

Economic development, transport and tourism Committee

Women Talking, City Listening: Summary Report

Date: 14th January 2021

Lead director: Miranda Cannon

Useful information

■ Ward(s) affected: All

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1 Summary

1.1 The purpose of this report is;

1.2 To outline the research undertaken by the City Listening Project team over the previous 12 months and summarise the key findings and recommendation relevant to this committee.

2 Recommendations

2.1 The report contains both national and local recommendations. The Corporate Management Team, (CMT), and Executive have agreed the recommendations. This work is on-going and therefore the recommendations are likely to continue to be refined and built upon over the coming months.

2.2 The local recommendations will be integrated into the Equality Action Plan, which will be reported to Overview Select Committee, (OSC) and agreed by CMT and the Executive, as per the usual reporting and governance arrangements for the Equality Action Plan. The national recommendations have been provisionally made to the Government Equalities Office (GEO). A copy of the list of the full set of recommendations arising from the research is attached as Appendix A.

2.3 The recommendations particularly relevant to Economic Development, Transport and Tourism Committee are highlighted in this report.

2.4 It is recommended that;

- The Committee note the contents of the report, in particular the findings of the research project and the recommendations (both local and national).
- The Committee endorse the recommendations in principle, subject to any comment and/or revisions.

3 Background Information

3.1 Funding for this project came from Government Equality Office and was as a result of the work undertaken through the Centenary Cities project.

3.2 This research project sought to identify barriers to equality in modern Leicester and elevate the voices of women, using their insight to develop the

recommendations made.

3.3 Using a range of research methods (focus groups, 121 semi-structured interviews, online consultation, Dialogue and email submissions) 330 women were involved in the project.

3.4 This summary report captures the ten key issues identified by this research:

Careers and Motherhood

Community Support

Workplace – Policies vs Practice

Recognition of and Support for Carers

Sports and Access

Safety

Personalisation of Services and Communication to Service Users

Finance

Health

Covid-19

3.5 This summary refers to the full draft research report, which is attached as Appendix C. For ease of cross-referencing, the pages of each theme in the full research report are listed against the theme summaries in this report.

4 Careers and Motherhood (Pages 10-27)

4.1 The most prevalent theme, highlighted by a vast majority of women, was the strain felt between pursuing career goals and managing childcare responsibilities. Almost all mothers spoken to were the primary caregiver of their child or children. 61.71% of women asked, said that family commitments hold them back.

4.2 The main issues raised by the women we spoke to were: -

- Trying to cope with the 'triple shift' i.e. paid employment, housework and childcare.
- The desire to do paid work, but the feeling of being unable to. Childcare issues contributed to this.
- Lack of flexibility around work arrangements balanced with childrearing.
- Lack of options and opportunities to network with women in similar situations.
- Skilled careers often fail to support part time working.
- Disadvantages faced after returning to work after having children.
- The over reliance on women in families to look after children. Mothers looking to sisters, aunts and grandmothers. This has an impact on the opportunities available to those women.
- Delaying or abandoning career goals due to the lack of support available for the other tasks they are expected to do, housework, childcare and other support roles.

- 4.3 **Recommendation 1: Flexible Working Arrangements (including flexibility in recruitment to facilitate job shares) to be implemented by employers in corporate policy and job advertisements.**
- 4.4 **Recommendation 2: Leicester City Council to integrate an action into its Equality Action Plan to support and publicise more opportunities for women employees, including networking events and promotion of the Council's employee groups.**
- 4.5 **Recommendation 3: Leicester City Council to further consider and integrate an appropriate action into its Equality Action Plan: ways in which to promote professional and employment opportunities and to provide more opportunities for women in the City to network (for example, an externally focused event, possibly in partnership with Economic Regeneration).**
- 4.6 **Recommendation 4: Leicester City Council's Voluntary Community Sector liaisons and Communications team to communicate news of both Council-affiliated and external networking events to women-majority community groups (for example, library and children's centre 'Toddler Time' attendees), to offer mothers who are not in employment greater professional opportunities.**
- 4.7 **Recommendation 5: Leicester City Council's Human Resources team to consider implementing employee policy for those returning from maternity leave to better support both the employee and their manager's facilitation or their re-entry into work.**
- 4.8 **Recommendation 6: That the government flexible working taskforce continue to campaign for employers to adopt flexible working practises in the public sector and the private sector.**
- 4.9 **Recommendation 7: That the Job Centre Plus continue to build on its work thus far to promote flexible working practises, by challenging appropriately and requiring adequate justification where an employer has communicated that an opportunity is not suitable for flexible working.**
- 4.10 **Recommendation 8: That governmental policymakers review the '30 hours free childcare scheme', taking into account and addressing the issues raised by participants, to give women a greater opportunity to re-enter work without suffering financially.**
- 4.11 **Recommendation 9: That governmental policymakers consider exploring the merits and risks to implementing an allowance or financial benefit (subject to certain conditions), where women are relying on family members informally to take on childcare responsibilities to enable them to work, to ensure that family members (particularly female family members) are supplemented and are not experiencing detriment financially.**

