

ITEM 1

MEETING NOTE

CABINET SECRETARY FOR WELLBEING ECONOMY, FAIR WORK AND ENERGY, NEIL GRAY MSP MEETING ENGENDER

TUESDAY 25 JULY 2023 - 16:00 – 16:45

Attending

Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work And Energy, Neil Gray MSP
Catherine Murphy, Executive Director, Engender
[redacted], Engender

Official support

[redacted]

Actions

- Engender offered to send a revised *Enough is Enough* report briefing to Mr Gray.
- Officials agreed to send Engender details around the updated governance for the Fair Work Oversight Group following the meeting.
- Mr Gray encouraged Engender to speak with Barry White, co-Chair of the NSET Delivery Board.
- Officials will continue to work with Engender to ensure refreshed NSET EQIAs have an impact through informing updated NSET delivery plans.
- Officials offered to connect Engender with SG Wellbeing Economy officials.

Note of the meeting

- Mr Gray welcomed Engender and noted that gender equality has been a key focus of his meetings today having earlier met with [redacted]. Engender thanked Mr Gray for meeting with them and gave a brief overview of their work in promoting gender mainstreaming in Scottish Government (SG) and wider society.
- Engender raised their *Enough is Enough: Tackling Workplace Sexual Harassment in Scotland* report published in 2022. Research showed that sexual harassment is endemic and a big barrier to women in work, for example as a driver for occupational segregation and in turn the gender pay gap. The issue must be key to strategies on women's labour market participation, with a focus on prevention.
- Engender met with Mr Lochhead (previously Minister for Just Transition, Fair Work and Employment) towards the end of 2022 looking for actionable change and provided a briefing summarising the report and recommendations for SG.
- Engender offered to send a revised *Enough is Enough* report briefing to Mr Gray.
- Mr Gray noted that findings of the report are very concerning but sadly not surprising. Mr Gray enquired whether the report has already been shared with the UK Gov as it relates to reserved matters and asked whether there is anything Engender has done that SG can follow up on to stamp out this culture.
- Engender wants SG to show leadership where powers are devolved and would welcome Mr Gray's support to push the UK Gov to take meaningful action.
- Engender developed a 'Model Sexual Harassment Prevention and Action Policy'.

- Engender welcomes that the refreshed Fair Work Action Plan and Fair Work First Guidance mentions efforts and best practice examples on how to tackle sexual harassment in the workplace but feel more practical guidance is needed for employers to tackle such a deeply rooted issue.
- Specific areas of action highlighted by Engender include: failures in tribunals (reserved); health & safety (reserved); digital safety at work.

The Refreshed Fair Work Action Plan (FWAP)

- Engender raised concerns that in incorporating the Gender Pay Gap Action Plan into the FWAP, it is perceived that SG is diluting the focus on tackling women's inequality and that governance arrangements will need to be robust to ensure that barriers faced by women specifically are not due to the intersectional focus of FWAP.
- Mr Gray stated that does not want any perception that SG would diminish the importance of addressing women's inequality in the labour market.
- Mr Gray referred to actions around the recommendation from the Anna Stewart Review into Women in Enterprise to demonstrate SG's commitment to tackling women's inequality.
- Mr Gray noted that through the FWAP the SG is looking to create more diverse workplaces and workforces across Scotland and this is of critical importance.
- Mr Gray was keen to address Engender's concerns and to hear suggestions as Close the Gap expressed similar concerns in previous meeting.
- Engender raised concerns about the governance and accountability around actions from previous plans involving stakeholders. Engender asked for information on the planned governance for the FWAP delivery.
- Mr Gray stated that he is keen to foster strong stakeholder engagement and asked officials to provide Engender with an update on the governance of FWAP.

