

A photograph of three women from behind, embracing each other in a grassy field. The woman in the center wears a black and white striped t-shirt and blue jeans. The woman on the left has long, curly blonde hair and wears a floral patterned top. The woman on the right wears a yellow sleeveless top and blue jeans. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent dark green filter and a white rectangular box containing text. Red lines are visible in the corners of the page.

Transforming Lives

A Study looking at the Landscape of Support for Women who Offend and Ways to Move Forward in Northern Ireland.

Kate Campbell
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Executive Summary

In 2019, NIACRO and the Prison Reform Trust (PRT) commissioned the updating of research previously carried out in 2015 namely ‘The Current Landscape of Support for Women who Offend in Northern Ireland’ (2015). PRT’s ‘Transforming Lives’ programme developed in response to the rising numbers of women being sent to prison across the UK; similarly in Northern Ireland there is concern about the rising numbers of women in prison and receiving probation orders.

Three significant research studies have been conducted in Northern Ireland since 2015 exploring: women in the criminal justice system who experienced domestic abuse; the use of custodial remand; and transitions from custody to the community. The studies have brought much-needed focus and contributed to our understanding of the needs and challenges associated with supporting women through the criminal justice system custody. Recommendations have been taken into consideration by the Department of Justice, in developing its new Women’s Strategy.

For this research, 27 staff in 17 organisations across the statutory, voluntary and community sectors were interviewed. The key statutory agencies included were the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) and Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI). This report references the Inspire Project and the Inspire Model. Inspire Project is PBNI’s programme of support for women under Probation supervision. Inspire Model refers to a partnership model that included, PBNI, NIPS, Women’s Support Network (WSN), NIACRO and other community and voluntary groups.

This research concludes that, since 2015, much remains the same for women within and leaving the criminal justice system. Lack of change, alongside steadily increasing numbers being sent to prison requires a more radical review across policy, provision, sentencing and approach.

However, the changes that have been introduced since 2015 are summarised below:

1. Changes within prison

Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS), Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI), Chaplaincy and voluntary organisations have developed and are making a significant contribution to women’s experiences of custody and preparation for release. Prison Service staff have made good strides since 2015, introducing new programmes and activities and encouraging links with communities of interest. There is also increased awareness about the impact of domestic abuse with a question introduced into the Prisoner Needs Profile and plans to employ a dedicated domestic abuse staff member. NIACRO, working closely with the Prison Service, have initiated better family ties through improvements to prison visits for children and family information days. However, funding shortages mean it can be difficult to sustain initiatives long term.

There are, therefore, several helpful initiatives emerging within prison that are supporting women, in custody and in preparation for release. However, the sustainability of these initiatives, and their connectivity with community-based supports for women once released, are weak.

2. Changes within Communities

Funding cuts have severely affected the resources available for support services and it may be that this is contributing to increased numbers of women receiving custodial sentences, including for repeat offences. Cuts have been within specialist health and social care provision including mental health, counselling and addiction services; and specific support for women leaving prison.

The Inspire Model ^a provided foundational resettlement support for women, with support starting before release and continuing for some time after. It was proving to be effective in addressing recidivism through effective partnership working. It continues to be sorely missed since it was significantly cut in 2016 and interviewees continue to feel it should be reinstated as the ‘cornerstone’ for community-based support.

Support for women upon release is patchy, with just two formal provisions; Start 360’s Engage and PBNI-led Inspire Project. Whilst the voluntary and community sector has lost some of its infrastructure for supporting women ^b who have been through the criminal justice system, it continues to demonstrate high levels of expertise, commitment and innovation.

The lack of suitable accommodation continues to contribute to women ending up and / or returning to prison and this requires urgent attention.

3. Changes within the Statutory Sector

Enhanced Combination Orders (ECO’s) and Problem Solving Courts are to be welcomed. Although not specifically designed for women, they both represent the opportunity for women to be diverted from custodial sentences and to receive support for the often-underlying causes of offending behaviour. They also introduce a partnership approach, combining the skills and expertise of the statutory, voluntary and community sectors.

The report’s eight conclusions and associated recommendations are summarised as:

Conclusion 1

Commitment and expertise across the sectors remain despite significant funding constraints.

Recommendation 1:

Make use of women’s centres; recovery and rebuilding lives is not a linear process and should draw on experienced and skilled staff rooted in communities.

Conclusion 2

Short-term programmes and piece-meal funding have resulted in deterioration of practical support and resource planning. Many women are being sent to prison rather than receiving support for the root causes of offending behaviour.

There was widespread support for the Inspire Model; it appears to have as much merit now as at its height, four years ago.

^a. (A partnership between PBNI, NIPS, NIACRO and the Women’s Support Network (WSN), which supported links into women’s groups, thereby facilitating access to education, counselling, childcare, volunteering etc.)

^b. (For example, through the loss of PBNI community grants for the voluntary sector and the cuts to the Inspire Model.)

Recommendation 2:

2.1. Improved community provisions must address complex issues including:

1. Trauma and its impact (stemming from domestic abuse, paramilitarism and other factors)
2. Addictions and mental health difficulties
3. Homelessness / unstable accommodation provision (see Recommendation 3)
4. The impact of welfare reform (see Recommendation 8)

Provision must also be:

1. Evidence-based and collaborative
2. Needs-led. Growing numbers of younger women, whose addictions are often associated with trauma and who are becoming involved in increasingly violent offences, need distinctive support, as do women who may be subject to trafficking or deportation.
3. Centred on key workers supporting women over the long-term.
4. Aligned with provisions in prison to ensure continuity 'through the gate'.

2.2. The Inspire Model should be reinstated as the 'cornerstone' for community-based support. This will require statutory agencies to consult with the original board, review the current needs and identify where the required financial resources could be sourced.

Conclusion 3

Accommodation for women at risk of entering the justice system and for those being released is the most pressing need in Greater Belfast and other locations across Northern Ireland.

Recommendation 3:

DoJ-led consultation to establish the requirements for supportive accommodation that would address the need for: bail address; post-release accommodation; and provision for those for whom supported accommodation could help to divert from offending.

Conclusion 4

High (and increasing) numbers of women continue to be remanded into custody.

Recommendation 4:

The DoJ could consider a bail support service; commissioned by a statutory agency to be delivered by a community / voluntary collaboration. Such a service would be most effective if accommodation needs were met (Recommendation 2).

Conclusion 5

ECOs and Problem Solving justice indicate a willingness to promote options that enable women to serve

sentences within the community and receive supports, where possible.

