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Transforming Lives

reducing women's imprisonment



Soroptimist International (SI) is the only women's service organisation with general consultative status at the United Nations. Soroptimists inspire action and create opportunities to transform the lives of women and girls through their programmes and voluntary work. Members are women of all ages, cultures and ethnic groups, who join their local clubs to give service to women and girls. Each club identifies the needs of its community, then establishes specific projects to address those needs. Clubs are grouped into Regions within the UK. The UK Programme Action Committee (UKPAC) provides help and guidance on project work to Soroptimist clubs in the UK.

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The work of the Prison Reform Trust is aimed at creating a just, humane and effective penal system. We do this by inquiring into the workings of the system; informing prisoners, staff and the wider public; and by influencing Parliament, government, and officials towards reform. The Prison Reform Trust's three year programme (2012-2015) to reduce women's imprisonment in the UK is supported by the Pilgrim Trust: www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/women

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FOREWORD

Soroptimist International is a women's voluntary organisation "Inspiring Action and Transforming Lives" around the world. Since the UK Programme Action Committee took the decision in December 2011 to mount a campaign in partnership with the Prison Reform Trust to reduce women's imprisonment, members from all of our 17 Regions across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have been working to increase awareness of how women are treated in the criminal justice system. We hope that the information gathered in this report will inspire the changes necessary to provide more community-based solutions to women's minor offending. This would reduce the damage and disruption to the lives of so many women and children. Preventing violence against women has been at the core of Soroptimist project work for many years, and having learnt that it is so often an underlying factor in women's offending, we welcomed this opportunity to provide a voice for women who, very often, are victims themselves.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this report and look forward to ensuring that it does help inspire action and transform the lives of women whose needs have been overlooked and unmet in the past.

Kay Richmond

Kay Richmond, Chairman

Soroptimist International UK Programme Action Committee

This report is a distillation of the wealth of information on the state of women's justice that Soroptimists have gathered since the launch of the Reducing Women's Imprisonment Action Pack in 2013. It presents a mixed picture, profiling some excellent local practice whilst highlighting a lack of consistency and a dearth of services in many parts of the UK that would enable women to address the causes of their offending and get out of trouble. It is invaluable in mapping some critical gaps in service provision for vulnerable women, and in identifying disconnects between policy and practice.

The recommendations that we make reflect the evidence gathered strategically by Soroptimists and cross-refer to other work to reduce women's imprisonment, including our *Brighter Futures* report. Trustees and staff are delighted that the Prison Reform Trust's partnership with Soroptimist UKPAC is proving to be such a productive one. Soroptimists not only have impressive local and regional reach through their many active clubs across the UK but they also have a reputation as effective lobbyists nationally and internationally on behalf of women. I am therefore confident that this report will be a spur to action that will see long overdue reforms to women's justice.



Juliet Lyon CBE, Director,
Prison Reform Trust

...[T]he government is committed to a vision of fewer women offending, and to more women being punished in the community where it is safe and appropriate to do so. I was therefore very interested to learn of the Soroptimists' and Prison Reform Trust campaign...

... if we are to rehabilitate female offenders, we must take proper account of the realities of their lives and ensure that resources are best targeted to help more women turn their lives around.

The Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP, Secretary of State for Justice¹

As a result of their nature and levels of offending women are disproportionately affected by short term custodial sentences...The IOM Cymru Women Offender Pathfinder has been established...to ensure the development of a whole system approach to reducing female offending across Wales.

Wales Reducing Reoffending Strategy 2014-2016²

For me, it is not necessarily about creating new pilots or short-term initiatives; it is about ensuring that we recognise and respond to the particular needs of women as a normal part of everything we do within the justice system...

David Ford MLA, Minister of Justice in Northern Ireland³

I share the [Angiolini] Commission's determination to improve the outcomes for women offenders across the criminal justice system. It is, however, important to recognise that there are a number of areas where progress will require substantial input and support from services outwith the criminal justice system if we are to deliver the changes the Commission recommended.

Kenny MacAskill MSP, then Cabinet Secretary for Justice in Scotland⁴

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND TO THIS REPORT

In December 2011 the Soroptimist International UK Programme Action Committee (UKPAC) took the decision to work in partnership with the Prison Reform Trust to reduce women's imprisonment across the UK. The decision reflected concern that women who have committed petty and non-violent offences are unnecessarily and disproportionately imprisoned when community solutions are often more effective and less damaging for children and families. The project also ties in with Soroptimists' flagship project Violence Against Women – Stop It Now,⁵ as abusive and coercive relationships are a significant driver to women's offending, and a majority of women in prison report having been abused at some point in their life.

In April 2013 the Soroptimists' *Action Pack on Reducing Women's Imprisonment* was launched at Westminster, followed by launches at the Pierhead in Cardiff and Holyrood in Edinburgh, with a call for renewed efforts in each UK nation to improve justice outcomes for women. As Jan Hemlin, then Chair of UKPAC, said:

The Soroptimists are uniquely placed to gather much-needed information and add a strong voice from communities across the UK to press for, and achieve long-awaited change. Our members are committed to ensuring more constructive responses across the country to women who come into contact with the criminal justice system, many of whom are involved in non-violent, petty offending and have been victims themselves.

This report, based on information gathered by Soroptimists across the UK in 2013-14 about what happens in their local areas to women who offend, or are at risk of offending, highlights progress and good practice whilst identifying constraints, gaps and shortcomings in local service provision. We are grateful to the hundreds of Soroptimists who have done so much to raise awareness of the over-imprisonment of women in the UK and the consequences for children and families, and contribute to progress towards a more effective and humane approach to women's justice.

The Soroptimists' 2013-14 inquiry

In 2013-14 Soroptimists belonging to 139 SI clubs across the United Kingdom asked police officers, probation officers, criminal justice social workers, magistrates, sheriffs, health professionals and managers of community services for women for the following information:

- What systems and safeguards are in place, at each stage of the criminal justice process, to ensure appropriate responses to women who have committed, or are suspected of committing, an offence?
- What women-specific services are available in the local community to support those processes, and to help women avoid getting into trouble in the first place?

The agreed objectives of local information gathering by clubs were to:

- find out if there is effective multi-agency work being done in their area to reduce the number of women who end up in prison for petty non-violent offences
- identify local examples of good practice that deliver positive outcomes for women and their children, families and communities
- establish whether there are robust alternatives to custody available to and used by local sentencers
- explain what may be inhibiting the development or spread of good practice.

Information was obtained through face-to-face or telephone interviews, at local meetings and regional conferences organised by SI clubs, and by means of postal questionnaires and Freedom of Information Act requests. In particular, Soroptimists sought to identify the extent to which training, protocols, procedures and services are tailored to meet the needs and characteristics of women offenders.

The information gathered by SI members is not exhaustive, but it gives a unique snapshot of variable practice and uneven progress across the country as well as the insights of frontline professionals into what improvements are needed. The project served to raise awareness amongst Soroptimists themselves of the difficulties faced by vulnerable women in their local community. SI members have in turn raised awareness amongst local politicians, other community groups and the wider public through letters, meetings and local media coverage.

This is in addition to voluntary work, donations and awareness-raising that many Soroptimists across the country are engaged in to support vulnerable women in their local communities who have become involved with the criminal justice system.

Achieving change

In addition to local awareness raising and information gathering, Soroptimists have played a key role in achieving, for the first time, a statutory foothold for women-specific provision in the criminal justice system in England and Wales. Letters from Soroptimists to their local MPs helped to secure support for a ‘women’s amendment’ to the Crime and Courts Bill in England and Wales in 2012-13. This resulted eventually in a government amendment to the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 (Section 10) which commenced on 1 June 2014 and will help ensure women’s needs are identified and addressed in the criminal justice system.

During the course of the Soroptimists’ inquiry, in response to the questions frequently asked of them, the Prison Reform Trust produced *Why focus on reducing women’s imprisonment?* a briefing which has proved a valuable resource for work in England and Wales and is regularly

updated.⁶ In Scotland, Soroptimists joined with the Prison Reform Trust, the Scottish Working Group on Women's Offending (SWGWO) and the eight Scottish Community Justice Authorities to publish and disseminate a leaflet entitled *Women in the Criminal Justice System in Scotland: the Facts*⁷ as a tool to raise awareness.

Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI) has special consultative status at the United Nations (UN) Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC) enabling it to submit information to any of ECOSEC's committees and commissions. Members met with the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women during her mission to the UK, which included visits to a number of women's prisons. The Rapporteur issued a statement emphasising the need to "develop gender-specific sentencing alternatives and to recognise women's histories of victimisation when making decisions about incarceration."⁸

How the report is organised

Information gathered, findings and recommendations are presented in distinct country reports for England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, and within each country report the material is organised thematically. The Annexes at the end provide further detail of activities undertaken and work done by individual SI Clubs and regions, from lobbying local MPs and councillors about funding for women's services and providing voluntary support to these services, to organising workshops and conferences and engaging with local media.

KEY FINDINGS

Whilst Soroptimists encountered differences in governance and approach to women in the criminal justice system between the four nations, a number of themes (many of them inter-linked) were common across the UK.

UK-wide themes

Leadership is needed to bridge the disconnect between policy and implementation

Despite commitments to reforming women's justice voiced by politicians of every stripe, a leadership deficit has meant UK-wide change has not been delivered. This is all the more surprising given the degree of political consensus that exists over the effectiveness of women-specific responses to offending and the case for reducing the women's prison population. Failure to capitalise on this consensus is indicative of the need for high-level political leadership across each of the UK nations.

Gender-specific approaches are the exception but should be the rule

Equality law requires specific treatment for groups with protected characteristics where this has been shown to be more effective in meeting their needs. Despite the evidence that women-specific responses to offending are cost-effective and reduce reoffending, enabling women to live healthier, more productive lives, most women in contact with criminal justice agencies across the UK are still subject to generic systems and practices which have evolved in response to men's offending. Soroptimists encountered instances, particularly in their dealings with the police, where equality law was routinely misinterpreted as requiring a gender neutral approach. If gender-specific approaches to women's offending are to be mainstreamed, all agencies and frontline staff working with women in trouble must understand and accept the basic principle that equal treatment does not mean the same treatment for everyone. Public sector duties and anti-discrimination law should be clarified and enforced.

Uncertain funding of services working with women in trouble is counter-productive

Despite operating across jurisdictions characterised by their differences rather than similarities, the community services identified in the course of Soroptimists' inquiries shared an uncertain funding future and were at the mercy of budget cuts and short-term funding decisions. In each of the nations, services were expected to do more with less. In some parts of the country, services women could ill afford to lose were at risk of closing. In others, last-minute funding extensions had been granted, but in the long-term, the expectation was that services would demonstrate their worth locally and be commissioned and funded from mainstream grants and budgets. Historically, services working with vulnerable women and women in trouble have been over-looked because of the minority status of women in the criminal justice system. It is unlikely that this will change without a coherent funding strategy.

Attitudes to women in trouble are perceived as barriers to progress

Soroptimists around the UK found evidence that political, media and some public attitudes towards women in trouble are barriers to reform. In England contributors noted that an emphasis on "being tough on crime", dispensing harsh justice and punitive sentencing reflected a lack of understanding of women's lives and had a distorting effect on criminal justice responses to women's offending. In Wales, practitioners thought women offenders were an

unpopular group and that a general unwillingness to look at the causes of, and solutions to, women's offending requires a cultural shift across criminal justice agencies and the wider public. Practitioners in Scotland also identified public perceptions of women offenders as one of the key challenges facing women's justice, with the need to challenge employers' attitudes towards women offenders cited. Despite these concerns, evidence from public opinion polling has found that attitudes towards women who offend, and support for effective responses, are more nuanced, with strong public support for community solutions to the drivers to women's offending.⁹ That this dichotomy exists suggests the need for strong leadership across governments and local agencies in making the case for women in trouble.

There are clear opportunities to reduce the women's prison population

Soroptimists identified common drivers to custody that if tackled, could deliver reductions in the number of women imprisoned in the UK. Whilst limited availability of women-specific community orders was cited as a reason sentencers felt they had no option but to impose custodial sentences, poor-information sharing about services available locally hampered take-up of women-specific orders where they did exist. Some services had sought to address this by involving local sentencers in management boards but a more systematic approach is needed if women's community services are to fulfil their potential as alternatives to custody. Simple practical measures, such as a local directory of services to which sentencers can refer women, would go a long way to addressing the information-deficit.

Whilst the small number of women (relative to men) in contact with criminal justice agencies is often cited as a barrier to reform, it also presents opportunities as small-scale but targeted action could lead to significant change. In each of the nations, the use of custodial remand in lieu of community alternatives was a significant driver to women's imprisonment, despite evidence that many remanded women are given community orders on conviction. Extension of the 'no real prospect' device introduced in England and Wales to Northern Ireland and Scotland would begin to address overuse of remand whilst strategic expansion of approved premises provision in England would address sentencers' concerns about women in insecure or unsafe accommodation. Likewise, restricting use of custody for non-violent crimes would go some way to addressing the disproportionate number of women imprisoned in the UK for such offences.

Soroptimists across the UK were particularly concerned by the large number of women in prison who were mothers, and found little evidence that criminal justice agencies made adjustments to accommodate women with dependents (e.g. childcare provision or interventions scheduled around nursery or school hours). Imprisoning mothers is counter-productive and costly to the state, both in the short and long-term, and could often be avoided if courts took proper account of primary caring responsibilities in sentencing decisions, and women were supported to stay with their children. Removing the availability of custody for breaching community orders where this is the result of women's child-caring responsibilities would be a step in the right direction.

Sharing learning across jurisdictions is important

As this report demonstrates, women in contact with criminal justice agencies across the UK have much in common, and it stands to reason that, despite different approaches and legal systems, lessons which are drawn from what works in one corner of the UK will apply equally across the rest of the country. In the course of their inquiries, Soroptimists uncovered pockets of interesting practice, innovative approaches to funding and examples of integration which need to be applied more widely. Sharing learning across jurisdictions would not only ensure the spread of effective practice, but also protect against the temptation to reinvent the wheel when working with women in trouble in different parts of the country. As this report finds, what works with women in the criminal justice system is in evidence across the UK. The challenge is now to take that learning and turn it into standard practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations have been developed by the Prison Reform Trust to reflect the evidence gathered by Soroptimists. They draw on Soroptimists' findings of both good practice and uneven spread of women-centred policy, practice and legislation already in operation in parts of the country and are designed to improve consistency across the UK. If implemented, these recommendations would reform women's justice and deliver welcome reductions in the imprisonment of women in the UK.

ENGLAND

- The Minister for Female Offenders (Ministry of Justice) and the Minister for Women and Equalities (Government Equalities Office) should promote a gender-informed approach to women in the criminal justice system and lead a cross-government strategy for reform of women's justice.
- Guidance should be developed by lead agencies, including the police, health and local authorities, to ensure policy and practice is compliant with equalities legislation. All mandatory staff training should include statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010.
- Criminal justice inspectorates and regulators should monitor and report on the provision of local women-specific measures, especially in light of Section 10 of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 2014. The Joint inspectorate review *Equal but different?* is an excellent example.
- A national network of women-specific community services, including multi-agency one-stop shops and outreach services, should be funded by government, drawing on cross-departmental budgets on three to five year funding cycles and building in savings from the re-rolling or closure of women's prisons.
- Measures of effectiveness against which these services are evaluated should capture distance travelled by women accessing them, as well as binary reoffending rates, to ensure wider outcomes and cost benefits can be evidenced.

- Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs), in consultation with the police, council and service providers, should develop directories of local services for women offenders. Information on services available locally should be shared with the National Probation Service to inform pre-sentence reports and sentence recommendations.
- Each Bench should appoint a women's champion responsible for ensuring that all magistrates are aware of local programmes and interventions for women offenders.
- Women's centres should take all possible steps to ensure regular contact and information exchange with local courts, and consider inviting members of the local judiciary to join their governance structures.
- All local courts but especially those with access to a women's centre should consider developing a problem-solving pilot for women's justice.
- All agencies should undertake gender monitoring, analysis and evaluation as part of routine data collection. This should be used to develop a detailed and robust analysis of the needs of women offenders and those at risk of offending in their area, and to evidence the case for co-ordinated multi-agency responses to women's offending, including women-specific services and community disposals in their area.
- Learning from successful multi-agency approaches in some areas should inform the national roll-out of coordinated responses to women in the criminal justice system.
- Health and Wellbeing Boards, Reducing Reoffending Boards, Local Criminal Justice Boards and other multi-agency partnerships, should appoint a women's champion with responsibility for developing effective partnership-working locally.
- The College of Policing should develop national guidance identifying good practice when working with women offenders. This should include appointment of a designated women's lead in each force, adopting a women-specific approach to risk assessment, staff training, diversionary measures and referral to local support services.
- Police training, protocols and diversionary measures concerning or aimed at vulnerable people more generally should take explicit account of women's specific needs and characteristics. Learning from protocols on the treatment of women victims of crime should be applied to the treatment of women offenders to tackle the artificial distinction often made between these groups, and improve outcomes for women.
- The Ministry of Justice should undertake an annual audit and evaluation of probation services provided in accordance with Section 10 of the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 to meet the particular needs of female offenders.

- The development of restorative justice options for women offenders should be explored, with a view to expanding its use for women at all stages of the criminal justice system. The Restorative Justice Council should be asked to put costed proposals to the Advisory Board on Female Offenders.
- A national review of Approved Premises for women should be undertaken urgently, with ring-fenced funding made available to plug gaps identified.
- Local authorities and housing associations should give housing priority to women with vulnerabilities that put them at risk of offending – including women affected by abusive relationships, drug or alcohol problems, or poor mental health.
- Local strategies to reduce women’s offending and imprisonment should take account of women’s housing needs, including the needs of those with dependent children and the consequences for children of lack of stable, secure homes, drawing on data identified in local Joint Strategic Needs Assessments.
- The time limit for eligibility for housing benefit for sentenced prisoners should be extended from 13 weeks to six months to prevent short-sentenced women from losing their home.
- The government should develop a strategy to increase employment opportunities and programmes for women with a criminal record. This should include employer incentives.
- A model for providing services to women in rural areas should be developed, piloted and evaluated by National Offender Management Service (NOMS), in collaboration with existing service providers, drawing on the success of the hub approach and use of mobile facilities attached to regional women’s centres. Pooled budgets provide an opportunity to ensure cross-departmental buy-in, and long-term sustainability.
- Women attending court, and those subject to court orders in the community, should have access to childcare facilities if needed.
- Women should not be breached for failing to attend probation appointments where this is a direct result of their caring responsibilities.
- Much more regard should be had to the needs of children whose mothers are caught up in the criminal justice system and steps taken by all relevant agencies to mitigate the impact.

WALES

- A Welsh government Minister should be designated to lead development of the All-Wales Women's Pathfinder project, including ensuring it is adequately resourced, the pan-Wales roll-out happens as planned and its objective of improving outcomes for women in the criminal justice system is met.
- The College of Policing should develop national guidance identifying good practice when working with women offenders. This should include appointment of a designated women's lead in each force, adopting a women-specific approach to risk assessment, staff training, diversionary measures and referral to local support services. Best practice models identified by the Women's Pathfinder should be applied pan-Wales as soon as possible.
- Police training, protocols and diversionary measures concerning or aimed at vulnerable people more generally should take explicit account of women's specific needs and characteristics. Lessons learned from protocols on the treatment of women victims of crime should be applied to the treatment of women offenders to tackle the artificial distinction often made between these groups, and improve outcomes for women.
- A national network of women-specific community services, including multi-agency one-stop shops and outreach services, should be funded by government, drawing on cross-departmental budgets on three to five year funding cycles.
- Measures of their effectiveness in working with women offenders and evaluation models should be built into funding agreements, taking account of the methodological difficulties inherent in building an evidence base with small numbers of women.
- Priority should be given to setting up adequate Approved Premises for women in Wales.
- Generic health, housing and other support services should monitor and evaluate take-up and impact by gender.
- Health services, including mental health and substance misuse, must recognise and address women's distinct needs and characteristics.
- The Welsh government should undertake an audit of Local Health Board provision delivered as part of criminal justice liaison services to ensure Boards are providing the minimum level of services required by guidance and the distinct needs of women are identified and met.
- Health services aligned to the Offender Mental Health Care Pathway should recognise women's journey through the criminal justice system as it differs to men's and provide access points reflecting this distinction.

NORTHERN IRELAND

- The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) should adopt a clear force-wide strategy and protocols for working with women, and provide mandatory training for police officers and staff on women-specific approaches.
- PSNI should develop a directory of services to which women offenders can be referred.
- Every effort should be made to maintain and extend services based on the Inspire model, building on the project's success to date and developing valuable evidence of the effectiveness of provision in rural areas. A cost-benefit study by Department of Justice for Northern Ireland (DOJNI) would likely support expansion of this service.
- Funding to replace Ash House should be allocated as a matter of urgency and a date set for its closure and replacement with a small separate women's facility.
- A legislative vehicle to introduce a 'no real prospect' test should be sought at the earliest opportunity to tackle the overuse of remand for women.
- Drawing on the success of youth conferencing for young offenders in Northern Ireland, a restorative justice order should be developed for use by the courts as an alternative to custody for women.

SCOTLAND

- Police Scotland should develop force-wide training for all staff, particularly custody suite and frontline officers, which promotes understanding of the need for and legitimacy of a gender-informed approach to working with women offenders. Training should be underpinned by protocols and guidance, making clear the links between experience of domestic abuse and women's offending, and the likelihood that for some victims of domestic abuse, their first contact with the police may be as a suspect/offender.
- Women-specific diversionary approaches, working in conjunction with existing community provision including Community Justice Centres, should be introduced Scotland-wide.
- Following its acceptance of the Angiolini Commission's recommendation,¹⁰ the Scottish government should legislate to enable police to divert women offenders from prosecution and into rehabilitative services as part of a conditional caution. This should be done at the earliest opportunity and before the next election.

- The Scottish government should scale back its proposal to build a new national women's prison at HMP Inverclyde. Much of the cost of building a new prison would be better spent on embedding and expanding community alternatives to custody, and ensuring imprisonment is used as a last resort. If sufficient focus was given to community alternatives a smaller facility at HMP Inverclyde would be all that is required.
- Community Justice Authorities, in conjunction with Criminal Justice Social Work Services and women-specific service providers, should develop local resources for use by sheriffs and other court users, detailing the availability of local services and alternative sanctions for women offenders.
- The Scottish government should legislate to restrict the use of remand where there is no real prospect of the offender/defendant receiving a custodial sentence on conviction.
- The Judicial Institute for Scotland should review its training for JPs and sheriffs on women in the criminal justice system in accordance with the Angiolini Commission's recommendation.
- There should be a presumption against remanding into custody or imprisoning women with dependent children and against use of short sentences, which can lead to loss of housing and employment, in favour of community alternatives where appropriate.
- Local authorities should ensure their Criminal Justice Social Work Service provides women-specific services. In rural communities, virtual hubs or mobile outreach services should be developed.
- Following the extension of funding for the Reducing Reoffending Change Fund (RRCF) to 2017, the government should undertake an audit of funding for other services for women offenders with a view to providing ring-fenced funding, on a three-year basis, to ensure their sustainability beyond March 2015.
- Where a service model has a robust evidence base for reducing women's reoffending and achieving positive outcomes for women and their families, this success should not be jeopardised by 'diluting the model'.

COUNTRY REPORT - ENGLAND

Eden House is structured, and gives you the chance to use your time in a better way. This place gives you more confidence. It gives you the chance to show the courts or anyone else that you are committed to making a change.

Service user, Eden House¹¹

Anawim are the reason I'm not in prison now....there's something different about this project...The staff are great, they're always there to help and support me and if they can't help, they always know the people who can. The difference with the staff here is that they don't judge...Since my involvement with the project I have been able to stop taking the drugs and am not even on a script anymore. My life has stabilised and I have been able to move from a hostel to my own flat. Most significantly of all, I have managed to stay out of jail for a whole year...My life is going in the right direction again thanks to the help of Anawim and I can see a future.

Service user, Anawim¹²

FACTS¹³

Use and effectiveness of prison and community sentencing

Numbers in prison – Between 1995-2010, the women's prison population more than doubled. In 2013, women were received into prison on 12,699 occasions, 954 fewer than the previous year. At 10th October 2014 the women's prison population in England & Wales stood at 3,902, 50 less than a year previously.

Community orders – In 2013, 20,568 females were given community orders, 15% fewer than 2012. Over the same period, the total number of females sentenced fell 4%.

Types of offence - In 2013, 83% of women entering prison under sentence had committed non-violent offences, compared to 72% of men. Theft and handling stolen goods, the most common offence, accounted for 40% of all women entering prison under sentence.