The National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET)

- Engender, alongside Close the Gap, feel NSET is a largely gender blind strategy and has a lack focus on addressing women's economic inequality.
- Engender referred to previous discussions with officials regarding a proposal to refresh the NSET EQIAs which would feed into updated NSET delivery plans – while Engender welcomed this they have concerns it will lead to limited impact and called for a greater focus on the gendered dimensions of the economy.
- Engender wants a focused approach to bring together targeted actions which address women's economic inequality and promote gender mainstreaming.
- Engender noted that the NSET delivery board should have gender competence, as should SG policy which is implementing NSET actions and welcomed the work of the Centre of Expertise in Equality and Human Rights in addressing this.
- Mr Gray stressed the importance of having strong NSET EQIAs and for Engender to continue to engage, and indicated that there is an opportunity to refocus elements of NSET to adapt to changes in the economy and look to address investment in social infrastructure (i.e. care economy). Mr Gray also encouraged Engender to speak with Barry White, co-Chair of the NSET Delivery Board.

- Officials will continue to work with Engender to ensure NSET EQIAs have an impact through informing updated NSET delivery plans.
- Engender welcomed SG's work on the wellbeing economy and noted they continue to work with the Wellbeing Economy Alliance and Scottish Women's Budget Group on a feminist approach to gender equality in the economy.
- Officials offered to connect Engender with SG Wellbeing Economy officials.
- Engender raised issues around a lack of online harassment guidance and how SG plans to address this. Officials responded that SG is working with Close the Gap through Equally Safe at Work to develop guidance around harassment at work but would be keen to work with Engender to ensure approaches match up.
- Mr Gray closed the meeting by thanking Engender and other gender stakeholders for their work and their efforts to hold SG accountable.

Item 2

Introductory meeting between Engender and Ms Roddick, 27 June 2023

Attendees

Engender

Cat Murphy, Engender Executive Director

[redacted], Engender [redacted]

[redacted], Engender [redacted]

Scottish Government

Emma Roddick, Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Cat Murphy congratulated the Minister on her new role and gave an overview of Engender's work, highlighting their focus on gender mainstreaming, policy coherence and implementation.

[redacted - Engender] opened the meeting by discussing Engender's upcoming Sex and Power report. [redacted] explained that large data gaps have prevented a full intersectional data analysis. This is an ongoing issue which is not improving. Engender would like to discuss this with the Minister at a later date since the Minister's portfolio covers equalities broadly. [redacted] also highlighted the launch of Engender's Equal Media and Culture Centre in August 2023.

Ms Roddick asked about the experience of women in politics. Cat Murphy outlined Engender's work on the Gender Sensitive Audit at the Scottish Parliament and their work on the Equal Representation project. Cat Murphy and Ms Roddick agreed that while there is support to get women into politics, more support is needed to improve retention.

[redacted - Engender] discussed the decriminalisation of abortion, noting that while this sits under Jenny Minto's portfolio, it is an important women's rights issue. Engender have been working with legal academics to produce a paper considering how decriminalisation might work in practice and how this might affect women's experiences. Ms Roddick strongly agreed with the importance of abortion access as a women's rights issue.

Cat Murphy raised concerns about delays to the Scottish Government's mainstreaming strategy and a lack of resources to realise commitments. She highlighted that there have been developments over the last few years that will now need to be integrated into the strategy. Ms Roddick agreed with the difficulties around mainstreaming and said she would think further on this issue.

[redacted - Engender] explained that Engender have been long involved in the Public Sector Equality Duty review. They previously discussed this with Ms McKelvie, who committed to setting up an advisory group to develop regulations. Engender raised concerns about the lack of progress with the advisory group. Ms Roddick explained that work was still in the planning stage and took an action to get an update on the advisory group. Cat Murphy offered to send draft regulations developed by Engender.

On the Human Rights Bill consultation, Engender and Ms Roddick shared frustrations that the incorporation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is restricted by constitutional limitations. Ms Roddick asked to be kept updated on the sector's discussion of the Bill.

[redacted] asked whether commitments made but not yet implemented would be revisited for the Programme for Government, in particular a Leaver's Fund to help those escaping domestic abuse and abolishing social care charges. Ms Roddick acknowledged that there are challenges in balancing the budget and encouraged Engender to speak to Siobhan Brown as the Minister responsible for violence against women and girls.