Recommendation 5:

Promote alternatives to custody for women amongst sentencers, particularly ECO's, and evaluate the effectiveness of Problem Solving justice approaches for women with a view to increasing this provision, particularly Substance Misuse and Mental Health Problem Solving Courts. Furthermore, promote the impact of a mother being sent to prison on children and the family unit amongst sentencers.

Conclusion 6

Partnerships with shared responsibilities are to be encouraged to strengthen the implementation of services and make best use of resources in the current financial climate.

Recommendation 6:

Inter-departmental approaches with shared responsibilities that recognise expertise and responsibilities are required if complex difficulties are to be addressed effectively.

Conclusion 7

Significant numbers of women in the criminal justice system have deep seated and complex needs necessitating skilled support and adequate time resources.

Recommendation 7:

Recognise that long-term and relationship-led approaches work most effectively and invest in these.

Conclusion 8

Two current societal challenges are impacting on women in the criminal justice system:

- (i) Universal Credit roll out; impacting women being released and those considered to be 'at risk' of offending because of financial pressures which brings to the fore the potential for criminalising poverty.
- (ii) Political uncertainty over Brexit combined with global changing trends in crime, particularly human trafficking.

Recommendation 8:

8.1. The DoJ should take the lead in monitoring the impact of Universal Credit with regard to crimes which relate to poverty.

8.2. The DoJ should take the lead in monitoring the impact on women (in custody and beyond) of crimes relating to human trafficking and migration and associated support needs.

With the DoJ's new Women's Strategy to be launched soon, there exists an opportunity to identify the key building blocks for moving forward, particularly to tackle the causes of offending and re-offending amongst women, and to invest in prevention and relationship-based community supports with the aim, where possible, to divert women from prison. There will, of course, always be a need for a custodial facility, but one that takes a holistic, trauma and gender-informed approach incorporating pre-release support with post-release provisions that help to ensure the cycle of re-offending can be broken.

1. Introduction

1.1 Transforming Lives

Transforming Lives was a UK-wide programme led by the Prison Reform Trust and funded by the National Lottery's Community Fund from 2015 to 2019. It was developed in response to the rising numbers of women being sent to prison across the UK. The Transforming Lives Advisory Group visited Belfast early in 2019 and this visit shed light on the particular challenges, as well as some of the strengths locally that helped to shape the programme's priorities for Northern Ireland. Visits to women's centres in Belfast and Lisburn provided an opportunity to appreciate the strength and potential within the community sector to support women who have been through the justice system and particularly those being released from custody.

Transforming Lives, Prison Reform Trust and NIACRO have jointly commissioned this research, as an update of a 2015 report entitled, *The Landscape of Support for Women who Offend in Northern Ireland*, believing this will be a helpful legacy/contribution of the programme for Northern Ireland.

1.2 Research Aim

The aim of this research is to revisit the views of participants and professionals about the current landscape of support in the community for women who have been through the criminal justice system. Specifically the research focuses on:

- The current contribution of Statutory and Voluntary partners including the Inspire Model;
- The impact that shifts in funding have had for supporting women e.g. resources through different funding streams;
- The increased use of remand and the pressures associated with this including housing pressures;
- Sentencing patterns including the merits of non-custodial options for women;
- Revisiting the Department of Justice (DoJ) work towards the development of a Women's Strategy and how this will relate to and impact on the landscape of support for women who offend.

2. Background

2.1 Previous Research

2.1.1 'The Landscape of Support for Women Who Offend in Northern Ireland' (Campbell, 2015)

Commissioned by the VSB Foundation and funded by the Pilgrim Trust, this research investigated the statutory, voluntary and community interventions supporting women who offend and those women 'at risk' of offending and identified instances of good practice. It evidenced that, for many women, their vulnerabilities, including being a victim of crime, led to a crisis resulting in their entry into the criminal justice system. It also highlighted the well-documented disproportionate impact of incarceration on women and made 27 recommendations, summarised as follows:

For Women in the Criminal Justice System

- Every women should be treated with dignity, respect and humanity, emphasising a restorative, supportive approach over a punitive one.
- Strengthening women's role as a mother ^c (where applicable) and increasing ways to keep relationships with children/family need to be found; many women lose this role while in prison with huge personal and familial impact.
- 'Wrap-around' interagency services, appropriately coordinated and resourced, are needed to support the complex process of transitioning into the community to help reduce the risk returning to prison.
- The frequent link between experiences of trauma, particularly domestic and sexual violence, and offending should be researched. Furthermore, staff training in and outside prison in this regard is needed along with greater involvement of Women's Aid for practical support.

For Policy

- A re-think about the incarceration of women is required; strong political leadership with cross-departmental support to make effective alternative provisions including looking at the 'new' Enhanced Combination Orders being piloted by PBNI as an effective alternative.
- A wider exploration of alternatives to custody involving women who offend to involve practitioners, policy makers, academics and politicians.
- Remand should only be used where a woman is likely to receive a custodial sentence.
- PBNI-led Inspire Model (partnership between NIACRO, NIPS, PBNI and Women's Support Network) to be resourced and recognised as a successful model.
- Mental ill-health provision to be increased along with mental health resources with legislation for Personality Disorders.

^c (50% of women at that time in NI were mothers.)

- The impact of welfare reform particularly on crimes linked to poverty and vulnerability should be monitored.
- Opportunities to share learning, practice, funding and policy issues that would identify changes (small and large) that have the potential to make a difference should be created. Independent funders could have a more strategic role to play in funding this.
- Options for safe, secure and supported accommodation with services attached should be further researched. Small, community-based units may be most effective.
- Continuation of voluntary sector-led / community solutions to strengthen resettlement and reduce women's imprisonment.

Whilst few of the above recommendations were actioned, several strategic developments have come about; particularly alternatives to short prison sentences and research which has made an important contribution to addressing the needs of women who offend. However, the intervening four years of austerity have seen significant cuts to the statutory, voluntary and community sectors such that women's centres and support networks reported that "support services for women are under serious threat from funding cuts with many organisations reducing services, losing staff or closing altogether." The community and voluntary sectors continue to provide "a range of services to women, children and families in some of the most disadvantaged areas of Northern Ireland" in a time of increased demand for these services.

2.1.2. 'Survived... but at what cost? A study of women in the criminal justice system who experience domestic abuse and the potential for change' (McGuigan and Walker 2018)

The impact of domestic abuse and its implications for women who offend was explored by NIACRO staff supported by the Griffins Society. The research focussed on the impacts on women of living under abusive control and ways in which these impacts contributed towards the women's journey into criminal behaviour. Being distanced from community life was highlighted as having a limiting effect on life opportunities and choices. The research also exposed difficulties women encountered reporting domestic abuse to agencies and even to friends and concluded that, in Northern Ireland's post-conflict society, disproportionate barriers to reporting remain.