5 Community Support (Pages 27-31)

- 5.1 Women talked about needing community support and networks to help deal with isolation and other mental health issues. These groups serve many functions, such as providing a sense of belonging and collectivism, therapeutic interaction, escapism and even career support. However, women felt there were a number of barriers to these.
- 5.2 The main issues that women spoke about were: -
- Threats presented by lack of funding
 - The narrowness of funding streams that mean that women's groups are not able to meet criteria
 - Lack of information about how to apply for funding, including funding available through Leicester City Council.
 - Lack of accessibility to funding processes.
- 5.3 **Recommendation 10: Leicester City Council to review all funding application systems, to check accessibility and make the relevant changes where any issues with accessibility are determined.**
- 5.4 **Recommendation 11: Leicester City Council teams dealing with bid funding applications (within both Neighbourhoods and Procurement) to consider how contact information for advice and support is published, to ensure maximum uptake of such offers of support.**
- 5.5 **Recommendation 12: Adult Social Care and others who may have an interest in mapping the support offer to consider whether it may be beneficial to align to Leicester Open Data, in order that information isn't replicated and can be found in one place.**
- 5.6 **Recommendation 13: Leicester City Council to develop a Comms plan which fulfils two functions; 1. to make VCS organisations and community groups aware of the Open Data Platform and to encourage as many as possible to add information to the relevant map and 2. to make citizens of Leicester aware of the Open Data Platform and how to use it.**
- 5.7 **Recommendation 14: Once the Open Data Platform is more developed, consider overlaying VCS support map with public transport routes map to establish whether there are any issues which need to be addressed. This will need to be in partnership with public transport operators.**

6 Workplace – Policies vs. Practice (Pages 32-49)

- 6.1 Participants frequently spoke about the following issues relating to work: unhealthy working environments where the workplace culture stifled women from being retained or progressing in their organisation, guilt for exercising supportive policies such as flexible working or parental leave and such policies not being properly implemented by managers, discriminatory behaviour, sexual harassment and poor, potentially illegal, employer practice. This highlighted that some organisations are complicit, to a certain extent, in sustaining inequality.

6.2 The things directly mentioned by the women engaged in the project were: -

- the 'tick box' approach to gender equality which is not true equality.
- The lack of 'tone from the top' in some organisations to set an example for gender equality to be important.
- Lack of opportunities for flexible working arrangements, or, if they exist, they are not seen as 'normal'.
- Looking at the 'new normal' around Covid, IT costs, and the lack of support for small businesses.
- When women reduced their hours, they often found that their workload did not reduce in proportion.
- Women being more affected by unconscious bias than men.
- BAME women felt that they faced double barriers in terms of race and gender.
- Career goals being incompatible with family goals.
- Women who are mothers being asked to prioritise work over family.
- Women felt their fertility, and health issues associated with it, was open for discussion in a way that would never happen to a man.
- Harassment from managers, service users and colleagues. Particularly for younger women and those in lower paid roles.
- Lack of accountability for senior managers who do not support a focus on improving the workplace for women.
- Safe places, physical and/or environmental need to be made available to women. This would include an environment where women feel safe and supported to report problems and harassment.
- Recruitment needs to better reflect women, including more representative panels.
- Recruitment is still poor in terms of hidden preferences for women who aren't a 'pregnancy risk'
- Better training for people on recruitment panels to avoid bias.