Cat Murphy closed the meeting by stating a commitment to trans rights alongside women's rights and offered support to the Minister in the current context of polarising discussions of gender.

Item 3**Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care****Meeting with Engender****20th June 2023****Attendees:**

Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care
Cat Murphy, Engender Executive Director
[redacted], Engender [redacted]
[redacted]

1. Women's Health Inequalities

Engender have been involved in the development and delivery of the Women's Health Plan and very pleased with progress so far. They are keen to see progress and roll out beyond the current parliamentary session and expansion into more complex and less covered and non sex specific health inequalities women experience.

They feel there is more work to be done to look at things like chronic pain, mental health, chronic conditions and more of a root cause analysis. Engender see future iterations of the Women's Health Plan as a good vehicle. Health inequalities that women experience in Scotland that are not well understood, and there is not enough gender sensitive data. The organisation have done some work in this area, and wish to share this with Ministers so that gender differences are recognised to the extent they should be.

Their key ask for the meeting was to draw the Cabinet Secretary's attention to call made by Engender and in the SNP Manifesto for a 'Scottish Institute for Women's Health'. The importance of good data was highlighted.

The Cabinet Secretary noted that the Women's Health Plan landed at a difficult time for NHS, during Covid and that whilst we are in the recovery phase it is about recovering to make things better than they were before, addressing underlying systemic issues.

Abortion Access

Abortion was discussed as a good example of recovery, services changes in the pandemic brought meaningful change, and improved access. Engender will be updating their 2016 report on abortion, towards the end of the year.

They noted the widening of inequality in terms of which women are accessing abortion, and how quickly. They noted issues in rural areas, and a huge gap in terms of deprivation.

Mental Health Strategy

Engender felt there was little gendered analysis within the review of the Mental Health Strategy and that women's health needs to be mainstreamed into other areas. They would like to see more attention to women's mental health in the new Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, as women and girl's experience of mental health is very different and experienced in a more internalised way to men and boys.

Engender gave a lengthy submission to the consultation on how to better gender the strategy and they are keen to work with the policy team.

The Cabinet Secretary noted that the new Strategy was being published imminently but that he would pick this up with the Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport.

Covid Inquiry

In coalition with four other organisations, Engender have applied for status in the Scottish Covid Inquiry. They are happy to keep the Cabinet Secretary up to date on the submissions being offered. A joint piece with the ALLIANCE on women's experiences in maternity during the pandemic is due to be published shortly and they would be very happy to meet and discuss.

The Cabinet Secretary noted that sharing that information would be very helpful.

Social Care

Engender updated on the work they do in relation to social care and advocated for policy coherence on social care across the board. They are following the progress of the National Care Services and noted the totemic importance of social care as a gender equality issue.

The Cabinet Secretary agreed about the importance of getting the programme right.

Engender are keen to be supportive and noted the vibrant work happening in the women's sector in this area.

Item 4

Meeting between the Deputy First Minister, Engender, Close the Gap, Rape Crisis Scotland and Scottish Women's Aid on Gender Budgeting and Advancing Gender Equality 26 September 2023

External stakeholders

- Cat Murphy, Executive Director, Engender
- Anna Ritchie Allan, Executive Director, Close the Gap
- Sandy Brindley, Chief Executive, Rape Crisis Scotland
- **[redacted]**, Scottish Women's Aid

Scottish Government

- Shona Robison, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance
- **[redacted]**
- **[redacted]**
- **[redacted]**

Cat explained that the organisations are pleased that Scottish Government is progressively improving its approach to gender budget analysis but they still feel the approach is somewhat limited, in that it gives a flavour of spend on equality rather than a more detailed accumulative analysis on spending on women. Cat asked if developments on the Equality and Fairer Budget statement are likely and if recommendations from the Equality and Human Rights Budget Advisory Group (EHRBAG) would be integrated this year.