McGuigan and Walker also concluded that it was likely that the domestic circumstances of all of the women interviewed for the research were likely to have been taken into consideration in sentencing, and details of domestic abuse were featured in all of the women's Pre Sentence reports prepared by Probation. However, this was not clear to the majority of women interviewed.

Recommendations included increased specialist domestic abuse support for women going through courts, in prison and on community sentences, and increased use of alternatives to custody, focusing on therapeutic interventions and practical support for independent living.

This research meets one of the 2015 recommendations ^d and was a timely study that "focuses on the impact of domestic abuse and its implications for women who offend so that more appropriate responses can be identified and introduced across the criminal justice system". Domestic abuse

^d (The frequent link between experiences of trauma particularly domestic violence and sexual abuse and offending behaviour should be researched)

(including emotional, physical and coercive control) continues to be “the single most significant contributory factor” influencing many women’s “journey into crime”.

2.1.3 ‘Women’s Custodial Remand in NI; an examination of why women are remanded to custody and their distinct experiences of prison’ (McNaull, 2018)

McNaull explored women’s experience of custodial remand, highlighting criminalisation of vulnerability when women are remanded, not for the severity of their crime but other factors including ‘no fixed abode’, ‘chaotic’ lifestyle, ‘risk’ to self and psychiatric assessment. Many women on remand experience long periods of ‘lock up’. Alongside their addiction, medication and mental health needs, this may be seen as an inappropriate response. Recommended responses included diversion from the point of policing, diversion from the point of court, an explicit distinction between remand and sentenced prisoners and alternatives to custodial remand.

2.1.4 ‘Time after Time: A study of Women’s Transitions from Custody’ (O’Neil, 2016)

This research explored the transition of women from prison into the community in Northern Ireland through women’s accounts and was also supported by the Griffin’s Society. The majority of women interviewed were first-time offenders and most were sentenced to custody for less than one year. They reported that the pain of being parted from their children adversely affected their mental health and employment prospects. They also reported additional difficulties associated with living in a society emerging from years of conflict and a sense of loss and disorientation after release.

Recommendations included long-term funding for community initiatives to provide women exiting prison with practical and emotional support to rebuild lives and return to the community; mental health assessments and appropriate community services support; a look at the accommodation needs of women leaving custody; more emphasis on support for women returning to the home particularly support for maintaining family contact and access to benefits, GP registration and help with obtaining personal identification documents to ensure access to services.

These three research reports published in Northern Ireland since 2016 add to the continuing narrative regarding women in the criminal justice system. They identify key issues to be addressed and contributed to an expansion of knowledge and understanding of each of these issues, making pertinent recommendations for the criminal justice sector.

2.2 Women in NI criminal Justice System: Trends

Interviewees participating in this research reported that the majority of the women in prison have experienced domestic abuse, sexual violence and / or childhood abuse and the impact of the resulting trauma has led to increases in prescribed medication and/or alcohol misuse as negative coping methods. Women’s Aid found that “85% of the participants attending the training course they ran had experienced domestic abuse” (Women’s Aid Improving Health Within Criminal Justice, 2016). Entering the criminal justice system compounds these difficulties, leaving many much worse off as a result of their prison experience. The higher proportion of women in prison for relatively short sentences results in the lack of appropriate levels of support for returning to the community.

Many require a “care package” rather than a prison sentence.

Northern Ireland’s average female prison population has remained fairly stagnant over four years. However, the average number of receptions has risen considerably, particularly remand receptions (up by 35%) and fine default receptions (up by 176%). These trends have accelerated the urgency for exploring alternatives to custody, particularly the use of remand. The gender profile (Table 2) of people on PBNI caseload presents a small decrease in males and an 11% increase in females between March 2018 and March 2019.

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Remand Receptions	182	215	235	246
Immediate Custody Receptions	103	84	105	117
Fine Defaulter Receptions	21	55	68	58
Non-criminal Receptions	0	1	2	2
Totals	306	355	410	423

Table 1: Ash House Receptions 2014 - 2018

	31 st March 2015	31 st March 2016	31 st March 2017	31 st March 2018	31 st March 2019	% change March 2019 on March 2018
Male	3,975	3,810	3,901	3,738	3,702	-1%
Female	420	399	400	409	452	11%

Table 2: Gender profile of persons on the PBNI Caseload March 2015 – March 2019

There is a wide age range (18-63 years) of women in Ash House with reception population’s age profile becoming younger. This presents challenges for services and provision in meeting a wide range of needs. There is a small though growing number of young women in the 18-24 year age group whom many interviewees felt were not receiving age-appropriate specific support.

3. Methodology and Definition of Terms

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 27 people who have direct experience of supporting women who offend by providing a range of services, specific interventions, academic research, policy development and analysis as summarised in Table 3.

The key statutory agencies included in the research were the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) and Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI). This report references several terms that merit defining.

The **Inspire Project** is PBNI's programme of support for women under Probation supervision.

The **Inspire Model** refers to a partnership model which included, PBNI, NIPS, Women's Support Network (WSN), NIACRO and other community and voluntary groups. The Inspire Model had previously been referred to as Women's Support Programme (WSP), but following 2011 research by Easton and Matthews, the name was changed to Inspire Model.

Interviewees were sent the recommendations from the 2015 research in advance of the interviews and asked to comment on the progress made, as they perceive it. The organisations and individuals represented are listed below. Approximately a quarter of the interviewees had been interviewed for the previous report.

The research questions revolved around four areas:

- Q 1** Current experiences including the nature of their work with women who offend in prison (Ash House) or in the community;
- Q 2** Comments on the 2015 recommendations, particularly their perceptions of progress made;
- Q 3** New initiatives/services/policies/research that have emerged;
- Q 4** Suggested initiatives for the support of women or improvements to services that would make a significant difference to women who offend.