6.3 Recommendation 15: That Leicester City Council's Equality Action Plan 2021 incorporate work internally to support line managers to understand organisational support mechanisms which are particularly relevant to the issues that participants have raised (such as the flexible working policy, time off for dependents policy) how those policies and support mechanisms support equality and how to make decisions which promote a supportive environment and also more flexible working, where it is practicable. This is likely to be achieved most effectively through some form of training or workshop style events.

6.4 Recommendation 16: Leicester City Council to consider what training and/or guidance managers are currently having on Occupational Health and consider reviewing this to promote an understanding of Occupational Health as a supportive tool, not a disciplinary measure.

6.5 Recommendation 17: That further work is undertaken with other services within the Council, for example economic regeneration, tourism and

culture, to establish whether there are any actions that could be included in the Equality Action Plan 2021 which would encourage other employers in the City to promote supportive policies and work environment, for example flexible working and increased part-time working and job share opportunities, where practicable.

- 6.6 **Recommendation 18: Organisations should review their policies collaboratively with their employees, by seeking feedback on how policy is currently used and understood. This could be facilitated by an anonymous internal survey, the information gathered aiding meaningful policy refinement. It is not within Leicester City council's remit to implement this in other organisations, but the Council should pay further consideration to how they might be able to influence and share best practice with employers across the City.**
- 6.7 **Recommendation 19: Awareness raising and information sharing locally and nationally to ensure that women understand their rights in relation to employment, and to increase women's confidence and ability to challenge effectively, where they have experienced both overt and/or covert discrimination, harassment or victimisation. This also links with a recommendation under 'Safety' to ensure that women are confident and equipped to raise concerns and complaints in relation to service provision (p. 75)**
- 6.8 **Recommendation 20: That policymakers consider providing some form of funding to small and medium sized enterprises, (SMEs), and VCS organisations to enable them to purchase equipment, for the specific purpose of encouraging and enabling them to implement flexible/ home working.**
- 6.9 **Recommendation 21: The government flexible working taskforce/ policymakers to consider how they might influence employers to more openly consider employee part-time proposals and support part-time employees to do an effective job within contracted hours.**
- 6.10 **Recommendation 22: The government flexible working taskforce/ policymakers to consider how they can promote and encourage employees to offer job shares, to better support part-time employees to progress in their careers into more senior or skilled roles – benefitting both employer and employee.**
- 6.11 **Recommendation 23: Leicester City Council to consider implementing a zero-tolerance approach within the review of the Dignity at Work Policy.**
- 6.12 **Recommendation 24: Policymakers to consider ways in which to either encourage or mandate transparent recruitment processes that are publicly available for scrutiny and are designed using positive action where lawful, to reduce recruitment bias.**
- 6.13 **Recommendation 25: Leicester City Council to ensure that guidance on**

how to use the positive action provisions under the Equality Act and guidance on recruitment panel make-up is included in updated recruitment guidance for managers.

7 Recognition of and Support for Carers (Pages 49-66)

7.1 Women are more likely to provide support and this has increased during the increased support in the home required during lockdowns and reductions in social isolation due to Covid. Women mentioned a number of issues are part of the engagement: -

- Caring within the family is (for an older or disabled family member) is frequently delegated to female family members.
- Caring can sometimes put career and education on hold.
- Many women see caring as a family duty and do not recognise the support they might be entitled to.
- Many of societies structures do not recognise carers or their responsibilities and this can create multiple barriers to work and education – for example, trying to get GP appointments or time off for these appointments and accessing health and well-being support.
- Caring causes marginalisation and loneliness for the carer.
- Young carers in particular lose out because of the time they are spending caring.
- Lack of opportunities for carers to be part of a support group.
- Lack of respite opportunities caused by financial restraints
- Financial loss for unpaid carers.
- Inappropriate respite care can be the only service on offer.
- Caring responsibilities were prioritised over life aspirations and that led to strain, resentment and low esteem.
- Lack of employment opportunities that fit around caring responsibilities.
- The disparity between paid caring and the value given to women who provide care whilst losing out on paid employment
- The lack of recompense for women providing care against bills and other expenses.
- Lack of respect for carers who feel ignored and not listened to.
- Many women told of occasions where their own health had suffered as a result of providing care.
- Many women said that if the state could provide small ‘thanks yous’ such as cinema tickets, they would feel appreciated