The DFM said that the Programme for Government commitment on gender budgeting was an acknowledgement that this is important and that there is still more work to be done. DFM recognised that we might not be fully successful at doing an intersectional gender analysis on this budget but is keen to continue to work with stakeholders to make improvements. DFM mentioned that the OECD will be undertaking a pilot of intersectional gender analysis in two Scottish Government portfolio areas and took an **action** to share the research specification of the work with stakeholders.

Cat raised concerns that the National Performance Framework is not adequately gendered and lacks the 'twin track' approach which is global best practice for mainstreaming. An improved approach to gender within the framework could also drive better collection of gender sensitive sex aggregated data. Cat highlighted that work such as the PSED review and Equally Safe should be mentioned in the

framework. She asked how the organisations could feed into this. DFM explained that these issues will be examined as part of the Review of National Outcomes and would finish early 2024, so there is still time for stakeholder input. We are engaging with Scottish Government analysts on what more is possible regarding data availability, including providing more intersectional data. DFM took an action to ensure officials update stakeholders on how to be involved.

Cat emphasised the importance of a twin track approach to set the tone and is keen to see a commitment on that. **[redacted – SG]** n took an action to arrange further discussions. Anna added that the twin track approach is important in mitigating the homogenising of human rights work, which reduces the focus on women specifically.

Sandy raised concerns about year to year funding in the sector. This is causing inequalities in whether schoolchildren are receiving lessons on primary prevention of violence against women. DFM acknowledged that it is difficult to move away from year to year funding but recognised that this is important work, so further thinking was needed on funding. DFM highlighted that the First Minister is keen to foreground the responsibility men have in challenging misogyny.

Sandy said that while the Misogyny Bill is a good step forward, we cannot rely solely on legislation and need to do community work to help people report crime. DFM was in agreement on the importance of changing attitudes around unacceptable behaviours.

[redacted – Scottish Women's Aid] raised the issue of unpaid carers and suggested that this should be considered more with the upcoming National Care Service review. DFM took an **action** to raise this with officials working in this area.

Anna explained that gender stakeholders are critical of the National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET) and its delivery plans for lacking a focus on gender equality and not recognising the importance of the care economy. They welcome its refresh as a chance to reconsider how to make NSET more effective for women, especially marginalised women. DFM agreed that this is a good opportunity and stressed the importance of putting demands on the private sector to improve conditions to attract women (such as flexible working and childcare options), as well as the public sector leading by example. DFM highlighted the reopening of the Independent Living Fund and the effect this might have on disabled women. DFM took an **action** to share an update on the outcome of the session on 7 November.

Cat closed the meeting by highlighting that the organisations are registered as core participants in the COVID enquiry and have formally raised concerns to ensure that gender is integrated throughout.

Item 5

Minister for Public Health and Women's Health Meeting with Engender 13 June 2023

Attendees:

Minister for Public Health and Women's Health
Cat Murphy, Engender Executive Director
[redacted], Engender [redacted]
[redacted], Engender [redacted]
[redacted – SG]

Ms Minto welcomed the meeting and asked attendees to introduce themselves. In her introduction, Cat noted that Engender are currently working on their Strategic Plan and it is likely Women's Health will be a focus, not least because an interest in women's health is not duplicated elsewhere in the sector.

Abortion policy

Colleagues from Engender provided updates on the work they have been taking forward around abortion. They are hoping to publish a paper in this summer, which looks at different models of provision and the practical barriers to abortion healthcare in Scotland. They noted that they were delighted with the commitment from the FM on decriminalisation and appreciate that it is a complex issue. They noted the need for it to be a thorough process and to bring in women's experiences and intersectionality so there is equity of access to services in Scotland. Cat noted that they are keen to be as much of a support as possible.

There was a short discussion on the recently published abortion statistics. Engender are planning to update the abortion report they did in partnership with other organisations in 2016, which is likely to be published later in the year.