Organisation	Organisation Status	No. Staff Interviewed
NIACRO	Voluntary	3
Prison Chaplaincy	Voluntary	1
Start 360	Voluntary	1
Women's Centres (6)	Community	6
Women's Support Network (regional organisation)	Voluntary	1
Women's Aid (2):-Foyle Women's Aid; Belfast Women's Aid	Voluntary	4
Northern Ireland Prison Service	Statutory	4
Probation Board for Northern Ireland	Statutory	3
Department of Justice	Statutory	1
Academia (2)	Statutory	2
Political, former Minister for Justice	Statutory	1
ORGANISATIONS – 17		INTERVIEWEES – 27

Table 3: Organisational and sector breakdown of Interviewees

4. The Current Landscape of Support for Women who Offend: Changes within Prison (supporting release)

Rich and long-standing experience of supporting women who offend was evident within the Prison Service, Probation Board, Chaplaincy and voluntary and community organisations interviewed. Prison Service staff have made great strides with new programmes and activities such as healthy eating initiatives, events to mark International Women's Day, 10x9 storytelling events, trade unions delivering short courses and inspirational talks. Events are often aimed at encouraging links with communities of interest that might be continued upon women's release.

One interviewee from a rural womens centre observed that variety of activities serve to "encourage people to reflect in some cases and maybe change their perspective". Some interventions help build specific skills whilst others are concerned with "reconnecting women back into communities".

However, women's experience of 'constructive activity' is varied; with interviewees reporting that, for some, boredom is a huge issue, whilst others engage with more activities than they had prior to custody and may, for example join a gym or sports club as a result of their experiences in custody.

Funding shortages mean it can be difficult to sustain valuable programmes long term. For example, GRIT, a course run in Ash House by a voluntary training organisation, explores "a more positive way of thinking and creating new choices". Very positive feedback was given by staff and participants, and although everyone was keen to repeat it as it was effective in helping women to re-evaluate their lives and approaches to problem-solving, resources were not available. One interviewee felt the effects of this training gave the women a firm basis on which to build their future:

"I find the women have no self-worth so you see unless you give people self-worth and confidence, they're not going to achieve anything because if you haven't anything to move forward with ... you can't move forward ... you're really stuck. Certainly I could see this course (GRIT) built them up, it was very good." (Prison Service staff member)

Some women have "had so many practical and emotional issues that they just weren't ready to connect into different programmes". For many "it's tea and chat where we have an opportunity to remind them of what their motivation for change was but it's mostly reminding them of how far they've come" (Voluntary organisation staff). In addition, circumstances continually change; home, relationships, family circumstances, so "it's trying to work with them, engage them in different activities which is a big thing for anybody and if you take drugs out of the equation, there's a huge gap and we try to get them to use other services provided by the prison as preparation for release." (Prison Service staff).

One Prison Service staff member emphasised:

"Yes it's good to get them off the landings and get them into classes and keep them busy but those classes and that being busy needs to be something that benefits them. It's not about making life easier for us because somebody else has them for an hour; it's about 100% engagement in something they need."

Several professionals interviewed called for a greater flexibility of provision including one-to-one activities for very vulnerable women who, for a variety of reasons, may not leave their cells.

Whilst considerable time and thought within Ash House is devoted to interventions that will help women on release, this has limited value when there is no follow-through post-release support:

"There's so much going on in Hydebank and then when they go outside into the community it's like there's nothing" (Voluntary sector interviewee).

Hydebank Wood was re-designated as a secure College in 2016 and Belfast Met are contracted to provide Learning and Skills, covering topics such as music, art, horticulture, hospitality and catering, primarily to help the high numbers of people coming into custody without formal qualifications to gain vocational skills that will better equip them for life post release. A few women with positive educational experiences engage with vocational classes, yet more are interested in 'softer' skills; art, reading classes etc. Many work in gardening, catering and care of animals which helps build skills, team work and employment prospects. Prison staff demonstrated a flexibility and understanding towards many women's needs and previous poor educational experiences:

"While there's a need for English and maths, we do have older women who can't read but is this the crucial thing for now? The ethos now is to get the help they need ... yes she needs to learn to read but let's solve something else first and the education will come when the confidence grows and the motivation grows and once it's there and we can teach her to read but do it in a different way so it's not an obstruction sitting in a class and getting all those negative feelings reinforced."

Interviewees observed that many struggle to adapt to life outside, requiring considerable practical and emotional support before and after leaving custody. It is important therefore to note that several programmes which originate in the prison are offered 'through the gate': NIACRO's Working Well ESF employability programme; NIACRO's Women's Group; and Start 360's Engage. Start 360's group work is often followed by one-to-one 'reinforcement' sessions to discuss how women will put the issues explored into practice in preparation for release.

Several interviewees highlighted their concern about the extent to which the **Prison Service seems to becoming increasingly reliant on voluntary services** they are not funding but that are being delivered in the prison and therefore questioned the extent to which the Prison Service valued the contribution of the community and voluntary sector.

5. The Current Landscape of Support for Women who Offend: Changes within Communities

Interviewees pointed to the lack of resources for support services in the community as the main reason for a rise in the number of women in Ash House, including repeat offenders. The significant personal and psychological impacts of custody leave long-term consequences for women and their families, and yet **support for transitioning into the community appeared very patchy**. Whilst it is evident that Probation, Prison Service and voluntary organisations do their best to arrange for support upon release such as accommodation, registering with a GP, medication and benefits, the practicalities associated with this often proved extremely difficult and interviewees observed an increase in the complexity of many women's needs:

“We are seeing referrals of women from probation who have huge issues are often not ready and programmes have needed to be adapted” (Voluntary sector interviewee)

This is compounded by a reduction in health and social care services, particularly for complex needs and comorbidity. Women need access to services to help with addressing poverty, homelessness, health and addiction difficulties, yet interviewees reflected that many services are becoming scarcer with longer waiting times, particularly specialist mental health interventions, medical appointments and counselling. Many interviewees felt that **women with high levels of need “were set up to fail”** as the statutory and community support required was often scarce.

These difficulties are to be considered in the context of a society in which the full impact of Universal Credit is yet to be felt. Universal Credit, and the end of welfare mitigations which have protected welfare claimants from the harshest effects, are proving to be hugely problematic for many people and cuts to social security will have an acute impact on women and children, especially lone parents; this is described as a “cliff edge” by the NI Law Centre and advice services.

Finally, suitable, safe accommodation with accessible services is problematic in Greater Belfast and rural areas; this is perhaps the greatest challenge of all.