7.2 **Recommendation 26 Leicester City Council to work with schools in the City to help to introduce guidance, training or professional development, as deemed appropriate, for teachers - to aid them in identifying young carers and referring to the relevant support. To publicise tools to aid schools in identifying young carers, for example the young carers identification tool for education staff on the schools intranet.**

7.3 **Recommendation 27: Policymakers to consider the issue more widely to see whether there are any additional national measures which could be put into place to better equip teachers in identifying young carers.**

- 7.4 **Recommendation 28: Leicester City Council to consider the merit of personal, social, health and economic, (PSHE)/Citizenship in the City's schools including a lesson on being a carer and having meaningful conversations about caring. Although this is not directly within the Council's remit, it is worth considering how the Council might effectively engage with schools to achieve this.**
- 7.5 **Recommendation 29: Leicester City Council's Adult Social Care/ Communications teams to share information with schools in the city on what support is available for young carers.**
- 7.6 **Recommendation 30: Leicester City Council's Adult Social Care Department to work with health partners to review the way in which information is shared with carers; to make information packs more easily accessible, so that service users know exactly what support is available and whether they are entitled to such services. To utilise the Council's communication mechanisms, including social media, to raise awareness of information and support for carers.**
- 7.7 **Recommendation 31: Undertake further work locally with the relevant service area to understand and respond to the issues raised by participants in relation to respite.**
- 7.8 **Recommendation 32: Government to include policy ideas to address the nuanced issues raised in this report in relation to unpaid caring responsibilities, particularly in terms of the financial difficulties that they face, in the Green Paper on Social Care, and publish for public consultation.**
- 7.9 **Recommendation 33: Leicester City Council to ensure that the relevant corporate policies acknowledge carers and the discrimination they can face arising from their association with someone with a disability/ies (discrimination by association).**
- 7.10 **Recommendation 34: Leicester City Council to consider offering carers discounts, deals or occasional free treats at City Council run sites (museum and heritage sites, for example) and events, to acknowledge the hard work of those who care and the minimal disposable income available. To encourage other businesses in the City (who are in a position to do so), to also consider offering discounts or deals for carers.**
- 8 Sports and access (Pages 66-69)**
- 8.1 The main barrier felt in accessing sports is the gendering of certain sports as 'male'.
- 8.2 The main issues raised were: -
- The segregation of activities at school
 - The lack of clubs supporting and aimed at women
 - Some women wanted women only spaces, sometimes for cultural or faith

reasons

- The societal view of some sports being suitable for women and others not.

8.3 **Recommendation 35: The Department of Education to give guidance to schools and colleges relating to the P.E. Curriculum and equal access to sports in practice, to ensure education providers are aware that while they can separate by sex for P.E. lawfully, they are obliged to provide the same opportunities for both girls and boys to engage in sports.**

8.4 **Recommendation 36: Existing Council-operated sport and gym facilities to consider expanding their selection of 'women only' classes where there is evidence of need and to offer these at a range of days and times, accommodating for the many responsibilities women take on (as highlighted throughout this report). In addition, to advertise services more widely to enable women to participate.**

9 Safety (Pages 70-78)

9.1 This was a common concern to the women. This section explored how real safety concerns impact on how women live, how unsafe situations can be mitigated and where crimes have occurred, women's experience of engaging with the police and sport services. Reports of crimes against women have significantly increased during the Covid lockdowns.

9.2 The main issues that women reported were:

- Having to rely on others to stay safe. This included things like having to ask for lifts. This limits women with a lack of a support network or women from poorer backgrounds.
- Lack of input from women to design in safety. This is sometimes because women are underrepresented in the professions that influence such planning and therefore are less visible.
- Neighbourhood safety such as lighting.
- Lack of safe parking
- Victim blaming was a common discussion
- Poor experiences working with professionals after experiencing crime
- Many women said they did not know how to hold bodies to account
- The need for advocacy
- The costs of divorce and separation meant that some women feel that is not an option for them.
- Increased isolation during lockdown led to many women feeling very vulnerable
- The resentment of losing ones home when you have to leave to escape a violent partner

9.3 **Recommendation 37: Local Authorities to consider keeping intermittent streetlights on to ensure no one area is pitch-black. This local strategy should be individually tailored to neighbourhoods, with priority given to**

areas of higher criminal activity.

