



# NOTTINGHAM WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS NETWORK MANIFESTO



# **ABOUT THE WOMEN'S ORGANISATION NETWORK**

**The Women's Organisations Network (WON) is the largest coalition of women's organisations in Nottinghamshire. With over 100 members, WON works to foster a cohesive and joined up approach to change the lives and future of women and girls in our communities and beyond. This manifesto was developed by a steering group of five organizations (Nottingham Women's Centre, Juno Women's Aid, Equation, Nottinghamshire Sexual Violence Support Services, and POW) incorporating contributions from WON member organisations, survey responses from our wider network of women, and current research on women.**

**This manifesto includes and supports the policy asks of many other women's organisations and coalitions nationally that we are connected to – the #SheVotes24 Coalition, the National Women's Justice Coalition, Agenda Alliance, Women's Resource Centre, End Violence Against Women Coalition, Women's Budget Group, and Rape Crisis England and Wales amongst others.**



# ABOUT THE WOMEN'S ORGANISATION NETWORK

**We stand in solidarity with all women and girls, who make up 51% of the population and who so far in this election campaign have heard very little about the issues that affect their lives and how the changes proposed will benefit them. This manifesto contains proposals for achievable change to improve the lives of women and girls in Nottinghamshire and beyond. We ask all political parties to ensure that women and girls are at the heart of their General Election campaigning and that women's voices are listened to in policy and practice by Government.**



# OUR OVERARCHING ASKS

**Nottingham Women's Centre and the Women's Organisation Network, alongside our partners in the sector, ask for a commitment to:**

- **A dedicated role of Secretary of State for Women and Girls in cabinet to champion and prioritise the needs of women and girls, at the highest level of politics as called for by the Agenda Alliance.**
- **Policy making that centres women through a gendered approach to the design, monitoring and evaluation of policies. Central to this is the collection of disaggregated data at the local and national level.**
- **Sustainable funding for community-based women's centres and specialist women's organisations, especially those that are run by-and-for specific groups (such as Black women's organisations). These organisations are best placed to address the cycles of trauma, inequality, disadvantage and harm experienced by women and girls and must be prioritised and listened to.**



# WOMEN'S HEALTH

Health is a fundamental human right, and women's health, in all its complexity and diversity, deserves focused attention and action. Five times more research goes into erectile dysfunction – which affects 19% of men – than into premenstrual syndrome, which affects 90% of women.

NHS Maternity Service in Nottingham has proven to be 'not fit for purpose'. The Ockenden Review and Report provides insight into the appalling services and life-threatening experiences of women in maternity including dozens of baby deaths.

Maternal mortality for Black women is currently almost four times higher than for White women. Over 570,000 women across the UK are waiting for Gynaecology treatment, with gynaecology waiting lists growing the most in percentage terms of all elective specialties since the pandemic. Over 8 in 10 women in the UK feel they were not listened to by healthcare professionals.



# **We call on the next UK Government to:**

- **Improve waiting lists in gynaecology services as gynaecological conditions such as endometriosis and fibroids, which are often progressive, have a huge impact on a woman's quality of life**
- **Fund research on health conditions that predominantly or uniquely affect women such as endometriosis.**
- **Protect women's reproductive rights and their rights to make choices about their own bodies and health, including through the decriminalisation of abortion.**
- **Adopt and implement a gender-responsive mental health service to address the fundamental and specific needs of women's mental health, including those related to postnatal depression, menopause, and violence against women and girls.**
- **Establish a women's health hub in Nottinghamshire- Women's hubs provide a real opportunity to reduce inequalities in access and outcomes as well as diagnosis support for women and more.**



# **We call on the next UK Government to:**

- **Commit to improving the specific vulnerabilities for the trans community within the health sector.**
- **Address the disparities in maternal health outcomes by providing compulsory targeted training for medical professionals (doctors, nurses etc.) on listening to and addressing the needs of women particularly Black and minoritised women.**
- **Ensure that CQC inspections include an assessment of whether women's voices are truly heard by the maternity service through the active and meaningful involvement of the Maternity Voices Partnership.**
- **Provide support for parents with children with suspected and/or diagnosed neurodiversity and accessibility to Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) for all who are diagnosed to ensure continuation of care and awareness through all educational settings.**
- **Ensure GPs receive mandatory training to help diagnose menopause earlier and invite every woman to speak with her GP about menopause at an appropriate age.**

# HOUSING

**With new 'affordable rent' levels set at up to 80 percent of market rates, the idea of affordable housing needs to be redefined.**