“We don't have women's hostels; we're looking for accommodation within working class communities rather than the anonymity of south Belfast. Some women said to me that they got into fights in the hostels and that 'fed' into them 'breaching their bail and being recalled.” (Women's centre worker)

5.1 Impacts of Cuts in Funding

5.1.1 Inspire Model

Established in 2008, The *Inspire Model* was a gender-specific partnership led by PBNI and including NIPS, NIACRO and Women's Support Network (WSN). An independent evaluation (Easton & Matthews, 2011) of the project demonstrated its high success rates with 78% of interviewees not having committed any further offences since engaging the model addressed the specific needs of women attempting to desist from crime and reintegrate into the community. The programme was “*responsive to women's needs*”, actively “*encouraging women to identify their own solutions; innovative and flexible*” (statutory sector worker). Dedicated staff in NIACRO and WSN, an extensive network of participating women's centres offering a range of programmes as well as childcare and counselling,

coupled with knowledge and understanding of women's needs made for an effective model, building confidence and strength in participating women. All participating partners, as well as independent organisations, (including the six women's centres which delivered the service) reflected its key role in “*addressing specific needs that women who offend had as they made the journey from offending to developing desisting strategies and reintegrating into the community*” (statutory sector worker).

In 2015 funding for the Inspire Model was significantly cut, staff dispersed and the venue from which the model operated was relocated. Probation's Inspire team does now have new Belfast City Centre premises and delivers a small number of core programmes required by the courts. It also secures occasional places/programmes from the community sector when funding becomes available and small numbers of women are referred to women's centres and to Start 360's Engage programme - a relationship-led programme using small group and one-to-one sessions to build confidence and resilience with women in the criminal justice system. Inspire Probation staff have remained committed to the ethos of the model and associated relationships.

However, interviewees reflecting on this cut, four years on, still question whether those who made that decision understood the extent of the need for gender-specific provision. Indeed, gender remains a significant factor in many of the offences being committed by women. Prison Service staff and voluntary organisations agreed that a different approach for women is needed and yet the *Inspire model* was the single gender-specific programme that was lost.

“Lost now is the dedicated staff who could go to the prison, who could provide the linkages for women to women's centres and specific opportunities” (Women's Centre interviewee)

5.1.2 Further Impacts of Shifts in Funding

Small numbers of women have still been able to get support through women's centres throughout Northern Ireland with the support of Probation's Inspire Project. However, cuts in resources within Probation and the women's sector have significantly eroded the availability of services. According to the Women's Support Network, the women's sector has faced so many funding cuts that the ability to link women to suitable women's centre programmes has been severely compromised. Probation can “*pay only for those additional programmes where they are required by the court, for example thinking skills*” (Statutory sector interviewee). Probation's Inspire Project team's “*community grants which would have supported the women's centres and other organisations such as arts projects have had to be stopped and that's a significant drop in funding*” (Statutory sector interviewee).

Since 2015, the loss of the European Social Fund (ESF) across many women's centres and for NIACRO (until it was reinstated in 2018) has been significant. Only two of the women's centres with ESF funding appear to have the resources required to support women attending the centre and to provide ‘wrap-around’ services needed. These centres, located in the North and West of the Province (Derry City and Dungannon, Co Tyrone) have small numbers of women from the criminal justice sector attending. Greater numbers requiring support are in Greater Belfast.

5.2 The Current Contribution of Community and Voluntary Partners

The added value gained from community, voluntary and statutory bodies pooling their resources, expertise and commitment to support women was said to be something worth investing in. **Yet little new investment is evident despite several innovatory initiatives**. Interviews revealed a high level of

concern about the impact of four years of cuts and closures. In particular, the reduction in the Inspire Model was considered to be a poor return from the statutory sector.

The last round of funding cuts being implemented across all government departments “*affected the voluntary sector disproportionately*” and this has been “*hugely damaging to that group of the population who may end up in the criminal justice system*”. (Women’s Resource and Development Agency). The reduction in funding for voluntary and community sectors, lack of a longer-term funding strategy from government and “*piece-meal funding*” was felt to be inefficient and damaging.

“The work was funded but funded through crumbs and when the crumbs were removed then everything goes back to where it was before. I mean without resources and, because women are so small a group within the system, I would say they are not even visible!” (Women’s Centre Manager).

There was a sense of ‘slipping back rather than moving forward’ with interviewees remarking on the lack of a NI Assembly meeting at the time of the interviews contributing to a sense of despair.

5.2.1 Women’s Centres

The ‘wrap-around’ services that many women require on release, including counselling, therapies, childcare, transport, addictions support, training and education exist in women’s centres. Several were able to offer pre-release work placements and, owing to their diverse locations, they are a potentially valuable source of long-term support. One Centre Manager reflected:

“The women come here for classes and to socialise, the spin-off is improved mental health; they can just be normal here, sit and have tea and socialise and that helps, they say it does anyway ... it helps to heal and to mend them ... if you can create a space where their mind can settle it gives them a better chance. And there’s a lot of bonding with staff and they get to know people and realise a lot of women here have issues too ... so someone to advocate for them, provide counselling and help with addictions. A significant number of women have come out of the ‘care’ system and are gaining a decent education – because the longer you’re in it (prison) the worse it is.”

“I think our centre is focussed on the well-being of the individual and whatever support we can give, without mollycoddling them, and just be themselves; there are rules in every centre, if you’ve been drinking or taking drugs you can’t get in, not that day, but we will follow up.”

There is not support for women being mandated to attend women’s centres. The ethos must be one of choice, as one centre manager explained:

“It’s voluntary coming here, if people are told they must come, I won’t accept them ... no you come here under your own desire ... and of course it can be tough ... psychologically tough for women that have never been out, but if they come they will be looked after by other women and staff – it’s taking that first step.”

“What women need lies within the community, you’ve got the example of Social Services because they use us (women’s centre) for access visits so they’ve got it’ that it’s better to use facilities in your community, the small counselling rooms and crèche for whoever needs it and all the toys they need are there.”

Northern Ireland’s women’s centres are a unique resource, many having well over 30 years’ experience of providing what women need upon release. Yet resources need to be invested for the long-term.

5.2.2 The Fresh Start initiative

Delivered by Start 360 and funded through the Fresh Start initiative, Engage employs two staff members to support approximately 32 women, initially in the prison and then helping them to reconnect with communities through building trust, confidence and goal setting before a ‘warm handover’ to local organisations. Many of the women are vulnerable, having lost networks and friendships whilst in prison. Support is relationship-led using small group and one-to-one sessions and helping with immediate needs. Engage’s key programme goals are to: build confidence and resilience; enable women to better address community issues; and increase their capacity to engage with Fresh Start’s wider women’s programme. Most women are supported for 18 weeks, though this may stretch to six months. Several affiliated health, well-being and creative programmes are run weekly in Start 360’s Belfast offices.

