

Agenda Alliance
Senna Building, Gorsuch Place
London, E2 8JF

5 June 2024

Calling SOS: Supported by over 50 organisations, Agenda Alliance leads calls for the next government to introduce a dedicated Secretary of State for Women and Girls

"Policymakers need a kick up the butt. They need to do something, and they need to do it fast otherwise there are going to be so many more disadvantaged women; more suicides, homelessness, child removal. It needs acting on and it needs acting on fast."

Nici, member of Agenda Alliance's [Women's Advisory Network](#)

Dear Rishi, Sir Keir, Sir Ed, Carla and Adrian,

We are writing from [Agenda Alliance](#), a coalition of over 100 member organisations working to make a difference to the lives of women and girls at the sharpest end of inequality. Our Alliance includes large national bodies and smaller, specialist organisations, working in collaboration to influence public policy and improve the response to women and girls experiencing multiple unmet needs. As the 4 July General Election approaches, we are writing to ask you to commit to a central ask to improve the lives of women and girls. We want the next government to **create a dedicated Secretary of State for Women and Girls**, matching the seriousness of women and girls' needs with serious political resource.

There is a strong case for ensuring women and girls are represented at the highest levels of politics – especially women and girls experiencing multiple disadvantage. Multiple unmet needs are often interconnected, complex and gender-specific. They may include contact with the criminal justice system, poverty, using substances to cope, having no recourse to public funds and having no safe place to call home. For many women and girls these challenges are underpinned by extensive experience of abuse and violence throughout their lives. However, single issue policy responses which try and address these problems one at a time ignore the connections between them, causing these problems to escalate. **Far too often**, women experiencing disadvantage and misogyny are stigmatised, labelled as just 'victims'; 'criminals'; 'bad mothers', 'addicts', 'poor' or 'useless'. These labels stick, and they ignore the fact that women and girls experiencing multiple unmet needs are whole individuals, who are hopeful, inspiring, joyful, aspirational and caring.

Early intervention from relational, cross-cutting services which provide gender-, age-, culture- and trauma-responsive support is critical – **but without senior political backing, effective, gendered prevention won't have a lasting transformative impact**. Political focus on the issues women and girls face has been diluted for too long: since the inception of these roles, ministers assigned to support women and girls have only had a position in Cabinet because they also hold other full-time government roles, such as Home Secretary; Secretary of State for Culture, Media and

Sport; or Secretary of State for Business and Trade. **Responsibility for women and girls facing the greatest disadvantage shouldn't be a bolt on to other more senior roles.**

We all want society to be safer and more functional – polling tells us that the majority of Britons, whoever they vote for, [think public services are in a very bad state](#). A Secretary of State for Women and Girls would work across Government at the most senior levels to reshape public services and embed a preventative approach. They should draw together healthcare, education, housing, violence against women and girls and justice policy to deliver lasting change which addresses how women and girls' problems are often multiple and interconnected. Primarily, we believe that a Secretary of State for Women and Girls should:

- **Centre prioritisation and prevention.** A cross-cutting, Cabinet level women and girls' representative will work across government departments to embed early intervention and hold them accountable for ensuring that **all policy responds to gender, age, culture and trauma as a matter of course.**
- **Share their power.** Women and girls with lived experience have the answers to so many persistent policy problems – but they are so rarely included. This role should hold a core focus on designing future solutions alongside women and girls with lived experience, from consultation to legislation, service delivery to service evaluation.
- **Champion the sector.** After decades of declining investment in vital services, women and girls need high level political advocacy to bring departments together and address the distinct issues the specialist sector supporting them faces. We need funding models which embed full-cost recovery, articulate the cost-savings of prevention, and provide ring-fenced resource for specialist and by-and-for organisations.

We are attaching to this letter detailed policy recommendations which set out our ambitions for what a senior political focus on women and girls could achieve. If we are bold enough to address gendered multiple disadvantage with fresh eyes, the returns will be huge. The 55 organisations who are signatories to this letter are urging you to pledge your support, and call for dedicated political focus on women and girls now.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet you or a member of your team and discuss this manifesto ask further; do not hesitate to get in touch with our Policy and Public Affairs Officer Tara on tara@agendaalliance.org to arrange a meeting.

Yours faithfully,



Indy Cross, Chief Executive of Agenda Alliance

A Way Out, Kay Nicholson, Chief Executive



Advance, Liz Mack, CEO



Alliance for Youth Justice, Jess Mullen, CEO



Anawim, Joy Doal, Chief Executive



Barrow Cadbury Trust, Dame Sara Llewellyn, Chief Executive



Beyond the Streets, Mari Edwards, CEO



Birth Companions, Naomi Delap, Chief Executive



Black Country Women's Aid, Sara Ward, Chief Executive



Brighton Women's Centre, Lisa Dando,



Cardboard Citizens, Jessie Wyld, Chief Executive



Centre for Justice Innovation, Phil Bowen, Director



Centre for Mental Health, Andy Bell, Chief Executive



Centre for Women's Justice, Harriet Wistrich, Solicitor & Director



Chance UK, Vanessa Longley, CEO



Changing Lives, Stephen Bell, Chief Executive



Children and Young People's Mental Health Alliance, Amy Whitelock Gibbs, Chair



Clean Break, Anna Herrmann, Artistic Director/Joint CEO



Clinks, Anne Fox, Chief Executive



Criminal Justice Alliance, Mark Blake, Policy Manager

The logo for Criminal Justice Alliance, featuring the words "Criminal Justice Alliance" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font, stacked vertically.