Remand – In 2013, untried women were received into prison on remand on 3,652 occasions, four per cent fewer than 2012 and down 14% on 2011. This comes after a 43% increase between 2000-2008.¹⁴ These women spend on average four to six weeks in prison.

Short sentences - In 2013, 60% of women entering prison under sentence were to serve six months or less, compared to a third of women in 1993.¹⁵

Reoffending rates – Figures for 2010 show that 45% of women leaving prison are reconvicted within one year. Community orders and suspended sentences are more effective (by nearly seven percentage points) at reducing one-year reoffending rates than custodial sentences of less than 12 months.

About women in prison

Children – In 2010, an estimated 17,240 children were separated from their mother by imprisonment.

Domestic violence – 53% of women in prison report having experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse as a child, compared with 27% of men.

Mental health – 46% of women in prison have attempted suicide at some point in their lifetime. In 2013 women represented 26% of all incidents of self-harm in prison despite accounting for less than five per cent of the total prison population.¹⁶

Drug and alcohol addictions – 52% of women in prison said that they had used heroin, crack or cocaine in the four weeks prior to custody, compared to 40% of men. Practitioners report that women may hide or underplay substance misuse through fear of losing their children.

Housing – Around one-third of women prisoners lose their homes, and often their possessions, whilst in prison.

Employment – In 2011-12 just 8.4% of women leaving prison had a positive resettlement outcome on employment. For men the proportion was 27.3%.

THE SOROPTIMISTS' INQUIRY IN ENGLAND

In 2013-14, Soroptimists belonging to over 97 SI clubs across England gathered information on the operation of the criminal justice system for women in their local area. Information was collected through a variety of means including visits to women's centres and to HMP Styal. Their research offers an insight into current practice in many parts of England. Before presenting their findings we provide an overview of the policy context.

POLICY CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW

The Soroptimists' inquiry in England took place during a period when significant changes to the administration and funding of criminal justice and health services were under way. These included the first ever election of Police and Crime Commissioners, the wholesale reorganisation of probation services, and the review of the women's secure estate.

There have been positive statements from government about its commitment to a women-specific approach, and welcome developments in some areas such as new women's police pathfinders in Manchester and Hull, and investment in some new women's services (for example in Northumbria and Wiltshire). Liaison and Diversion services are being trialled for people with mental health problems in the criminal justice system, with women-specific provision as an integral element. However, progress in these areas has been tempered by the uncertainty of funding for women's community services beyond March 2015, fears that they will be vulnerable under a payment by results model, awareness that services for women affected by domestic violence have been cut in some areas, and concern about potentially adverse effects of extending post-custody supervision to short-sentenced prisoners at the same time as opening up probation to the marketplace.

Governance

Responsibility for women in the criminal justice system currently lies with the Minister of State for Justice and Civil Liberties, the Rt Hon Simon Hughes MP. His appointment marked the third change of lead minister in under two years, not auspicious for maintaining a consistent focus on reforms to women's justice.¹⁷ However, as chair of the Advisory Board on Female Offenders, set up in 2013 as part of the government's new approach to managing female offenders, he has shown leadership and drive. The House of Commons Justice Committee has argued that the Advisory Board is not "a sufficient mechanism for high level cross-departmental governance arrangements" and lacks "the authority to bring about integrated strategy and co-ordinated service provision".¹⁸ This was reiterated by Juliet Lyon, Director of the Prison Reform Trust and member of the Advisory Board, who said in oral evidence to the Justice Committee in July 2014 that, notwithstanding the Minister's evident commitment the Board has limited powers and "is inadequate as a method for trying to lead women's justice".¹⁹

The government's approach

The Westminster government published its strategic objectives for female offenders in March 2013. These are:

- ensuring credible, robust sentencing options in the community
- ensuring community services that recognise and address the specific needs of female offenders
- tailoring the women's custodial estate and regimes so that they reform and rehabilitate offenders effectively, punish properly, protect the public fully, and meet women-specific standards, and locate women in prisons as near to their families as possible
- through the Transforming Rehabilitation programme, supporting better life management by female offenders ensuring all criminal justice system partners work together to enable women to stop reoffending.²⁰

Guarantee of women-specific provision

In response to representations from the Prison Reform Trust and Sorooptimists, many of whom wrote to their MPs, the government introduced a new requirement for the Secretary of State for Justice to ensure that arrangements for offender supervision "meet the particular needs of female offenders".²¹ The provision in the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014, in force from 1 June 2014,²² means:

*...that the Secretary of State for Justice must consider evidence on the particular needs of female offenders where they differ from those of men, and consider whether any adjustments or special provision for female offenders is needed. Where a particular need is identified, this will be reflected in the contractual or other arrangements.*²³

Women's community services

Community services such as women's centres are widely regarded as key to both diversion out of the criminal justice system and robust community sentences for women offenders. However, commitment to funding these services and ensuring adequate national provision has waxed and waned. A recent review of projects providing community-based support services for women who offend found that:

- 89% of projects felt their service was less secure than, or as insecure as, it had been 12 months previously
- the sustainability of specific services for female offenders was often not embedded in local strategies
- many service users were in crisis as a result of current austerity measures and welfare changes, reporting rising debt, an inability to purchase food, increased anxiety, self-harm and depression.²⁴

A subsequent report highlighted local concerns that “the uniqueness of the women’s projects... may get lost in the wider criminal justice system reforms”, noting that “changes to commissioning arrangements were starting to generate unhelpful local competitiveness between organisations”.²⁵

In 2013 the Ministry of Justice undertook a stocktake of women’s community provision which identified 53 women’s centres or hubs then operating and stated that “a further 22 new centres or hubs will be operating by end March 2014”.²⁶ The 2014 government update stated that £5.8 million was spent in 2013-14 (including £3.78m ring-fenced for the provision of women’s services) through Probation Trust contract and partnership arrangements on services for female offenders.

Three women-specific outputs will be included in government contracts with Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs), requiring providers to give women offenders the option, “where practicable, of (i) having a female supervisor/responsible officer; (ii) attending meetings or appointments in a female-only environment; and (iii) of not being placed in a male-only environment for unpaid work or attendance requirements”.²⁷ However many fear that the commissioning model adopted could undermine the sustainability of specialist services working with women offenders.²⁸ The House of Commons Justice Committee commented:

*Funding arrangements for provision for women appear to be being shoehorned into the payment-by-results programme, resulting in the likelihood of a loss of funding.*²⁹

Transitional arrangements mean “existing providers of women’s services (will) continue to receive funding from CRCs until March 2015 unless there are concerns about performance or there is insufficient demand.”³⁰

Police

Authorised Professional Practice (APP) from the College of Policing³¹ sets the standard for practice relating to detention and custody and draws attention to the potential vulnerabilities of women detainees, including:

- any physical and medical welfare needs
- child/dependent welfare issues (particularly for lone parents and foreign nationals) and the effects of separation where the detainee has a baby
- possible pregnancy

- mental health and increased risk of self harm
- domestic violence and abuse issues
- increased likelihood of drug addiction and/or alcoholism
- conditions under which women are searched.³²

Women should be given access to a female custody staff member and under section 31 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 detained girls must be ‘under the care of a woman’. The standards provide welcome recognition of the distinct needs of women, including reference to the Corston Report and link to other relevant resources such as research on the mental health needs of women in prison.³³

A number of police forces are developing a women-specific approach to Integrated Offender Management (IOM), a multi-agency strategy to reduce reoffending that has tended to exclude women in the past, and innovative diversion or triage schemes. These police pathfinder initiatives share outcomes, research and expertise through a Women Offenders Forum jointly convened by the Home Office and College of Police. Many are profiled in the Prison Reform Trust’s *Brighter Futures* report.³⁴

The police response to domestic violence was the focus of a recent critical report by the police inspectorate, which reinforced calls for improved women’s justice in England and Wales. The report, *Everyone’s business: Improving the police response to domestic abuse*, recommended urgent action by police forces:

Domestic abuse is a priority on paper but, in the majority of forces, not in practice. Almost all police and crime commissioners have identified domestic abuse as a priority in their Police and Crime Plans. All forces told us that it is a priority for them. This stated intent is not translating into operational reality in most forces. Tackling domestic abuse too often remains a poor relation to acquisitive crime and serious organised crime.

Soroptimists welcome the report’s acknowledgment that victims may first come to police attention when arrested as suspects and that many women would have disclosed the abuse they were experiencing then if the officer had been “more supportive or understanding”.³⁵ Authorised Professional Practice on detention and custody³⁶ highlights that “as many as half of the women who have passed through the criminal justice system and then entered prison have experienced domestic abuse”. As Prison Reform Trust trustee Carlene Firmin has commented:

*When a woman is processed through the criminal justice system, it is likely that those responsible for her case will not be from specialist domestic violence teams. All officers, not just those trained in domestic abuse, should be able to spot the signs and support women to disclose experiences of abuse. It is critical that police forces and the crown prosecution service work together to ensure that when they make decisions to charge women, enough has been done to identify potential links between domestic violence and their offence.*³⁷

Liaison and Diversion

The Department of Health is funding Liaison and Diversion services across England, including ten trial sites that are testing a standard model of provision. Based in police stations and courts, these are commissioned by NHS England “so that people with mental health conditions and substance misuse problems get the right treatment as quickly as possible with the aim to help reduce reoffending.” These services will be evaluated and, if successful, extended to the rest of the country by 2017.³⁸

The 2009 Bradley Report recommended better treatment of people with mental health problems or learning disabilities in the criminal justice system and supported the case for a different approach to women.³⁹ Some women’s centres were included in the first phase of the national Liaison and Diversion programme, as were some court-based projects specifically for women. In London, specialist workers provided by Together for Mental Wellbeing screen and support all women in the courts where they operate.⁴⁰

The particular needs of women suspects and offenders should inform training for all Liaison and Diversion staff, and these services should routinely offer women-specific provision and build links with local women’s services. The outcomes for women in the ten trial sites should be carefully evaluated to ensure that the resulting service specification is gender-sensitive.⁴¹

Probation

In June 2014, a National Probation Service (NPS), split into seven regions, and 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) replaced the 25 Probation Trusts in England and Wales. Competitive tendering will determine which private or voluntary sector bidders will take over running the CRCs from early 2015.⁴² The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) commissioning intentions make clear that:⁴³

For women offenders, interventions and services to reduce reoffending should be effectively targeted to address factors related to women’s reoffending and to enable them to complete their sentences successfully.

In response to concerns raised by Soroptimists about the new arrangements the Rt Hon Simon Hughes MP, the minister with responsibility for women in the criminal justice system, wrote:

*In order to win contracts, service providers will be required to demonstrate how they will respond to the gender-specific needs of female offenders, such as their family and caring responsibilities... These changes offer real opportunities for an expansion in the women’s community service sector.*⁴⁴

A good practice guide developed by the Ministry of Justice for practitioners working with women in the criminal justice system recommended the following key actions:

- all staff working with women offenders should receive gender awareness training, particularly frontline court staff
- probation staff, the judiciary and court staff should have accurate and up to date information on bail provision and support identified as suitable for women offenders

- in areas which do not have a women's community service, specific reporting times should be designated for women
- women offenders should be given the option of having a female report writer or offender manager at the pre-sentence report stage.⁴⁵

During the course of the Soroptimist project, the Ministry of Justice produced guidance for companies bidding for probation service contracts.⁴⁶

Prison

There are 12 women's prisons in England since the re-role in September 2013 of HMP Downview to a men's prison. Following the review of the custodial estate all women's prisons have been designated resettlement prisons. Once the new arrangements for through-the-gate and resettlement services are in place, including improved employment opportunities, the government will consider closing the two open women's prisons, HMP Askham Grange and HMP East Sutton Park "as they will no longer offer the best option for the majority of women due to their location."⁴⁷ SI members raised concerns about these closures, and urged careful consideration of alternative provision for local women given that location close to home is imperative to maintaining family contact. The Ministry of Justice's stated priorities for 2014-15 include supporting women to maintain links with children and family while in prison, making sure more women find suitable housing immediately upon release and that women's prisons have "the strongest possible focus on employment".⁴⁸

The gender-specific standards governing women's prisons⁴⁹ are being reviewed in 2014-15, including "the alignment of support and services for women who have been abused, raped, involved in prostitution or experienced domestic violence."⁵⁰ In a significant forward step, HM Inspectorate of Prisons has developed a women-specific set of expectations for women's prisons against which they will be inspected.⁵¹

KEY THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The key themes emerging from the Soroptimists' inquiries and activities in England are:

- 1 on-going confusion between gender neutrality and gender equality reflects a failure to translate national policy into local action
- 2 widespread support for women-specific services has not yet translated into secure funding
- 3 there is uneven awareness of women-specific services, and their effectiveness, amongst the judiciary
- 4 there is a lack of co-ordination, partnership working and data collection about women
- 5 police approaches to working with women offenders vary widely
- 6 availability of women-specific community sentencing options is limited in many areas
- 7 there is a shortage of suitable accommodation for women in many areas
- 8 women-specific service provision in rural areas remains a challenge
- 9 limited recognition of primary caring responsibilities, and lack of practical measures to support mothers, can affect women's engagement.

1) On-going confusion between gender neutrality and gender equality reflects a failure to translate national policy into local action

There seems to be a common view amongst many working in criminal justice agencies that men and women must be treated the same, albeit as individuals. Guidance on the application of the Public Sector Equality Duty is clear that treating people equally does not mean treating them the same:

*The Equality Duty does not require public bodies to treat everyone the same. Rather, it requires [them] to think about people's different needs and how these can be met. So [it] does not prevent public bodies providing women-only services – for example, for female victims of sexual violence or domestic violence. Indeed, such services may be necessary in order to ensure women have access to the services they need.*⁵²

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has expressed it thus:

*The equality duty is clear that to eliminate discrimination and advance equality means recognising and taking steps to meet different needs and acting to remove disadvantage. This may involve treating some people more favourably than others.*⁵³

In April 2014 the United Nation's Special Rapporteur on violence against women undertook a 16-day mission to the United Kingdom. Her report on the visit stated:⁵⁴

It is of concern that policies and practices on equality broadly, and those on violence in particular, are gender neutral, and aim for equal treatment for all, thereby disregarding the need for special measures which acknowledge difference, and which also recognise that women are disproportionately impacted by violence, inequality and discrimination.

Soroptimists encountered this gender-neutral approach in their evidence gathering. Responses from some police forces, for example, revealed a belief that treating women detainees differently on account of their gender was unnecessary and could even constitute unlawful discrimination. This misinterpretation of equalities legislation must be challenged wherever it occurs and indicates a need for more training or guidance on gender equality.

West Midlands Police reported to SI members that they train their officers to deal with all suspected offenders equally and that officers are not expected to discriminate on factors of sexual orientation, race, or gender. However, the same force works successfully with Birmingham's Anawim Women's Centre in the delivery of women-specific interventions. Force-wide training, protocols and strategies are needed to ensure consistency and raise awareness of the need for a gender-informed approach.

The Equality Act 2010 and government policy are clear that where women-only or women-specific services and interventions are known to be more effective, for example women-only hostels or support groups for women who have experienced domestic abuse,⁵⁵ they should be provided.⁵⁶ A failure to recognise the specific needs and characteristics of women when designing programmes and staff training, is likely to result in less effective responses to and treatment of individual women and measures to reduce their offending will be less effective.

This misunderstanding of equality at a local level appears to be a continuing obstacle to implementation of gender-specific responses that have long been accepted national policy. The introduction of Section 10 of the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 provides an opportunity in terms of service provision for women supervised in the community and supported through-the-gate, but ensuring the availability of gender-specific responses requires leadership at every level.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The Minister for Female Offenders (Ministry of Justice) and the Minister for Women and Equalities (Government Equalities Office) should promote a gender-informed approach to women in the criminal justice system and lead a cross-government strategy for reform of women's justice.
- Guidance should be developed by lead agencies, including the police, health and local authorities, to ensure policy and practice is compliant with equalities legislation. All mandatory staff training should include statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010.
- Criminal justice inspectorates and regulators should monitor and report on the provision of local women-specific measures, especially in light of Section 10 of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 2014. The Joint inspectorate review *Equal but different?* is an excellent example.

2) Widespread support for women-specific services has not yet translated into secure funding

Many of the agencies contacted by Sorooptimists expressed strong support for the women's centre model and were concerned about the adverse impact on women in the criminal justice system if local women's services were lost through lack of funding. They reported that they would welcome increased availability of women's one-stop shops, offering a safe, women-only environment and a co-located team working to help women with multiple and complex vulnerabilities to achieve lasting changes in their lives. Provision of consistent, central government, ring-fenced funding, complemented by private and voluntary sector funding, is vital to achieve this goal. The Justice Secretary has promised that savings from women's prison closures will be spent on preventing women from going to prison but it is not clear that has been done with money saved from the closure of HMP Downview women's prison.⁵⁷

Concerns were raised by women's centres in all regions about their future funding, the impact of uncertainty caused by both short-term funding and the restructuring of probation services, and the sustainability of existing services for women.

- In Nottinghamshire the Mansfield probation office expressed "considerable concern" about the potential loss of the CHANGES (Creating Hope Achieving New Goals Experiencing Success) project at Nottingham Women's Centre if further funding did not become available after September 2014.⁵⁸

- Practitioners in the West Midlands strongly supported the multi-agency women's centre model, commenting that a women's centre does not have to be big but should pull together the necessary services. Stable funding for women's centres is essential if they are to retain professional staff and achieve the reductions in reoffending by which their performance is measured.⁵⁹
- Practitioners in Dorset Probation Trust (now Dorset, Devon and Cornwall CRC) noted that lack of funding inhibited the development of innovative support.
- Feedback from all agencies approached by SI Cheshire and Wirral indicated that funding shortfalls and insecurity were a fundamental barrier to progress.
- Agencies contacted by SI Midland Chase reported that short-term funding makes it difficult to plan future work, and limits the capacity for inter-agency working and the development of integrated services.
- Soroptimists in Southern England suggested that more research on best practice and the effectiveness and quality of women's centres would help centres make the case for their services and secure future funding. In areas where there is no women's centre, women-specific support for offenders could be offered by other services, including Well Women's drop-in services.⁶⁰ There needs to be improved consistency in women's centre provision, with central government funding.

Sandwell Women's Aid, West Midlands - the Mariposa Project

The Mariposa Project offers a one-stop shop where women offenders and those at risk of offending can access a variety of services tailored to their individual needs and circumstances. A 12-week Specified Activity Requirement (SAR) is run by Sandwell probation services in partnership with Sandwell Women's Aid, with sessions covering substance misuse, sexual health, housing and finance. At the time of Soroptimists inquiry, the project was in its second year and funding was still uncertain.⁶²

Debbie's story

Debbie's offence was her repeated failure to send her children to school. She was scared she would go to prison, and worried about the effects of her behaviour on her children's education and life chances. She told Mariposa staff that her elder daughter did not go to school as a direct result of witnessing domestic violence against her mother. Both Debbie and her daughter felt safe in the house and this was why she did not go to school.

Seeing the individual woman (and her circumstances) and not just the offence affords Mariposa an insight into the causes and allows them to work with people to prevent further offending by offering support and new pathways.

Mental health alternatives to custody project, Anawim women's centre, Birmingham

Anawim women's centre developed a mental health project in partnership with probation, the courts and Birmingham & Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust. It is delivered by a team comprising a mental health practitioner, a mental health probation officer and a support worker. They assist the court by offering professional input to the pre-sentence report as to whether the defendant is suitable for a mental health treatment requirement. The service also enables pathway to treatment where necessary. Support may include crisis intervention, emotional support, counselling, group work on self-esteem and confidence, and anger management.

Melissa's story

Melissa (not her real name) has been arrested about 45 times and has over 35 convictions, mainly for theft from shops. As a young child Melissa experienced domestic and sexual abuse. As a young woman, her life was chaotic and she was using drugs. Melissa developed a crack cocaine-induced psychosis, which was not identified by criminal justice agencies.

She has been subject to a range of sentences from fines to custody. No one picked up her mental health issues. Her last sentence, two years ago, was a 12-month suspended sentence with a referral to Anawim to complete a specified activity requirement (SAR).

Staff at Anawim listened to Melissa and asked what support she needed. "Everything", was her reply, but mainly help with substance misuse and housing, and support to enable her to deal with everyday life, including self-esteem and confidence.

Melissa says:

Anawim changed my life – everything they offered I took on and completed, even doing a maths course and counselling. Now I even have my child back.

Her message to those working with women offenders is

listen more and don't judge a book by its covers. Women like me need help and the first step is that someone listens, has empathy and shows some love and kindness. I see only good things in the future for me and my child.

Cheshire Specified Activity for Female Empowerment (SAFE)

The SAFE project was developed by Cheshire Probation Trust in response to the Corston report. It empowered women to address aspects of their life which had contributed to their offending behaviour. Designed as an alternative to custody, women received a bespoke package of interventions over 15 sessions. SAFE was successful in actively engaging women in supervision and resulted in fewer women going to prison, significantly reduced breach rates and low reoffending rates - 89% of women who completed the intervention in 2012 did not reoffend. The project won second place in the Howard League for Penal Reform Community Awards (Women's category) in 2013.⁶¹

In 2014, following the creation of Cheshire and Greater Manchester CRC, the project was replaced by the Women's Intervention to Support Empowerment and Rehabilitation (WISER). Available across the CRC region, WISER is delivered by probation staff in conjunction with local women's centres.

SI members in Yorkshire were hopeful that the proposed closure of the only two open prisons in the women's estate, HMPs Askham Grange and East Sutton Park, would be an opportunity to invest money saved in local service provision for women in the community.

Perhaps the use of more community orders within the excellent provision and success of projects such as WomenCentre/ Evolve and Together Women Project should be the way forward.

SI Yorkshire

As an alternative to the traditional women's centre model, over the past three years Hampshire Probation Trust has run pop up women's centres in Southampton, Havant and Basingstoke, whenever there have been sufficient women with appropriate needs to make a group. They commented that this model has worked better in Southampton where they have a dedicated team working with women offenders. In other areas it has not worked as well because of limited demand, time and travel.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- A national network of women-specific community services, including multi-agency one-stop shops and outreach services, should be funded by government, drawing on cross-departmental budgets on three to five year funding cycles and building in savings from the re-rolling or closure of women's prisons.
- Measures of effectiveness against which these services are evaluated should capture distance travelled by women accessing them, as well as binary reoffending rates, to ensure wider outcomes and cost benefits can be evidenced.

3) There is uneven awareness of women-specific services and their effectiveness amongst the judiciary

Practitioners in a number of areas felt that judges and magistrates often had insufficient awareness of local women-specific services and programmes, and this adversely impacts on sentencing options and disposals for women. Several magistrates were at pains to point out that no account is taken of gender in sentencing, noting the absence of any such requirement in sentencing guidelines.⁶³ Where women-specific community orders are known to be effective they should be used.

Lancashire Women's Centres reported that lack of buy-in by local magistrates was a problem and sometimes resulted in women either being fined with no support or even being sent to prison (HMP Styall) in circumstances where a community order could have been more effective. The women's centres were developing an information package for magistrates to try to tackle this.

Eden House women's centre, Bristol

Eden House women's centre has a Sentencers' Committee, whose members include the women's lead at Bristol probation services, and a local magistrate who works closely with the centre, with regular exchanges of information, and a designated local Crown Court judge who works with the community and specifically Eden House and other women's agencies. The Deputy Chairman of the Bristol Magistrates' Bench sits on the Eden House Strategic Committee. This is a promising model for ensuring judges and magistrates are aware of local alternatives to custody, and able to inform their development.

Service providers in the West Midlands⁶⁴ highlighted inconsistent awareness amongst judges and magistrates of the non-custodial options available for women. The closure of some courts had exacerbated this problem, with magistrates in Birmingham commenting that as local courts have closed, local services and knowledge are lost. SI Sutton Coldfield members visited Victoria Magistrates Court in Birmingham following the closure of their local court, and were told that the court in Solihull was also due to close and that the move away from local courts could be contributing to an increase in women's remand.

In Kent Soroptimists were told that specific court sessions for defendants with mental health needs were being trialled, an approach that could be adapted for women. It is a way to raise awareness amongst sentencers of the distinct needs of women appearing in court, and would make it easier for agencies to share information about the availability of local services. Probation in Merseyside also thought that women-only courts or list-days might help women in the criminal justice system.

Stepping Stones women's centre, Luton

Stepping Stones ran a series of open information sessions for the probation service and local magistrates, reporting that this has resulted in a greater understanding of the women's centre as offering robust alternative disposals to prison rather than being viewed as a soft sentencing option.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs), in consultation with the police, council and service providers, should develop directories of local services for women offenders. Information on services available locally should be shared with the National Probation Service to inform pre-sentence reports and sentence recommendations.
- Each Bench should appoint a women's champion responsible for ensuring that all magistrates are aware of local programmes and interventions for women offenders.
- Women's centres should take all possible steps to ensure regular contact and information exchange with local courts, and consider inviting members of the local judiciary to join their governance structures.
- All local courts but especially those with access to a women's centre should consider developing a problem-solving pilot for women's justice.