5.2.3 NIACRO’s Women’s Group and Working Well ESF Programme

In 2015 NIACRO received funding from PBNI for its part in the Inspire Model to help build a cohesive approach towards supporting women on statutory supervision. This came five years after NIACRO first developed its Women’s Project, again with PBNI support. Inspire Model’s funding was, however, short-lived, being cut in 2016. Whilst this cut had a significant impact on the model, NIACRO made efforts to continue supporting women who offend. It continued its weekly group for women in the community and on day release from Ash House and to contribute where possible to partnership working; supporting women through the use of volunteers; and planning events and courses by securing small grants.

The women supported by NIACRO’s weekly women’s group are often vulnerable due to many personal, family and community pressures including domestic/sexual violence and trauma. They often use alcohol and drugs to escape from experiences in their past and to cope with day-to-day life. The women engaging in the project have low self-confidence, and heightened feelings of guilt and shame, resulting in them becoming lonely and isolated in their community. This often means that they ‘hide away’ from services in their community and avoid the support and help they need. All activities and programmes delivered are in response to the needs of the group and go some way to closing the gap created by the women’s isolation from their communities.

In addition, in April 2018 NIACRO received ESF funding for its employment support programme, Working Well. This programme supports women serving sentences of one year, helping them to engage with education and training in the prison and to identify relevant support in the community in preparation for release (including, for example, debt advice, GP registration, benefits advice etc.) Working Well also supports women who are coming to the end of their sentence into training or employment in the community ‘through the gate’ service.

5.2.4 Themed Support: Domestic Violence

Given the documented links between experiencing domestic abuse and offending behaviour, several initiatives relating to the support of women who experience domestic abuse are worth referencing. Professionals interviewed are finding that women require intensive support if they are to break away

from abusive relationships and destructive lifestyles.

“... to be honest women would benefit more from doing more community based programmes and not going into custody, particularly under 12 months, ... yes it leaves the woman in a worse position and it's recognising that if there's domestic abuse, they (courts) should be looking at different solutions because prison costs a lot ... it doesn't help and it doesn't reform because they just keep going in and out of prison.” (Voluntary Organisation interviewee)

Women's Aid PSNI Support Workers: Belfast and Lisburn's Womens Aid have placed two staff members with the PSNI to support women and tackle domestic abuse. Whilst not an initiative specifically dedicated to women within the criminal justice system, it is nevertheless a skilled and necessary resource that is helping to build closer relationships and understanding between the two organisations. There is evidence that PSNI responding officers have a better understanding of the complex and volatile domestic abuse situations that they may be handling, signs indicating abusive behaviour, and how they can best encourage woman affected to keep safe and be directed to other supports. The PSNI Support Worker interviewed observed:

“I've discovered that domestic abuse is not a very tidy crime, what I mean is there's not a beginning, middle and end like burglary ... and get what's referred to as closure. With domestic abuse women will return and give this relationship another go, will try again and go back with new information to try for all the reasons we know about ... and if you've decided to withdraw your statement and you're back with him ... it's still pending” (PSNI Support Worker).

Family Justice Centre: this proposal, under development by Foyle Women's Aid (not yet implemented), envisages staff from all relevant partner agencies being located together in one building, thereby reducing the number of places victims of domestic abuse must go for help and the number of times they need to recount their stories. This resource will be of particular benefit to women who are victims of domestic abuse and who have also offended.

“We should be looking at different solutions because going to prison costs a lot, it doesn't help and it doesn't reform and really it should be community based type programmes”
(Women's Aid Centre Manager).

This planned initiative is a good example of a voluntary sector organisation offering early, effective and professional early intervention, supported by research into best practice meeting of women's needs.

5.3 Accommodation Needs

The need for *suitable, safe and secure accommodation was felt to have reached a critical point*, with increased numbers of women in prison (often on remand) due to homelessness. It emerged as the most important factor interviewees felt would make a significant difference to lowering the numbers of women going to prison, reoffending rates, and reintegration into the community.

Women are often 'remanded' to prison due to homelessness / not having a bail address. McNaull (2019) also highlighted the need for alternative responses to women in alcohol, drug and mental health crisis which should be *“non-criminal justice centred, community based and multi-disciplinary models for responding to people in crisis.”* (McNaull 2019:4)

“The majority of women are in short-term sentences, over half of them (57%) are on remand and quite often that is because they don't have a 'bail address'. It's not a good reason for women being placed in prison!”

“The number of women remanded for non-prisonable offenses, so immediately there are so many women that you could be diverting but in the absence of community resources, the women will continually be sent to prison. I think they could be housed elsewhere in a therapeutic community.”
(McNaull)

A shortage of safe, long-term accommodation forces many women to be released into unsuitable and temporary accommodation. This is true of women assessed to be of low and high risk, including those who are persistent offenders. Interviewees offered many accounts of women not knowing where they would be living, or which hostel they would be placed in until the day of release and / or of ending up in temporary 'crash' accommodation with very basic support. The dangers associated with being released into unsuitable, unsupported accommodation were highlighted:

“Many who have fallen outside the margins altogether that nobody wants, they have serious drug problems and serious drink problems, very little family support, some have come through the care system and so who do you meet in the hostel, all your pals who have either been in prison with you or have the same problems as you.” (Voluntary organisation interviewee)

“Certainly older women with a serious alcohol addiction who are coming into prison and the reason they are coming into prison over and over again is the lack of suitable accommodation on release that is the number one!” (Voluntary organisation interviewee)

The hostel accommodation currently available is mixed gender; unsuitable for many women with a range of vulnerabilities including addictions, mental ill health difficulties, often having experienced domestic abuse and/or sexual violence. The accommodation is often unsafe as well as unsuitable:

“Women only hostels are safer, men in hostels can be dangerous and women are not safe in the communal space. They're (men) are repeat offenders ... petty crime often drunk and disorderly but there's a major issue of drugs and drug dealing.... You have the local drug dealers who call to the hostel and hang around outside it. It's an intimidating environment and can be frightening and upsetting.”
(Voluntary organisation interviewee)

Women-only hostels, in addition to Women's Aid refuges, are urgently needed to provide for women's most basic needs upon release; to feel safe and have somewhere to sleep where you and your possessions are safe. Interviewees advocated for *small, specialised regional units linked to support services and resourced over the longer term* recognising that many women often lead complex and distressed lives.

5.4 Impactful Community-Based Practice

Successful interventions are most likely to be based on long-term relationship-led approaches; feedback from interviewees emphasised the requirement for women to have one individual with whom she can build trust to help her to navigate often complex difficulties associated with chaotic lifestyles, often with a web of abuse and trauma underpinning everything, *“the more problems women have the more work you need to do”* and this approach can take into consideration realistic and achievable goals.

