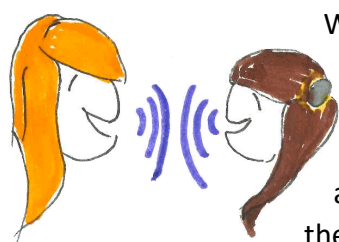


Women's Homelessness Involvement Group's political asks

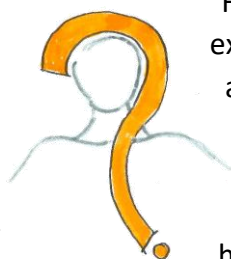
We at the Women's Homelessness Involvement Group (WHIG) have developed some key political asks. These are based on what women who are experiencing homelessness and stakeholders from frontline services have told us are the gaps in provision and barriers to accessing support. Through a coproduced approach with women, we have developed solutions to address those gaps and identified what is needed to improve homelessness services for women.



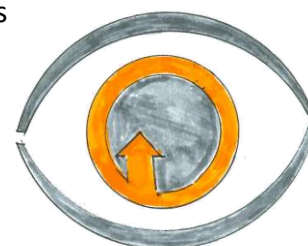
We would like to have an open conversation about these asks and discuss what you agree with and what might be different from your experiences. We are talking to lots of different people about these asks and are really keen to start conversations about how to work together on creating lasting change. Some of the asks need decision makers input to create this change but for many of the asks, maybe on a smaller scale, we can start to take action immediately

We see this as the start of a conversation. A conversation about what change we together want to see and the action we can take as one to improve access and increase provision of services for women in our city.

Why political asks for women's homelessness?



From our work with women and services we see and hear that women's experiences of homelessness often differ from men and that this is not always considered in the design and delivery of services. One clear example of this is how women's homelessness may be more hidden, with women rough sleeping hiding themselves off the main streets due to experiences of harassment and sexual exploitation, for instance being approached for sex in exchange for a place to stay.



Lack of provision and suitable accommodation for women and women with families is also leaving women experiencing domestic abuse trapped in their homes, as they are forced to make the choice to remain where they are, rather than make themselves homeless.

Through conversations with women and front line staff, and research into women's homelessness, these types of experiences come up again and again.

If our thinking and planning around homelessness services is what is visible and who is more likely to access homeless services, then we may believe that to be the need too. We also suggest that because homelessness services are often designed around visible homelessness that services are more often built around men's needs as this is often more visible and there

is often more provision for men in terms of numbers of places in accommodation and services. If this has been the design for years, if not decades, then the implications of this are quite worrying for women and the provision for women’s homelessness.

Homelessness services have traditionally been designed by men, for men, meaning that they don’t cater to the needs of women. Women experiencing homelessness, often have a history of trauma, for this reason, it is important the support and provision is seen and designed through a gendered lens, taking into account the need for safety, security and trust.

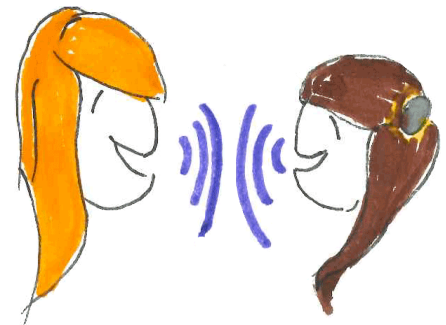
In general, women’s voices and experiences of homeless services and accommodation are underreported and not always heard within the system. This is why Women’s Homelessness Involvement Group (WHIG) felt the urge to call for action in order to change the dialogue around homelessness services and commissioning in Manchester.