**For women who make up the majority of low - income earners, 80 percent is still too high for many.**





# **We call on the next UK Government to:**

- **Provide more accessible, affordable and safe housing to reduce the use of hotels for asylum seekers and women rough sleeping and to enable survivors to access emergency accommodation and move on from refuge.**
- **Provide greater access to housing that meets the accessibility needs of disabled women.**
- **Take enforcement action under the Housing Act 2004 to identify and eradicate damp and mould hazards in privately rented and social housing. Pregnant women, older people and women with disabilities are most at risk of health issues from damp and mould.**
- **Invest in energy efficient social housing, paying particular attention to the safety of women and experience of homelessness- women are at risk of abuse in shared accommodations.**

# **We call on the next UK Government to:**

- **Exempt survivors of domestic abuse from local connections or residency requirements for the application of social housing.**
- **Provide storage facilities for women fleeing domestic abuse and introduction of a streamlined legal system that requires the perpetrator to leave so that survivors can continue or secure a sole tenancy.**



# **RIGHTS OF REFUGEES, ASYLUM-SEEKING & MIGRANT WOMEN**

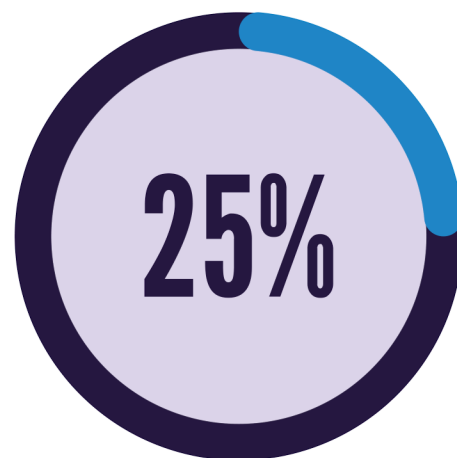
**We call on the next UK Government to:**

- **Ensure access to healthcare, housing, education, and care regardless of immigration status, including by abolishing the 'No Recourse to Public Funds' visa condition for people living in the UK.**
- **Support access to education, work, and social inclusion for refugee women, specifically recognising the unique barriers such as childcare and language.**
- **Provide clear, accessible information in community languages for people in the immigration system so they can know their rights and access legal advice.**
- **End the detention of women seeking asylum in the UK.**

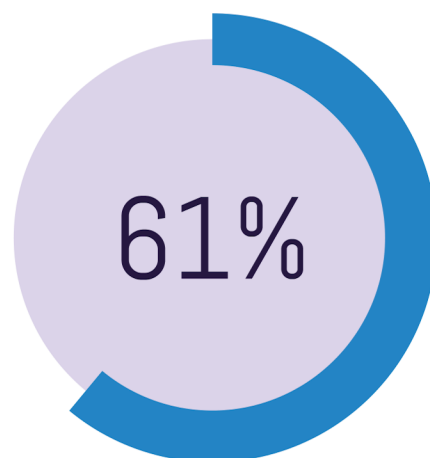


# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & GIRLS

**1 in 4 women have experienced rape or sexual assault as an adult.**



**Specialist services for victims / survivors of VAWG are underfunded leading to over 61% of referrals to women's refuges in England in 2022-23 being declined.**



**Three in ten victims of domestic abuse are repeat victims.**

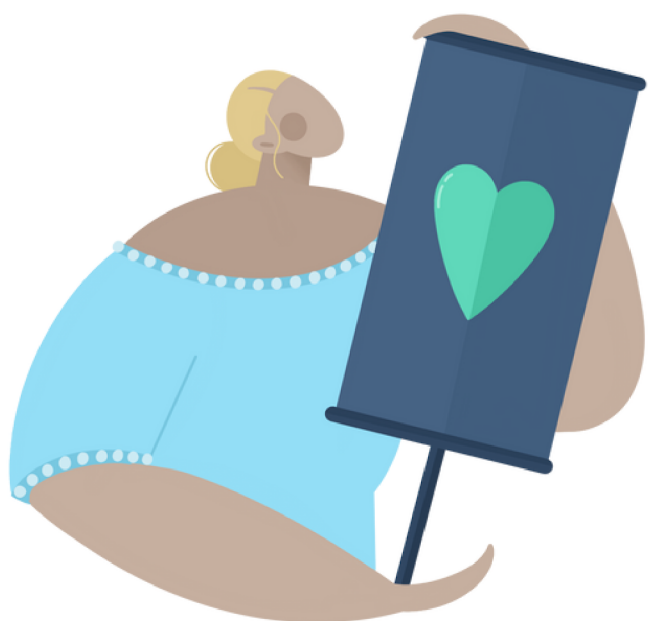


# **We call on the next UK Government to:**

- **Ensure continued and sustainable funding for specialist women's organisations to provide holistic support to survivors across their journey, including support for recovery and healing, and to deliver initiatives tackling violence against women and girls.**
- **Recommission the Rape and Sexual Abuse Fund as a multi-year fund beyond 2025.**
- **Take action on violence against women and girls across public, private and online spaces including a focus on the safety of those engaged in the sex industry.**
- **Commit to introduce a Domestic Abusers Register to enable the police proactively work with timely and appropriate information on the offender's history as well as the commencement of a new relationship to avoid repeat victimisation.**