4) There is a lack of co-ordination, partnership working and data collection about women

Practitioners in many parts of the country felt that joint working and inter-agency communication was lacking, sometimes compounded by poor systems for identifying local needs, limited awareness of the impact of women's imprisonment and limited data collection on women. Persuading local agencies to take a different approach has been hampered by a perception that women's imprisonment is not a priority issue as the number of women from any one area who are in custody is small. Soroptimists consider that more emphasis should be placed on the cost-benefits, particularly for the families, communities and local services which can bear the brunt of the costs associated with women ending up in custody. It is clear that leadership, both nationally and regionally, is needed if government policy on a distinct approach to women offenders is to be consistently and effectively implemented.

In some areas, such as the West Midlands, there appear to be sound working relationships between criminal justice agencies and community services and a co-ordinated approach to working with prolific offenders and those with mental health or substance misuse problems.

Elsewhere saw gaps in the availability of gender-specific data from local agencies and a failure to share data, which is an essential foundation for developing women-specific services and supporting inter-agency working.

SI Lichfield were told by Staffordshire County Council's public health team that in order for the needs of women offenders to be considered, they would have to be included in Joint Strategic Needs Assessments. Nacro in Lichfield felt that communication between agencies was poor in some areas of Staffordshire.

Soroptimists in Canterbury, Folkestone and Ashford drew parallels between the lack of data available locally and the limitations of data published nationally:

It is imperative for [women specific sentencing data] to continue to be collected and available. Without this information it would be impossible to monitor the achievement of the Corston recommendations.

SI Canterbury, Folkestone and Ashford

Local authority processes and service delivery are not always aligned which makes it difficult to achieve a cross-county consistency. SI members in South East England concluded that better links were needed between Criminal Justice Boards and probation. Southern England Soroptimists considered that communication between the courts and service providers needed to be improved. Dorset Probation Trust (now Dorset, Devon and Cornwall CRC) reported that joined up services would improve effective support for women.

In some regions, measures have been taken to improve co-ordination. For example, the Women's Forum in North Yorkshire is intended to deliver a coordinated approach to support vulnerable women and girls and women offenders. This also helps build a shared understanding of the gaps in services in this diverse area.

Women's Community Matters, Cumbria

This women's centre was set up in Barrow-in-Furness in November 2013, in partnership with WomenCentre and with funding from NOMS, grants from Barrow Community Safety Partnership, the local Clinical Commissioning Group and a range of charitable trusts. The centre delivers a wide range of services in a safe environment to enable women to improve their health and wellbeing and that of their children, to increase their skills and employment opportunities and to raise confidence and self esteem. A range of inclusive courses is offered to women whether they are offenders, at risk of offending or neither. This includes the Red Road programme and other confidence building courses. At the time of the Soroptimists' inquiry, outcomes data was not available, but early indications are positive. More women were keeping their appointments and complying with community orders than previously. The aim is to develop further hubs and outreach services in Cumbria.

Even where women-specific services exist, awareness of them varies, which can result in women not being referred to a service that might be able to help them.

They are at the mercy of who they spoke to and we know that communication across agencies is a very difficult thing...The community services which are outside the criminal justice system are changing constantly due to funding pressures...So if someone's gone into custody and then discharged, they are at the mercy of the [particular] custody officer or whoever having mentioned the particular service, and they may not have realised what somebody's issues are, they don't know necessarily that they have a mental health issue which may be low-lying, but they could do with some support, and again they may not realise that there is drugs or alcohol involved, so do they have the appropriate service leaflet to hand – they will do in most custody suites, but it's going to be different depending on who you speak to. This is the challenge of working in the community.

Probation group service provider, SE England focus group

Some agencies told Soroptimists that information sharing between probation, health and mental health could be improved. Tamworth Police in Staffordshire suggested a joined up IT system, allowing partners to share information would be beneficial. However, the split between the National Probation Service and Community Rehabilitation Companies may create new barriers to information sharing within probation services.

South Yorkshire probation – women's strategy

South Yorkshire Probation Trust (now South Yorkshire CRC) reported that it had an explicit strategy for working in partnership with a range of services in Sheffield, Barnsley, Rotherham and Doncaster to support women who have committed minor offences. Every female offender is given the option of a female offender manager and the facility to report in a women-friendly environment. In Sheffield and Doncaster this was at the women's centres, then run by Together Women's Project (TWP) and Platform 51 (now the Young Women's Trust) respectively. In Barnsley this was at a community venue paid for by the Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT); and in Rotherham the main office was closed to male offenders from 12-3pm on a

Friday to allow women, and if necessary their children, a safer environment. A Specified Activity Requirement (SAR) for women offenders was a popular sanction at court with over 400 requirements made in 2012-13. The Trust commented “our focus for these [requirements] is to reduce short term custody and unnecessarily lengthy supervision. We are proud that we are achieving both.”⁶⁵

South Lancashire Soroptimists noted that county/regional boundaries are not coterminous for the range of agencies involved in supporting vulnerable women, which can hinder effective co-ordination. Local councils have an important role to play in supporting the effective provision of women-specific services and some have a good track record in fostering a multi-agency approach to support vulnerable members of society.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- All agencies should undertake gender monitoring, analysis and evaluation as part of routine data collection. This should be used to develop a detailed and robust analysis of the needs of women offenders and those at risk of offending in their area, and to evidence the case for co-ordinated multi-agency responses to women’s offending, including women-specific services and community disposals in their area.
- Learning from successful multi-agency approaches in some areas should inform the national roll-out of coordinated responses to women in the criminal justice system.
- Health and Wellbeing Boards, Reducing Reoffending Boards, Local Criminal Justice Boards and other multi-agency partnerships, should appoint a women’s champion with responsibility for developing effective partnership-working locally.

5) Police approaches to working with women offenders vary widely

All police forces that responded to Soroptimist inquiries reported that they comply with the rules on same-sex searching and most mentioned women-specific measures reflecting elements of the Authorised Professional Practice on detention and custody⁶⁶ such as:

- girls must be under the care of a woman whilst detained⁶⁷
- women should have access to a female member of staff whose responsibility is to check on their welfare
- female detainees should be informed of the availability of sanitary items on request.

However, beyond compliance with these basic requirements, the Soroptimists’ research revealed a wide variation in police treatment of women detainees.

Most police forces did not have a designated lead for women detainees, with some notable exceptions, such as Greater Manchester Police and Avon and Somerset Police. As noted above, a misguided focus on taking a gender-neutral approach was identified in several forces’ responses.

The Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands told Soroptimists he would like to see a better understanding in police stations and IOM schemes of the offending pathways and the complex needs of female offenders, their experiences of domestic violence and financial or family issues, and how these can trigger offending. In his view, probation services should use centres and services such as Anawim in Birmingham as a matter of course when working with women serving community orders or on licence. This would ensure women received the support they need to address the drivers to their offending and prevent reoffending.

Some police forces recognise the value of a women-specific approach

It was clear from the responses of some forces that they recognise the value and importance of a women-specific approach. Examples cited include:

- the development of innovative, women-specific diversionary measures
- adapting existing measures to make them more appropriate for women
- implementing protocols for the treatment of women who are victims
- recognising women offenders as a vulnerable group within a non-women specific model.

Innovative, women-specific diversionary measures

Some police forces have developed innovative, women-specific approaches to diversion. These include an IOM scheme in Kent, triage schemes in Greater Manchester and Hull, and a fixed penalty notice fee waiver scheme in Sheffield.⁶⁸

AVERT pilot, Lancashire

AVERT diverts women from the risk of a custodial sentence by tackling the causes of their offending at an early stage. A dynamic needs assessment is conducted in the custody suite at the point of arrest. Where a woman's unmet needs are linked to her offending behaviour, she will be given a conditional caution to attend Lancashire Women's Centres. The most common offences for which women are diverted are drunk and disorderly, shoplifting and assault.

Avert was launched in November 2013 and is part-funded by the PCC, who says "this is a unique initiative...which focuses on providing early intervention and diverting women away from custody rather than trying to pick up the pieces once they have already been prosecuted and processed through the criminal justice system. Avert provides another route into support services for women who otherwise would not have received any support."

South Yorkshire Police – Women-specific Fixed Penalty Notice Fee Waiver Scheme

In partnership with NHS Yorkshire, South Yorkshire Police have developed a women-specific Fixed Penalty Notice Fee Waiver Scheme in Sheffield. This is designed to address a variety of behaviour, including alcohol related offences. Women issued with a notice who volunteer to attend within 28 days of receiving it, and successfully complete an alcohol awareness session and a follow-up session with local alcohol services, have their fine waived.

Under the scheme, women who have committed theft and criminal damage may be required to attend two sessions at the Sheffield Together Women Project (TWP), comprising an initial needs assessment with a key worker and a follow-up to draft a support and action plan. In 2011-12, 33 women were referred to Sheffield TWP as part of this scheme, all of whom successfully completed their two sessions and had their fine waived. Eight in ten women continued to engage voluntarily or have returned to the service since for further support.⁷⁰

Hull adult female triage pathfinder project

The Hull adult female triage pathfinder project developed as part of the national IOM programme is delivered by a community safety partnership between Humberside Police, Hull Youth Justice Service, local drug treatment services and Hull Together Women Project (TWP).

The project refers women who are assessed as suitable to receive tailored support from TWP, including:

- crisis intervention
- housing related support
- outreach, resettlement and recovery services
- Women's Aid
- access to employment and training activities provided at local colleges
- drug and alcohol awareness
- free and confidential counselling services.

Between December 2012 and November 2013, 493 women were assessed, accounting for 36% of all women entering the custody suite. Of those eligible for an out of court disposal, more than half (135) were referred to TWP, with a further 36 women attending TWP voluntarily. Engagement rates were high, with more than three quarters of women attending the scheme as required and only two further offences committed during the period.⁶⁹

West Midlands Police, raising officers' awareness

West Midlands Police ran a women-focused event, led by the IOM women's lead, aimed at raising officers' awareness of the multiple and complex needs of women offenders.

Greater Manchester Police – Women's triage pilot scheme

The Transforming Justice Programme is being trialled across four local authority areas – Manchester, Trafford, Bolton and Salford – introducing multidisciplinary working to address reoffending, particularly with vulnerable individuals. Under the pilot, frontline staff are trained to identify and respond to women suspects with multiple and complex needs. Using a women-specific triage assessment at the bail stage allows a problem-solving approach by WomenMatta, a specialist service for women offenders involved in lower levels of criminality. This approach may end in a caution or formal charge.

A Greater Manchester Police Chief Inspector commented that at point of arrest, the scheme:

offers a new way of dealing with adult female offenders that utilises police bail to ensure a women-specific assessment is undertaken by a third sector specialist women's service provider...The model proposed is pump-priming the establishment of the women's centres where they do not [exist] via the [Transforming Justice] justice reinvestment money and the long-term sustainability will be secured by a community budget investment agreement from the agencies that benefit.

Police protocols for the treatment of women victims of crime can improve responses to women offenders

Many police forces have protocols applicable to women as victims, for example of domestic abuse. Officers in Northwich (part of Cheshire Police), were amongst a number of police respondents who reported having strict protocols in place for the following:

- domestic violence and abuse management
- investigation of stalking and harassment
- investigation of serious sexual offences and aftercare
- vulnerable adult abuse: investigation procedures
- sexual exploitation
- prostitution.

Given that so many women offenders are also victims of domestic abuse and other crimes, it is important for police to apply the lessons learned from these protocols to their work with women offenders. Training and awareness-raising of the links between victimisation and offending are essential.

Police training and practice in the treatment of vulnerable people can improve responses to women offenders

Many of the forces contacted by Soroptimists took a generic approach to risk assessment, diversion and referral to other services, though some had processes in place for the treatment of vulnerable detainees that would particularly benefit women. Accurately assessing vulnerabilities of all types at an early stage in the process was identified as a 'must' by agencies working with women in the West Midlands, including more mental health screening at arrest stage to divert those in need into a service that helps rather than criminalises.

Even amongst forces that did not take a women-specific approach, referral might still be made to women's services where appropriate and available. This was particularly the case with regard to domestic violence services and, to a lesser extent, support for sex-workers. Asked what links they have with health, social care and women-only services in the community a Leicestershire Police representative responded:

I am unsure of any that are women-specific tailored towards women, as we tend to assess individuals on their vulnerability regardless of gender. I am aware that we have links with agencies that assist women who are victims of domestic violence in order to ensure that they are protected. For example, there is a domestic violence shelter and advice service.

Generic diversionary measures can be beneficial to women

In some areas, Soroptimists heard about the potential benefits of restorative justice as a tool to change women's offending behaviour, and in others about Community Resolution Orders (CROs). Restorative justice brings victims and offenders together (with the consent of all parties). It gives victims the chance to tell offenders how a crime has affected them, and to get answers to questions they may have, whilst offenders are better able to understand the impact

of their actions. Both parties are involved in deciding what steps will be taken by the offender to make amends. This can include unpaid work, making reparation for lost or damaged items, or written apologies.

Midland Chase Soroptimists heard that Staffordshire Police had piloted Community Resolution. Like restorative justice, this allows perpetrators to meet with victims where this is appropriate and agreed, to offer some recompense. Staffordshire Police reported that this has had some success in diverting offenders from the court process.

Yorkshire Soroptimists found that Humberside, South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire Police use CROs and restorative justice schemes as early intervention and to divert low-level offenders away from the criminal justice system, while North Yorkshire Police reported that they have a strong focus on restorative justice. This was also the case for police in Torquay, who reported that in Devon and Cornwall restorative justice has been used 20,000 times since 2008 for offences including shoplifting, fraud and criminal damage, and that there is only a five per cent rate of reoffending.⁷¹

Police deploy a range of diversionary measures including cautions, conditional cautions, penalty notices, and street triage with some IOM schemes also diverting low-level offenders.

- West Midlands Police operate an IOM scheme with multi-agency input, including a mental health delivery plan with data sharing and support from West Midlands Ambulance service and the local authority to support anyone with health problems who is taken into custody
- Southampton police are piloting a scheme that involves mental health workers being in police patrol cars and in the police control centre.

In some areas, these measures have been adapted to take a women-specific approach, such as women-specific conditional cautions in Lancashire⁷² and women-specific IOM in Kent, Durham and Bedford.⁷³

Staffordshire Police, Community Safety Hubs

Two Staffordshire police stations – Burton and Tamworth – described their Community Safety Hubs. These use a problem-solving approach to work with vulnerable offenders. The hubs are not women-specific but can provide an avenue to women's programmes or services, though there appear to be limited women-specific community services in the local area, with the nearest women's centres at Chepstow House in Stoke on Trent and Nottingham Women's Centre, each around 30 miles away. Both police stations recognised domestic violence as a factor in women's offending, with officers in Tamworth also identifying substance misuse and mental health problems as barriers to engagement, both in terms of women's unmet needs and statutory agencies capacity.

Tamworth police noted some excellent services who offer support to women and children, for example local support teams, Home Start, health visitors and Bromford Support. For women without children this is more difficult.

Burton

SI Lichfield and District spoke to the Arrest Referral Officer at Burton police station, who was also the Assessment and Care Coordinator for Burton Addiction Centre. Frontline police at the station have women-specific training, principally relating to domestic violence and substance misuse. The station's Community Safety Hub refers vulnerable suspects to appropriate services using a multi-agency approach and has, according to the Arrest Referral Officer, proved "vital for vulnerable women."

Tamworth

The Community Safety Hub at Tamworth takes the form of daily partnership hub briefings between police and a range of outside agencies including Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs), housing associations, mental health, adult social services for Care and Health and the Pathway Project, a women's refuge operating in Tamworth and Lichfield. Appropriate referrals are made following discussion.

Tamworth police have staff who are trained in working with women suspects. The station has an arrest referral worker who works in the custody block and would offer support to those with an alcohol issue, and officers would contact children's services if the suspect was a single parent with childcare needs. However, referral of vulnerable women to other services can be dependent on the knowledge of the individual custody sergeant or attending officer.

Tackling domestic violence – Operation Bluebell

Tamworth police work closely with the IDVA at the Pathway Project to tackle domestic violence, through Operation Bluebell. Victims of domestic violence are visited and offered support and reassurance. Women's vulnerabilities are identified when the Community Safety Hub meets to share information.

There were several examples of good police practice to minimise the negative impact on children of women in trouble with the law.

In **Humberside, South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire Police** areas, if a woman has children with her when arrested, or if the offence is one that can be dealt with at a later date, the woman will be bailed immediately to return to the police station at a more convenient time for all concerned.

All custody officers and staff in Humberside, South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire Police undergo training which includes guidelines on handling women offenders. Special cells are available at the majority of police stations for women and juveniles. Most have a designated lead officer for women and the majority of frontline staff are trained to identify and respond to women suspects with multiple and complex needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The College of Policing should develop national guidance identifying good practice when working with women offenders. This should include appointment of a designated women's lead in each force, adopting a women-specific approach to risk assessment, staff training, diversionary measures and referral to local support services.
- Police training, protocols and diversionary measures concerning or aimed at vulnerable people more generally should take explicit account of women's specific needs and characteristics. Learning from protocols on the treatment of women victims of crime should be applied to the treatment of women offenders to tackle the artificial distinction often made between these groups, and improve outcomes for women.

6) Availability of women-specific community sentencing options is limited in many areas

Whilst Soroptimists found many examples of good and promising practice in the delivery of women-specific community options there was a postcode lottery in availability, and in some areas there was evidence to suggest this was exacerbated by central government funding cuts. A judge who spoke to SI Leigh and District (South Lancashire) reported that there are limited options available in their court when sentencing women, whilst Derby magistrates felt that the local probation service rarely recommended a sentence with a supervision element as this would involve staff resources that they do not have, following cut backs. These magistrates felt that housing problems or an abusive relationship contribute to criminal behaviour and regular contact with a probation officer could lead to referrals to deal with these problems. Instead, probation seemed to favour curfews without supervision, which were especially unsuitable for women in abusive relationships, as it could leave them vulnerable for 12 hours a day.

Need for alternatives to short sentences

Many agencies mentioned the lack of support for women who have received short sentences, as probation services have not had a statutory obligation or been resourced to work with these offenders. Once the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 is fully implemented, short-sentenced prisoners will be subject to supervision on release, and it is a stated intention of the Transforming Rehabilitation programme that this should involve effective support for women. It is too soon to say what the changes will mean in practice but there are fears that more women may end up in custody, either because sentencers are reassured that women will receive probation support after a short prison sentence or because women may be imprisoned for breach of the new supervision requirements. In this context, ensuring robust local community sentencing options as a credible alternative to short custodial sentences becomes even more important.

Magistrates in Cheshire confirmed that breach was already a driver to women's imprisonment locally, particularly for women whose offences alone would not necessarily merit a custodial sentence.

The offences that women commit tend to be less serious and are of less risk to the community. However of those that go into custody a significant percentage were for breaching court orders...not attending probation/not paying fines etc.

Cheshire magistrate

Soroptimists in South Lancashire and Bristol wanted to see a greater range of options made available to magistrates as alternatives to short prison sentences. For clubs in South Lancashire this was particularly important in light of the impending changes to supervision following sentences of less than 12 months.

We want sentencing for non-violent crimes to be reviewed and more community options available to sentencers, and that more funding will be found from central sources to increase the number of women's centres.

SI Bristol

Clubs across the country heard about the use of restorative justice, both in diversionary measures (see section 5 above) and requirements attached to community sentences or undertaken during time spent in prison. Under the Crime and Courts Act 2013, courts have the option to defer sentence for up to six months following conviction to allow for restorative justice activities to take place where both offender and victim agree to participate.⁷⁴ This may afford scope for improved outcomes for women, particularly following the Justice Committee's recommendation that the Sentencing Council "encourage sentencers to consider the use of restorative justice in the sentencing process where it is available"⁷⁵ for theft offences, which account for the single largest group of women who are sentenced to custody.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The Ministry of Justice should undertake an annual audit and evaluation of probation services provided in accordance with Section 10 of the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 to meet the particular needs of female offenders.
- The development of restorative justice options for women offenders should be explored, with a view to expanding its use for women at all stages of the criminal justice system. The Restorative Justice Council should be asked to put costed proposals to the Advisory Board on Female Offenders.

7) There is a shortage of suitable accommodation for women in many areas

Approved Premises

Approved Premises, formerly known as probation and bail hostels, are managed by probation services or the voluntary sector and provide enhanced residential supervision for offenders and individuals on bail.⁷⁶ One probation trust suggested that approved premises for women should be centrally funded.

Many regions reported that there are no, or insufficient, Approved Premises for women in the local area. This issue has also been the subject of legal proceedings in which the Ministry of

Justice admitted there had been little planned or co-ordinated development of approved premises for women. The court found that insufficient regard had been given to the public sector equality duty and that women offenders in some areas may be disadvantaged:⁷⁷

- magistrates in Hampshire commented that many women in prison are on remand because there are insufficient Approved Premises - the nearest Approved Premises for Bristol women is the Elizabeth Fry hostel in Reading
- soroptimists in Bristol were told that efforts are being made to address the need for women's Approved Premises in the area, and that there is a particular need for women with mental health needs, and for women who are trying to get their children back into their own care
- the Pathway Centre in Lichfield commented that there are not many Approved Premises for women in the area, and not enough support to help women get their life back in order after going through the criminal justice system
- there are no Approved Premises available for women in the Barnstaple area while the closest women's prison to North Devon and Cornwall is in Gloucester
- probation in Weston-super-Mare noted that there are no specialist residential facilities for women in Avon and Somerset, with Elizabeth Fry in Reading the nearest Approved Premises for women
- Brighton Women's Centre (Inspire) has recently sought funding to address the lack of Approved Premises provision for women locally
- there are no Approved Premises in Bolton (Greater Manchester) and local women's services reported that this is a problem for the area⁷⁸
- Adelaide House Approved Premises in Liverpool provides accommodation for 20 women. Probation in Merseyside suggested that women should be bailed to women-only centres as an alternative to custody
- Gloucester Isis women's centre highlighted the limited accommodation available for women in Gloucestershire, with one Approved Premises providing two beds to which only prison or probation can make referrals, despite Isis workers providing through-the-gate support to women being released from prison. The restrictions on referral exacerbate the problem, with Stonham claiming its women-only accommodation service was unsustainable due to insufficient referrals.

One local practitioner was "not convinced hostels are the best use of scarce resources – we should concentrate on creating services around the women." This is one of the approaches taken in the West Midlands, alongside the provision of specialist residential facilities. West Midlands Police however, highlighted the lack of accommodation for offenders who needed to be rehoused away from the areas and peer groups where they got into trouble. This is especially true for women released from custody returning to areas often in deprived locations and in sub-standard housing where drugs and crime are rife. The lack of options for women with mental health or substance misuse problems was also noted.

Eden House women's centre in Bristol used to offer accommodation and could provide much needed residential support if it were funded to do so.

The Dawn Project Community Hub in Cambridge told Soroptimists that addressing the lack of provision in the area, where only three to four women can be accommodated, would require funding to open another hostel. Whilst Stonham provide shared support housing in Peterborough, the Hub would welcome more women-only shared accommodation.

Tomorrow's Women Wirral (TWW) in Birkenhead reported a need for more single-sex accommodation for vulnerable women.

Birmingham - From Street to Home

Social housing provider Midland Heart entered into an EU-funded research project with Anawim and Birmingham City University entitled From Street to Home to investigate how an integrated approach to housing provision and social support can reduce the threat of violence against women, and produce an evidence base to enable policy makers and practitioners to connect housing more effectively with social support for vulnerable women.

The project included a cohort of women offenders who had experienced custody (for non-violent offences) and whose sentences were under six months. An evaluation estimated that for every £1 invested £5.58 of social value was created by the project's interventions.⁷⁹

Affordable housing and supported housing

Problems with the lack, inadequacy or unaffordability of housing were identified by many as significant contributing factors to offending and reoffending, with prison staff recognising that women with accommodation to return to found it easier to resettle:

Many female offenders realise they are far more capable than they believe during their custodial sentence, but if they have no home address, they get off to a poor start on release. Those with homes to rent seem to stand more chance of settling back in a direction of non-offending.

SE England SI members saw a need for more supported housing in their region specifically for women offenders and their children.