The Minister noted that she meets regularly with Gillian MacKay and the abortion policy team to move the legislation on, but it is important to make sure to get it right and follow parliamentary process. Ms Minto welcomed Engender's support.

Engender are coordinating a letter to FM, welcoming commitments and offering support calling for an advisory group, signed by around 15 organisations.

Pregnancy and Maternity Research

Engender plan to feed into the covid inquiry, including the gendered dimension of public health decision making. In terms of the research there will be a set of recommendations in the report and it would be helpful to revisit these sometime in the future.

When working with women on what mattered to them, maternity services came up time and again. The initial report's purpose is to feed into inquiry with women's experiences.

Intersectional data was limited, but need to find out more about those women's experiences. Happy to return to the report in due course.

The Minister agreed that she would be interested to hear more and that it may be useful to include the Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise in discussions.

[redacted – Engender] noted the particular need to have a gendered focus on the needs of the woman (mother) and how it can affect their care.

Cat spoke about the body of work on the disproportionate impact of covid on women. Keen for lessons to be learned and for Scotland to have a progressive approach to public health.

Women's Health Plan

Engender are strongly invested in the Plan and Cat is on the WHP Implementation Programme Board. Broadly, the organisation are very happy with the progress of the Plan, and quite alive to that fact that it is being rolled out in a very difficult post covid environment and how that could impact success.

Welcome that it is a long term approach and that this is the beginning. In the longer term, beyond 2024, they would like to see the Plan build on broader health, such as women's mental health where there are gendered issues at play, particularly post covid. Also keen to see more intersectionality brought in.

Engender put in detailed consultation response on mental health strategy – they were disappointed with the lack of gendered analysis.

Action: Engender to share consultation response.

Cat also noted the manifesto commitment on Scottish institute for women's health – as something they would be keen to see progress.

Our Bodies, Our Rights

[redacted – Engender] spoke about the report and committed to sending follow up information. It was noted that there had been a commitment by Ms McKelvie to develop a working group to support disabled women, and Engender would like to see a return to that commitment, post covid. Ms Minto noted that this area is part of the portfolio of the Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees but that working across portfolios is important.

It was agreed it would be good to discuss these topics again in the near future.

Action: Scottish Government to consider next steps.

Item 6

Minister for Public Health and Women's Health: Introductory meeting with pro-choice stakeholders on Abortion Law Reform.

Date: 4 October 2023

Time: 09.00 – 10:00

Location: Hosted on Microsoft Teams

Present

Jenni Minto MSP (**JM**) – Minister for Public Health and Women's Health

Ann Henderson (**AH**) – Abortion Rights Scotland

Lucy Grieve (**LG**) – British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) and Back Off Scotland

[redacted] – Close the Gap

[redacted] – Engender

Sinead Cook (**SC**) – Faculty for Sexual and Reproductive Health (FSRH)

Sigi Joseph (**SJ**) – Royal College of GPs

[redacted] – Scottish Women's Budget Group

[redacted] – Young Women's Movement

[redacted] – Scottish Government

[redacted] – Scottish Government

[redacted] – Scottish Government

Agenda item 1: Welcome and Introductions

1. JM opened meeting by thanking everyone for joining, recognising the letter that had been sent to the First Minister in June 2023. She offered to meet in person in future.

2. **[redacted - Engender]** gave an overview of the current landscape of abortion in Scotland and highlighted that they were delighted the First Minister had committed to a review of abortion law and bringing groups together to work on this.

3. **[redacted – Engender]** called for the establishment of an expert working group and was happy to hear that the abortion policy team has started initial work on this, before introducing SC and SJ to give a view from practitioners/ clinicians.

Agenda item 2: Overview of campaign and need for Abortion Law Reform

4. SC emphasised the important of setting up a working group. She advised that at present, access to care lies with two doctors and five criteria, creating a sexist and outdated view of healthcare and not how we look at any other healthcare. A more pragmatic view is required to remove unnecessary barriers, especially in rural areas where staffing issues means it is harder to get a doctor.