Our political asks

Approaches for women’s needs

Women-centred approaches

- Women are given a choice of a female worker, whenever possible
- Safety needs and consideration should come first in approaches in working with women, and their sense of control and choice should be maximised in support
- Rights and responsibilities should be clearly outlined and accessible to women accessing a service and/or accommodation

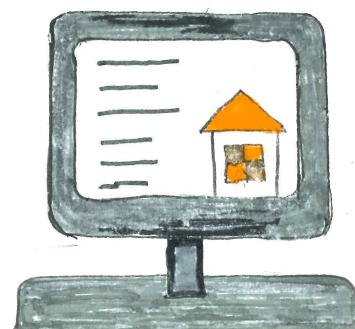


Training for staff working at different levels, from decision makers to front line staff

- Front line staff and services working with women with multiple disadvantage should be trained in trauma-informed practices / psychologically informed environments (PIE) and domestic abuse.
- Commissioners trained in trauma-informed practices to better understand the needs of women and the impact of trauma on women’s lives

Review and meet the needs of women and girls during these challenging times of covid-19

- Equalities impact assessment – i.e. review, of the impact of changes to policy and services on women and girls, including those from BAMER communities, before any changes to funding and services are made that might disproportionately impact
- Plans and appropriate monitoring of these impacts should be in place if changes are made to mitigate some of these impacts.



Accommodation

Setting and improving standards of current accommodation.



- Accommodation standards and safety should be improved for women, whether mixed or women only. Including secure storage for belongings, sanitation, accessible for women who have a disability, located close to support networks, safe staffing presence and levels and appropriately trained to work with women experiencing multiple disadvantage.

More women only accommodation.

- Increase women only provision and accommodation with different criteria for women to access for women with higher needs and those with lower needs
- Women appropriately placed and supported in accommodation depending on needs
- All mixed and women's accommodation to have staff trained in trauma-informed practices / PIE / domestic abuse

Wellbeing and addressing isolation.

- Opportunities for social connection, skill building and activities in accommodation. Spaces for reflection and being heard.
- 1-2-1 support from a key worker where possible with wraparound support and support to access social networks and community spaces outside of the accommodation.

Voice and involvement

Involvement, being heard and having a process where feedback is always responded to.

- Work with and involve the voices of women with lived experience and the services that support them.
- Provide real opportunities for people who have lived it using different approaches to involvement that are as relational as possible. This can be any or several levels of what we call the 'involvement ladder', from providing information, to involvement and engagement activities, to consultation, and all the way to co-designing services
- Ensure women feel heard by providing a response to what they have said, even if things are delayed or changed, it is important to keep people involved by keeping in contact and providing regular updates.

Improve standards and reduce stigma.

- Involve women currently accessing homeless services and in accommodation to improve the standards and safety of accommodation and pathways to accessing services.





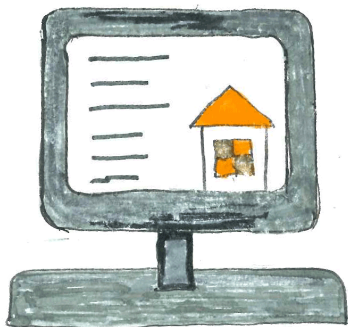
- Explore and work with others to provide opportunities for bringing people together, women and services and decision makers, to talk and listen to each other to encourage mutual understanding, build trust and reduce the instances of judgement and stigma that women still often face when access services around things like begging, drug use and sex working.

Recruitment and representation.

- Staff recruitment should represent a broader and more diverse range of skills and backgrounds in services and in positions of leadership and power
- Include some allocation to recruit people / women with lived experience and/or share power in decision making through meaningful and appropriately remunerated co-production processes.

Joined up multi-agency approaches

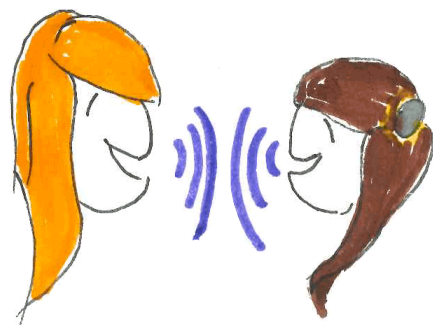
Improve access and referral pathways through partnerships and multi-agency approaches.