For example:

“Making appointments for 10 am was just setting them up to fail so we made sure and took them to appointments at a time that suited them – simple stuff!” (Women’s Centre Manager)

Support needs longevity; the greater the damage the longer it takes to repair. Short term support of a few weeks or months will have little hope of addressing the trauma associated with a lifetime of abuse, years of the uncertainty caused by homelessness, the grief of losing children to the care system or the long-term ingrained effects of years of poverty and destitution. Several staff from the women’s centres reported that it takes years of consistent, patient and challenging support, *“a lot need supported living, many lose their homes when they go to prison; I could support her (woman offending) and it worked but it was constant for me”* (Women’s centre interviewee). In addition, women also often have basic support needs; obtaining and managing money, paying bills, food shopping, arranging and attending appointments etc.

Coming out of prison, women need help to develop a plan. Their lives have been largely planned when in prison with many responding well to courses and activities, only to find on release that they need help to develop routine to structure their days. Alongside activities of interest may be opportunities to rebuild a sense of purpose, self-confidence and self-worth. Several support staff felt that we should not forget that **people in prison come from the community and will return to the community**, and it may be worth exploring how or if the community might take some responsibility for people who *“have taken a wrong turn in their lives”* (Voluntary sector interviewee).

6. The Current Landscape of Support for Women who Offend: Statutory Changes

All interviewees were convinced of the need for alternatives to prison for most women who offend, including properly resourced targeted support, particularly for women involved in crimes linked to poverty and vulnerability. There was also significant support for a dedicated women’s prison facility, with designated and well-trained staff and a more enlightened, therapeutic prison regime which had women’s needs placed at the centre.

“Women need to be looked at in a different way ... from a different perspective from men as a group ... women’s lives are more complex ... they have the pain of being separated from their children and those coming in here with trauma ... we haven’t the resources to support them.” (Prison Service staff)

“Can the DoJ not be more imaginative and think, let’s put a 10 bed ‘step down unit’ in the City Centre or some sort of gendered hostel provision so some of the remanded women could be bailed to a bed?” (Academic)

“We want to support women in communities rather than in prisons; no matter how nice the building, it will be seen as another arm of authority” (Women’s Centre manager)

“We proposed a ‘half way’ house, offered mentoring support for women coming out of prison needing a ‘wrap-around’ service. I think there’s a lack of understanding about how professional we are in the women’s sector.” (Women’s Centre Manager)

“We definitely need the radical rethink about prisons. I think DoJ are trying to think outside the box, I do think so; I think it will take massive resourcing to make a real ‘dent’ in it, to make a real change – to set things up and then maybe some levelling out ... well you would hope so.” (Voluntary Organisation interviewee)

Many felt strongly that the DoJ ‘keep funding a broken system’ which we ‘should be trying to fix, not patch up’. Evidence suggests that prison doesn’t work for many women; even those serving very short sentences of days or weeks were said to leave with emotional and psychological challenges.

6.1 Enhanced Combination Orders (ECOs)

PBNI introduced ECOs as a pilot in 2015, rolling them out more widely in 2017/18. They are intensive community-based sentences that are designed to be handed down as an alternative to short prison sentences of 12 months or less which focus on rehabilitation, restorative practices and desistance. They are managed by the PBNI with contributions from voluntary organisations and create a platform for addressing issues underlying offending behaviour. They enable the recipient to stay *“within their community and remain with their family”* and have *“a positive social and intergenerational impact, making them certainly appear to be more cost effective than prison”* (PBNI Manager).

The involvement of Barnardo’s with respect to parenting/family support was felt to be critical alongside support from other organisations for addictions, mental health, self-confidence and community integration. The approach also relies on a positive relationship with the Probation Officer and additional Probation staff were recruited. An evaluation of ECO’s described them as an *“intensive*

package”^e. which, whilst demanding for staff and service users, were successful in achieving their aims and were valued by the judiciary, with non-custodial sentences of 12 months or falling by almost 11% as a result. 10% of ECO recipients have been women reflecting the numbers of women in the criminal justice system. Although this reflects the percentage of women in the criminal justice system, given the significant implications for children of imprisoning mothers, ECO’s have the potential to be particularly valuable; they “*suit women very well as the impact of prison is very negative*”. Furthermore, “*community based provision has better outcomes for women as they stay connected with their community, family and support networks*” (Statutory interviewee). ***There appears therefore to be room for greater take-up of ECOs for women within Northern Ireland as a helpful alternative to custodial sentencing for 12 months or less.***

6.2 Problem Solving Courts

The DoJ has funded two Problem Solving Court pilots (2018); therapeutic courts which supervise the treatment of defendants to help break the cycle of offending by addressing the underlying causes of criminal behaviour. A Belfast Substance Misuse Court is helping to challenge those offending to tackle drug and alcohol misuse when this is regarded by PBNI to be the root cause of offending behaviour. The other pilot court makes referrals to Probation’s perpetrator programme for domestic violence cases. The presiding judge has been working on domestic abuse in collaboration with PBNI and Women’s Aid to provide a more holistic approach to victims and offenders of domestic abuse:

“I’m personally of the opinion that short sentences aren’t much good ... they take someone off the streets for few months ... they are not going to be changed. I would prefer to change people and see Problem Solving Courts brought in across the courts, the drug court, if successful in attacking the addiction issue, you have a strong chance of addressing the mental health issues.” (County Judge presiding over Domestic Abuse Problem Solving Court)

Whilst it is premature to assess the impact of the Problem Solving Courts in Northern Ireland, many feel there are positive signs emerging as these courts address underlying issues and apply a rehabilitative approach which helps to reduce the number of people going to prison and instances of re-offending. ***Problem Solving Courts have the potential to have a particularly positive impact on women as they help people to address the root causes of offending rather than lead directly to a custodial sentence.***

6.3 DoJ Women’s Strategy

In designing its latest strategy entitled ‘Strategy to Support and Challenge Females in Contact with the Criminal Justice System’, the DoJ has consulted with justice, community, voluntary and academic representatives as well as residents from Ash House. It has also drawn from evidence emerging from Problem Solving Courts, ECO’s and the three research pieces cited in this paper. The document sets out that the new strategy will be justice-wide and considering the totality of a female’s journey through the criminal justice system. Ahead of the strategy, the Department is taking steps to address a number of issues including:

- Ensuring the Prisoner Needs Profile captures relevant information on domestic and sexual abuse for women in custody and initiate staff information sessions so that staff are aware of the complexities of the impact on women in their care;
- The appointment of a Prison Officer trained as a domestic abuse worker to support women in custody and the partners of perpetrators on the Building Better Relationships programme;
- Exploration of alternatives to remand in partnership with its criminal justice agencies;
- The creation of a separate discrete Female Facility at Hydebank Wood providing a therapeutic environment with a new visitors/welcome centre, single ensuite accommodation and new social and sports facilities;
- A commitment to taking a trauma informed approach to women– one that addresses vulnerability and treats women as individuals of value.

