

AGENDA ALLIANCE GENERAL ELECTION 2024 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Our manifesto rests on a central ask to all political parties: that **the next Government creates a dedicated Secretary of State for Women and Girls**. We recommend that within the first year in government, the Cabinet Office form the position and appoint an incumbent, who will attend Cabinet meetings and play a leading role in ensuring a consistent focus on women and girls' needs. The Secretary of State should initially develop three core workstreams:

1. **Prioritisation and prevention**, focusing on early intervention and ensuring that all policy responds to gender, age, culture and trauma as a matter of course
2. **Sharing power** by involving women and girls with lived experience of multiple unmet needs in designing policy solutions
3. **Championing the specialist women and girls' sector** as experts and developing models for meaningful, equitable partnerships, supported by funding which recognises the unique value of the sector and address their long-term challenges in accessing resource

We need to match the seriousness of women and girls' multiple unmet needs with serious political resource. Women and girls deserve meaningful political advocacy, someone working across government to design preventative, holistic and gendered interventions. In the tables below we set out areas of work which the new Secretary of State should initially prioritise.

If you have any questions, please contact Maisie, our Policy, Research and Campaigns Manager on maisie@agendaalliance.org.

1. Prioritisation and prevention

To address women and girls' multiple unmet needs, we need to reframe our public services and direct resources towards gendered preventative action rather than crisis support. As things stand, under-funded and siloed public services fail to provide relational, community-based support. Multiple unmet needs are further worsened by one-size-fits-all approaches which assume a generic 'male service user'. The Secretary of State for Women and Girls would **work across government departments** to ensure that **policy-making is gendered as a matter of course**, ensuring checks and balances are in place to assess whether policy responses and services are gender-, trauma-, culturally- and age-informed. This is particularly pertinent in a number of key areas where women and girls' needs have been overlooked for too long, such as mental health services and the criminal justice system.

<p>PRIORITISATION AND PREVENTION:</p>	<p>Women and girls experiencing multiple unmet needs are usually only in this position because opportunities to help them earlier on were missed. We need to overhaul our approach to delivering support - creating holistic, locally-driven, wraparound services which cut across the arbitrary boundaries between government departments and intervene earlier.</p>		
<p>Preventing women and girls' from experiencing harm, and stopping problems from getting worse, by intervening earlier in gender-specific ways</p>	<p>Policy recommendation</p>	<p>Department</p>	<p>Timeline</p>
	<p>1a. Table legislation at the earliest possible opportunity which mandates that a gendered approach be mainstreamed into the design, reporting, monitoring, and scrutiny of all public services. This gendered approach should ensure that fully disaggregated data is captured at both local and national levels to demonstrate gendered difference and outcomes.</p>	<p>Government Commercial Function (within the Cabinet Office)</p>	<p>Within one year in office</p>
	<p>1b. Introduce Radical Prevention Funds for combined and local authorities to spend on local responses to gendered multiple unmet need.</p>	<p>Treasury</p>	<p>Within two years in Government</p>
	<p>1c. In partnership with the Chancellor, end the siloed approach to government budgets by developing a new model for public service funding that cuts across departments and effectively measures the cost-savings of prevention.</p>	<p>Treasury</p>	<p>Within one year in office</p>
	<p>1d. Secretary of State for Women and Girls to Chair a cross-departmental Prevention for Women and Girls Taskforce to help to embed women and girls' needs across government. The taskforce will contribute to work in the following initial priority areas:</p>	<p>Cabinet Office (Secretary of State for Women and Girls) with representatives from relevant departments as needed</p>	<p>Introduce Taskforce within first year in Government and pursue priority areas in line with relevant departmental workstreams/wider priorities</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An annual statement to Parliament from the Secretary of State sharing publicly the disaggregated data captured through local and national gendered policy and practice. - Contribute to the development of the Race Equality Act by commissioning an independent review of gendered racism in public services, making clear recommendations for how this can implement radical change. - Develop and publish a co-produced national trauma-informed standard, building on work begun through the Women’s Mental Health Taskforce, to be implemented across Government. - Work with the Treasury to deliver a cross-departmental review into the gendered impacts of poverty and the cost of living crisis. This should include exploring how data on the nation’s economy can be better disaggregated to understand the impacts on specific disadvantaged groups. 	<p>Cabinet Office</p> <p>Cabinet Office</p> <p>Department for Health and Social Care, Ministry of Justice, Department for Education, Home Office</p> <p>Treasury</p>	
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2. Sharing power

Women and girls at the sharpest edge of inequality have been overlooked for too long, and their trust in public services is at an all-time low. Decisions about the services which support them must no longer be made without their involvement, as this fails to address multiple unmet need nor recognises specific local or cultural contexts. Co-producing from the earliest possible stages of policymaking will develop political and public awareness of multiple unmet need, forming more effective policy responses, and increase public confidence in political decision making by ensuring decisions are guided by those closest to the social problems women and girls face.