Re:Unite

Re:Unite is a nationwide housing and support project to reunite and resettle families when a mother is released from prison. With a presence in each of the women's prisons in England, it works with women in prison and on release, providing individual, tailored support and help in finding and securing settled housing. It has recently been evaluated, whilst a cost-benefit analysis found that for every £1 spent on service users, more than double (£2.22) was saved, primarily through reductions in reoffending, and less use of emergency accommodation and local authority child care.⁸⁰

Housing and work as the cornerstones to resettlement

Respondents in several regions, including Hampshire and Staffordshire, highlighted the fact that housing shortages compound women's resettlement difficulties. Agencies in Staffordshire considered that this put women at greater risk of committing offences such as trespassing and being vulnerable to peer pressure, drugs and alcohol.

Having safe, secure housing is also a pre-requisite for finding and securing employment, which prison staff identified as another essential component in resettlement:

Suitable work is hard to come by for ex-offenders, and if there is no income, then offending is the only way of getting or acquiring food/clothing etc.

South Lancashire Soroptimists wanted women in prison to receive more assistance to secure accommodation and work on release. They commented that meaningful, purposeful and vocational work for women in prison, as well as incentives or financial support to businesses that are willing to provide employment to women who have offended, would be helpful in achieving this.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- A national review of Approved Premises for women should be undertaken urgently, with ring-fenced funding made available to plug gaps identified.
- Local authorities and housing associations should give housing priority to women with vulnerabilities that put them at risk of offending – including women affected by abusive relationships, drug or alcohol problems, or poor mental health.
- Local strategies to reduce women's offending and imprisonment should take account of women's housing needs, including the needs of those with dependent children and the consequences for children of lack of stable, secure homes, drawing on data identified in local Joint Strategic Needs Assessments.
- The time limit for eligibility for housing benefit for sentenced prisoners should be extended from 13 weeks to six months to prevent short-sentenced women from losing their home.
- The government should develop a strategy to increase employment opportunities and programmes for women with a criminal record. This should include employer incentives.

8) Women-specific service provision in rural areas remains a challenge

Some clear gaps in provision were identified by Soroptimists during their inquiry. There were no women-only centres in North Devon, Somerset or Dorset. There are centres in Plymouth and Cornwall, and at the time of the inquiry Devon and Cornwall Probation Trust (now Dorset, Devon and Cornwall CRC) was looking to re-commission these to cover the whole of the area.

It was agreed by practitioners that there were inherent difficulties in rural service provision.⁸¹ SI members suggested that women-specific outreach services should be put in place to address the lack of facilities in rural areas. Problems in serving rural areas might be alleviated by mobile teams that are able to move to differing locations as well as improved partnership working between agencies.

Women's services in rural areas are costly to run and can frequently require women to travel longer distances to access the support they require. Ensuring services are provided through hubs, for example, via children's centres, health centres, and women's refuges could be a way forward.⁸²

Women's Community Hubs, provided in Northumbria by probation services in partnership with the police and voluntary agencies, are one example of a promising approach.

Northumbria – Women's Community Hubs

Following the closure of the Ministry of Justice-funded SWAN project (Support for Women around Northumberland) in March 2013, a new service based on the creation of Women's Community Hubs was introduced, funded by Northumbria Probation Trust (now CRC).

The Hubs aim to reduce the risk of reoffending by supporting women to overcome the obstacles which contribute to their offending. They are designed to provide additional support for women at risk of a custodial sentence, to enable them to be successfully managed in the community. The first Hubs opened in June 2013. They operate for half a day each week in community venues, providing a women-only environment for probation supervision sessions. There are no crèche facilities but sessions are, as far as possible, arranged in school hours.

The Hubs are run as partnerships between probation, voluntary organisations and other agencies. There are ten Hubs, operational or planned, in the Northumbria Contract Package Area (CPA), managed by a female Probation Manager and sited as close as possible to the homes of women attending. The spread of the rural population of Northumberland over a large geographical area makes this difficult.

Women are eligible to use the Hubs if they are subject to statutory supervision, including women on community orders and on licence from custody, for whom attendance is compulsory. All women take part in a core programme designed to help build their confidence and self-esteem and enable them to tackle the problems in their lives. The programme is delivered by probation staff and outside agencies and comprises a full range of services, from drug treatment to professional advice on personal finances and housing.

Women who are at risk of offending may be referred for voluntary attendance by agencies such as the police or the courts, including women affected by substance misuse. The Hubs also engage with women who are involved in the IOM scheme and there are plans to introduce conditional cautioning by Northumbria Police, including a women-specific condition that will require attendance at a Hub.

There is good evidence, including from the SWAN project,⁸³ that Hubs can support women to address the difficulties that drive their offending, and so reduce reoffending. Early experience of women who have attended Hubs in North Tyneside and Sunderland is encouraging.

Chepstow House would like to provide another one-stop shop in Staffordshire, with Lichfield and Cannock identified as suitable strategic locations. Cost-effective proposals for the small towns that characterise the county will be challenging but satellite services could be provided in police stations. They would also like to offer services to 14-17 year olds, and want to offer a consistent service across the whole of Staffordshire, not the present postcode lottery. The Pathway Project in Staffordshire suggested that their local Family Justice Centre, providing all services in one place, is a good model.

There is no women's centre in Warwickshire. Warwickshire Probation Trust (now Warwickshire and West Mercia CRC) operates a women-specific outreach team, seen as a more effective use of resources in this large, rural county. Out-of-county facilities are accessed where necessary to meet any specific needs. The new CRC reports that its strategic partnership One Step Beyond has "helped in the development of a range of new projects specifically for women offenders across the area...delivered in partnership with other organisations."⁸⁴

Probation services at Weston-super-Mare cited the lack of women's facilities in rural areas as a barrier to women meeting with others in the same predicament in a safe environment.

RECOMMENDATION:

- A model for providing services to women in rural areas should be developed, piloted and evaluated by NOMS, in collaboration with existing service providers, drawing on the success of the hub approach and use of mobile facilities attached to regional women's centres. Pooled budgets provide an opportunity to ensure cross-departmental buy-in, and long-term sustainability.

9) Limited recognition of primary caring responsibilities, and lack of practical measures to support mothers, can affect women's engagement

Despite research showing that many women in the criminal justice system are mothers (with many being sole carers for their children) Sorooptimists found little evidence that primary caring responsibilities are recognised by criminal justice agencies, for example through provision of childcare facilities, or scheduling probation appointments at family-friendly times during school holidays. The dearth of childcare facilities reflected wider concerns over the lack of consideration that was given to primary caring responsibilities.

Bristol Magistrates' and Crown courts reported that women have to make their own childcare arrangements when they are due to appear in court. However, the Crown Court is working with Barnardos to provide a specific waiting area for families.

In some areas, such as Merseyside, there are no childcare services available for women undertaking community orders.⁸⁵ It appeared from other responses that provision of childcare was discretionary on the part of the local probation service, or would only be provided in some circumstances. Derbyshire probation services reported that childcare is provided if required for community sentences, but that the general expectation is that the mother would make her own arrangements.

There were indications that women were at greater risk of breaching court orders for non-compliance as a result of their caring responsibilities.

....men and women are treated exactly the same, however the women who have children would quite often be late coming or early leaving and we would have to report to probation and that would be treated as a breach.

Probation group service provider, SE England focus group

To counter this, some practitioners made arrangements that accommodated the needs of women with dependents:

We have to look at things like half term where women with children would find it difficult to attend the women's group...We will be responsive to their needs to allow them not to come in that week.

Family support worker, SE England focus group

Some practitioners noted that the lack of recognition from agencies could be compounded by an unwillingness to disclose primary caring responsibilities by women wary of contact with statutory services, and fearful that their children would be taken into local authority care. This fear of disclosure and its consequences could also mean that some women with mental health problems or a drug or alcohol dependency chose not to access available services for which they were eligible.

It's a case of whether or not they want to be on the radar - they have a concern about loss of their children, loss of confidentiality, the loss of who you are...who you are submitting yourself into the hands of the system.

Delegate at the SE England focus group

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Women attending court, and those subject to court orders in the community, should have access to childcare facilities if needed.
- Women should not be breached for failing to attend probation appointments where this is a direct result of their caring responsibilities.
- Much more regard should be had to the needs of children whose mothers are caught up in the criminal justice system and steps taken by all relevant agencies to mitigate the impact.

COUNTRY REPORT - WALES

Turnaround is supporting YOU and what you want, not your addictions and your failures, the whole point of it is pushing you forward...they inspire you to turn your life around, and it's your life and it's not all about the amount you've drunk or the amount of drugs you've took, or the bad deeds you've done, it's about moving you forward... that's the difference between Turnaround and [other organisations]. Turnaround is a crutch, they cover all areas, they give you that support.

Service user, Women's Turnaround Service in North Wales⁸⁶

FACTS

Use and effectiveness of prison and community sentencing

Numbers in prison - At December 2013, 256 Welsh women were in prison. In 2012-13, 510 Welsh women were sentenced to custody.⁸⁷

Community orders - In 2012-13, 1,234 women started a community order in Wales.⁸⁸

Distance from home for women in prison - The average distance from home for Welsh women in custody varies widely. For those in HMP Eastwood Park it is around 64 miles, but ranges from 30 miles for those from Newport to 148 miles for women from Fishguard. Women from North Wales are likely to be imprisoned in HMP Styal, 48 miles from Wrexham and 127 miles from Aberystwyth. Although fewer Welsh women are imprisoned in London, the distances are daunting, with Cardiff 153 miles away and Anglesey 286 miles away.

Table 1: Welsh women in prison, December 2013 by prison⁸⁹

Prison	Number of women from Wales
Eastwood Park	131
Drake Hall	39
Styal	30
Send	18
Low Newton	7
Bronzefield	6
Holloway	6
Askham Grange, East Sutton Park, Foston Hall, New Hall Peterborough (female)	<5 each
Total	256

Reoffending rates - The reoffending rate for women who started a Community Order or Suspended Sentence Order with Wales Probation in 2011 was approximately 30%, or 506 of 1,688 women. This is similar to the England and Wales average of 27.8%.⁹⁰

Prison receptions data, sentence length and types of offence - In March 2014 Madeleine Moon MP (Bridgend) tabled a parliamentary question requesting data on Welsh women received into prison, the average length of custodial sentences and types of offences committed. The request was refused on the grounds of cost.⁹¹ Without this information, it is difficult to target efforts to reduce the imprisonment of Welsh women.

THE SOROPTIMISTS' INQUIRY IN WALES

Twenty-four SI clubs across Wales took part in campaign activities in 2013-14. Information was collected from local police, probation services, Local Health Boards, courts, women's centres and other agencies by various means, including attending meetings, and at a well-attended Action Research workshop held by SI Wales South in December 2013.

POLICY CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW

Criminal justice and the treatment of offenders are not devolved in Wales and so are subject to the Westminster government's strategy on women's justice⁹² and the Transforming Rehabilitation reforms.⁹³ Some changes have been proposed by the recent Silk Commission on Devolution in Wales that could have future implications for the treatment of Welsh women offenders.⁹⁴ The Welsh Affairs House of Commons Select Committee is considering the proposals in its inquiry into prisons in Wales and treatment of Welsh offenders, due to report in 2015.⁹⁵

In its *Reducing Reoffending Strategy 2014-2016*,⁹⁶ the Welsh government recognises the need for government departments and agencies outside the criminal justice system to work together, and with non-devolved criminal justice agencies, to reduce reoffending.

*The strategy brings together the ambitions of criminal and social justice agencies to reduce crime by reducing reoffending, and provides a framework to support our programme for government commitment to improving community safety.*⁹⁷

Lesley Griffiths AM, Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty

The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) explains this further:

*NOMS directly commissions offender services costing approximately £140 million in Wales. While NOMS...[commissions] prison and probation services in Wales, the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh government are accountable for a wide range of devolved responsibilities which contribute to the rehabilitation of offenders. These include health and social services, learning and skills, housing and local government.*⁹⁸

In relation to women offenders, NOMS' Commissioning Intentions for 2014 state:

*Work with the Welsh government will include a particular focus on...supporting vulnerable women who are at risk of offending and improving access to appropriate support services to reduce the numbers of women who reoffend.*⁹⁹

Police

Police services in Wales are delivered by four police forces – Dyfed-Powys, South Wales, Gwent and North Wales, each with an elected Police and Crime Commissioner. All forces are partners in the IOM Cymru Women's Pathfinder project (see below).

Probation

The Wales Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) and Wales National Probation Service (NPS), which replaced Wales Probation Trust in June 2014, provide probation services in Wales. Wales CRC oversees community-based rehabilitation while high-risk offenders, victim liaison and sentencing advice and reports are managed by the NPS (NOMS in Wales).¹⁰⁰ One of the Probation Trust's measures of success for 2013-16 was that "access to services for women offenders in Wales is enhanced through a co-ordinated IOM approach, improving resettlement outcomes and promoting desistance."¹⁰¹

Prison and Approved Premises

There are no women's prisons in Wales, and the lack of women-only Approved Premises has been the subject of a legal challenge.¹⁰²

Women who are imprisoned will be sent to England and Welsh language provision in custody is poor or non-existent.

SI South Caernarfon

The distance from home makes it particularly difficult for women prisoners from Wales to maintain contact with family and resettle in their community after release. NOMS recognise this:

*We are working to improve resettlement outcomes for prisoners from Wales held in prisons in England. There is a particular focus in relation to the rehabilitation of women offenders and resettlement of women back to their communities in Wales.*¹⁰³

Following the custodial estate review, Welsh women sentenced to prison are to be held in HMP Eastwood Park (Gloucestershire) or HMP Styal (Cheshire) for as much of their sentence as possible, with the two prisons working closely together to improve responses to Welsh women's needs.¹⁰⁴ As the Prison Reform Trust argued in its submission to the Welsh Affairs Committee's inquiry, the priority should be improving community solutions to women's offending in Wales and addressing the causes, rather than building a women's prison in Wales.¹⁰⁵

Criminal Justice Liaison Service

In November 2013 the Welsh government launched revised guidance to help police and court staff identify people who have a mental health problem, personality disorder, learning disability or difficulty, or other complex needs. The guidance sets out the minimum levels of criminal

justice liaison service (similar to Liaison and Diversion services in England) required in all Local Health Board areas. Health Minister Mark Drakeford AM commented:

*Public protection and the safeguarding of individuals are of paramount concern, however many offenders with a mental health problem or a learning disability are vulnerable because of those conditions and by addressing their needs we help both the offender and also improve public safety.*¹⁰⁶

Soroptimists welcome the emphasis on screening and early intervention but would like to see more recognition in the guidance of women's distinct needs.

KEY THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following key themes emerged from the Soroptimists' inquiry:

- 1 the All-Wales IOM Cymru women's pathfinder is an inspiring new development
- 2 the approach advocated by the Women's Pathfinder has yet to influence much of the police response to women offenders
- 3 despite support for women's community services funding is limited and short-term and rural provision is a challenge
- 4 there is a lack of women-specific health services.

1) The All-Wales IOM Cymru women's pathfinder is an inspiring new development

The IOM Cymru Women's Pathfinder project (see below) builds on other initiatives developed in 2013 in the Swansea, Neath, Port Talbot and Bridgend area by Wales Probation (now Wales CRC), including:

- a women's reporting centre set up for women offenders to attend their probation appointments in a women-only environment with women staff
- a women's specified activity requirement (W-SAR), delivered at Swansea Women's Centre by Wales Probation staff with support from Changing Lives. This intervention is focussed on issues affecting women's offending behaviour. Its aims are to provide an empowering environment, assist problem identification and solving, encourage skill development and enhance women's understanding of the community resources available to them.

It's really good to come somewhere where I can talk freely...

Woman taking part in women's specified activity requirement¹⁰⁷

Wales Probation introduced a number of specialist training packages and initiated research to improve understanding of women offenders.¹⁰⁸ The Sex Worker Research Wales project, for example, was carried out jointly by the Centre for Criminal Justice and Criminology at Swansea University and Gibran, a social enterprise working with women ex-offenders across Wales. It sought to map the locations of sex workers across Wales and to examine their perceptions as well as those of the general public and agencies involved, including the police and NHS. The

study found sex workers in all 22 local authority areas (mainly concentrated in Newport, Cardiff and Swansea), two thirds of whom are women. It found that off-street sex work is largely invisible to agencies working in the field. The research called for a multi-agency approach, with greater understanding of the needs and perceptions of the sex workers themselves.¹⁰⁹

Women-only unpaid work placements were introduced by Wales Probation in 2013, as well as the option for women offenders to report to a female officer throughout their sentence. In Gwent, where this way of working was first adopted, there was a 30% reduction in the number of women offenders given short-term custodial sentences.¹¹⁰

Without these services and interventions, there is no doubt that more women offenders would reoffend.

Probation Officer, Wales Probation¹¹¹

IOM Cymru Women's Pathfinder Project

IOM Cymru is one of the most ambitious implementations of IOM in the UK, spanning all four police forces in Wales, as well as 22 community safety partnerships, Wales probation, Welsh government, Welsh prisons and seven Local Health Boards.

IOM (Integrated Offender Management) is the term used to describe a multi-agency approach to managing persistent offenders who commit a lot of crime, causing damage and nuisance to communities. The approach recognises that repeat offenders often have multiple problems which contribute to their offending and that these cannot be addressed by a single agency such as probation but require input from non-criminal justice agencies.¹¹²

The Women's Pathfinder project was commissioned in late 2011, following successful pilots by Wales Probation and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Cymru. Results had been positive with a reported 71% reduction in arrests for North West Wales IOM offenders and 50% reduction in burglary for Cardiff IOM offenders, but the pilots had not included women.

Recognising this, the Women's Pathfinder project was launched in 2013 to deliver a distinct, whole-system approach for women offenders. The operating model includes early assessment of needs and diversion if appropriate (triage), pre-sentence engagement, sentencing options for court, female multi-agency hubs and coordinated case management systems. All Wales police forces are taking part.

The Pathfinder is focussed on the following three objectives:

- **reducing arrests:** in 2012-13, 10,545 women were arrested in Wales – this accounts for 16% of all arrests and equates to 29 women arrested each day¹¹³
- **diversion from custody:** the Pathfinder will divert women away from short-term custody where appropriate and improve resettlement services¹¹⁴
- **improving community provision:** the Pathfinder will improve service provision for women serving community sentences and for those leaving prison.

The IOM Cymru Women's Pathfinder Project Manager considers that all the nine pathways for reducing reoffending would benefit from being developed more specifically to meet the needs of female offenders throughout Wales, that services would benefit from better coordination and additional provision of triage, and that more support is needed around sex working and domestic violence where there are identified gaps.

Barriers that the Pathfinder is looking to overcome include:

- fragmented funding arrangements for women's services
- barriers to access for generic services for women
- small numbers of women in a predominantly male service.

Research, monitoring and evaluation frameworks have been built into the project from the start, and in 2014-15 it is piloting the whole-system approach in Cardiff with a view to rolling out across Wales.

Dyfed-Powys Police are fully engaged with the Women's Pathfinder project and reported that a custody suite in their area was being evaluated for a women offender triage pilot. It is their intention to participate fully in the development of the best practice operating model that is being developed by IOM Cymru for women offenders, recognising some of the unique circumstances that lead to women offending. The force will then seek to implement this model across its custody estate in due course.

Delegates at the SI Wales South Action Research meeting, including third sector representatives and several South Wales magistrates said they are looking forward to the full introduction of the IOM Cymru Women's Pathfinder in the Dyfed-Powys police area. They felt that there was insufficient knowledge of help available and poor transparency across agencies and hoped that the Pathfinder would implement a much-needed holistic approach and appropriate infrastructure, and make the most of the third sector. Interest was expressed in extending the Invisible Walls project being developed by Parc Prison for male offenders to offer support for women too. Delegates identified funding constraints, a lack of trust and joint working between different professionals as problems that should be addressed, and emphasised the need for more effective collaboration.

RECOMMENDATION:

- A Welsh government Minister should be designated to lead development of the All-Wales Women's Pathfinder project, including ensuring it is adequately resourced, the pan-Wales roll-out happens as planned and its objective of improving outcomes for women in the criminal justice system is met.

2) The approach advocated by the Women's Pathfinder has yet to influence much of the police response to women offenders

Dyfed-Powys

Dyfed-Powys Police Forces' current arrangements include an arrest or referral scheme which is available to all detainees, women and men, and provides support for those with drug and/or alcohol problems. It is underpinned by regular visits to custody suites by local support workers from the current contract provider. Services in the area include Hafan Cymru, a supported housing association for vulnerable women and children, community partnerships and drug and alcohol rehabilitation services.

The Police and Crime Commissioner for Dyfed-Powys is concerned about under-reporting of domestic and sexual violence in the area. He wants to strengthen confidence in the police with improved recording and cross-agency liaison between police, health services and community groups. Greater inter-organisation collaboration and understanding is needed, requiring leadership, investment and training.

Delegates at a Dyfed-Powys action research meeting were concerned about the lack of service coordination and collaboration across the region, and considered the role that an All-Wales Constabulary could play in improving consistency of approach across the country.

South Wales

South Wales Police has in place a number of schemes that, whilst not gender-specific, can particularly benefit women:

- sex worker support schemes (two different models working in Swansea and Cardiff)
- youth diversionary schemes for under-18s including girls (different models in Swansea, Cardiff and Bridgend)
- integrated offender intervention services (IOIS) referral schemes for people with drug misuse problems.

SI Action Research meeting delegates said that they would like to:

- improve relationships between schools and social services
- see more effective Personal and Social Education in schools
- publicise the help already available
- achieve funding support for longer periods and consistently
- make more use of one-stop shops
- achieve all-Wales coordination
- ensure health centres have information about appropriate services for women.

In its 2012-16 Strategic Equality Plan, South Wales Police committed to conduct research to establish a baseline of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of women detained in police custody, with a view to developing a “strategic equality objective to design and implement appropriate initiatives to meet the specific needs of women who are detained in custody.”¹¹⁵

Gwent

In Gwent there is a generic triage system that seeks to ensure offenders are referred to the appropriate agency. Local services for women include Gibran (a social enterprise service for women offenders), drug and alcohol rehabilitation, Women's Refuge and Women's Aid.

The Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent highlighted that awareness and functioning of existing provision could be improved to deliver more effective support. He wanted to see more joint working across organisations, an agreed set of outcomes to focus activity, and pooled budgets to provide services. He proposed that co-location of service providers would assist planning and delivery, reduce duplication and improve partnership working. His office's commissioning methodology is intended to redress confusion and duplication in Gwent.

Constraints identified include:

- lack of strategic direction at the political level
- distribution of funding and tasks to a range of organisations
- austerity impacts
- confused landscape (though the PCC is working to improve this)
- challenges of partnership working around common outcomes.

Practitioners told Soroptimists that they would welcome a triage scheme to ensure women apprehended by the police are referred to appropriate agencies and given the opportunity to address any underlying problems, as well as preventative work with women at risk of offending. They highlighted lack of funding for some crucial services as a constraint. They also expressed frustration that women offenders are not a popular subject for discussion and that there is a general unwillingness to look at causes and cures. Delegates believed a cultural shift is required across agencies and the public if lasting change is to be achieved.

North Wales

North Wales Police reported that in 2013-14 2,442 women (compared to 12,016 men) were arrested in this police force area. There is no designated lead on women and as yet they do not have specific procedures for responding to women at first point of contact, apart from those in the Guidance on the Safer Detention and Handling of Persons in Police Custody.¹¹⁶ The North Wales Integrated Offender Management Unit (IOMU) refers all its women clients to appropriate women's services and the force is introducing a wraparound service that will involve a needs assessment for each person in custody

All officers receive training on mental health and domestic abuse, including how to identify and deal with vulnerable people, and what special measures to put in place. There are no women-specific protocols for referrals. Depending on the level of vulnerability, a detainee may see a social worker or nurse while in custody who will make suitable referrals. Drug and alcohol workers are based in custody suites and there is an out-of-hours referral process when they are not there.

North Wales Police are looking to adopt best practice from the Women's Pathfinder being trialled in South Wales, which would enable the IOMU and custody suites to offer a better support and referral package to women offenders.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The College of Policing should develop national guidance identifying good practice when working with women offenders. This should include appointment of a designated women's lead in each force, adopting a women-specific approach to risk assessment, staff training, diversionary measures and referral to local support services. Best practice models identified by the Women's Pathfinder should be applied pan-Wales as soon as possible.
- Police training, protocols and diversionary measures concerning or aimed at vulnerable people more generally should take explicit account of women's specific needs and characteristics. Lessons learned from protocols on the treatment of women victims of crime should be applied to the treatment of women offenders to tackle the artificial distinction often made between these groups, and improve outcomes for women.

3) Despite support for women's community services, funding is limited and short-term and rural provision is a challenge

The feedback received from all the agencies approached indicates that lack of funding is the fundamental issue here. In order to maintain and develop the services available at present it is necessary to know that funding will be available to continue, and to be secure in the future.