- Improve and widen access into mental and physical health services through multi-agency and joined up approaches.
- Consider access needs and communication barriers to accessing these types of services including, digital exclusion, language and cultural barriers, poverty and experiences of abuse that means that accessing mixed gender spaces can be problematic for many women.

Partner with specialised services:

- Work with specialist women's support services to understand and meet the needs of women involved in sex work / survival sex and those experiencing /fleeing domestic abuse.



Multiple barriers.



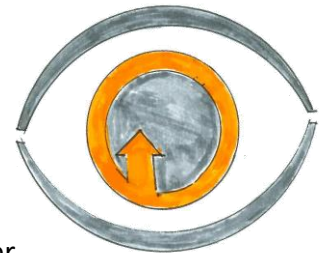
- Improve understanding and seek to remove barriers for women experiencing multiple disadvantage through training, involvement and commissioning services differently i.e. provision and support built around relational, person-centred approaches with key workers in services that can provide long-term wraparound support through partnerships and multi-agency approaches.



Gender data gap, access barriers and criteria

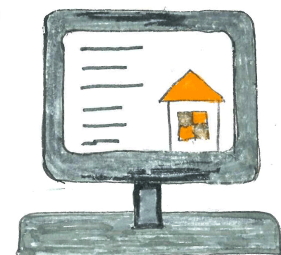
Review and reallocation of resources based on homelessness and hidden needs

- Review need and account for more hidden types of homelessness to appropriately allocate resources, services and accommodation for women
- Review criteria of current women’s accommodation to map the needs of women currently accessing services and collect data on exclusions evictions to understand where exclusion of need and barriers may still present problems to women accessing these services
- Review accommodation places along gender and take up of these places, to see the real allocation of women’s spaces in accommodation, not just what is on paper



Comprehensive and centralised collection of data

- Review data collection and monitoring practices along data on demographics
- Keep introducing more comprehensive and centralised collection of gender and demographics data and need through GMTHINK. This will support a more joined up approach for services, and prevent women from having to retell their story multiple times
- Acknowledge the gender data gap and impact on provision for women and exclusion in some services like ABEN historically and address the issues of this legacy of underreporting and accounting of women’s needs



- Due to lack of gendered and other demographic centralised collection and monitoring of data historically there is a lack of data and knowledge around more hidden types of homelessness and the scale of women's homelessness and need.
- Utilise wider research and data to assess need, especially hidden needs of women

Review of criteria for rough sleeping

- Urgent review of criteria for accessing accommodation, including accommodation only accessed through the rough sleepers team.
- Allow for other services and teams to report women rough sleeping, so that women are not forced to make themselves visible on the city streets in order to be seen and picked up by the rough sleepers team, potentially putting them in danger

Who are we?

WHIG is part of the Manchester Homelessness Partnership (MHP), one of several action groups bringing people together to influence, change, and improve homelessness services. WHIG brings together women with lived experience of homelessness and professionals representing organisations which deliver services or who can influence systemic change. Membership is open to women with lived experience and professionals who are committed to women's involvement and influencing change that improves women's experience of homeless services and accommodation.

☀️ This is how it is: key messages and sketches

from women who have experienced homelessness

... homelessness can seem faceless...

This is how it is...

"It's like being in a fishbowl, you're looking out and people look in but there's a void between you."



This is how it is...

"At first you can sleep anywhere. Get off your face, so you don't feel it."



This is how it should be...

"There should be the right support for women. Link in and involve other services and have information readily available."

"Not to be seen as a problem but as someone going through a lot of stuff, including trauma."

This is how it is...

"Literally when you have nowhere to go. Find yourself welling up and crying. Someone will always say, 'come and stay with me' but always want something from you and can be controlling."



"You see everything you don't want to see. You wake up and someone's robbed you. Anything can happen to you. Like, 'people spitting at you'."

This is how it is...

"Affects how you think of others and yourself."



This is how it should be..."

"If I miss an appointment, show you care by checking in with me. You don't know what I am dealing with, I might have forgotten or something could be wrong."