- 9.4 **Recommendation 38: Leicester City Council to consider the merit of PSHE/Citizenship in the City's schools including a lesson on a rape culture and identifying harmful views and behaviour around love, sex and sexual assault, (such as shaming women who are sexually active or based on how many sexual partners they have, rape jokes, victim blaming, judging what women wear, 'cat calling'). Whilst this is not within the Council's direct remit, it is worth considering how the Council might effectively engage with schools to achieve this.**
- 9.5 **Recommendation 39: Feed the issues raised in this section to the Smart Cities Team and Community Safety to consider whether we can use technology as a means to collaborate with citizens, to identify problems in their neighbourhoods and help facilitate a safer Leicester.**
- 9.6 **Recommendation 40: The Council's Community Safety and Protection team to support local community awareness initiatives relating to standing against rape culture and violence towards women (i.e. in externally circulated communications such as Your Leicester).**
- 9.7 **Recommendation 41: National policymakers consider ways in which women who have experienced domestic violence are enabled to safely stay in their own homes should they wish to, and instead perpetrators are required to leave the household.**
- 9.8 **Recommendation 42: Leicester City Council to do some awareness raising work on how citizens can raise complaints and escalate concerns about any public body/authority if they feel that their complaint has not been sufficiently dealt with. Work may also need to be undertaken nationally to ensure that women are equipped to challenge effectively. This links with a recommendation in the section 'Workplace – Policies vs. Practise' (p.35) which recommends that awareness raising work is undertaken to ensure that women are aware of their rights in employment and are equipped to challenge where these are breached and where they have experienced discrimination, harassment and victimisation. It may be that these two recommendations can be combined, if appropriate.**
- 9.9 **Recommendation 43: Leicester City Council and the Government Equalities Office to continue to support campaigns to increase awareness and recognition around the different types of abuse, where and how to get support, both locally and nationally.**
- 9.10 **Recommendation 44: Leicester City Council to ensure our relevant commissioned services (in Community Safety, Housing and Social Care) continue to make available practical help and support to survivors of domestic violence, taking into account the lived experiences of those seeking support and taking steps to ease the process of resettling and in some cases, becoming independent for the first time.**

10 Personalisation of Services and Communication to Service Users (Pages 78-92)

10.1 Many women raised the importance of receiving a person-centred service. They felt that seeing numerous different professionals contributed to a lack of consistency or personalised support, for example seeing a different GP or support worker at an employment agency were commonly raised.

10.2 Women raised the following issues: -

- Feeling like a number going through the system.
- Lack of trust in services and therefore not sharing valid information.
- Lack of consistency of services leading to resentment against other women seen to have a better service.
- Frustrations around lack of access to quality housing.
- Lack of financial support.
- The unfairness of private renters refusing to accept tenants on benefits. (this has recently been made unlawful, but few women knew this).
- Employment agencies not tailoring their services to the situations that women are placed in.
- Being placed in unsuitable jobs so that targets are achieved at employment agencies and Job Centres.
- Lack of tailored support for women with caring responsibilities.
- Problems getting the services they have a right to unless they know their rights in the first place.
- Miscommunication between a variety of agencies where dealing with one person would have solved problems.
- Problems with schools when children have additional needs leading to lack of care and problems getting a diagnosis.
- Parental concerns being overlooked until the same opinion is shared by an agency.
- Lack of holistic services for women with caring responsibilities.
- Lack of support through transitions from childhood to adulthood.
- Lack of feedback and good quality mentors for colleges.
- Significant resource problems which stop women with children going back into education.
- Problems with primary care services including inaccessibility, lack of information and lack of post-natal care.
- Problems getting appointments with female health practitioners.
- The problem with the '1 issue per appointment' approach when dealing with problems that are connected.
- Social stigma around menopause.
- The increase in online services when women are overrepresented in the digitally excluded groups.
- Many women from groups with multiple marginalisations said few services met their needs.
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10.3 **Recommendation 45: Ask the clinical commissioning groups, (CCG) to suggest that general practitioners, (GPs), document conversations on**

concerns voiced over dependant's behaviours and commit to listening and exploring these with the advocate.