SI Cheshire, North Wales & Wirral

Three women's centres operating as part of the Women's Turnaround Project, and North Wales Women's Centre, appear in the UK government's 2013 Stocktake of Women's Services for Offenders in the Community, where it is also stated that "[o]utreach services are provided in a further ten areas" in Wales.¹¹⁷ NOMS/Ministry of Justice funding for such services is only assured until March 2015.¹¹⁸

Women's Turnaround Service

The Women's Turnaround Project¹¹⁹ was commissioned by NOMS Cymru and launched in Cardiff in 2007 in response to the Corston report, to provide Welsh women offenders and women at risk of being an offender and/or victim of crime with a multi-agency, community based service that addresses individual risks and needs.¹²⁰ Having received further funding from a variety of sources, the Women's Turnaround Service is now delivered in Swansea and Cardiff by Changing Lives (formerly the Cyrenians) who took over the service from Platform 51 (now the Young Women's Trust), and in North Wales by KIM Inspire.¹²¹

Swansea and Cardiff

South Wales staff provide information, guidance and support tailored to individual needs in a friendly, women-only environment. Over a 12 week period, they aim to reduce women's risk of offending by providing a range of services targeted at the nine pathways into offending.

Chrysalis, for example, is an eight week programme which aims to address the barriers to entering education, training & employment, and to equip women with the motivation, skills and knowledge to make informed, positive lifestyle choices. It is delivered one-to-one at probation offices and community venues and in group sessions.

In Cardiff, the Service is part of the Women's Pathfinder and runs a hub, with probation and support services co-located, providing a coordinated response to women's needs and clear referral pathways to other specialist services.

North Wales

KIM Inspire delivers the Women's Turnaround Service on behalf of Changing Lives both at their base in Holywell, Flintshire and through outreach services across the region. The KIM Turnaround Service offers flexible, holistic support for women who have offended or who are potentially at risk of offending across the North Wales area, providing a lifeline for vulnerable women in rural localities. Women can be referred through probation, police, IOM teams, Jobcentre Plus and other agencies and service providers, with trained staff providing information, guidance and support tailored to individual needs in a friendly and women-only environment. Having developed good partnership working with relevant statutory, non-statutory, voluntary and criminal justice agencies, the service can signpost women to appropriate services, so that women can access and engage with community provision.

Women's groups, focused on enabling women to build self-confidence and learn new life skills, are offered at different community locations, including libraries, in Gwynedd and on Anglesey. Most recently held in Bangor (May-July 2014), the next groups are planned for Anglesey and Pwllheli.

Apart from these services and Gibran UK, all of which are profiled in this section, women-specific services in Wales appear to focus on domestic abuse, including women's refuges run by Women's Aid. Hafan Cymru offers housing and support to vulnerable women across Wales, especially those escaping domestic violence, and floating support to women with offending histories.

Gibran UK

Gibran UK is a social enterprise working with women ex-offenders across Wales. In 2013 it completed its five-year GOING HOME project which supported 465 women and engaged with women in all 22 local authority areas in Wales, piloted work in magistrates' courts and diversion with Gwent Police. It saved the tax payer an estimated £11m for every 100 women it supported. The organisation is now engaged in CONNECT, a two-year project funded by BIG Innovation to work with women ex-offenders across Wales, to support their resettlement, reduce re-offending and help them to find work.¹²²

Practitioners, including third sector representatives and several South Wales magistrates, said that they would like Gibran UK's services to be extended and more women's centres in Dyfed-Powys. Lack of funding is a constraint, and the fact that this is a large rural area, with poor transport links, is a challenge. The scarceness of services is also a problem in the Bangor area, where the nearest women's centre, North Wales Women's Centre in Rhyl, is over 30 miles away.

North Wales Women's Centre, Rhyl, Denbighshire

Established in 2001 in the ward ranked highest in the Index of Deprivation in Wales, North Wales Women's Centre "has a history and growing track record of engaging vulnerable women who have difficulties in their lives which may, or has, resulted in them breaking the law."¹²³ The centre is run by Rhyl Interactive Limited and delivers a wide range of services and activities helping women improve their health, confidence and livelihoods, including outreach services in more rural areas of Denbighshire and along the North Wales coast. The centre reports that it was recently saved from closure by a £500,000 grant from the Welsh government Equality and Inclusion Grant Funding programme, for the period 2014-17.

The Women's Centre is an essential facility for the Rhyl area and surrounding communities.

SI Rhyl & District

In addition to scarcity of women's centres and other women-specific services across Wales, practitioners identified the lack of women-specific Approved Premises accommodation for women offenders as being detrimental.

Soroptimists identified some generic services that offer potential benefits for women, providing that they monitor their use and impact by gender:

- the Timpson Foundation's Chef Academy and The Oyster Catcher restaurant in Rhosneigr, Isle of Anglesey - launched in 2011, these provide opportunities for men and women in the criminal justice system to gain qualifications
- the All Wales Domestic Abuse helpline (0808 8010800) provides support for women and men affected by domestic abuse
- CAIS - a registered charity offering drug and alcohol treatment services, including residential treatment and rehabilitation, counselling, peer mentoring, supporting people in their homes, assisting people back into work or education and group work. CAIS operates a partnership with Parabl to offer therapeutic services to adults in Gwynedd with mild to moderate mental health needs
- MIND - mental health support and advice
- GISDA - a registered charity providing services to vulnerable young people in several locations across Gwynedd, including supported accommodation
- Nacro - the national crime reduction charity provides services in North Wales including support and training to help people back to work
- Dicartref - an agency for the homeless in Wales.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- A national network of women-specific community services, including multi-agency one-stop shops and outreach services, should be funded by government, drawing on cross-departmental budgets on three to five year funding cycles.
- Measures of their effectiveness in working with women offenders and evaluation models should be built into funding agreements, taking account of the methodological difficulties inherent in building an evidence base with small numbers of women.
- Priority should be given to setting up adequate Approved Premises for women in Wales.
- Generic health, housing and other support services should monitor and evaluate take-up and impact by gender.

4) There is a lack of women-specific health services

In South Caernarfon, accessibility to sustained mental health services was found to be very limited. Cuts in public services are causing significant problems locally, as well as adversely affecting accessibility in this large geographical area.

SI Wales South members wrote to all six Local Health Boards in South Wales. Whilst some responses made reference to services delivered as part of Criminal Justice Liaison Services, delivery of women-specific health services was limited, despite guidance “setting out the minimum levels of service required in each Local Health Board (LHB) area.”¹²⁴

- Aneurin Bevan University Health Board said that when a woman is arrested with markers for mental health on her arrest record, criminal justice practitioners are informed, carry out a screening assessment and take appropriate action. In 2013, 21 women were referred and screened. Services available include a dedicated women-only forensic rehabilitation ward (6 beds) as part of the pathway from secure services, and a Personality Disorder service with a pathway in conjunction with probation services.
- Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board work closely with the Criminal Justice Liaison Service for men in Swansea Prison and Parc Prison but have no specific arrangements for women. Short-term therapeutic interventions are offered and there are close links with third sector organisations for signposting to further advice and support (e.g. substance misuse, domestic abuse and housing). If a woman wishes to see a female member of staff this can be arranged. Services are offered via GP surgeries, not on a women-only basis. This Board reported that there are opportunities to improve care arrangements for women offenders with mental health disorders and develop links with HMP Eastwood Park similar to those already in place for male offenders with HMPs Parc, Cardiff and Usk.

- Cardiff & Vale University Health Board does not offer specific services for women offenders. There is a Cardiff Health Access Practice (CHAP) for those deemed vulnerable and high-risk groups who are unable to register with other primary care services.
- Cwm Taf University Health Board reported that women offenders have full access to the Criminal Justice Liaison Service for mental health problems. A practitioner based in the police custody suites in Merthyr Tydfil and Pontypridd proactively screens people on a daily basis. This service is mostly delivered by female practitioners. Further assessment required within normal working hours is undertaken by the Community Mental Health Teams and out-of-hours by the Emergency Duty Teams. Women can attend the Crisis Resolution Teams in Prince Charles or Royal Glamorgan Hospitals. This extends to women going through the court system, usually supported by female staff in both the Merthyr and Pontypridd courts. The service supports women at HMP Eastwood Park and helps them prepare for release. Practitioners provide services for women who are having reports written for Court, and those on mental health orders who are under the care of probation. Mental Health Assessment Clinics are held every two weeks at Merthyr and Pontypridd Probation offices.

The high level of female referrals into the practitioners when compared to the overall number of women offenders generally...It is clear that many women...in the criminal justice system have significant complex, mental health difficulties and end up in custody for less serious offences than men.

Cwm Taf University Health Board

Practitioners acknowledged that the lack of women-specific accommodation in Wales impacted on women with health needs, with Cwm Taf University Health Board commenting that access to accommodation with criminal justice and mental health input as an alternative to custodial remand or short custodial sentences would improve care for women in their area.

Services are aligned to the Offender Mental Health Care Pathway with access available at all points of the journey through the criminal justice system. We acknowledge that Welsh women are disadvantaged by having no female prison in Wales and limited access to Approved Premises for women when compared to men.

Cwm Taf University Health Board

- Hywel Dda University Health Board provides Drug Intervention Programme (DIP) services in Carmarthen, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire which are delivered by third sector organisations. Individuals in the criminal justice system who have drug misuse problems are offered drug-testing on arrest, referral to advice services and liaison on release from prison. There is no equivalent service for those with alcohol-related problems, although some providers do deliver alcohol-awareness sessions for those caught speeding. Women-only groups are provided on request.

- Powys Teaching Health Board reported that there is a liaison service between Community Mental Health Teams (CMHT) and the police. This includes arrest referrals and court diversion support from Community Psychiatric Nurses directly at a police station. Gender-specific arrangements are not routinely provided but can be organised according to the specific needs of the individual.

Women have more problems as a consequence of domestic abuse and we work closely with dedicated services.

Powys Teaching Health Board

In adult mental health services, women come via direct referral from the custody sergeant to the CMHT. Each CMHT has a designated nurse for this role who in turn covers all the police stations in Powys. Other support services, including safe houses for victims of domestic abuse, are available via probation and the local authority. Kaleidoscope provides a full range of substance misuse services for adults and young people.

This Board thought the current system for adult mental health services was working well, although availability of a nurse is sometimes delayed if other assessments are underway at the time of contact. For substance misuse, the Board wants to develop day services and services that are more accessible to older people.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Health services, including mental health and substance misuse, must recognise and address women's distinct needs and characteristics.
- The Welsh government should undertake an audit of Local Health Board provision delivered as part of criminal justice liaison services to ensure Boards are providing the minimum level of services required by guidance and the distinct needs of women are identified and met.
- Health services aligned to the Offender Mental Health Care Pathway should recognise women's journey through the criminal justice system as it differs to men's and provide access points reflecting this distinction.

COUNTRY REPORT - NORTHERN IRELAND

I enjoyed it so much and I have never got so much out of something. I still have my book with my goals in it. I just can't explain what coming here does. It's unbelievable. I couldn't believe it and it took me out of my shell as well...It was like a new lifeline. It closed the door on all the stress...I couldn't have done it on my own.

Service user, Inspire women's project

FACTS

Use and effectiveness of prison and community sentencing

Numbers in prison - At 31 March 2014 there were 72 women and girls in prison, comprising 3.8% of the prison population.¹²⁵ The average weekly women's prison population in Northern Ireland has increased year on year, rising from 22 in 2003 and 56 in 2012.

Types of offences - In contrast to other parts of the UK, the majority of sentenced women in prison in Northern Ireland are there for offences relating to violence against the person. The next most common offences relate to theft, fraud and drugs,¹²⁶ with on average one-third (34%) of adult women imprisoned for non-violent offences.¹²⁷

Community orders - In 2012, 4,942 females were convicted by the courts: 3,167 were given a monetary penalty, 149 community service orders, 248 probation orders/ supervision orders and 645 suspended custodial disposals.¹²⁸

Remand - On 31 March 2014, 31% of women and girls in prison were on remand, compared to 21% the previous year.¹²⁹

Short sentences - On 31 March 2014, 42% of sentenced women were serving sentences of 12 months or less, compared to 38% the previous year.¹³⁰

Reoffending rates - A comparison of reoffending rates for women and men given non-custodial sentences or a diversionary disposal found that 9% of women and 17% of men were reconvicted within one year. Those sentenced to imprisonment (men and women) had the highest reoffending rate (at 45%).¹³¹

THE SOROPTIMISTS' INQUIRY IN NORTHERN IRELAND

SI Northern Ireland approached their inquiry as a region-wide project with a working sub-group that included clubs from Bangor (Co. Down), Belfast (Co. Down), Downpatrick (Co. Down) and Enniskillen (Co. Fermanagh). SI members began by consulting on an individual basis with key organisations at regional level that are involved with women offenders. Information was gathered through:

- correspondence and questionnaires
- face-to-face meetings
- structured questions
- published reports.

The Soroptimist International Northern Ireland (SINI) working group received positive and constructive responses from all organisations/individuals contacted, with some indicating that ongoing support/collaboration would be welcome (e.g. NIACRO). [We] intend to recommend...that further work is done, including follow through with other voluntary sector organisations working with women offenders (e.g. Barnardo's, Extern, women's centres).

SI Northern Ireland Working Group Member

POLICY CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW

A gender-informed approach should underpin each stage of the justice system. A gender-informed approach means addressing the needs of women in a holistic way, taking account of the realities of women's lives, and matching interventions with risks and need. It involves the development of relationships, between criminal justice practitioners and the women they supervise and support, that are based on respect and dignity, and enable women to build on their strengths and to make positive changes.

Reducing offending among women 2013-2016, DOJNI strategy

Governance and key institutions

Policing and justice powers were devolved to the NI Assembly and Ministers in 2010 and are the responsibility of the Department of Justice (DOJNI). There is a single police force, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and a single probation service, the Probation Board of Northern Ireland (PBNI). Women prisoners are held in Ash House, which is housed within a men's prison, Hydebank Wood in Belfast. Community services for women offenders are primarily delivered by the PBNI-led Inspire project, which operates in Greater Belfast, mid-Ulster and the North West.

The Review of the NI Prison Service in 2011 found that "women...are poorly catered for in prison systems geared around adult males" and called for a new women's prison to be "built, staffed and run around a therapeutic model" and for the Inspire model of community provision to be "adopted as the norm for dealing with women who offend."¹³²

Department of Justice women's strategy

In 2013 the Department published *Reducing offending among women 2013-2016*, a refresh of the 2010 women offenders strategy.¹³³ It

seeks to promote and embed a gender-informed approach throughout the criminal justice system to ensure it is effective in responding to the needs of women and ultimately reducing offending behaviour among women.

We will continue to support and work with our partners across government and the voluntary and community sectors to prevent and divert women from offending. Within the justice system, we will, as resources become available, roll out the Inspire model and establish the long-awaited new custodial facility for women.

David Ford MLA, Minister of Justice¹³⁴

A Women's Strategy Steering Group, chaired by the Department of Justice, oversees progress in delivering against the following strategic priorities:¹³⁵

- focus on prevention and early intervention strategies that will improve outcomes for girls and women and reduce the risk of involvement in offending behaviour
- continue to put in place alternative measures to divert girls and women, particularly those who have some form of vulnerability, from prosecution and custody
- provide child-centred interventions for young female offenders being supervised in the community or held in custody
- roll out the Inspire model across Northern Ireland to provide community-based interventions aimed at reducing reoffending among women
- establish a new, separate custodial facility and step-down accommodation for women (to replace Ash House), with a prison culture focused on women's needs
- support women involved in prostitution to exit the trade
- ensure a continuing strategic focus on reducing offending among women that is supported by local research and awareness raising.

Strategic Framework for Reducing Women's Reoffending

The women's strategy sits within Northern Ireland's wider *Strategic Framework for Reducing Reoffending* published in 2013.¹³⁶ It includes a multi-agency approach, Reducing Offending in Partnership (ROP), which involves specific interventions for women offenders.

KEY THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the Soroptimists first met with pivotal contacts in 2013, financial constraints and transfer of key personnel (including within the Department of Justice) have inhibited progress in critical areas. This is reflected particularly in the key themes listed below:

- 1 inconsistencies in the police approach to women offenders
- 2 the Inspire project is a successful initiative but faces significant challenges
- 3 delayed replacement of Ash House and concern about conditions and outcomes for women in the prison
- 4 new measures have the potential to reduce the use of prison for women committing non-violent offences.

1) Inconsistencies in the police approach to women offenders

In the year ending March 2014, 4,491 women were arrested in Northern Ireland, accounting for 14% of the total. This was an increase from the previous year in both the number and proportion of women arrested (4,411; 12% of the total).

The Police Service responses to Soroptimist enquiries indicated that in general police focus on individual vulnerabilities. However, when giving evidence to the Committee for Justice, the head of healthcare, custody and reducing reoffending for the Police Service suggested a gender-informed approach was taken:

One of the important things around that is prevention. In the Police Service, when we see women starting to come into custody, we link with partners in services that those women may need, such as for mental health, low self-esteem, addictions, abusive backgrounds, domestic violence, and so on. The very powerful bit is actually the work that we can do at the front end to try to prevent those women with vulnerabilities whom we know are getting involved in those offending cycles

Head of healthcare, custody and reducing reoffending, PSNI¹³⁷

PSNI reported no women-specific measures or processes in place save for those that are legally required including same-sex searching, providing a female officer responsible for the welfare of girls and the measures set out in the Guidance on Safer Handling of Persons in Police Custody,¹³⁸ including provision of sanitary packs.

PSNI reported it has mixed gender custody teams, and the sensitive needs of females are addressed by a female officer/custody detention officer. Frontline officers receive initial training in the full spectrum of the diverse needs of individuals they may encounter including gender, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, mental health and learning disability and are trained to identify and respond to women suspects with multiple and complex needs. There is no designated lead on women, although the Head of Custody Healthcare/Reducing Offending leads from an offender perspective. This officer contributed to the Department of Justice's updated Women's Strategy and leads PSNI strategy in connection with ROP. The Soroptimists consider that a clear force-wide strategy and set of protocols for working with women is needed rather than this somewhat piecemeal and reactive approach.

PSNI did not report any Liaison and Diversion schemes for adult women but does work with partners, in particular the Youth Justice Agency and PBNI around early intervention, in accordance with the Department of Justice's Women's Strategy. Specific links with health, social care and women-only services in the local community vary according to the geographical area and associated Health Trust. PSNI intends, in consultation with the Department of Justice, to develop a directory of services to cover the entire province of Northern Ireland. Soroptimists would welcome this development.

Under the Women's Strategy, PSNI is expected to put interventions in place for women offenders being managed through ROP, which has three strands:

- **prevent and deter** – reduce crime and anti-social behaviour through early identification and intervention
- **catch and control** – close monitoring of those who persist in their offending
- **rehabilitate and resettlement** – provide support and assistance to find a way out of crime.

ROP was piloted in Ballymena (Co. Antrim) and Coleraine (Co. Derry) with results indicating that 68% of offenders involved reduced their offending behaviour during 2011-2012.¹³⁹

PSNI's development of ROP for women will include a greater focus on providing interventions for women in police custody, with partners being fully consulted throughout the investigative process before a decision is made in respect of remand or specific bail conditions.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- PSNI should adopt a clear force-wide strategy and protocols for working with women, and provide mandatory training for police officers and staff on women-specific approaches.
- PSNI should develop a directory of services to which women offenders can be referred.

2) The Inspire project is a successful initiative but faces significant challenges

The Inspire women's project is a women-only, multi-agency service, based on the Corston model, which was successfully piloted in Belfast in 2010¹⁴⁰ before being extended by the Department of Justice to mid-Ulster and the North West as well as Greater Belfast. It offers supervision for women on community orders, preparation for release to women in custody who will be under statutory supervision, and post-release community support. In 2012, 188 women serving community sentences were supervised by Inspire, with an additional nine women supervised post-release.¹⁴¹ It is run by the Probation Board of Northern Ireland, in partnership with NIACRO's Assisting People and Communities (APAC) team.

The Inspire model is a partnership between statutory agencies, and voluntary and community agencies in the women's sector. It is about recognising the experience and expertise of all those sectors, and coming together. Up to now, all those agencies were working in parallel but not together.

PBNI Inspire project manager¹⁴²

In Belfast, the project takes the form of a meeting space with a range of services relating to domestic violence, accommodation, family support, alcohol and drug abuse, employability and financial advice delivered through commissioned community organisations. It is planned to roll out the Inspire model as the norm for supervision and support for women offenders in the community. This includes putting in place a gender-informed approach to the preparation of pre-sentence reports for women offenders.

I couldn't get over the place. I thought it was lovely... lovely and bright and clean and it was far, far better [than other probation offices].

Service user, Inspire women's project

Delayed national roll out means gaps in community provision for women

When Soroptimists met the Deputy Director of the Criminal Justice Service (DOJNI), he endorsed the Inspire project as best practice and agreed that it is the Department's responsibility to allocate the necessary resources for an expansion of the service. However, the Department of Justice "have not yet found the money to have a full roll-out".¹⁴³ A commitment has been made to fund the expansion of the project to the North East, but there is no indication when it will become available in other parts of Northern Ireland. On the contrary, Soroptimists were told in June 2014 that budgetary pressure is making it difficult for PBNI to maintain the Inspire project, and some cutbacks had already been made.

The DOJNI is supporting the project's development in both mid-Ulster and the North West. In mid-Ulster, PBNI already had good links with local women's services which were keen to become involved. The North West also has a significant number of women under probation supervision including in Derry city. The DOJNI is funding one NIACRO Assisting People and Communities (APAC) worker across these two areas, working part-time in each. The model was modified because of the rural spread of the women on probation. Unlike the Inspire model in Belfast, where the worker is located within the probation staff team in the Inspire premises, this new post required the APAC worker to liaise with probation staff across five different office locations.

Speaking to the NI Assembly Committee for Justice, the Inspire project manager described the expanded project:¹⁴⁴

It is about bringing together local agencies to find out what resources are in those areas. The big difference is in the numbers. We work with about 460 women on probation or subject to statutory orders. The majority are in the greater Belfast area — around 200 — and the rest are much smaller numbers. There are 20 women subject to probation orders in the mid-Ulster area and about 50 in the north-west.

It does not require the same physical structures because there are resources. My colleague came with me just this morning to have lunch at the Derry Women's Centre, which, alongside voluntary agencies, is putting programmes into the community for women subject to probation orders. We are not looking for huge additional resources. We have put together a business case for the roll-out, which is part of the prison reform measures.

The Deputy Director of the Criminal Justice Service (DOJNI) added:

What we are looking to do is to work creatively with some key players, such as that women's support service in Derry, where using their resources in programmes and support makes a big difference.

The APAC worker promotes the Inspire model within PBNI and offers support to individual women on probation, liaising closely with existing community services and working alongside PBNI staff. Local women's centres have been supported by the Pilgrim Trust to deliver new

programmes and services for women who offend. NIACRO and PBNI established Inspire groups in mid-Ulster and another in the North West (which includes Derry, Strathfoyle and Waterside women's centres and Foyle Women's Aid). These groups meet regularly with local PBNI and NIACRO staff to plan services for women in the area. NIACRO offer accredited training to women's centre staff on women and offending behaviour, introducing them to criminal justice, the agencies involved and the needs of women in the system. Prison staff are involved in delivering the training, which also serves to build relationships.

The initial evaluation of the Inspire model was undertaken by the London South Bank University, which found a significant number of reports of a decrease in offending, which was good. Certainly, when we looked at our assessment tool for predicting reoffending, there was a significant decrease. The Department of Justice is looking at reconviction rates, but it is still early yet. It has been only four years. That work is ongoing, and we hope to be able to report back on that. Having worked with women on an individual basis, I can certainly say that we have been able to break that cycle with some who would have ended up in going back into custody. Indeed, some of those women have not only broken that cycle, but are now actually helping other women. They have done things like producing a video. They go into prisons and talk to other women. They help other women to actually make that link to engaging with the programmes that are in the community.

PBNI Inspire project manager¹⁴⁵

A commitment has been made to fund a NIACRO APAC worker for the North East – specifically the Coleraine (Co. Derry), Ballymena and Antrim areas (both Co. Antrim). PBNI is continuing to fund the APAC post in mid-Ulster and the North West, although hours have been reduced. The APAC worker has continued in the Belfast team but changes within the women's sector in Belfast are prompting the partnership to look at how the model will be delivered in the future.