# **We call on the next UK Government to:**

- **Commit to make misogyny a hate crime and challenge racism against women in politics.**
- **Drive an increase in early intervention and education for boys and men as well as the use of protection orders and notices for VAWG related offences.**
- **Provide emergency funding and refuge space for survivors of domestic abuse (regardless of immigration/residency status) to enable them to be safe and to cover their immediate and short-term costs.**





# THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM & WOMEN

A recent National Audit Office (NAO) report noted that the Crown Court outstanding caseload at the end of December 2023 reached 67,573 cases, 78% higher than at the end of 2019. The number of sexual offence cases waiting to go to the Crown Court now stands at 10,141 – a 21% increase compared to the number waiting at the same time 2023 year and a 196% increase from 2019.

In 2023, advocacy charity Rape Crisis reported that “since 2022, women in the Rape Crisis movement have increasingly cited the impact of delays and other issues in the Crown Court as their primary concern”. Protracted waits can lead to deteriorating mental wellbeing, suicide attempts, and survivors and their families feeling unable to plan for the future or move on.

Additionally, the family justice system, which should be heralded for a culture of safety and protection from harm, where children’s needs and the impact of domestic abuse are central considerations, and victims and survivors of domestic abuse feel listened to and respected is chronically reported for re-traumatisation of families and children.

# **We call on the next UK Government to:**

- **URGENTLY...**
- **Stop the prosecution of parents for their children's school non-attendance.**
- **Ensure women who are at the risk of offending or have offended receive appropriate rehabilitation and support in the community rather than in prisons which do not meet women's needs or prevent re-offending.**
- **Increase the number of judges, lawyers and barristers with specialist knowledge around sexual violence and victim blaming to enable those cases to be progressed in a timely fashion.**

# **We call on the next UK Government to:**

- **URGENTLY...**
- **Strengthen national response to domestic abuse by improving the family justice system's response to domestic abuse through a specialist trauma informed training for all professional across the whole family justice system including judges, lawyers, court adviser, Cafcass guardians etc. specifically focused on the use of language, labelling as well as the assessment of the child's diversity needs and how this specifically relates to domestic abuse.**
- **Enforce amnesty from arrest and fines for people engaged in the sex industry for reporting offences.**
- **End the imprisonment of pregnant women and ensure pregnant women in the Criminal Justice System are provided with the appropriate support and care.**



# **WELFARE**

## **POVERTY, COST-OF-LIVING & WELFARE**

**Cuts to the legal aid budget in the LASPO Act 2012 leading to the closures of law centres and advice providers and some areas of law taken out of the scope of legal aid completely has led to a gendered 'justice gap' with millions of people denied, primarily driving women to crisis point.**

**Many women are driven into the sex industry as a result of benefit sanctions. It is completely unacceptable for government policy to repeatedly drive women into the sex industry. This is especially so during a cost-of-living crisis, when they have limited or no access to public funds, or because benefits are simply not enough to live on, particularly when supporting a family.**



# **We call on the next UK Government to:**

- **Invest in legal aid in a sustainable way to make it more accessible to those who need it the most.**
- **Put an end to benefit sanctions.**
- **Raise benefits for all to a real living wage to ensure that everyone experiencing poverty in the UK has access to benefits.**
- **Implement social tariffs for those on low-income persons with disabilities and single parents.**
- **Abolish the two-child benefit cap currently driving thousands of single mothers and children into poverty.**
- **Extend free school meals to every child in primary school.**



# EDUCATION

**Nottingham Women's Centre flagged in its evidence that the prosecution of women with onerous fines and custodial sentences is ruining family relationships and driving more women, particularly single mothers, into debts amidst the current climate of austerity.**

**Recent evidence shows that single mothers are over-represented in the Criminal Justice System for failure to secure their children's attendance in school.**



## **We call on the next UK Government to:**

- **Substitute the current prosecution approach to attendance with a supportive approach through the provision of pastoral oversight in every school to support children, head teachers and parents in a joint walk towards ensuring children attend school.**
- **Establish mental health professionals and support workers that are competent to support parents within local communities in culturally sensitive ways to act as mediators between parents and schools on poor attendance issues.**
- **Invest in specialist prevention programmes for sexual violence and abuse in all schools and higher education settings.**
- **End the lottery on PSHE provision around relationships, consent and sexual violence by funding specialist prevention programmes in all schools and higher education settings.**

# EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS & GENDER PAY GAP

**In 2023, women earned £574 less than men per month on average. Disabled women face the highest pay gap at 35% compared to non-disabled men. Unequal pay contributes to a gender pension gap of 37.9%.**

**According to research by TUC, four in ten workers said that they would be pushed into debt or not be able to pay bills if their income dropped down to the Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) rate for just two weeks.**





# **We call on the next UK Government to:**

- **Maintain wage levels in line with inflation rates, paying special attention to sectors over-represented by women in the workforce such as childcare sector and the voluntary and community sector.**
- **Provide affordable, accessible, and high quality childcare for all women (regardless of migration status) to drive equal access to employment and close the gender pay gap.**
- **Make flexible working the default not a day one right- to enable everyone balance their caring responsibilities with work.**
- **Abolish the Lower Earnings Limit for Statutory Sick Pay, extending coverage to almost two million workers.**
- **Introduce Day One Sick Pay, removing the waiting period for sick pay for all absences, so that people receive pay from the first day that they are sick.**



# OUR QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES



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1

- With the completion of the independent review of the Nottingham Maternity Service, how will you fix the maternal care scandal with attention to the disparity and additional risk for Black and minoritized women during pregnancy, labour and post-natal care?

2

- Trauma can make us more vulnerable to developing mental health problems. Women who have experienced sexual assaults are currently experiencing astronomical waiting times to access trauma related support in Nottingham, leaving them at further risk of developing mental health problems. How do you plan to improve access to these crucial services?



# QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

3

- **How will you protect and support women's organisations and groups in Nottinghamshire, who are at constant risk of closures due to funding cuts, increase in running costs, and high demand? Women's organisations and groups are often best placed to deliver the right service, at the right time, to those who need it most, and need access to long-term ring-fenced funding for this work in order to continue supporting our communities.**

4

- **How would you ensure women who are at the risk of offending or have offended receive appropriate rehabilitation and support in the community rather than in prisons which do not meet women's needs or prevent re-offending? Especially for women on short sentences and considering that women are non-violent offenders?**



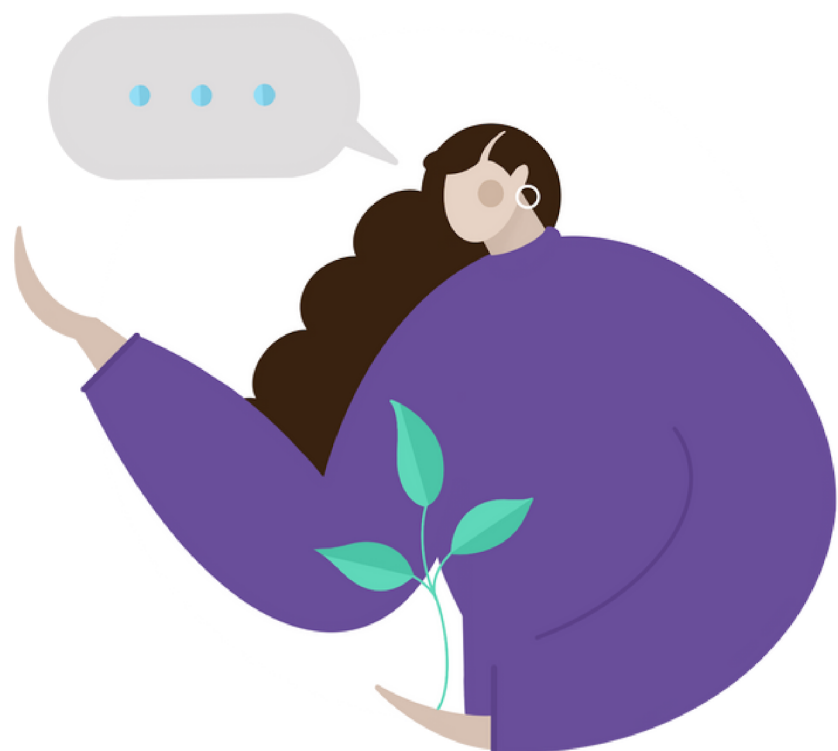
# QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

5

- What actions will you take to ensure safety for women across private, public and online? What prevention and support strategies would you advocate for to ensure all forms of violence against women is eliminated and survivors can access appropriate and timely support?

6

- Many women are being prosecuted for their children's non attendance in schools or experiencing punitive approaches that are shown to cause greater harm. How do you intend to deal with this issue in a way that supports women and their families rather than punishing them? What actions will you take to support families and schools to deal with issues of school attendance for children who are struggling?



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