Daddyless Daughters, Aliyah Ali, Founder and Chief Executive

The logo for Daddyless Daughters, consisting of the words "DADDYLESS DAUGHTERS" in a pink, sans-serif font, enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Fawcett, Jemima Olchawski, Chief Executive

The logo for Fawcett, featuring the word "Fawcett" in a purple, serif font with a purple arrow pointing right. Above it is "150 YEARS" in a smaller, orange, sans-serif font. Below it is the tagline "Equality. It's about time." in a purple, cursive font.

Greater Manchester Women's Support Alliance, Tracey Sparkes, Chief Executive

The logo for Greater Manchester Women's Support Alliance, featuring a colorful, multi-colored fan-like graphic on the left, followed by the text "GREATER MANCHESTER WOMEN'S SUPPORT ALLIANCE" in a black, sans-serif font.

Howard League for Penal Reform, Andrea Coomber KC (Hon.), Chief Executive

The logo for Howard League for Penal Reform, featuring the words "Howard League for Penal Reform" in a green, sans-serif font, with "for" in a smaller font size. The logo is framed by a thin black border.

Inquest, Deborah Coles, Executive Director

The logo for Inquest, featuring the word "INQUEST" in a black, sans-serif font, followed by a purple keyhole icon.

IRISI, Medina Johnson, Chief Executive

The logo for IRISI interventions, featuring the word "IRISI" in a white, sans-serif font on a yellow background, with a blue dot above the "i". Below it is the word "interventions" in a white, sans-serif font on a blue background.

Kairos, Kellie Ziemba, Chief Executive Officer

The logo for Kairos, featuring a stylized "W" made of two overlapping shapes in green and yellow, followed by the word "kairos" in a black, sans-serif font. Below it is the tagline "WOMEN WORKING TOGETHER" in a smaller, black, sans-serif font.

Lancashire Women, Amanda Greenwood, Chief Executive

The logo for Lancashire Women, featuring the words "LANCASHIRE WOMEN" in a white, sans-serif font, with "LANCASHIRE" on a teal background and "WOMEN" on a pink background.

Liz Hogarth OBE, Independent Adviser to the Corston Independent Funders' Coalition.

Luton All Women's Centre, Caroline Cook, Chief Executive Officer

The logo for Luton All Women's Centre, featuring the words "LUTON ALL WOMEN'S CENTRE" in a pink, sans-serif font, with "LUTON" in a smaller font size. A blue wavy line is positioned above the word "ALL".

Maternal Mental Health Alliance, Karen Middleton,
Head of Campaigns and Policy



National Ugly Mugs, Dr Raven Bowen, CEO



Nelson Trust, Niki Gould, Director of Women's
Services



North Wales Women's Centre, Abby Lewis, Chief
Executive



Nottingham Women's Centre, Vandna Gohil, Chief
Executive



National Women's Justice Coalition, Abbi Ayers,
Development Manager



One Small Thing, Claire Hubberstey, CEO



One25, Jennifer Riley, Chief Executive



Open Clasp Theatre Company, Catrina McHugh MBE
and Ellie Turner, joint Chief Executives



Pecan, Cat Millar, Women's Services Manager



Prison Reform Trust, Pia Sinha, CEO



PSS UK, Lesley Dixon, Chief Executive



Redthread, Lucie Russell, Chief Executive



Respect, Jo Todd CBE, Chief Executive



Rj4all, Anna Fosse-Galtier, UK Operations Director



Social Benefits Consortium, Sandra Beeton, Chief Executive



Support and Action for Women's Network, Rose Ssali, Chief Executive Officer/Founder



Talk Listen Change, Michelle Hill, Chief Executive



The Drive Partnership, Kyla Kirkpatrick, Director



The JABBS Foundation, Chloé Geoghegan, Head of Programme – Women and the Criminal Justice System



Westend Women and Girls, Huffty McHugh, Centre Co-ordinator



Women in Prison, Sonya Ruparel, Chief executive



WomenCentre, Angela Everson, Chief Executive



Working Chance, Natasha Finlayson, Chief Executive



Young Women's Trust, Claire Reindorp, CEO



Youth Access, Cassandra Harrison, Chief Executive



Additional signatories after initial publication:

Bright Futures, Helen Dunmore and Nicola Whalen, Managing Directors

Womankind Worldwide, Diana Njuguna & Disha Sughand, Co-CEOs

Getaway Girls, Flavia Docherty, CEO

The Late Discovered Club, Catherine Asta, Founder

Alison G Rosen, Trustee of Lift and Co-Chair of Nisa Nashim Bushey

Together UK, Linda Bryant, Chief Executive

WISH, Joyce Kallevik, Director

Basis Yorkshire, Moya Woolven, CEO