- 10.4 **Recommendation 46: Reviewing the sharing systems of key information in health and social care patient files.**
- 10.5 **Recommendation 47: Social care workers and health workers to provide service users date deadlines to provide updates/information where possible.**
- 10.6 **Recommendation 48: Social care services to continue to review the way in which dependant services users go through from child's to adults' services and respond to feedback to ensure a gradual and manageable transition for the service user.**
- 10.7 **Recommendation 49: Feedback to colleges the need for post-college lessons to both pay fair attention to all career paths (not putting the onus on University) and for such sessions to take a more collaborative structure, in which students are made to feel comfortable asking questions, and confident their query will be met with a response.**
- 10.8 **Recommendation 50: Universities and other adult learning institutions to identify and establish whether there is a need for childcare facilities and act accordingly to accommodate for this. This may be in the form of creating links with nearby nurseries to offer parents subsidised rates or priority places for children.**
- 10.9 **Recommendation 51: Employers in Leicester and across the country to be encouraged to support their employee more widely in gaining additional qualifications.**
- 10.10 **Recommendation 52: The GEO to consider feeding back to the Department for Health the expressed need to assign 'lead GPs' to patients and prioritise this GP as the care provider, for patients to receive consistent care. Similarly, in a longstanding condition, the GP first approached with the concern/s should be the one to oversee this care, to ensure continuous support, non-conflating information or guidance offered, and lesser oversights via inter-GP communication.**
- 10.11 **Recommendation 53: Leicester City Council to continue to ensure where decisions are made to channel shift our services, that an equality impact assessment, (EIA), is completed - demonstrating consideration of our public section equality duty, (PSED).**
- 10.12 **Recommendation 54: Leicester City Council to ensure that service users are given notice of our services digitising and to make online access an option to using services, not the only method of using the service.**
- 10.13 **Recommendation 55: In recognition that digital inclusion plays an important role in enabling women to not only access services but also to**

engage fully in public life (including work and education), particularly given some of the additional barriers posed by Covid-19, the Smart Cities, Equalities, Adult Skills and Learning and Neighbourhoods, in addition to other relevant services, will work together to scope a proposal for a project to deal with issues that have been highlighted as part of this project and more widely in response to Covid-19 – such as lack of access to devices, including appropriate devices for work and study and lack of access to adequate internet connection.

10.14 **Recommendation 56:** That the Government should evaluate and review existing legislation and policy to ensure it takes an approach which fully considers the interaction between sex and other protected characteristics, or ‘intersectionality’ in addressing inequalities disproportionately experienced by women, many of which are covered in the later sections of this report.

10.15 **Recommendation 57:** That the Government should make it possible to bring a single discrimination claim based on an individual’s full identity (which is likely to include multiple intersecting protected characteristics), by reviewing and then implementing Section 14 of the Equality Act 2010. Whilst Section 14 covers ‘dual discrimination’ there may be merit in considering intersectionality of more than two protected characteristics in conjunction with one another, as part of the review.

11 Finance (Pages 92-98)

11.1 Leicester is a city experiencing significant and chronic economic deprivation (The English Indices of Deprivation, ONS 2019); widespread poverty likely to be further exacerbated by the impact of Coronavirus (The World Bank 2020). The economy has historically hit women hardest in a variety of ways. In this section the main concerns women voiced will be explored: impacts of change to benefits including introduction of Universal Credit, dependency on male partners in heterosexual monogamous relationships, a lack of understanding of gender pay gaps and pension, Period Poverty and mental and physical health implications of being disproportionately affected by poverty and economic hardship.

11.2 Women participating in the project had a range of issues to raise regarding finance. They included: -

- **Period Poverty:** In March 2020 it was announced that the luxury taxing of menstrual products was to be abolished as of January 2021. The news is wholeheartedly supported by the project. Despite this good news there will remain many people who have periods who are unable to afford the appropriate menstrual products for their needs, known as ‘period poverty’.
- Lack of menstrual products for women using refuges, food banks and homeless shelters.
- Stress caused by economic hardship and trying to navigate the ever-changing welfare system.
- Stress and hardship caused by particular rules relating to benefits such as waiting periods.