Currently under the Abortion Act midwifery and nursing staff cannot approve abortions, even though they are the people most closely associated with the service.

She called for abortion services to continue being regulated, but considered a healthcare and medical issue, rather than a criminal issue.

5. SJ discussed primary care and barriers to patients reaching out, the stigma that women feel and how this results in patients presenting late with complications to abortion services. This is not good from a medical point of view and worrying that there is evidence of this happening in city centres, never mind rural areas.

Note that nurses do a great job but they should have more autonomy, particularly in the rural areas so that good access to abortion services is not a postcode lottery.

6. **[redacted – Close the Gap]** mentioned the impact of access to abortion on the women's labour market and the intrinsic link to access to birth control and the gender pay gap. The financial cost of raising a child and access to childcare is difficult.

She argued that women will always be disadvantaged, low paid and undervalued if they don't have full access to abortion. She also noted that unwanted pregnancies/abortions in deprived areas are higher as a result of some of these factors.

Agenda item 3: Framing and language

7. **[redacted – Young Women's Movement]** discussed lived experience, the fear of making the first step and how this is another barrier for accessing a simple healthcare procedure that should not be so difficult. Having run an engagement with an advisory collective of 30 young women, she had some thoughts for the Scottish Government review:

- would encourage involvement of patients from the start, including what pathways and outcomes might be and women from all demographics should be included.
- involve the women's sector in engagement. **[redacted – Young Women's Movement]** keen to be involved in designing participation and everyone in this call can contribute in different ways.

8. AH noted that it was necessary to do a lot of work to reiterate that it is a healthcare matter. Having spoken to MSPs outside the Scottish Parliament there was support for this.

Scotland is not unique in this situation, where many members of the public are unaware of their abortion laws; public messaging is complicated about what is legal and what is not legal. Public work will need to be considered carefully.

Raises concern that an impact of covid pandemic is that sex education for younger people will create a cohort of younger people who may have missed this education because parents/guardians will not have wanted to do this part of the curriculum.

Raises that we need to look at other countries and what they have done and experience where decriminalisation has been implemented up to certain limits. She acknowledged that there is no simple or right answer.

9. JM noted the point on education and will chat with fellow ministers in the education space to keep this in mind.

10. LG notes that the term 'decriminalisation' is confusing and risks making patients concerned so law reform may be a better term.

Agenda item 4: Funding for Women's Health

11. CM noted that the Women's Health Plan does not include specific funding and argued women's health should be well resourced to ensure the effectiveness of the plan.

12. JM noted Health Boards are given money by the Scottish Government and they make decisions on what they spend it on and don't appreciate funds being ringfenced. She and other Ministers do keep emphasising to Health Boards the importance of women's health issues.

The message is clear to Health Boards on who they are supporting and Scottish Government policies, but the people on this call are critical friends and JM asked that they continue to be.

Agenda item 5: Next Steps - Review of Abortion Law and Expert working group

13. [redacted – SG] and [redacted – SG] say they will welcome conversations with the groups on the call in the scoping phase of the review and that currently work on reviewing international examples is underway.

14. [redacted – Engender] advised that Engender has commissioned research on Scots law on abortion.

15. JM confirmed work has started, we need to get this review right and that it will be good to have clinicians in the room for the practical side. She reaffirmed the ask for those on the call to be critical friends so we can get this done. She confirmed that this work is a priority once the Safe Access Zones Bill has been considered by the Parliament.

16. SC noted that we need to be aware of the risks as other countries have reformed the law and in some respects it has made it more restrictive. There is potential to make the law better for women, but equally so to increase barriers, which disproportionately impact disadvantaged/vulnerable women.