This is how it is...

“Women don’t always speak out. You see fear on women’s faces, can see some of what is going on but can’t put this down on paper. You have to wait until they tell you. Once they trust you, they will tell you.”



This is how it should be...

“Have the right supported accommodation, with referrals or drop-ins to other services.”

“We need strong, compassionate women supporting women.”



This is how it should be...

“Women only accommodation with support and your own key... even if the weather is nasty the right support is in place. If you’ve got the right support things can be good.”

This is how it is...

“If you haven’t gone through stuff yourself and work with women, you need trauma-informed training.”



This is how it is...

*"you miss out on so much.
Everyone around you is getting
on with their lives..."*



This is how it is...

"Feels like snakes and ladders..."



*"Takes you ages to get into normal
patterns again, after being
homeless and recovering from
addiction..."*

*"... It is scary when you come out of it. It
takes time to remember to do things and
get back basic life skills."*

**"Maybe, the system
needs to change?"**



This is how it is...

"...it is not just rough sleeping..."

"Being homeless isn't always about sleeping outside... when you've got no option you have to stay with someone you don't know...."

"You can never relax when you haven't got your own space."



This is how it is...

"Sometimes I feel like I am on a hamster wheel, going round and round."

This is how it should be...

"Access to support to prevent homelessness in the first place and the revolving door of homelessness."

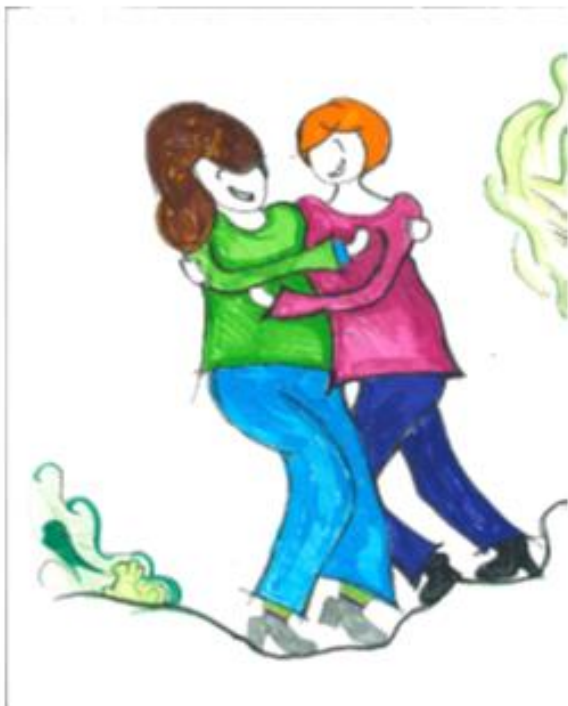
"Women need support to maintain long-term accommodation and support around their mental health and trauma."

This is how it is...

"Sometimes trying to go down the right path seems easy but when everyone around you is not on the same path it can become difficult..."

This is how it should be...

"Not enough help and understanding. Everyone has different needs, so there needs to be better and more tailored support that meets those needs."



"That one person did make a difference to me. They took the time to listen and get to know me and they did it with others too. They stuck by me. If I had not had them I would not have had the support to change things in my life."



“Don’t whig out, join us in raising our voices for involvement and change”

With Thanks

*To women from the Women’s
Homelessness Involvement Group (WHIG)
for sharing their experiences of how it is,
how they felt and what is needed*

“Don’t whig out, join us in raising our voices for involvement and change”

Homelessness can seem faceless and to represent this, and the feelings that can come with it, the group discussed and decided that the women drawn here would be faceless, ageless and colourless to represent this.

The situations and direct quotes are there to show and tell the experiences of different women involved and represented through the group and will not represent all situations and experiences.

The group would love to hear from and work with others, so please do get in touch - womencochairs@gmail.com

Read the latest news from our group here: <https://mhp.org.uk/action-groups/womens-homelessness-involvement/>