Giving evidence to the Committee for Justice, the Deputy Director of the Criminal Justice Service (DOJNI) appeared to suggest that, faced with financial constraints, the DOJNI was prioritising early intervention measures to prevent offending and divert offenders, over spending on prisons and probation:¹⁴⁶

Inspire is an important part of the picture. However, we have to see it as a tapestry. Often, it is about what we can do at the front end, working with other Departments.

Challenges of rural coverage

The extension of the Inspire project to mid-Ulster and the North West offers an example of promising practice in making the best use of available resources to provide a women-specific service in rural areas, provided sufficient investment can be maintained to support it. The Inspire project manager described the different approach being taken outside Greater Belfast:

In mid-Ulster, for example, we work with First Steps in Dungannon, Positive Steps in Cookstown and the Learning Lodge in Magherafelt, so we are working with projects that are already well established. When I say that it will be a different model, I do not mean

that we actually need an Inspire building, because there might be only three or four women. The biggest challenge is transport and travel, because you might have one woman coming from Armagh and somebody else coming from Cookstown...I am aware that there is an appetite and a willingness for the groups to work together. The model is an integrated one, so a woman would be far better going to some of the projects in Cookstown than coming to a Probation Service office in Armagh.

Gaps in provision

At a meeting with Soroptimists, the Inspire Project manager called for resourcing of community support services for women who are not under statutory supervision following their release from prison, whilst NIACRO stated that women's centres could provide a crucial component of services to women prisoners.

RECOMMENDATION:

- Every effort should be made to maintain and extend services based on the Inspire model, building on the project's success to date and developing valuable evidence of the effectiveness of provision in rural areas. A cost-benefit study by DOJNI would likely support expansion of this service.

3) Delayed replacement of Ash House and concern about conditions and outcomes for women in the prison

Women prisoners continue to be held in Ash House, despite the Justice Minister's commitment in 2010 to replace it with a smaller, separate facility and the Prison Review Team's 2011 recommendation to do so urgently. In 2013 an announced inspection found:

Overall this was a disappointing inspection, in particular because women continued to be held in a predominantly male prison, which was having a significant and intractable impact upon outcomes they experienced. Women were reasonably well cared for but they were inevitably marginalised and restricted in their access to facilities and services. There was also evidence of verbal intimidation from male prisoners from time to time. Only the long-promised closure and replacement of Ash House would resolve the problems we saw. Recent instability in the management team had also contributed to the problems we highlight, and there was a clear gap evident in leadership and direction.¹⁴⁷

The inspectors concluded:

This inspection raised a number of significant concerns – not least, it is wrong to run a female prison at the margins of an overwhelmingly male establishment. The impact on outcomes for the women was, in our view, fundamentally disrespectful. The prison was safe but little was done to equip women with meaningful skills, and preparation for release and resettlement needed to be a lot sharper. Management and many staff appeared confused about the future direction of the prison and its core purpose. In our view, there needed to be a radical rethink of the approach to the imprisonment of women in Northern Ireland.

NIACRO separately reported to Soroptimists that recent changes in NI prison staffing had resulted in inexperienced, less flexible and fewer wardens. Coupled with an increase in bullying, NIACRO considered that women were not being well managed.

The NI Assembly Committee for Justice has challenged the on-going delays in replacing Ash House. Committee member Mr Alban Maginness MLA commented: ¹⁴⁸

There is a need for robust prison reform here, and it seems to be rather slow and fragmentary...Essentially, Ash House should not be there. There should be a separate women's facility. I understand the budgetary pressures and all the rest of it, but it is becoming increasingly obvious, particularly in light of the report by Criminal Justice Inspection, that you need to separate the women's facility from the Hydebank young offenders' complex...I would like to see some sort of indicative date or objective set by the Department on that, rather than saying that you are committed to this but you do not know when it will happen. That is on the never-never, and I do not think that is acceptable to the women in those circumstances.

The vision is of a facility that will address the needs of women, including through in-reach and outreach support, delivered in partnership with agencies working in the community. The DOJNI plans are on a community village model, to foster independent living skills, to support those dealing with vulnerabilities, provide for mothers and babies, with more secure accommodation for the most serious offenders and those with severe mental health needs.

The Director General of NIPS confirmed that “subject to funding being made available” a new female prison would be complete within 5 years.

We've been out looking at some secure mental health facilities, we have been out looking at other female prisons, just to get ideas for what we might design that would better suit the needs of our female population. So that's on the plan, that's on the books, that will happen. ¹⁴⁹

Work is underway to establish step-down accommodation for those women assessed as suitable for working outside the prison and accessing support in the community in preparation for their release from custody.

The DOJNI cites a number of positive developments in its 2013 strategy:

- The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) published Gender Specific Standards for Working with Women Prisoners in 2010 to underpin the implementation of a gender-specific approach in custody.¹⁵⁰ This was followed in 2014 by NIPS' estate strategy, which included its objectives for women offenders, focusing on a dedicated facility for women in prison.¹⁵¹
- NIPS will implement agreed recommendations arising from its review of categorisation for female prisoners. The purpose of this review is to ensure that decisions are based not only on the risk posed by prisoners, but also on their needs.

- work continues to support women in custody and the community following the nine pathways to resettlement. For example, employment support is provided through NIACRO's Jobtrack programme and Business in the Community; addictions support is provided by AD:EPT and a pilot hard-to-place case conference model.

PSNI and NIPS are working to create a more joined-up approach between police and prison custody healthcare, ensuring more fluid sharing of information and swifter responses to meeting the assessed needs of vulnerable individuals.¹⁵² This should have particular benefits for women.

RECOMMENDATION:

- Funding to replace Ash House should be allocated as a matter of urgency and a date set for its closure and replacement with a small separate women's facility.

4) New measures have the potential to reduce the use of prison for women committing non-violent offences

- **Tackling fine default:** following the Prison Review Team's finding that half the women in Hydebank Wood in 2010 were there for fine default, fixed penalty notices were launched in May 2012 as an alternative to prosecution.¹⁵³ A supervised activity order pilot scheme was launched in January 2012 intended as an alternative to custody for fine defaulters.¹⁵⁴ Plans have been developed to improve fine collection and provide courts with alternatives to custody for fine default. Whilst these measures are not women-specific, they have particular benefits for women offenders.¹⁵⁵
- **Failure to use existing alternatives to prison:** the Prison Review Team found an unacceptable failure to use existing alternatives to prison and NIACRO have suggested that the judiciary may be reluctant to use alternative disposals. As well as conducting a review of community sentences, the DOJNI's women offender's strategy refresh stated that measures to ensure alternatives to prosecution and custody were being progressed, including to "reinforce the need for courts to consider whether a community sentence, rather than a short custodial sentence, might offer more effective rehabilitative opportunities to the offender."¹⁵⁶ It is not yet clear what the outcome of this proposal may be.
- **Over-use of remand for women:** in August 2011, the Prison Review Team found that 36% of women in prison were on remand and at March 2014, this proportion was largely unchanged at 31%. In 2013, DOJNI sought views on a proposal that defendants should not be held on remand for an offence if, upon subsequent conviction, they would be unlikely to receive a custodial sentence (the no real prospect test) as part of a wider consultation on the use of bail.¹⁵⁷ A draft Bail Bill was expected in 2015 but this looks unlikely and it is unclear whether a new test for remand will be included.

- **Improvements needed to education and training services:** when SI members met with the Deputy Director of the Criminal Justice Service (Department of Justice), he considered that provision of education services to female offenders in custody, before and after custody could be improved, and noted that this requires a joint strategy and cross-Departmental funding. NIACRO wanted to see better access for women to training outside prison (e.g. courses at local colleges), which is often frustrated by prison rules. Its Jobtrack employment programme has been developing arrangements for day release with Ash House and PBNI, building on the services the organisation brings into the prison, and linking with other providers in Hydebank Wood.
- **Further potential in restorative justice interventions:** the Deputy Director of the Criminal Justice Service agreed in a meeting with Soroptimists that restorative justice disposals for adult offenders may be appropriate for women and would help reduce use of custody. However, this is not in the Department's strategic plan. The PBNI manager of the Inspire project told Soroptimists that she wanted to see a restorative justice option as an alternative to prison. NIACRO commented that judges already have the option to use restorative justice programmes. Inspire can refer women to the Restorative Adult Practices, (RAPs) programme run by Northern Ireland Alternatives (NIA), the government-accredited restorative justice programme. NIA currently has branches in North Belfast, Greater Shankill, East Belfast, South Belfast and North Down. RAPs accept referrals from the Inspire project and cover the area from Coleraine (Co. Derry) down to Bangor (Co. Down) dealing with offences from assault to driving offences and shoplifting. The programme is voluntary and each referral makes a commitment to engage for between four and 12 weeks (longer if required). As well as completing offence-focused work around victim and harm awareness, the programme is holistic and explores reasons for offending and helps the woman make positive changes in her life. These might include education, training and job skills, counselling and volunteering opportunities.

The NIA Restorative Adult Practices programme – a young mum's story¹⁵⁸

A young single mother was referred to the RAPs programme - her offence being theft of a large sum of money from the organisation she worked for.

Through telling her story it emerged that not only was she estranged from her family but also had been in an extremely abusive relationship for a number of years. Her partner was a heavy gambler and relied on her to provide for his addiction. She felt trapped and saw no other way of being able to provide for her young daughter and her partner's addiction except by stealing small sums of money on a regular basis from her place of work. Having received a two-year probation order and agreeing to pay back the money, she engaged in the RAPs programme to explore a more restorative resolution to her actions. After a period of intense preparation both the woman and a representative from the organisation agreed to face-to-face mediation culminating in an emotional, honest and successful meeting for both parties.

Aside from the mediation she linked in with Women's Aid, and completed their Journey to Freedom programme. She also undertook a local floristry class and now volunteers doing floral decorations at various community events. She seems to have completely turned her life around – she is no longer in contact with her ex-partner and is slowly rebuilding relationships with her parents and friends. She described the restorative process as the hardest thing she had ever had to do. Standing in court had been easy in comparison because she felt like a number (very impersonal) but the RAPs programme humanised everything for her and she now fully appreciates the impact of her actions on everyone.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- A legislative vehicle to introduce a 'no real prospect' test should be sought at the earliest opportunity to tackle the overuse of remand for women.
- Drawing on the success of youth conferencing for young offenders in Northern Ireland, a restorative justice order should be developed for use by the courts as an alternative to custody for women.

COUNTRY REPORT - SCOTLAND

When I got told about 218 I just thought it was the same as [another criminal justice voluntary sector service]. This is nothing like that. It's brilliant in here - you do one-to-one meetings and you learn and learn and learn...

Service user, 218 Service Glasgow¹⁵⁹

FACTS

Use and effectiveness of prison and community sentencing

Numbers in prison - In 2013-14 the average daily women's prison population was 431 – most (71%) were held in HMP & YOI Cornton Vale or HMP Edinburgh. Women account for 5.5% of the total prison population in Scotland.¹⁶⁰

Community orders – In 2012-13, 2,638 community sentences were given to females. A further 8,169 females were given a monetary penalty.¹⁶¹

Types of offence – In 2012-13, 37% of women sentenced to prison had committed crimes of dishonesty e.g. shoplifting and fraud. A further 29% were imprisoned for drug offences and crimes against public justice.

Remand - At the end of August 2014, 21% of the female prison population (82 adult women and 10 under-18 year olds) were on remand awaiting trial or sentence.¹⁶² Less than a third (30%) of women imprisoned on remand receive a custodial sentence.

Short sentences - Three-quarters of women sentenced to imprisonment receive sentences of six months or less.¹⁶³

Table 2: Scottish female prison population by home Community Justice Authority

Community Justice Authority	Women and girls in prison	
	7 June 2013 ¹⁶⁴	1 May 2014 ¹⁶⁵
Tayside	36	43
South West Scotland	56	63
Fife & Forth Valley	49	47
Glasgow	77	92
Northern	54	55
Lothian and Borders	52	38
Lanarkshire	55	45
North Strathclyde	40	40
Unknown CJA	22	18
Total	441	441

About women in prison¹⁶⁶

Children - Two-thirds of women in prison in Scotland have children under the age of 18. Since 2008, 38 babies have been born to mothers in HMP & YOI Cornton Vale - 22 of these babies were removed from their mother at birth by the authorities.

Domestic violence - More than half of women (56%) report having witnessed violence between their parents/carers when they were children.

Drug and alcohol addictions - Half of women surveyed in prison said they had been drunk at the time of their offence, a quarter (25%) reported that their drinking affected their ability to hold down a job, and 28% were worried that alcohol would be a problem for them on release. Over half of women surveyed (55%) said they had been under the influence of drugs at the time of their offence, 27% reported committing their offence to get money for drugs and a third (34%) said they were receiving treatment for drug use prior to their imprisonment.

Mental health - 80% of women in prison in HMP & YOI Cornton Vale have a history of mental health problems.¹⁶⁷

Housing - Women are more likely than men to lose their housing while in custody, and then be homeless on release.¹⁶⁸ More than half (57%) of women surveyed were council tenants or living in housing association accommodation and many lost their tenancy as a result of their imprisonment. Nearly half (45%) did not know where they would be living on release.

Employment - Just 39% of women in prison who had accessed services to help them prepare for release had sought advice on employment, and 22% on training.

THE SOROPTIMISTS' INQUIRY IN SCOTLAND

Over 15 Soroptimist clubs in Scotland took part in the inquiry, collecting information through:

- visits to Cornton Vale and Edinburgh prisons
- visits to women's centres including Tomorrow's Women Glasgow
- speakers at club meetings and region meetings
- an action research event organised by SI Kirkcaldy and SI Dunfermline, attended by a number of Soroptimist clubs and expert speakers
- an open meeting organised by SI Greenock, with a presentation by Professor Michele Burman, Department of Criminology Glasgow University
- participating SI members at the launch of the Shine Mentoring Scheme and the Scottish Breaking the Cycle of Re-offending conference
- correspondence between SI members and various agencies
- membership of the Scottish Working Group on Women's Offending
- a national Scottish Soroptimists conference held on 26 April 2014 with speakers including Kate Donegan of the Scottish Prison Service, Maura Daly of Circle Scotland's FABI project, Pete White of Positive Prison? Positive Futures, and Sharon Stirrat of the Scottish Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (Sacro) who spoke about the Shine scheme.

POLICY CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW

Governance and key institutions and services

- Criminal justice in Scotland was devolved in 1998 and is the responsibility of the Scottish government - Michael Matheson MSP is Cabinet Secretary for Justice.
- There is a single police force, Police Scotland, established in April 2013.
- Probation services are known as criminal justice social work services and are delivered by teams working within Scotland's 32 local authorities.
- Area planning and commissioning of criminal justice services is the responsibility of eight regional Community Justice Authorities (CJAs). There are plans to restructure community justice, under which CJAs will be phased out by 2016-17.
- There is one national women's prison in Scotland, HMP & YOI Cornton Vale in Stirling. Women are also held in small units within male prisons in HMP Edinburgh (114 women) and HMP Greenock (50) in the West of Scotland and within Community Integration Units at HMP Grampian (50) in Peterhead, Aberdeenshire and HMP Inverness.
- Community services for women offenders are delivered by a range of local providers.
- The Scottish Prison Health Service became part of NHS Scotland in 2012.

Commission on Women Offenders and Scottish government response

In June 2012 the Commission on Women Offenders, chaired by Dame Elish Angiolini, set out a radical blueprint for reform of the Scottish women's justice system,¹⁶⁹ picking up many of the themes raised in a series of earlier critical examinations of women's justice in Scotland since devolution.¹⁷⁰ The Commission's recommendations were accepted in large part by the Scottish government, which committed itself to a programme of reform involving:

- **Ensuring community based sentences are effective, supporting women's community services**

The Angiolini Commission endorsed a holistic approach to working with women offenders across services by delivering interventions that address their needs and improve the quality of their lives. It recommended the establishment of community justice centres staffed by criminal justice social workers, nurse and addictions workers to support behavioural change. The Commission praised the work of the 218 Centre in Glasgow, the Willow project in Edinburgh, and the practice of Dundee Criminal Justice Social Work (CJSW) women-specific team.

In response, the Scottish government allocated just over £3m to deliver women-centred provision. At the same time the Reducing Reoffending Change Fund (RRCF), worth £18m from 2012-17, with £13.5m from the Scottish government, £500,000 from the Scottish Prison Service and £4m from the Robertson Trust,¹⁷¹ saw the development of Public Social Partnerships (PSPs) in the justice field. PSPs pull together a range of third sector and statutory services.

*(PSPs) allow commissioning-free space to test different approaches, underpinned by a commitment from statutory partners to support future commissioned services based on evidence generated.*¹⁷²

Planning and Development Officer, Glasgow Community Justice Authority

The funding has supported:

- expansion of the Willow Project in Edinburgh
- creation of a new Women's Justice Centre, Tomorrow's Women Glasgow - modelled on Tomorrow's Women Wirral
- continued funding for the 218 Centre in Glasgow
- a new Women's Connections Centre for Aberdeen services for women offenders.
- expansion of Dundee women offenders team to enhance early intervention work and develop guidance on mental health, housing, employment and finance
- new projects in North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, Fife & Forth Valley, Angus, Renfrewshire and Ayrshire/South West Scotland in 2013-14 and 2014-15¹⁷³
- development of a virtual hub in Aberdeenshire and a group work programme in Highland.¹⁷⁴

- **The establishment of mentoring services nationwide**

The Angiolini report recommended that intensive mentoring to support women's compliance with court orders should complement the work delivered by community justice centres. It provides practical support and guidance, progressing to social support via befriending to build women's self confidence, self-esteem and capacity for a productive life.

The Shine mentoring service was launched in September 2013, using £2.7m from the RRCF.¹⁷⁵ The service was designed, and is co-delivered across Scotland, by a Public Social Partnership (PSP) led by Sacro, the Scottish Prison Service, the Association of Directors of Social Work, the eight Community Justice Authorities and a number of other third sector agencies. Initially funded for a two-year period, in 2014 funding was extended to 2017. It is expected to serve 700 women per year.

In addition, the RRCF funds two other mentoring services that will include work with women offenders. Tayside Council on Alcohol has been supported to expand its award-winning mentoring work with women and men in Dundee, Perth and Kinross and Angus. A specialised project in Glasgow run by Includem will support young women offenders to access their intensive outreach and mentoring programme for those who are hard to engage.¹⁷⁶

- **Replacing HMP & YOI Cornton Vale with a national prison for women, and other changes to the prison estate**

The Scottish Prison Service (SPS) is implementing six recommendations in the Angiolini report, aimed at improving responses to the complexities of the female prison population, and in particular those of young women, women with mental health problems, and mothers and their babies; and to accommodate women as close to home as possible. HMP

Inverclyde, a new, custom-built national women's prison with places for up to 350 women, including a community integration unit, is planned to open in 2017. The new prison at HMP Grampian which opened in 2013 has a unit for female offenders including a Community Integration Unit with capacity for 50 women. The intention is that all women and female young offenders remanded or imprisoned from the Northern CJA area will be located in HMP Grampian. A new custom built unit for approximately 100 women and female young offenders is also being constructed at HMP Edinburgh, and will be open in 2017. This will replace the existing accommodation used at HMP Edinburgh to hold women primarily from the east coast of Scotland.

The Scottish government accepted the report's recommendation that most women prisoners on remand or serving short-term sentences should be held in local prisons to improve liaison with local communities and reintegration post-sentence, noting that this reflected the SPS's policy to develop a community-facing regime that gives communities opportunities to engage with offenders before their release.

- **Restructuring community justice**

Scotland has eight Community Justice Authorities (CJAs), devolved public bodies responsible for preparing an area plan for reducing reoffending, allocating funds to local authorities, monitoring performance and promoting good practice.¹⁷⁷ Following a consultation, the government has proposed a new model of community justice. The main features include local strategic planning and service delivery by Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs), with duties on partner bodies such as local authorities, NHS boards and Police Scotland, to engage with this work. A national body, Community Justice Improvement Scotland will provide independent advice to Scottish Ministers. Subject to further consultation, implementation is expected in 2016-17.¹⁷⁸

- **Other reforms**

The Scottish government is implementing reforms in a number of other areas in response to the Commission's report, including piloting new approaches to mental health services for women in the criminal justice system; encouraging the introduction of inter-agency protocols on prison discharge and homelessness; and piloting a scheme to allow women to apply for benefits before release from prison. It has also committed to trialling a problem-solving summary criminal court.¹⁷⁹

KEY THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key themes emerging from the Soroptimists' inquiry included:

- 1 lack of women-specific approaches by police and conflation of gender equality with gender neutrality
- 2 sentencing policy and practice are not conducive to reducing women's imprisonment
- 3 over-use of remand leads to unnecessary imprisonment of women

- 4 detrimental impact of imprisonment on women and families
- 5 women-specific community services are limited in many areas but there are examples of good practice
- 6 support for the community justice centre approach is tempered by concerns about future funding and sustainability of services.

1) Lack of women-specific approaches by police and conflation of gender equality with gender neutrality

Although there is a single national police force, Police Scotland, Soroptimists found a variety of approaches in local practice.

Police in Glasgow reported that police action in response to a woman suspect or offender will be influenced not only by any obvious vulnerabilities such as substance misuse or an incident of domestic violence, but also whether the woman is known to the police officer, by the experience of the police officer and the nature and seriousness of the suspected offence.

Responses from other local police services indicated the lack of a women-specific approach, save for compliance with basic requirements in legislation or guidance.

Glasgow women offenders diversion pilot

A multi-agency partnership involving Police Scotland, Glasgow Criminal Justice Social Work, Community Safety Glasgow and the Crown Office/Procurator Fiscal Service, the Glasgow women offenders pilot was devised to increase the use of diversion for women who are arrested and detained by the police. Following a fast-track screening and planning support service, women who are suitable for diversion are identified in the police report which goes to the Procurator Fiscal. These women receive proactive tailored support to help them to comply with the terms of the pilot. Its aims include increasing the number of women diverted from prosecution; increasing engagement with mainstream services; and reducing reoffending.

Between December 2012-December 2013, 630 cases were referred to the Procurator Fiscal, 93 of whom (79 women) were diverted. During this period, 30 women successfully completed support programmes and avoided prosecution, whilst a further 15 women, who would not ordinarily have been diverted from prosecution, have received support. The response from service users has been positive, whilst outcomes across areas of social support have included reduced addictions, improved housing and reduced offending.

The Scottish government funded the first year of the pilot, with additional funding secured until March 2015. The sustainability of the pilot is under review, and it is hoped that a more long-term approach to funding will be approved. The pilot will be evaluated.

Some responses revealed confusion between gender equality and gender neutrality. Police in Crieff advised that because of the Equality Act all detainees are treated the same regardless of

gender, unless a woman prisoner needs searching, in which case a female officer is required by law. Training for frontline staff covers drug, alcohol and mental health issues, but there is no training or designated local police lead on women.

A Chief Inspector of the Custody Division (Tayside HQ in Dundee) described the police approach to women offenders, indicating that certain requirements will be met, including segregation of male and female wash facilities, and that training equips police officers to deal with individuals who have differing, multiple and complex needs although it is not women-specific. There is a named officer who is the designated lead on women for the police force, but no diversion scheme for women suspects and limited awareness of health, social care and women-only services in the local community.

This response is similar to that provided by police in Fife who reported that anyone suspected of committing a criminal offence is treated in the same way irrespective of gender, and that all police divisions in Scotland conform to the same standards. These include the Human Rights Act and the Code of Ethics for Police Scotland.¹⁸⁰ The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) Joint Protocol on Domestic Abuse¹⁸¹ makes no reference to women as detainees or the connection between domestic abuse and women's offending. Medical guidance is taken into account when determining whether a prisoner should remain in custody. For example, police in Fife would seek to avoid keeping a pregnant woman in custody and would only do so in consultation with the police doctor.

Dunfermline Police Station is piloting a generic service with Fife Alcohol Advisory Service aimed at detainees for whom alcohol is identified as a factor in their offending, who will receive advice and information from a counsellor. This should benefit women.

Police liaison and diversion scheme – NHS Lothian

A generic liaison and diversion scheme in Lothian and Borders has benefits for women. NHS Lothian (Custody Healthcare) reported that currently people taken into custody in Lothian and Borders are assessed by nurses. The specialist nurses assess mental health as well as drug and alcohol issues. They can make assessments about when people are able to be questioned, or leave custody, and can prescribe and treat people for pre-existing medical conditions. They can also do medical forensic examinations such as for sexual assault.

The service has been available in Lothian for eight years and is now nurse-led. Based in St Leonard's Police Station, the busiest in Scotland, the team go out to other stations as required. In the past the police were responsible for healthcare of anyone in custody, but this has now passed to individual health authorities. In the last year the service saw 8,000 people, more than 1,000 of whom were women. NHS Lothian reported that the service is running very well, ensuring that offenders are treated for any health issues at the earliest possible opportunity. It also means that the police do not use custody suites as places of safety as used to be the case.