- The problems of changes to state pensions and the reliance of women on male partners financially.
- Lack of information about which employers offer good services such as a good pension and lower gender pay gap.

- 11.3 **Recommendation 58: Leicester City Council to address period poverty in the Equality Action Plan - as part of that work opening a dialogue with Leicester's Homeless Charities on access to menstrual care products for people experiencing period poverty.**
- 11.4 **Recommendation 59: When calling for physical donations, Homeless Charities in Leicester to include mention of menstrual care products on their donation list. When calling for fiscal donations, Homeless Charities in Leicester could mention this money, in part, will buy menstrual products – to boost awareness around this essential need often overlooked.**
- 11.5 **Recommendation 60: Leicester City Council to commit to providing free menstrual products in all Council buildings that are accessed by the public.**
- 11.6 **Recommendation 61: That the Government consider the proposal that those eligible for free prescriptions be able to request free menstrual care products from primary healthcare services such as GPs and GUM Clinics.**
- 11.7 **Recommendation 62: Leicester City Council's Public Health, Sustainability (within Estates & Buildings Services) and Education services to consider the procurement of menstrual cups to be provided in school to each young person with periods, appealing to the Department for Education and their commitment to fully-fund access to free menstrual products in schools and colleges for funding.**
- 11.8 **Recommendation 63: Benefits, both current and those being phased out, to be assimilated by the Government, to ensure no eligible recipient is left waiting for payments and that no debts occur from overpayment – with any debts incurred to be gradually redacted from the overarching eligible payments.**
- 11.9 **Recommendation 64: The Government to review the Universal Credit assessment process to cut down wait-times for a verdict.**
- 11.10 **Recommendation 65: The Government to ensure that those who are jobseekers do not receive a benefit penalisation for attempts to make them better adapted or skilled to work.**
- 11.11 **Recommendation 66: Organisations to offer information to their employees on pension as a mandated part of their starter pack.**
- 11.12 **Recommendation 67: Organisations should consider periodically**

publishing data on their pay gaps in relation to protected characteristics beyond gender and making this information publicly accessible.

12 Health (Pages 98-109)

12.1 This section pays attention to the most prevalent health issues impacting women, including specific physical and mental conditions and experiences of care, as well as how accessible healthcare is.

12.2 Women had a range of issues, both for themselves and for children and people they cared for. They included.

- Postnatal experiences including postnatal depression and difficulties in breastfeeding were significant areas of concern for women.
- Pressure to enjoy being a mother and enjoying life after having a baby.
- The lack of support for women after miscarriage.
- The stigma about periods, endometriosis, and menstruation in general.
- Stigma around menopause and the linked ageism.
- Pain bias, this is where women's pain, particularly in BAME and younger women, is taken less seriously by professionals.
- Barriers to specific services, particularly smear tests and the increase in women, particularly from BAME communities, feeling less safe in surgeries due to Covid.
- The lack of services for people with disabilities e.g. narrow and busy pavements, lack of disabled access toilets, even the lack of information about how to get the sunflower lanyard associated with not wearing a mask at the current time. There was also a lack of information about how to apply for a bus pass.
- Late diagnosis for conditions such as Asperger's and Autism.
- Inappropriate or incorrect support for people with such conditions and the frustration that gives women who are often their carers.
- The lack of access to people providing support for mental health conditions and the services that are supposedly on offer.
- The stigma attached to mental health means that some women preferred not to approach professionals.

12.3 **Recommendation 68: If not already, healthcare practitioners should undergo some form of unconscious bias training to ensure they are providing care that is fair and consistent to all patients.**

12.4 **Recommendation 69: Leicester City Council's Public Health to discuss with healthcare practitioners the need for training staff on 'pain bias' and dispelling myths of different pain and symptoms experienced by people of various backgrounds.**

12.5 **Recommendation 70: Community-based officers should touch base with community group leaders to ensure they are aware of relevant support their participants may be entitled to. This could support constituents who don't have direct contact with the Local Authority to be more aware of support mechanisms in place and access the full range of support**

available to them.