Progress made in advance of the launch of the new strategy is welcomed and there is evidence of a willingness to listen to a range of observations and examine best practice with a view to reducing the number of women going to prison. However, it is clear that sufficient resources must be invested, by DoJ and other departments, if the Strategy is to make any significant impact on diversion and desistance.

Tackling issues relating to women’s offending behaviour will require the DoJ to lead a coordinated approach involving the Department of Health, Department of Communities, the Education Authority and others with the powers to invest resources, particularly for mental health, domestic abuse, accommodation and addiction supports. Yet the challenges associated with this in the context of the long period without a local assembly and the absence of a Minister of Justice are apparent.

Women’s needs ought to be at the centre of policy development, and consulted on, so that all involved understand how services can best fit needs. Such consultations may be best facilitated by organisations perceived as independent who have built relationships with women, including for example NIACRO, Start 360 and women’s centres. Furthermore, the best interests of children must be considered and means of strengthening family contact to uphold, where possible, imprisoned women’s roles as mother.

- Addressing the recommendations from the VSB/Pilgrim Trust, NIACRO and QUB reports;

^e. (the evaluation at 18mths (NISRA, 2017)

7. Conclusions and Recommendations:

There remains a wealth of expertise and commitment to supporting women transitioning from the criminal justice system. Whilst the support infrastructure in the statutory, the voluntary and community sector remains, it is significantly diminished after four years of funding cuts. In particular, women's centres represent an under-resourced yet potentially effective source of community support.

Conclusion 1

There remains strong interest, commitment and expertise within the statutory, voluntary and community sectors despite significant reductions in funding. Women's centres, already at the heart of many urban and rural communities, can provide effective support.

Recommendation 1:

Utilise community women's centres; recovery and rebuilding lives is not a linear process and needs to draw on experienced and skilled staff rooted in communities.

Conclusion 2

Four years' of short-term programmes and piece-meal funding for community-based work have resulted in significant deterioration of practical support and strategic, collaborative resource planning for future provision.

Inadequate provision within communities means many women are being sent to prison rather than being diverted from custodial sentences to receive support for the root causes of their offending behaviour. This appears to be contributing to a steady increase in the numbers of women being sentenced and remanded, for a first offence or for re-offending. This requires urgent attention.

There was, however, widespread support for the Inspire Model; it appears to have as much merit now as at its height, four years ago.

Recommendation 2:

2.1. Improved community provisions must be designed to address complex issues including:

- (i) Trauma and its impact (stemming from domestic abuse, paramilitarism and other factors)
- (ii) Addictions and mental health difficulties
- (iii) Homelessness / unstable accommodation provision (see Recommendation 3)
- (iv) The impact of welfare reform (see Recommendation 8)

Provision must also be:

- (i) Evidence-based and collaborative
- (ii) Needs-led; to take account of nationality, age etc. Growing numbers of younger women, whose addictions are often associated with trauma and who are becoming involved in increasingly violent offences, need distinctive support, as do women who may be subject to trafficking

or deportation.

- (iii) Centred on key workers supporting women over the long-term.
- (iv) Aligned with provisions in prison to ensure continuity 'through the gate'.

2.2. The Inspire Model should be reinstated as the 'cornerstone' for such community-based support. This will require statutory agencies to consult with the original partners, review the current needs and identify where the required financial resources could be sourced.

Conclusion 3

Safe, supportive accommodation for women at risk of entering the formal justice system and for those being released from custody is the most pressing need. Bespoke accommodation facilities are desperately needed in Greater Belfast and other locations across Northern Ireland.

Recommendation 3:

A DoJ-led consultation, to incorporate views of key delivery organisations (statutory, voluntary and community) to establish the precise requirements for bespoke accommodation that is safe, secure and has support services attached. This would include addressing the need for: an appropriate bail address; specialised accommodation available upon release; and for women for whom supported accommodation could help to divert from offending. Such provision should incorporate 'wrap around' support to help women to address many of the root causes that often lead to offending behaviour. Investment in such facilities would have to sit alongside the plans for a dedicated facility for women in Hydebank Wood.

Conclusion 4

High (and increasing) numbers of women continue to be remanded into custody, often inappropriately.

Recommendation 4:

To help to address the high numbers of women being remanded to custody, the DoJ should consider the introduction of a bail support service that would specifically support women who are on remand. Such a dedicated service may be commissioned by a statutory agency to be delivered by a community / voluntary collaboration. Such a service would be most effective if accommodation needs were met (Recommendation 2).

Conclusion 5

Several DoJ-led developments carry the potential to improve outcomes for women who offend. In particular, ECOs and Problem Solving justice indicate a willingness to develop and promote options that enable women to serve sentences within the community, thereby avoiding custodial sentencing, where this is possible.

Recommendation 5:

Increase the promotion of existing alternatives to custody for women amongst sentencers, particularly ECO's and evaluate the effectiveness of Problem Solving justice approaches for women with a view to increasing this provision, particularly Substance Misuse and Mental Health Problem Solving Courts. Furthermore, promote the impact of a mother being sent to prison on children and the family unit amongst sentencers.

Conclusion 6

Partnerships with shared responsibilities are to be encouraged to strengthen the implementation of services and make best use of resources in the current financial climate.

Recommendation 6:

Inter-departmental approaches with shared responsibilities that recognise expertise and responsibilities are required if complex difficulties are to be addressed effectively.

Conclusion 7

Significant numbers of women in the criminal justice system have deep seated and complex needs necessitating skilled support and adequate time resources.

Recommendation 7:

Recognise that long-term and relationship-led approaches work most effectively and invest in these.

Conclusion 8

Two current societal challenges are impacting on women in the criminal justice system:

- (iii) Universal Credit roll out; impacting women being released and those considered to be 'at risk' of offending because of financial pressures which brings to the fore the potential for criminalising poverty
- (iv) Political uncertainty over Brexit combined with global changing trends in crime, particularly human trafficking.

Recommendation 8:

8.1. The DoJ ought to take the lead in monitoring the impact of Universal Credit with regard to crimes which relate to poverty.

8.2. The DoJ ought to take the lead in monitoring the impact on women (in custody and beyond) of crimes relating to human trafficking and migration and associated support needs.