport Plan for Greater Manchester, and the Mobility Scooter Policy and Bikes on Trams.

4. Community engagement

This year, our panel has actively engaged in numerous collaborative initiatives and advocacy efforts to enhance community wellbeing and support various causes.

4.1 GM4Women2028 Dialogues, Deeds and Determination events

One of our Co-Chairs and other Panel members attended GM4Women2028's Annual Data Scorecard Reveal event in February 2025, which examines ten markers of gender

inequality in Greater Manchester. The data shows that inequality remains the reality for women and girls right across the board. The GM4Women2028 public event at Salford University in July 2024, saw two Panel-organised workshops on capacity building for girls and young women entering politics, and how to turn ideas into action. Over 100 people attended the event where we connected with community groups, charities, feminist leaders, and policymakers.

4.2 Bury International Women's Day

Bury Council held a roundtable event to connect key people involved in local and regional activity to be a starting point to forming a Women and Girls Forum for Bury. One of our Co-Chairs and another panel member attended to provide insight into the setup and running of the panel. Also, in attendance included Chief Executive of Bury Council and Equalities and Communities Portfolio lead Lynne Ridsdale.

4.3 Equality Panel's letter on the Pathways to Work Green Paper

We have signed the open letter to all Greater Manchester Members of Parliament regarding the Government's Green Paper on Benefits, written by the Disabled People's Panel. The letter raises serious concerns about the Government's 'Pathways to Work' Green Paper and its likely impact on disabled people's rights, dignity, and income. We will continue to monitor the response to this collective action.

Women make up most Disabled people, and most people caring for Disabled people. It will be women who take on or increase unpaid care for their loved ones when their benefits are stripped back, often to the detriment of their own health and wellbeing. According to the Women's Budget Group, disabled women are nearly twice as likely to experience economic abuse compared to non-disabled women and are nearly four times more likely to have a partner or ex-partner stop them, or try to stop them, accessing benefits that they or their children are entitled to. The panel signed this open letter in solidarity with all disabled people and those who would be affected by the proposals, whilst highlighting just a couple of the many intersecting identities of women, disabled people, and carers whose marginalisation is compounded.

5. Internal developments

At our Strategy Day in February 2025, we started succession planning for our Co-Chairs; established a Task and Finish group on Women's Health, and refreshed our Education, Skills and Employment working group to focus on the Good Employment Charter and the Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc). We also agreed on a decision-making process for sensitive and significant matters.

5.1 Communication and information sharing

We continue to improve our internal communication systems by utilising Basecamp to store minutes, research, and other documents which members can access for themselves at any time and allows time for processing and feedback after the meeting. We also use this platform to share with our Allies Network news and research, as well as upcoming events and opportunities in the equalities sphere in Greater Manchester and beyond.

5.2 Strengthening internal governance

We have improved the application of our trauma-informed values by explicitly acknowledging in meetings the psychological toll that equalities work can take on our members and reminding external attendees of the unpaid emotional labour that women and girls are providing as volunteers. We have also embedded having chairs/ facilitators stay behind at the end of meetings in case any members would like to debrief if they have been affected by the discussions, following suggestion by a Panel member that there be a platform immediately following the meeting if anyone wants to talk.

The Panel has also experienced challenges as we navigated important discussions around signing the LGBTQ+ Equality Panel Pledge to End Conversion Therapy. These conversations have tested our ability to engage in truly open discussion on complex or contentious issues. In response, we are taking active steps to create a psychologically safe space that encourages respectful and transparent conversations.

6. Looking forward

The GMCA Women and Girls' Equality Panel remains dedicated to reducing gender inequality in Greater Manchester through engagement with the public and policy makers, and collaborative efforts with other Equality Panels.

In the next 12 months we will continue to develop our profile as a key stakeholder in decision making. We will support the continued development of the Good Landlord Charter, MBacc and the Live Well programme, ensuring that gender equality is embedded in the design, development, and implementation of these important initiatives.

We will continue to collaborate with GM4Women to advance gender equality in Manchester by 2028. This partnership includes building our Allies' Network, gathering data on women's needs, and participating in engagement workshops such as Dialogue, Deeds, and Determination events.

We are scheduling community organising training for our panel members to strengthen their roles as connectors and listeners within their networks and communities. This training will equip them to better gather insights, amplify lived experiences, and act as a strong voice for women and girls across Greater Manchester.

We have continued to meet with Manchester City Council to promote anonymous voting for victims of domestic abuse and will support with organising a refresher information session with refuge providers in Manchester to help remove barriers to democratic participation.

Finally, we would like to thank the panel Co-Chairs for their dedicated leadership, who have made great strides in advancing not only the core goals of this work but also the way it is done. Over the coming months, we will begin succession planning for new chairs or explore whether current chairs wish to extend their leadership for another year. We will also begin recruitment for new panel members towards the end of the year.

7. Further information

Organisations or members of the public wishing to get involved in the Panel's work can email womenandgirls@pankhursttrust.org and ask to sign up to our Basecamp channel where we share Panel and equality network opportunities and updates. Anyone can also join one of the GM4Women subgroups on the [themes](#) of Education, Safety, Culture & Active Lives, Participation in Public Life or Employment.

You can also keep up to date and get involved with the Women and Girl's Equality Panel on social media:

Instagram - [@mancwomensaid](#)

Facebook – Manchester Women's Aid