SHARING POWER: Designing future solutions alongside women and girls	Women and girls at the sharpest end of inequality must be meaningfully engaged to shape policy and develop public knowledge of complex and multiple needs. Their voices should be at the heart of designing solutions at all stages, spanning public information, consultation processes, legislation, service delivery and evaluations.		
	Policy recommendation	Department	Timeline
	2a. To improve public confidence in the focus on women and girls' needs, Government should roll out a national public-facing communications campaign making the case for gender-informed early intervention , designed and produced in partnership with women and girls experiencing multiple unmet needs. This campaign should centre the voices of experts by experience and focus on improving public and practitioner understanding of complex needs across all public services and policy.	Government Communication Service (in partnership with all relevant departmental communications teams)	Within two years in Government
2b. Ring-fenced funding should be made available to ten local authorities initially to launch 12-month pilots of Women and Girls' Lived Experience Advisory Panels to shape local approaches to preventing gendered multiple unmet needs. These panels should fully remunerate all experts by experience and incorporate an independent	Treasury	Within two years in government	

	public evaluation after a 12-month pilot to explore options for wider rollout.		
	2c. Government should set a cross-departmental co-production strategy in partnership with all departments, setting out how designing, drafting, launching and evaluating policy can effectively centre experts by experience . As part of developing the strategy, Government must develop clear guidelines in partnership with specialist women and girls' organisations to ensure coproduction is gender- and trauma-informed.	Cabinet Office	Within one election cycle, following the evaluation of the Lived Experience Advisory Panels pilots
	2d. Continue to progress the Ministry of Justice Young Women's Strategy as part of commitments made in the Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan, ensuring that women and girls with lived experience of the criminal justice system are engaged in implementation and review of the Young Women's Strategy, as well as any accompanying guidance.	Ministry of Justice	Within first year in government

3. Championing the women and girl’s sector

The specialist women and girls’ sector is at the heart of effectively addressing women and girls’ multiple unmet needs. Their expert support and evidence base is unparalleled – but years of under-investment has left the sector struggling. Contract values have shrunk and we have seen reduced flexibility and variety in the design of public service contracts, with the number of grants reduced and mixed-sex services becoming more and more commonplace. This has left smaller, local and by-and-for organisations locked out of bidding for funds to deliver vital community services. Ultimately, placing community organisations under pressure to accept low-value contracts indefinitely only places women and girls at further risk.

We can resolve these problems, if the next government addresses them openly. A Secretary of State for Women and Girls must prioritise the relationship between government and gender specialist services, repairing trust by investing time in building meaningful models of delivering meaningful support in partnership. These conversations will require honest assessments of the funding relationship between women and girls’ organisations and the state, acknowledging the pressures the sector has faced and addressing the longstanding challenges with accessing and distributing financial resources fairly. This must include discussions about how funds can be meaningfully ring-fenced for specialist and by-and-for organisations.

<p>CHAMPION OUR SECTOR:</p> <p>Shaping fairer funding systems and strengthening relationships with women and girls’ specialist services</p>	<p>The specialist women and girls’ sector cannot deliver sustainable support if they are ineffectively funded or expected to pick up low value contracts without room for tailored support indefinitely. The Secretary of State for Women and Girls must drive a programme of work to repair the relationship between government and gender specialist organisations so that women and girls experiencing multiple unmet needs can access the support they need.</p>		
	Policy recommendation	Department	Timeline
	<p>3a. In partnership with the specialist women and girls’ sector, and using the Ministry of Justice Concordat on women in or at risk of contact with the criminal justice system as a starting point, form a Concordat for women and girls facing multiple disadvantage. This work should be independently facilitated and bring senior representatives from all Government departments together with</p>	<p>Cabinet Office, Home Office, Ministry of Justice, Department for Health and Social Care, Department for Education</p>	<p>Within two years in government</p>

	<p>specialist sector representatives, developing a joint commitment to action on addressing gendered multiple disadvantage. The Concordat should include commitments to repairing relationships between government departments and the specialist sector through meaningful collaboration and partnership routes.</p>		
	<p>3b. Lead a programme of work in partnership with local authorities and commissioners to develop a gender-, age-, trauma- and culturally responsive commissioning toolkit which can meet gendered multiple unmet needs, expanding upon the existing VAWG Commissioning toolkit. This work should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - End the practice of mixed-sex or gender-neutral commissioning across domestic abuse, substance use, criminal justice, mental health, education, and youth services, by releasing clear guidance and evidence demonstrating why a tailored approach is more effective; - Be accompanied by a ring-fenced funding package for local authorities to commission and grant fund by-and-for and specialist services, including specialist services 	Treasury	Within one year in government

	for Black and minoritised, LGBTQ+, disabled women, and women with no recourse to public funds.		
	<p>3c. Create new mechanisms to meaningfully gather, collate and learn from the specialist women and girls sector's expertise. This process should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prioritise developing systems which place a greater value on qualitative insights and expertise from the sector and experts by experience, to enrich the existing evidence base; - Ensure that data gathered through these systems is included in the Secretary of State's annual statement to parliament on gendered policy and practice. 	Cabinet Office	Within one election cycle

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