12.6 **Recommendation 71: Government to create long-term solutions to currently ‘underfunded’ (Mental Health Policy Group 2020) mental health support within the Comprehensive Spending Review.**

12.7 **Recommendation 72: Leicester City Council’s Public Health to request local GP surgeries to offer multiple forms of contact and not require a reason to give an appointment, where a service user doesn’t feel comfortable disclosing.**

13 Covid-19 (Pages 109-110)

13.1 As part of our consultation we asked women about the impact of Covid-19. Of the 175 responses, there were 128 responses. There were no additional themes identified. Responses highlighted the existing inequalities that women face in society; as the unpaid carer, at home and in society the little value placed on this. Many reported increased demands on their household workload. In addition to regular childcare, home-schooling was an additional ‘unpaid’ role they were expected to carry out. Participants mentioned often fathers didn’t take on this role as their workplaces did not make allowances for children being at home. Men were still expected to be as productive as they were in the office. However, this was an issue for women too. To make up for this, women expressed that they worked more hours at home or in some cases were forced to leave their jobs.

13.2 Women also reported how school vouchers were helpful, however they still had trouble in managing increased living costs (bills, groceries). Some women reported being trapped in abusive households with abuse increasing during the pandemic. Other comments surrounding Covid-19 were largely in relation to increased feelings of isolation, fear and anxiety. The mental health impacts of this may be long-lasting, providing further support for need for long-term investment in NHS Mental health services.

14 Appendix List

Appendix A – Full List of Recommendations

Appendix B – Women Talking, City Listening Full Research Report

Financial implications

No specific financial implications arise from this report. The research should be taken into consideration when making future policy and strategy decisions, and any costs should be included as required. Similarly, any specific initiatives that might arise should be costed and funding identified at the time. - Colin Sharpe, Deputy Director of Finance, tel. 0116 454 4081

Legal implications

The Women Talking, City Listening is a research project funded by the Government Equalities Office with the aim to learn about the barriers faced by women and how women can be better supported in the City. The research has been split thematically into the specific areas it consulted on. This report summaries the findings of the consultation and research which has been annexed to the report. Officers have derived a number of recommendations specific to each theme / area it had identified following the research.

The summary report in section 2 has explained that the main recommendation is that the Local Authority should use the research in future policies and strategies.

Whilst the research is not legally binding, the Local Authority can use the findings of the research to assist in developing future policies. Further legal advice should be sought at the time as and when these policies develop.

It is worth noting that some of the recommendations within the report would be applicable to the Council, some which the Council may have influence over (e.g. VCS groups etc) and some which fall outside its remit (e.g. the changing of legislation)

Suraiya Ziaullah, Solicitor, 0116 454 1487

Climate change and carbon reduction implications

There are no significant climate change implications directly relating to the presentation of this report. However, many of the issues raised and recommendations made will have significant links to the council's sustainability work, for example where they cover access to public transport, digital inclusion and homeworking, street lighting and various other areas. These implications should be considered individually when assessing implementation of the recommendations made.

Aidan Davis, Sustainability Officer, Ext 37 2284

Equalities implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have statutory duties, including the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), which means that, in carrying out their functions decision makers have to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

The report makes a number of recommendations which support the aims of the PSED and other duties placed on public authorities under the Equality Act 2010, including responsibilities under the equality Act as an employer. Whilst the report specifically focuses on the experiences of women, a number of intersectionalities are identified and the project involved women from a range of different backgrounds with different characteristics and identities. It is worth noting that some of the recommendations within the report would be applicable to the Council, some which the Council may have influence over (e.g. VCS groups, employers in the City etc) and some which fall outside its remit (e.g. the changing of legislation). Different organisations may have different levels of responsibility under the Equality Act.

The Local Authority can use the findings of the research to assist in developing future policies and projects and can be utilised to improve service delivery from an equalities perspective. Further equalities advice should be sought on any proposals for changes to or new policy, practice, projects or provision developed arising from this research. In many cases, new proposals or changes to existing policy and provision are likely to require equality impact assessment to ensure that any disproportionate negative impacts for any protected characteristic groups are identified and mitigated, opportunities to progress equality of opportunity are maximised and to ensure that due regard to the PSED is paid before and at the time a decision is taken.

Hannah Watkins, Equalities Manager ext. 37 5811