17. AH says they will speak to international trade union networks and feedback views via STUC.

18. JM thanked everyone for their comments. She looked forward to meeting again when we have some progress to update on.

Item 7**Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice meeting with Engender, Close the Gap, Rape Crisis Scotland and Scottish Women's Aid****Wednesday 15 November 2023****Note of meeting****Present:**

Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP

Cat Murphy, Executive Director, Engender

Anna Ritchie Allan, Executive Director, Close the Gap

Sandy Brindley, Chief Executive, Rape Crisis Scotland

Marsha Scott, Chief Executive, Scottish Women's Aid

[redacted]**[redacted]****[redacted]****Agenda:**

1. Women's poverty and the cost of living crisis
2. Social security
3. Mainstreaming
4. Human Rights
5. Violence against women and girls

Summary of discussion:

The following key points were made in discussion:

Women's poverty and the cost of living crisis

1. The Cabinet Secretary heard stakeholders' concerns that there is an insufficient focus on taking a gendered approach to anti-poverty and economic development activity, including within work to establish a Minimum Income Guarantee and the National Strategy for Economic Transformation's (NSET) forthcoming Delivery plan.
2. The Cabinet Secretary invited Anna Ritchie Allan to share further information on her concern that the Scottish Government's focus on tackling the gender pay gap has been diminished within the wider Fair Work agenda.

Social security

3. Marsha Scott welcomed the establishment of a 'Fund to Leave' to support women leaving an abusive partner, but noted that similar funds in England and Wales had been exhausted quickly and the fund is unlikely to last the duration of the pilot period to the end of March 2024. Consideration is therefore needed to scaling up and funding the project going forward.
4. There was a discussion about the delivery of split payments of Universal Credit. The Cabinet Secretary shared attendees' frustration with the length of time it was taking to deliver split payments but acknowledged the challenges inherent in identifying a solution that is compatible with DWP's systems.
5. Attendees discussed the Scottish Government's housing and homelessness policy and acknowledged that gender and VAWG need to be mainstreamed at a local as well as a national level. Marsha highlighted guidelines for social landlords developed by Scottish Women's Aid and the lack of evidence that they are being used. The Cabinet Secretary invited Marsha to share further information, noting that the Minister for Housing could raise issues in his meetings with local authorities and housing convenors.

Mainstreaming and human rights

6. In relation to the Scottish Government's forthcoming draft strategy on mainstreaming equality and human rights, Cat Murphy emphasised the importance of having sufficient resources in place to support competency building, noting that pressure could otherwise fall onto third sector partners to meet this need. Cat also asked if the consultation on the draft strategy could open in January rather than December, so that respondents don't lose response time over the Christmas period.
7. Cat raised the phased approach to the review of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) set out by the Minister for Equalities in a letter of 4 October, noting that this was more limited than Engender had hoped for, particularly considering the detailed revised regulations it had helped develop. While acknowledging the desire to align with other changes proposed through the Human Rights Bill, Cat raised concern that this would cause delay and she indicated that she intended to write to the Cabinet Secretary.
8. There was a brief discussion about the Human Rights Bill and the Cabinet Secretary acknowledged its complexity and her eagerness to work with gender stakeholders to make it as strong as it possible within devolved competence.

Violence against women and girls (VAWG)

9. Sandy Brindley highlighted that a paper setting out Rape Crisis Scotland's concerns about the Independent Strategic Review of the Funding and Commissioning of VAWG Services has been sent to the Minister for Victims and Community Safety, Siobhan Brown.

10. Sandy raised the need for community engagement work to support the forthcoming Misogyny Bill, emphasising that legislation isn't enough without work 'on the ground' to support it. The Cabinet Secretary invited Sandy to submit a proposal but acknowledged that the financial climate was challenging and we should also consider how we can best shape existing initiatives.
11. Attendees reflected on the First Minister's role in relation to gender equality and VAWG and acknowledged his eagerness to use his role impactfully.

Actions:

The Cabinet Secretary committed to:

Raise attendees' concerns about NSET with the Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy;

Share available information on timescales for the delivery of split payments of Universal Credit;

Raise attendees' request to open the consultation on the Scottish Government's draft mainstreaming equality and human rights strategy with officials in January rather than December.