The Lothian model has been hailed a success and the government is rolling it out throughout Scotland. Lothian has won a contract to form a regional service based on the success experienced in Lothian and Borders and the service is now up and running in Fife and Forth Valley, covering police stations and public protection units in Edinburgh, Livingston, Dalkeith, Hawick, Glenrothes, Kirkcaldy, Dunfermline, Falkirk and Stirling with a team of 24 dedicated nurses and 18 part-time doctors.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Police Scotland should develop force-wide training for all staff, particularly custody suite and frontline officers, which promotes understanding of the need for and legitimacy of a gender-informed approach to working with women offenders. Training should be underpinned by protocols and guidance, making clear the links between experience of domestic abuse and women's offending, and the likelihood that for some victims of domestic abuse, their first contact with the police may be as a suspect/offender.
- Women-specific diversionary approaches, working in conjunction with existing community provision including Community Justice Centres, should be introduced Scotland-wide.
- Following its acceptance of the Angiolini Commission's recommendation,¹⁸² the Scottish government should legislate to enable police to divert women offenders from prosecution and into rehabilitative services as part of a conditional caution. This should be done at the earliest opportunity and before the next election.

2) Sentencing policy and practice are not conducive to reducing women's imprisonment

Some research suggests that sentencing is the fundamental cause of the increasing number of women held in prison, with a trend towards longer sentences.¹⁸³ Sentencing practices are regarded as inconsistent and many feel that women convicted of non-violent, petty offences should not be given custodial sentences.¹⁸⁴ Some consider that equality issues are difficult to address within the current sentencing guidelines, and are concerned that family responsibilities are not taken into account when women are arrested or sentenced.

Where women offend it usually turns out that at some stage they have suffered some type of addiction or abuse. We have failed to grasp that the problems of alcohol and drug dependency are widespread and the effects are wide reaching and expensive, with serious impacts on our society.

Sheriff, Scotland South

One local sheriff commented however that custody is only used when courts have no other option. Discussing cases of benefit fraud, this sheriff gave an example:

Particular care must be taken where women have been caught in the benefits trap. An example is a 30 year old mother with two children, who has been in a violent relationship, just getting by and wants part-time employment which has to be weighed against childcare costs. She gets a part-time job, does not tell the benefits office in case the job does not work out as benefit is usually stopped immediately. The situation continues and eventually she gets caught. Care has to be taken in assessing the amount of benefit actually obtained by fraud. Often in such cases the offender would have been eligible for benefits which she could have claimed but did not as she was waiting to see if the job worked out. In such a case the offender should only properly be sentenced for the net amount of benefit fraudulently obtained. Usually in such cases sentence is deferred and the benefits agencies deduct the overpayment or she pays it back over a period. If she is of good behaviour during this process the result is often that she will be admonished.

Are women given prison sentences as a gateway to access services?

Fife Council Women Offenders' team had concerns that sentencers might be attracted to using custodial sentences as a way of helping vulnerable women access support:

It was cautiously suggested by practitioners in Fife that sometimes sentencers think prison can be a positive experience for women with chaotic lifestyles – can help them get sorted out a bit.

SI Dunfermline/ SI Kirkcaldy

This was reflected in comments from practitioners in Dunfermline and Kirkcaldy¹⁸⁵ and from the Project Executive of the Scottish Prison Service's Women's Offenders Project.¹⁸⁶

Concerns were raised by some that building a state-of-the-art new prison at Inverclyde, as well as the heavy investment in HMP & YOI Cornton Vale and new CIUs, will increase prison capacity for women when research shows that sending women offenders to prison is seldom proportionate or effective (see Rule 58 of the UN Bangkok Rules which calls for the use of diversionary measures and pre-trial and sentencing alternatives where appropriate).¹⁸⁷ There is a risk that sentencers view the prison as a gateway to accessing the specialist support that many women in the criminal justice system need. Coupled with the funding insecurity for many community projects and services, this could lead to an increase in the women's prison population with all the attendant personal, family and social costs.

Action to date emphasises the centring/prioritising of the prison, making it more attractive to sentencers. Without specific guidance/instruction, will sentencing practice change?

Michele Burman, Professor of Criminology at the University of Glasgow

A practitioner in the Highlands, meanwhile, noted that whilst it would offer a centre-of-excellence for women with complex needs, HMP Inverclyde would still lead to women being placed far from home, limiting their capacity to maintain contact with family (particularly

children) and to build good relationships with the local services that would be essential to successful resettlement. It would also hinder relationship-building between women and criminal justice practitioners from their home authority who would struggle to visit them due to time and resource limitations.¹⁸⁸

In response to a question noting the significant investment in developing parts of HMP & YOI Cornton Vale since 2012, the Chief Executive of the SPS commented:

Our current position is that we will close Cornton Vale as we commission the facilities at Inverclyde and Edinburgh. However...a lot of water must flow under the bridge between now and then, and we will keep that plan under review as the months and years roll by.

Failure to use community alternatives

It was agreed by many that sentencers must make themselves aware of the alternatives to prison and utilise them in order to reduce the number of women in prison.¹⁸⁹ Noting that the majority of women in prison are there for non-violent (often theft-related) offences, one local sheriff commented:

As with all offenders, the courts try to deal with first-time shoplifters by way of non-custodial disposals but if the offender will not engage eventually the stage is reached where the public interest requires that such offenders be imprisoned, not least because retailers cannot operate within a fixed cost base if this shoplifting goes unchecked and this activity is allowed to flourish.

Dundee Women Offenders Team – gaining the confidence of sentencers

A local sheriff stated that sheriffs “regard the mentoring scheme as having achieved some stunning results with a number of hard core, apparently immutable, drug-abusing women in their late 20s and early 30s, for whom we otherwise despaired...the team should know how highly we regard this service and how important it has become as having a real impact on re-offending and on changing lives.”

The Women’s Offending Team believes that the sheriffs’ confidence has contributed towards the marked reductions in custody. Case reviews in the Sheriffs Court also appear to have contributed towards improved compliance.

Community agencies, including social work and health, appear to be increasingly working in partnership, and can demonstrate some good practice, but their effectiveness is limited when sentencers do not use, or are unaware of, alternatives to imprisonment.

Restorative Justice Women's Programme, Lanarkshire

The Restorative Justice Women's Programme in Lanarkshire, delivered over a 10-week period, was designed with the aim of offering the courts a credible sentencing option that addresses the needs of women offenders within the community holistically.

Sessions are delivered by partners such as NHS Lanarkshire, which focuses on physical and sexual health, and North Lanarkshire Money Advice Service to address financial issues, debt awareness and budgeting.

Comments from service users include:

"[it has] changed my outlook"

"I think more about how my offending has affected my family life and health"

"the group has helped my confidence."

Lanarkshire CJA reported that the use of community payback orders is increasing as confidence in this relatively new sanction (2011) grows. This may help account for the recent reduction in the number of women in prison from Lanarkshire (see table 2).

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The Scottish government should scale back its proposal to build a new national women's prison at HMP Inverclyde. Much of the cost of building a new prison would be better spent on embedding and expanding community alternatives to custody, and ensuring imprisonment is used as a last resort. If sufficient focus was given to community alternatives, a smaller facility at HMP Inverclyde would be all that is required.
- Community Justice Authorities, in conjunction with Criminal Justice Social Work Services and women-specific service providers, should develop local resources for use by sheriffs and other court users, detailing the availability of local services and alternative sanctions for women offenders.

3) Over-use of remand leads to the unnecessary imprisonment of women

Concerns were raised by many about the high proportion of women remanded in custody who do not go on to serve a custodial sentence (70%). Responding to the Scottish Parliament Justice Committee, the then Cabinet Secretary for Justice said:

Some of the planned services that have come out of the Reducing Reoffending Change Fund have specific plans to enhance provision of bail supervision...In addition, funding is provided to local authorities via the CJA grant allocation for the provision of both bail supervision and information services...

He went on to say:

We are looking to work with the judiciary to ensure that it realises that remanding people is not the best or kindest thing to do...we need to make it clear that other facilities will be available and that judges do not have to resort to remand and all the medication, addiction, housing and other issues that follow and the difficulties that the Prison Service has to cope with. In short, we are taking a multi-agency approach, working with the judiciary and ensuring that support facilities are available in the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The Scottish government should legislate to restrict the use of remand where there is no real prospect of the offender/defendant receiving a custodial sentence on conviction.
- The Judicial Institute for Scotland should review its training for JPs and sheriffs on women in the criminal justice system in accordance with the Angiolini Commission's recommendation.

4) The detrimental impact of imprisonment on women and families

Some observed that to date, most research has been carried out on men in prison, making it difficult to achieve equality for women in the system. Current systems in place do not meet the needs of women offenders, who are dealing with different types of trauma, including abuse and bereavement and/or mental health problems, the effects of domestic violence, childcare and family responsibilities.

Separation from children

The harm that imprisonment causes to prisoners' children has been a major concern for Soroptimists. Separation from a parent, particularly a mother, who is held a long way from home, can be likened to the trauma of bereavement, with children of offenders being more likely to go on to commit crimes themselves. There is also a lack of financial and practical support for family members looking after children with a parent in prison, little understanding of the impact of feelings of shame, and the possibility of bullying. For mothers in prison, separation from children and other family members can lead to the breakdown of potentially supportive relationships.

Families Outside

Families Outside is developing a new Family Impact Assessment form, and advocates that this assessment should be carried out when anyone is arrested, as currently family commitments are not taken into consideration unless the police become aware of a formal child protection issue. Families Outside is in discussion with the Scottish government to ensure that the guidance under development for the Children and Young People's Act 2014 will allow wider scope for such assessments.

Impact on community support and housing

There is a lack of support on release from prison, with many community links broken by the period of absence. Homelessness is a common outcome, as offenders often lose their home when sent to prison. Women coming out of prison may find themselves rehoused in circumstances which put them at risk of reoffending, for example next door to drug dealers.

Distance from home

When held a great distance from home, the detrimental impact of imprisonment on family relationships and community support is exacerbated. Women, as the main carers, lose contact with dependants and, if their children are in care, they may lose custody.

Concerns were raised during this inquiry that women from the more remote parts of Scotland are not well served even with the introduction of regional women's prison units. For example, since the opening of HMP & YOI Grampian in Peterhead, Aberdeenshire in March 2014, most Northern CJA women serving custodial sentences are held in that establishment's women's unit. A small number are held in the Community Integration Unit (CIU) at HMP Inverness. This was established in 2010 for women coming to the end of their sentence who have been assessed as suitable to move to a unit nearer home and family, enabling them to engage with community services.¹⁹⁰ There was some positive feedback about the impact of the CIU, with a local Women's Criminal Justice Manager reporting that it had worked with at least one woman who maintained custody of a child who would otherwise have been put up for adoption. In another case, the service's intervention allowed a woman to maintain a tenancy that was on the cusp of being withdrawn by housing.

However, there were still concerns about how far from home many women from Highland are held. For them, the unit at HMP Grampian in Peterhead, Aberdeenshire, will be little closer to home than HMP & YOI Cornton Vale in Stirling. Travel by public transport to the new prison at HMP Grampian is also more complicated from some areas when compared to travel to Cornton Vale. These concerns also apply for women from other remote parts of Scotland, including the Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland and parts of Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway.

Effects of overcrowding

The overcrowding of the prison environment makes it impossible to deliver effective rehabilitation services. Women with mental health or addiction problems are particularly vulnerable within the prison environment as the high rates of self-harm testify.

Short sentences do not allow for interventions

Shorter sentences do not allow for meaningful interventions to be put in place or for women's complex problems to be addressed.

Lack of support for women attending court from prison

Staff at HMP & YOI Cornton Vale advised that women on remand experience varying support while attending court, including from voluntary organisations, family or friends. It was emphasised that many women had no support, with no formal process in place for them. Some described a postcode lottery determining whether or not a woman received support. If a woman had already been allocated a social worker then she would probably be accompanied to court but this was usually for women who had addiction problems.

Benefits of community alternatives

While there are a number of women in prison for crimes against society that will warrant a custodial sentence, there are a considerable number of women who could be given community payback sentences and an opportunity to repair the damage they have caused. This would perhaps help with the problem of reoffending, keep families together and also save money.

SI member, Scotland

Prison officers commented that many women would benefit more from community service than prison. An example given was of a young mother whose imprisonment meant her husband had to give up work to look after their child. She had no family available to help and because he wasn't working they were having trouble paying their rent. The staff at the prison felt she should not have been there in the first place as her crime didn't warrant a prison sentence and a community service order would have kept her family together.

One woman's comments highlighted another problem with imprisoning women for minor offences: "I was quite innocent and naïve when I came in here two months ago, I am not now."

The conclusion of our research suggests that in Scotland there are too many women being held on remand and too many women given a custodial sentence when community payback would be a better option.

SI Crieff

North Strathclyde CJA – Renfrewshire Women and Children First

The CJA is developing service provision for women leaving prison who have been the victims of abuse including domestic, sexual abuse and/or prostitution. Whilst the Scottish government is looking to develop Centres of Excellence that meet the specific needs of women prisoners, there would appear to be no new or additional money available to local areas for initiatives such as these.

Women and Children First actively participates within the Renfrewshire Gender Based Violence (GBV) Partnership Group facilitating a coordinated, integrated approach to address violence against women and children locally. The Group includes representatives from Police Scotland, Renfrewshire Council Housing, Education and Social Work departments, Greater Glasgow and Clyde CHP and drugs and alcohol teams, third sector organisations such as Barnardos, Renfrewshire Women's Association, Women's Aid and NSPCC.

RECOMMENDATION:

- There should be a presumption against remanding into custody or imprisoning women with dependent children and against use of short sentences, which can lead to loss of housing and employment, in favour of community alternatives where appropriate.

5) Women-specific community services are limited in many areas but there are examples of good practice

Criminal justice social work services

There were many examples of creative, women-specific approaches by local criminal justice social work services. Two examples are given here – Dundee and Fife.

Dundee

According to Dundee City Council, the local Criminal Justice Social Work (CJSW) team “has prioritised the development of services for women and...is...developing integrated approaches towards female offenders engaged in prostitution and/or who are victims of domestic abuse.”¹⁹¹

In the year ending March 2013, 830 men and 208 women had a full Criminal Justice Social Work report done at the Dundee office. Thirty-six women went into custody following a CJSW report. Two hundred and thirteen women underwent community orders.

Dundee Women Offenders Team report that Dundee has “the highest prevalence of female problem drug use and the highest one year re-conviction rate for females in Scotland” and notes, “it is clear that their needs are different to males.”¹⁹²

In Dundee Criminal Justice Services had previously failed to meet the distinct needs of women. The city had a high proportion of problem female drug users, high rates of re-offending, high rates of short-term custodial sentences and low engagement with community sentences. A dedicated and co-located multi-agency team of professionals able to address women’s needs was developed alongside a project plan to integrate the system and has led to marked improvements in engagement rates and positive feedback.

The team consists of social workers, support workers, an NHS Nurse, Tayside Council on Alcohol Mentoring Service and Apex Employability Workers. Links with children’s services are being developed and a new mentoring service has proved particularly important as a method to promote engagement. Mentors visit women at home, accompany them to key appointments, explore alternative behaviours and the potential consequences, motivate and model pro-social attitudes.

Over 60% of women referred by Dundee CJSW to a mentor reported increased confidence:

I’m more aware of consequences of my actions, make better decisions, able to build good relationships, gain trust and can be committed to my work experience.

I’m confident and feel ready to move away from the service.

I’m not drinking as much and not feeling the need to.

I’m not offending and aware I don’t want to offend. More focussed on positive future, attitude and think I have made more effort because of the mentoring service.

The service works with Dundee Women's Community Justice Centre, to which all women are referred. There are no childcare facilities for women on community orders, but the centre will pay for childcare where necessary.

SI members visited East Port House, a 16-bed hostel offering supported accommodation to offenders from across Scotland (although primarily Tayside) as part of a suite of interventions available to address offending behaviour and promote safe and supported resettlement into the community. Four of the beds are for women, with capacity for one mother and baby.

The Dundee Women Offenders Team has reached across traditional working boundaries to create joined-up support for women offenders engaged in prostitution or who are victims of domestic abuse. A drop-in health centre for all client groups appears to have increased the profile of and access to health services. All women sentenced to custody are allocated a support worker whose role is to make contact with them in prison; support them to address issues such as housing and benefits; build and maintain a relationship for the duration of the sentence; and help prepare post-release support. Partnership work with the Scottish Prison Service has been helpful, with joint-planning and review meetings pre-release, advance communication of discharge dates and gate pick-ups immediately on release from prison.

As a result of these changes the service is engaging with women far more effectively. As the table below shows, referrals from the Crown Office Procurator Fiscal Service to formal diversion schemes increased, there was a reduction in the number of women remanded and sentenced to prison, fewer nil reports submitted to the Court as a result of women's failure to attend, and an increase in community sentence completion and resettlement.

With more women engaging, the service has gained the confidence of sentencers who are more inclined to use community alternatives.

Table 3: Outcomes for women, Dundee

	2011-12	2012-13
Diversion	8	13
Remands	69	45
Nil Reports (client failure to attend)	128	115
Custody	51	36
Completion of community sentences	58%	77%
Resettlement	19	36

The service is viewed positively at the Sheriffs Court and feedback from service users has been excellent. It is now being expanded with Scottish government funding. Priorities for the Dundee CJSW women offenders team include the use of Early and Effective Intervention (EEI) processes to provide informal support; further increases in the number of referrals to diversion; the development of an offence-focused programme to address anti-social attitudes; further services including guidance and advice on welfare benefits; mental health assessments and interventions; parenting programmes; and the extension of health services to include dentistry. The service is working with the third sector to develop a more sustainable approach to mentoring as part of RRCF, and Abertay University to develop a qualitative evaluation framework.

Dundee Women's Community Justice Centre

The existing Dundee Women's Community Justice Centre is housed with Social Work Criminal Justice Services in Dundee and offers women-specific interventions. It receives core funding from Criminal Justice Services Dundee for the social workers, social work support workers and one mental health nurse in the women's team. At the time of SI inquiries, this was at risk of reduction, due to restraints on local authorities. Funding from the Scottish government to provide additional multi-agency workers and partners, is secure until April 2015. The centre is collecting outcomes to demonstrate the need for the services it offers and working with partner agencies to look at building capacity.

Women involved with the centre can access the supported accommodation at East Port House if assessed as suitable, whilst NHS services are also offered, including drug treatment in women-only groups or one-to-one, plus women-only groups for alcohol misuse and mental health problems. The centre has two mental health nurses with experience in addictions and offers women-only relapse prevention groups. Social care is available for those with learning disabilities via referral to the Social Work Learning Disability Team, and is available for other health needs via referral to social work services or NHS services if required.

In 2012-13, the centre saw approximately 300 individual women who were on orders. Referrals can be made by the police, procurator fiscal, justice of the peace, Dundee Sheriff Court, High Court and prisons. Most women are referred for shoplifting.

The centre offers the following community orders:

- diversion from court
- community payback orders
- drug treatment and testing orders
- restriction of liberty orders.

Three-quarters (74%) of women complete their order, with 28 women who breached re-sentenced in 2012-13. The one-year reconviction rate for women sentenced in 2010-11 was 31.2%.¹⁹³

Fife

Fife Criminal Justice Service Women's Offender Team is multi-agency, comprising housing, nursing/health service and Sacro and offering women's mentoring services. The team spoke about the national Diversion from Prosecution scheme, which aims to:

- provide a disposal which, due to the personal circumstances of the person, is more satisfactory than prosecution; or
- offer a more effective means to prevent reoffending through early intervention.¹⁹⁴

While the scheme is not confined to women, they are a target group. A 2011 study found a significant variation in the use of diversion across Scotland that could not be accounted for by population size or crime rates. The report recommended that the availability of diversion in local areas should continue to be expanded, along with efforts to encourage reciprocal working relationships between local social work teams and Fiscal offices.¹⁹⁵

Fife women's offender team reported a substantial increase in use of the diversion scheme, from 17 requests for assessment in April-September 2012 to 73 such requests between April-Sept 2013. Women in the scheme are required to complete a 10-12 week programme. They are initially assessed to identify needs relevant to their offending, for example alcohol or other addiction or relationship problems and are given access to counselling, social work and addiction services.

The team asked their service users to complete a questionnaire, with a view to creating a one-stop shop arrangement where women can access the services they need. Childcare was not identified as a significant problem, perhaps because children were already looked after or were being cared for by grandparents or other family.

There are women-only unpaid work squads for Community Payback Orders, as some women reported being uncomfortable working in mixed-sex groups. Individual placements are also available (e.g. in charity shops, market gardens or food banks), which can give women skills for future work. Thirty per cent of their payback hours go into retraining to enhance their employability.

The women's offender team had concerns that sentencers sometimes use custodial sentences as a route to support:

It was cautiously suggested by practitioners in Fife that sometimes sentencers think that prison can be a positive experience for women with chaotic lifestyles – can help them get sorted out a bit.

SI Dunfermline/ SI Kirkcaldy

Regarding housing, and the problem of women losing tenancies if given custodial sentences, the team reported that the Council is restricted by statutory guidelines which affect what housing they can offer. If a tenant is out of a tenancy for a certain time, the tenancy lapses, but Fife is very proactive about re-housing women. There are a small number of houses for women in this situation, and Fife supplies a car to pick women up at the prison gate and take them to

their new (shared) accommodation. Benefits are also a barrier to resettlement, as there is no central point of contact to co-ordinate payments. It is hoped that bringing benefit officers into HMP & YOI Cornton Vale will begin to address this.

Other examples of approaches by criminal justice social work services include the following:

- Stirling CJSW service has a dedicated women's worker who offers support through the prison gate, as well as to women finding it difficult to comply with their community order. It has close links with housing, the Benefits Agency and CAB.
- Scottish Borders have worked closely with partner agencies to develop a holistic programme for women for whom offending behaviour is or has been an issue. Over 12 weeks, the programme aims to increase participants' self-belief, sense of control and self-determination. The Almond Project is hosted within the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault Team, which encourages links across health and social work, as well as other support services in the statutory and voluntary sectors to provide a support package for women offenders.
- in North Lanarkshire, the Head of Social Work Services commented:

*While we are...unable to run projects such as Willow or 218 within North Lanarkshire Council Justice Services, we recognise the impact for women involved in the criminal justice system and despite the lack of any additional funding, we have been proactive in developing and establishing programmes which address some of the areas of need specifically for women.*¹⁹⁶

- South Lanarkshire CJSW service has developed a group work programme that addresses some of the unique problems experienced by women offenders. The programme runs over 10 weeks, with weekly 4-hour sessions, and is delivered during school hours by dedicated female facilitators, treatment and programme managers. It includes input from other agencies and addresses self-esteem and confidence, personal goals, anger awareness, offending behaviour, relationships, finances, substance misuse, employment and health.
- the Lanarkshire POP, funded through Lanarkshire Alcohol and Drug Partnership, works with the most persistent offenders within North and South Lanarkshire. This project targets those committing offences because of their dependency on drugs, alcohol or other substances. Since June 2012 only a small minority of referrals have been women (five women and 35 men). North Lanarkshire area became operational in January 2013 and has processed 21 referrals – though only one woman.
- integrated case management systems (ICMs) are also generally available in Lanarkshire. ICMs entail a holistic case conference approach that takes into account, for example: addictions; learning skills and employability and housing.

Members of SI West Lothian were told that agencies would like to achieve:

- better community support
- links to meaningful employment
- changing attitudes e.g. public perceptions of women offenders and employers attitudes to employing them.

Health and social care

It is clear that whilst there is an understanding that change is essential there are concerns over the long term viability of some on-going initiatives in the area and of multi-agency working long term. The information from NHS Lanarkshire shows...an attempt at providing joined-up services for women in general with an acknowledgement that women offenders may have specific needs.

SI Hamilton

Mental health provision

Soroptimists found little or no women-specific provision for women with mental health problems leaving prison, although there is good liaison with Community Mental Health Teams and Drug and Alcohol Teams. The Mental Health Team at HMP & YOI Cornton Vale advised that if a prisoner became acutely mentally ill they would be transferred to Stobhill Hospital, Orchard Clinic or Gartnavel Hospital in Glasgow. Criminal Justice Services in Perth were unaware of any women-specific mental health provision, but spoke about the benefits of the local Shine women's mentoring service, a more general well-being service for women. SI members felt that the lack of women-specific services for those leaving prison did little to address the problem of reoffending.

