

Child Impact Assessment Pilot: Action Plan



This action plan is designed as a guide and a starting point that can be adapted and expanded depending on context. Hopeside is a fictional local authority and its Women's Alliance is an imagined group that is reflective of similar alliances around the country. While this action plan focuses on support for children whose mothers are appearing in court, it can be adapted for use at any stage of, and for those with fathers in, the criminal justice system. The section in the Child Impact Assessment toolkit marked *How the Child Impact Assessment works in practice* may be of use when adapting a pilot for use at other stages.

Aim of the pilot

To pilot and evaluate the use of Child Impact Assessments for 15 children whose mothers have a court appearance.

Background to the pilot

Hopeside Women's Alliance is committed to ensuring holistic support and effective interventions are available to all women across Hopeside at every stage of the criminal justice system and as early as possible. The Alliance recognises the devastating impact on children of having a primary carer in the criminal justice system and is committed to supporting children appropriately and as early as possible. The Alliance agrees that:

- Children deserve support in and of their own right, regardless of what their parent has been accused, or convicted, of;
- Children should be listened to without judgement or assumption of what is best for them; and
- Where appropriate, children should be meaningfully involved in decisions that affect them.¹

The Alliance has agreed to pilot and evaluate the use of Child Impact Assessments for 15 children whose mothers are appearing before Hopeside Court from January to December 2023. This pilot project is underpinned by evidence from women and children with lived experience, academic research, and a call to action from the Prison Reform Trust Child Impact Assessment toolkit.

¹ A full list of guiding principles is available as a toolkit resource at <https://prisonreformtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/CIA-Guiding-Principles.pdf>

Because children with a mother in the criminal justice system are a hidden population, the Alliance has committed to piloting Child Impact Assessments with a small number initially. Further to a robust evaluation of the impact of this initiative on children, it is hoped that the project may be scaled up in future to include a larger number of children.

Action plan

The action plan is rooted in a gender-responsive, multi-agency, whole system approach which is known to improve outcomes for women in the criminal justice system. The action plan was devised by Alliance members and includes input from staff from statutory and voluntary organisations, academics, women with lived experience of the criminal justice system, and children. Progress will be monitored by the chair of the Alliance who reports to Hopeside’s Police and Crime Commissioner.

Stage	Desired Outcomes	Required Actions	Timescale	Lead(s)
Preparation	1. Alliance members will have collective ownership of the aim of the pilot and will understand their role in its delivery.	1.1 Share the Child Impact Assessment narrated PowerPoint with Alliance members to give an overview of the background to the project. 1.2 Facilitate a focus group with mothers with lived experience of the criminal justice system to ensure the project’s aims and outcomes are appropriate. 1.3 Facilitate a focus group with children and young people with lived experience of a mother in the criminal justice system to ensure the project’s aims and outcomes reflect their vision for change. ² 1.4 Address any concerns Alliance members may have about the pilot project or possible barriers to success.		

² If this is not possible, Alliance members may find it helpful to listen to the “Don’t leave us behind” podcast. <https://youtu.be/zRFQE45fdI4>

	<p>2. Alliance members, and other relevant stakeholders, will have increased understanding of the impact on children of having a primary carer appearing in court as well as the impact on children of a mother's custodial sentence and their role, however small, in ensuring children get the support they need.</p>	<p>1.5 Consider and agree what role Alliance members will play in the delivery of the project and if additional stakeholders could be included – for example, specialist services that support families affected by imprisonment, practitioners in training (eg student social workers).</p> <p>1.6 Agree possible referral routes for offering a Child Impact Assessment to children whose mothers are appearing in Hopeside Court (bearing in mind that choice is one of the core elements of the assessment).</p> <p>1.7 Agree where the Child Impact Assessment and accompanying notes could be made available to families, children and young people, and practitioners to maximise engagement (eg on Hopeside's local authority website).</p> <p>1.8 Agree how, and by whom, the project will be evaluated.</p> <p>2.1 Deliver an information session to Alliance members and other relevant stakeholders (eg education staff, health providers, etc) about the project which includes the experiences of children when a mother is involved in the criminal justice system (see training and resources in toolkit).</p> <p>2.2 Facilitate an information session about the accompanying notes (provided in the toolkit) for practitioners who may be supporting children with a Child Impact Assessment.</p>		
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<p>Delivery</p>	<p>3. Mothers appearing in court, and carers of their children, will be made aware of available support for children.</p> <p>4. The project will be known about through all statutory and voluntary sector services for children throughout Hopeside.</p> <p>5. The project will be known about, and understood, by all relevant court staff.</p>	<p>3.1 Create and display easy-read information (posters, flyers) that promote the project in the context of support for children.³</p> <p>4.1 Agree key messages about children with a primary carer in the criminal justice system to be used in all communications.⁴</p> <p>4.2 Share information about the Child Impact Assessment project with all universal (nurseries, schools, GP surgeries, youth clubs, children’s centres, etc), statutory, and voluntary sector services.</p> <p>5.1 Deliver an information session to court staff, including sentencers, about the project which includes the experiences of children when a mother is involved in the criminal justice system (see training and resources in toolkit).</p> <p>5.2 Agree with relevant court staff that for all cases during the period of the pilot, where the defendant is known to be a primary carer, there will be an adjournment to allow for the completion of a thorough Pre-Sentence Report and any Child Impact Assessments.</p>		
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³ Templates available by emailing sarah.beresford@prisonreformtrust.org.uk.

⁴ The guiding principles in the Child Impact Assessment toolkit may help with this. <https://prisonreformtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/CIA-Guiding-Principles.pdf>

	<p>6. Children with a mother appearing in court will receive timely and appropriate support.</p>	<p>6.1 Ensure appropriate and proportionate safeguarding measures are in place in all interventions and services related to the project.</p> <p>6.2 Explore and implement means of appropriate, child-centred, and sensitive data collection and information sharing between organisations.</p>		
Evaluation	<p>7. Quantitative and qualitative evidence will show that children feel listened to, well supported, and included in decision-making about agreed actions.</p> <p>8. Evidence will be collated and used to propose wider implementation of Child Impact Assessments.</p>	<p>7.1 Gather feedback⁵ from children, their mothers, and all relevant practitioners, including sentencers, about the effectiveness of the Child Impact Assessment and its process.</p> <p>8.1 Write up report of the project, rooted in feedback and evaluation from all stakeholders, including a proposal for scaling up / widening the project.</p> <p>8.2 Disseminate the report of the project and agree ongoing implementation strategy.</p>		

⁵ See appendix of Child Impact Assessment toolkit for an evaluation that can be adapted accordingly. <https://prisonreformtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/CIA-Sample-Evaluation.pdf>