ENeRGI provides mental health support workers in North East Fife, Levenmouth and St Andrews. Their Housing Support Service covers the East Neuk and Leven only. There are no other similar services in North East Fife. The service is open five days a week at drop-in centres and through outreach and housing support. Police, social workers, community psychiatric nurses and other agencies can all refer women involved in minor offending. Self-referral is also available. ENeRGI offers Community Payback Order placements but also tries to support women with other aspects of their lives that are often related to their offending behaviour. As transport is a real problem for women in the East Neuk, ENeRGI can assist with transport and accessing services. They have a phone and internet access and also do home visits if required.

ENeRGI are interested in developing a network to assist women to move forward, citing evidence that a peer support model is effective. They could provide the training and support required, as well as more benefits advice, assistance with gas/electricity to add to emergency/crisis support already in place. Provision for training, volunteering and employment opportunities for women is constrained by limited financial resources.

The service commented further:

The one-stop shop in Leven is in the development stage. We are keen to assist in whatever way we can. They have requested...a weekly benefits advice session.

NHS Fife

Work with mentally disordered offenders is ongoing and NHS Fife operates a Court Liaison scheme, which identifies such offenders early in the criminal justice process and diverts them to NHS treatment. However, NHS Fife reported that they do not have a strategy for working with

women offenders and there is nothing in place to identify and respond to the mental health needs of women offenders and ensuring that prison is not used as a gateway to support.

NHS Lanarkshire

NHS Lanarkshire explained that while they did not have a designated lead on women they have an executive lead director and gender-based violence manager advising the Board on good practice in this area. North Lanarkshire Council justice services have commissioned services for women leaving prison as part of their health and homeless service. NHS Lanarkshire provides social care for various health needs. The Alcohol and Drug Services commissioning guidelines are inclusive of women offenders and services are provided to help meet their needs. An assessment and planning process is in place with Criminal Justice Services to assist women offenders to achieve better outcomes.

For women aged 16 and above who have experienced abuse (including women offenders and those at risk of offending) NHS Lanarkshire has a specialist service called EVA (Ending Violence and Abuse) offering advocacy and therapy from a woman-centred perspective. They also work with women with learning disabilities, linking with other services as required. Alcohol and drug services work closely with learning disability services to provide social care. They provide training, consultancy and operational guidance to NHS Lanarkshire and partner agencies.

A women-only group for drug addiction is provided in South Lanarkshire, based in the Hamilton area. Women's groups are provided by NHS Lanarkshire's mental health services, where a particular need is identified. This includes groups delivered by occupational therapists for women with severe and/or enduring mental health problems.

Learning disability services work to improve the health and wellbeing of adults with a learning disability, reduce health inequalities and discrimination and increase the opportunity for affected adults to lead independent, fulfilling lives. Programmes in place include parenting, pregnancy, communication and active therapy. Elements of social care are also interwoven in service delivery for women who have experienced gender-based violence.

Circle has been working in Lanarkshire since January 2004, providing support in schools to families affected by parental substance misuse, early years work and to Families Affected by Imprisonment (FABI). In 2008, the FABI team began supporting women with children who were returning to Lanarkshire from HMP & YOI Cornton Vale. FABI work with women and men to secure outcomes including improved literacy, improved physical and mental health and reduced or stabilised substance misuse.

The women's support worker in Lanarkshire received PSP funding for two years. Four staff work with mums and dads affected by imprisonment returning to Lanarkshire.

...through all the many ups and downs of women with a chaotic lifestyle e.g. debt, housing problems, benefits mix-ups, family relationships etc, the mentor sticks with them - quick fixes don't work.

SI Stirling

Sacro – women’s mentoring services

Lanarkshire CJA reported that Sacro provided two women-only mentoring services. The local authority-funded service is voluntary, offered to women and girls aged 16 and above within the criminal justice system who want support to change. Referrals can be taken from many sources including criminal justice social work teams, addiction staff and women themselves. Mentors work with service users one-to-one, helping them to engage with statutory services, build self-esteem and improve social relationships, taking a holistic approach to improve lifestyles and reduce offending. Group work is also offered. The service has capacity to work with 50 women each year. The other service is Shine Women’s Mentoring Service (see page 72).

Shine women’s mentoring service - Kay’s story¹⁹⁷

Kay (not her real name) was in prison when she was referred to Shine after expressing a desire for support to turn her life around. She was due to be homeless on release. The Shine mentor arranged an interview at the local authority housing office to organise temporary accommodation. During the interview, communication between Kay and the housing office began to break down when she was told she was not eligible for accommodation. The mentor facilitated dialogue between Kay and the housing office, working with the homeless officer to secure local supported accommodation. Kay was also enrolled in a 12-week programme to help prepare for her own home in the future, and learn the skills she would need to successfully maintain this. When the accommodation proved unsuitable for Kay’s needs, the Shine champion secured a place in other local supported accommodation which provided the person-centred approach that Kay needed.

This was to be the pivotal change for Kay. She began to listen to those around her, made plans for the future and looked at how she might change certain elements of her life. She included her mentor more and more in this planning as the relationship and trust grew. On her mentor’s recommendation, Kay secured a place on the Venture Trust’s five-day personal development programme. She also re-established contact with her daughter through social workers and was granted supervised visits. The Shine mentor credited this to Kay’s hard work, to which Kay replied, “it is all down to you and you believing in me.”

Her mentor believes that being treated in a non-judgmental way, and given the chance to change and be supported with the choices she makes, has been key to Kay moving away from a life of offending and believing in the rewards of leading a positive life. While life can be hard, Kay firmly believes that taking the time to do things slowly and thoroughly and working on her issues one at a time has helped change her life.

Rural provision remains a challenge

A number of projects and services described in this report show how service providers are seeking to meet the challenge of effective service delivery to women in large, sparsely populated, rural areas. These include the Shine mentoring service in the Northern CJA, where training is being offered to local services in the remote parts of Scotland where the PSP partners do not have branches, as well as the development of Aberdeenshire’s virtual hub and the use of a women’s social worker in Highland.

Meeting the challenge of rural coverage

The national Sacro-led Shine women's mentoring service offers support to women who have patterns of behaviour that land them in the criminal justice system. For those who are imprisoned the aim is for the mentor to begin work inside the prison and continue on release into the community. The service is aimed at women who have served short sentences, or are at risk of breaching Community Payback Orders.

In the Northern CJA area, two specialist mentors employed by Turning Point Scotland and Apex Scotland deliver Shine. Where the partners in the PSP do not have operating bases, such as the Islands authorities and remoter parts of Scotland, part of the women's PSP bid was for funding to provide mentoring training for local service delivery. For example, a local third sector agency in Shetland could train staff in mentoring vulnerable women who would thereafter be able to provide such a service locally.¹⁹⁸

RECOMMENDATION:

- Local authorities should ensure their Criminal Justice Social Work Service provides women-specific services. In rural communities, virtual hubs or mobile outreach services should be developed.

6) Support for the community justice centre approach is tempered by concerns about future funding and sustainability of services

Members of the expert panel at the meeting held by SI Kirkcaldy and SI Dunfermline in February 2014 were amongst many others in expressing strong support for the community justice centre model as the norm for women who commit non-violent offences. They noted the key benefits as:

- a community one-stop shop co-ordinated approach to help reduce re-offending
- holistic approach to meet the needs of individual women
- organisations working together in partnership especially NHS with other agencies
- programme of core services in place, sharing information, ("tell the story once")
- all services in one place, more chance of women keeping appointments
- helping offenders develop new skills (to increase chances of employment)
- development of community links (to help reduce isolation)
- peer support for offenders (opportunity to develop relationships).

Several good practice examples of one-stop shop services currently operating in Scotland are featured in this section. A concern running throughout the responses received by Soroptimists from service providers was the short-term nature of their funding and how they will be sustained after funding ends in March 2015.

Speaking to the Scottish Parliament's Justice Committee about the government's commitment to community provision for women, the head of the Scottish government's Rehabilitation and Reintegration unit, said:

*We know that women and indeed others go round and round the system a number of times until they are ready to make the sometimes very difficult change that will ultimately result in them reducing their reoffending and perhaps leading a life free of crime. Initially, the partners will be the traditional ones that you would envisage, such as criminal justice social workers, third sector partners, health workers and addiction workers, but ultimately we aim to involve procurators fiscal, police colleagues, Prison Service colleagues, housing colleagues and anyone else who has an interest in ensuring that we can help women to turn their lives around.*¹⁹⁹

However, concerns were raised with Soroptimists during their inquiry and by the Committee about short-term funding for women's services. The then Cabinet Secretary for Justice, stated:

Reflecting the Commission's view that it should be possible to deliver an improved service through the more effective use of existing resources, it is expected that where these new developments prove their effectiveness, participating agencies and local stakeholders will ensure that they are sustained.

Scottish Working Group on Women's Offending

Concerns about the sustainability of women's projects are shared by the Scottish Working Group on Women's Offending (SWGWO). Established in early 2011, SWGWO comprises organisations and individuals engaged with addressing women's offending in Scotland. The group wishes to see true equality for all women across the criminal justice system, and to sharpen the focus of policymakers on those women with mental health and learning disabilities and women from a background of sexual abuse, addiction and substance misuse, as well as support for their families.²⁰⁰ The group has commented:

Whilst the national mentoring project Shine will get a further 2 years funding beyond its initial end date, there will still be a sustainability challenge for the smaller projects, which were funded on a one-off basis (12-18 months funding). SWGWO is concerned that when much of this funding expires in March 2015, many excellent projects will be discontinued. Many projects have and are indeed continuing to provide a solid evidence base of what works in supporting female offenders. However, the pressures on budgets locally and nationally as well as the fact that changes to the delivery structures for criminal justice services will not come on stream until 2016 may result in a gap in funding. Many good projects may be lost and the services for female offenders will suffer.

The manager of justice services for North Lanarkshire Council believed that three-year funding would help, as this would ensure the retention of staff who have gained particular expertise in engaging with women offenders and secure links with the third sector.

Tomorrow's Women Glasgow

Tomorrow's Women Glasgow, a community justice centre, is a new holistic service supported by Scottish government funding. Modelled on Tomorrow's Women Wirral, the centre opened to women offenders in December 2013. One of the principal aims is to prevent women reoffending and to divert women from custody. By June 2014 they had 100 clients on their books.

Located in the Gorbals area of Glasgow, staff at the centre include a psychologist, two criminal justice social workers, two social care workers, two mental health nurses, one secondee from the Scottish Prison Service, one from Glasgow Housing Association and a manager. The premises are not custom made but are part of a complex housing other services which SI members thought was helpful as it is not easily identified as a women's centre. Referrals are made by Criminal Justice Social Workers, the Scottish Prison Service and, recently, by Sheriffs as they become aware of the services provided. A small number of referrals are made by other agencies working in wider criminal justice services.

Government funding for the centre is time-limited for 18 months which does not allow much time to set up, develop and monitor the services provided, although the number of clients seen to date offers proof of the need for such services.

Although we are described as a centre much of the work done isn't here. A lot is chasing women. We know that the women don't turn up for appointments. We go and knock on doors and we don't stop until we get them. We will support them wherever they are, whether that is in hospital or prison.

Tomorrow's Women service manager²⁰¹

In relation to the Reducing Reoffending Change Fund (RRCF), the Deputy Director of the Scottish government's community justice division, explained:

The point of the Change fund is to leverage money from lots of partners and not just the community justice budget; it is an innovative way of bringing in new funding. We challenge the partnerships that are delivering projects to continue to deliver the utility of what the PSPs are delivering in the two years, so they can find ways of convincing other mainstream funders to continue to support the mentoring projects thereafter.

I am suggesting that the Change Fund acts as something of a catalyst. It provides a new way of bringing together money, but that is not intended to be for a sustained period. The worth of a project is demonstrated through the Change Fund mechanism, after which mainstream funding sources are expected to pick up and sustain the project.

The then Cabinet Secretary for Justice, added:

The Reducing Reoffending Change Fund is intended to ensure that we see what works and mainstream it. I give my assurance that the last thing that we want is for the projects to just come to an end, especially if they are working.

Many agencies in the Stirling area commented that short term funding isn't the answer. They noted that there is a good track record of knowing what works, including support for mental health and addiction problems and the provision of ongoing support.

It was also noted that it can be difficult for government agencies like the Scottish Prison Service, the Community Justice Authorities and Police Scotland to obtain sustained funding for initiatives for women offenders when they are constantly being asked to make savings and/or being reorganised.

Creative response to the sustainability challenge and concerns about 'dilution' of the model

A number of services profiled in this report are adopting creative strategies to deliver women-specific provision with limited resources, and to make this sustainable in the face of uncertain future core funding from the government. These include Aberdeenshire's virtual hub and Highland's women's social worker, embedded in the substance misuse service. While it is hoped that the strategies to achieve sustainability adopted by these services are successful, this is bound to be a real challenge.

Three new women's centres in Fife

With Scottish government funding, three new women's one-stop shops have been set up in Fife - Dunfermline, Methil and Cupar - where previously there were none. At a meeting hosted by SI St Andrews & District in October 2013, the Chief Officer of Fife and Forth Valley CJA, and Convenor of the Scottish Working Group on Women's Offending, noted that challenges include sustainability, given the short-term nature of the funding, the risk of net-widening, the difficulties of tackling the over-use of remand and custodial sentences, and challenging public perceptions of women offenders.

A concern raised by the SWGWO was that, in some cases, services being set up with the new funding are a diluted version of the models recommended in the Angiolini report:

We are concerned that many longer standing projects with a robust evidence base are not being replicated effectively across Scotland. Instead they are being implemented in a diluted form, which will not provide as effective support for female offenders as the original pilot schemes.

There is some evidence to suggest that new services are being co-located with generic services and employing male staff. One problem is the lack of premises or multi-agency shared location for some services. Giving evidence to the Scottish Parliament Justice Committee in November 2013, the Chief Executive of Sacro said:

I recognise that it might not be possible to have shared locations throughout Scotland, but where it is possible that is undoubtedly the right way to do things. We know that from our experience of the Willow Project.²⁰²

The 218 Service – Glasgow

The 218 Service is a Turning Point Scotland initiative that takes a person-centred approach in dealing with the problems women offenders face. The programme of work at 218 is designed to address problems with substance use, physical and mental health and other social needs including housing and childcare. The service deals primarily with women aged 18 and over who are involved in the criminal justice system, with a range of complex needs such as addiction, poor mental or physical health and trauma.

The 218 Service has a 12 bed residential unit and a day service programme providing a range of compulsory and optional group work sessions and one-to-one support. Women can access a clinic which deals with mental and physical health needs, a dietician, chiropodist, dentist, doctors and nurses.

My journey began in the crisis centre, then the past 5½ months have been in the 218 project for women. I have received group therapy to build me back up and I return to my community in 3 weeks. I don't know what lies ahead and can only continue to hope and pray. The main lesson is that I had to learn to live with and love the one person I can't get away from – me.

The staff are wonderful. They don't judge...I was told it was a service for women to rebuild their lives...I came to see 218 on the advice of the sheriff...[it] has been a valuable project in my life and I would recommend it to anyone. If you get the chance to go...take it 'cos it does improve your life...It's a fabulous thing changing your life around.

I've been wanting to do this for years...if I didn't come to 218, I'd still be mad wae coke, shoplifting everyday, this has just changed me. I wish I'd got this 10 years ago...it just came at the right time. I've got my new house, my front and back door, my grandson, and then 218 came into my life, those three things came into my life, and I said 'right enoughts enough'. I really believe I'd be still doing what I was doing if I wasn't here'.

Service users, 218 service Glasgow²⁰³

Aberdeen City Council Criminal Justice Social Work Service delivers the Connections programme, developed locally in response to the need to engage with women in different ways, with the overall aim of reducing the risk of reoffending. The Scottish government allocated 18-months funding to develop a Women's Connections Centre in Aberdeen city centre to extend the work that is already being done; two further bids for 12-month funding for the Aberdeenshire and Highland areas were also successful.

Aberdeenshire's virtual hub - strategy to achieve sustainability

As the geographical spread of Aberdeenshire does not lend itself to the establishment of a community justice centre, funding (£61,697) was awarded for delivery via a virtual hub, a structured network of practitioners across agencies and disciplines that allows a wrap-around, holistic, responsive, needs-led approach. The funding will be used to create a coordinator post with administrative support, and, through training and development of staff across Aberdeenshire's Criminal Justice Social Work Service and partners, embed the changes.

The aim is to concentrate on doing things differently rather than necessarily doing more, achieving better use of existing resources by improved targeting, better joint work, more effective practice and pooling of multi-agency resources. It is anticipated that this new model will be largely cost neutral and therefore viable in the long term.²⁰⁴

Highland - making use of existing structures to provide new women-specific services

Highland has implemented a revised model of delivering services to women offenders as part of a new substance misuse team. This includes the establishment of a dedicated women's social worker post to work exclusively with women subject to statutory supervision.

Highland was awarded funding (£23,000) to deliver a group work programme, in partnership with the Woodland Trust (at Abriachan) and Apex. This forms part of a package of interventions that can be offered to women offenders. The funding has also helped sustain a women's social worker post, which is part-funded by Northern CJA Section 27 funding and, in 2013-14, by one-off funding of £15,000 from Highland Council.

The short and medium-term outcomes of the programme will be particularly important – for example, increased problem-solving skills and increasing the number of women engaging with services – as longer term outcomes such as reducing reoffending will not be evidenced within the lifespan of the funding.

In terms of sustainability, Highland Criminal Justice Social Work Service has identified possible savings within its business support structure that would sustain the group-work programme with the Woodland Trust beyond 2014-15, and, assuming the continued £30,000 annual contribution from the Northern CJA, the social worker post too.²⁰⁵

OWLS Project – service provision on a shoestring

The One-Stop Women's Learning Service (OWLS) in Perth, a multi-agency women-specific community service, is provided at three sites. It was initially funded by Police and Fire Reserves Funding but is now managed through existing resources. The service runs on a part-time basis: appointments with core services are available on Thursday mornings, group work programmes on Thursday mornings and Friday afternoons, and a drop-in facility with core services on Tuesday afternoons.

There is an urgent need for a secure, permanent place for the women to work in, which could improve the effectiveness of the mentoring and support they receive, allowing women to be involved with running the centre, influence when it opens and the services it provides.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Following the extension of funding for the Reducing Reoffending Change Fund (RRCF) to 2017, the government should undertake an audit of funding for other services for women offenders with a view to providing ring-fenced funding, on a three-year basis, to ensure their sustainability beyond March 2015.
- Where a service model has a robust evidence base for reducing women's reoffending and achieving positive outcomes for women and their families, this success should not be jeopardised by 'diluting the model'.

ANNEX 1 - SUMMARY OF CLUB ACTIVITIES

ENGLAND

Local and regional SI events

SI England and the Prison Reform Trust held a Parliamentary reception in the House of Commons on 25 April 2013 to mark the publication of the Action Pack to Reduce Women's Imprisonment. Soroptimists representing clubs across the country attended and speakers included Lord Woolf (Prison Reform Trust chair), Jan Hemlin (then Soroptimist UKPAC chair), Juliet Lyon CBE (Prison Reform Trust director), Lord McNally, (then Minister of State for Justice and Deputy Leader in the House of Lords) and Baroness Kennedy of the Shaws QC, FRSA.

SIs Midland Chase and Midland Arden held a joint Action Research meeting in November 2013 attended by Yvonne Mosquito, Deputy PCC for the West Midlands; Barbara Sykes JP, a magistrate at Dudley Courthouse; Joy Doal, Chief Executive Officer of Anawim women's centre, Birmingham; Sara Ward of Sandwell Women's Aid; Vanessa Francis, Probation Officer for the Mariposa Project at Sandwell Women's Aid; Adele Brown, Probation Officer (Women's Champion) Staffordshire and West Midlands Probation Trust; Councillor Yvonne Davies, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care at Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council.

SI Southern England held a morning conference on 21 March 2014 exploring the impact of women's imprisonment and the alternatives. There were three speakers:

- a member of HMP Send Family Link who explained their work and the impact of imprisonment, particularly on children, the wider family, and their future
- a speaker from Women's Wisdom talking about the work the charity has undertaken with women offenders both in the community and pre-release in prison
- Mitch Egan CB spoke on behalf of the Women's Justice Taskforce.

SI Bristol held a conference Reducing Women's Imprisonment – Diverting Women from Custody on 9 September 2013 which aimed to:

- raise awareness of what is available for non-violent women in Bristol caught up or at risk of being caught up in the criminal justice system to divert them from custody and to serve their sentence in the community
- raise awareness of how sentencers come to their decisions
- ask those who can influence change to support the Soroptimists' project and increase the number of women's centres and bail hostels to allow more women to serve their sentence in the community.

There were 140 delegates registered including Soroptimists from ten clubs, judges, magistrates, NHS England, Bristol City Council Health Scrutiny Committee members, Bristol dignitaries, health care and criminal justice professionals and others. Bristol SI members were pleased that this event helped to raise awareness of the need for more women's centres and bail hostels in the area, and more female accommodation has since become available. Local MPs are looking

at the state of vulnerable women in the criminal justice system. People in Bristol are still talking by email, in person, and in the media about what the Soroptimists are trying to achieve. Delegates found the conference stimulating and invaluable. The conference gained extensive local media coverage.

Clubs within **SI North West England** held a number of awareness-raising events, involving speakers including a former governor of a women's prison, Juliet Lyon of the Prison Reform Trust, Maureen Thompson from Tomorrow's Women Wirral and service users.

SI Canterbury, Folkestone and Ashford held a focus group on 27 February 2014 attended by representatives from the police, magistrates, probation, prison, local authority, housing, health and mental health services and voluntary sector.

Lobbying

Some Soroptimist clubs wrote to their local MPs about the campaign, to raise awareness and obtain information. As a result, MPs wrote to ministers about the Soroptimists' concerns and replies were received from Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Danny Alexander MP, the Secretary of State for Justice, The Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP and the successive Justice Ministers with responsibility for women in the criminal justice system, Helen Grant MP, The Rt Hon Lord McNally and The Rt Hon Simon Hughes MP.

Supporting local services

A number of SI clubs were already involved in supporting local services for vulnerable women, including volunteering and fundraising. More activity is planned or underway, including:

- in **Heswall (Wirral)**, 21 Soroptimists volunteer at Tomorrow's Women Wirral, two are part of the conditional cautioning process and Maureen Thompson of SI Heswall is the chair of the Board
- **SI Norwich** members volunteer at The 4 Women Centre in Norwich, including teaching knitting skills and donating wool and thread or other materials which are being used by the women to make things to use or sell
- **SI Derby** members are currently working with their local probation service to offer bi-monthly one-stop shops with a variety of agencies attending and the Soroptimists hosting and providing refreshments. It is planned that this will lead to some mentoring work. SI Derby also puts on a number of courses at the local women's centres around confidence building and back-to-work activities, and are liaising with probation to see if there are courses they can put on for women on probation
- funding from the **SI Bradford club** has enabled Together Women (TWP) to employ a Parenting and Childcare Development Worker at the Bradford Centre and Family Resettlement Worker at New Hall Women's Prison. The project will provide childcare

while mothers access the centre's services, and deliver a special programme to help disadvantaged mums improve their parenting skills. It will also deliver specialist support to women in prison to help them maintain contact with their families²⁰⁶

- Soroptimists help out at the **Nottingham Women's Centre** Job Club and have raised funds for specific purposes at the centre - two Soroptimists are on the centre's board
- following a talk at a Regional Council Meeting by Canon Jane Clay about her work as chaplain in HMP New Hall and HMP Askham Grange, **Yorkshire Soroptimists** decided to donate good quality clothing for the charity shops within the prisons. Collections will be made at regional meetings over the coming years and taken to the prisons by the SI volunteers who offer their service, skills and time. Toiletries and other essentials such as sleeping bags and coats will be donated for the vulnerable women who attend the Tomorrow's Women Wirral Service and other local women's centres
- **SI Swindon** members are visiting the new Swindon Isis Women's Centre to see how they may be of help. They hope that lobbying will help persuade the government to make more funding available not only to increase the services available at the centre but also to make outreach services available throughout Wiltshire
- Soroptimists in **South East England** made donations to Brighton Women's Centre and Tunbridge Wells Women's Refuge and are offering ongoing support. SI Canterbury, Folkestone and Ashford have made a donation towards IT equipment to Rebuilders, a Kent-based organisation supporting vulnerable women with convictions find employment and accommodation. They are in active discussions with the probation service regarding contributing creative sessions to the women's probation groups, and one-on-one mentoring to support women on probation
- **SI Manchester** members are in regular contact with Community Outreach staff at Styal Prison. Facilities at the prison include an unused large workshop, which has all the facilities to provide meaningful employment for the women. They are appealing for the wider business community to consider setting up a business venture in partnership with the prison. SI members have agreed to promote this locally
- members of **SI Bristol** are Trustees of Eden House Women's Centre and others volunteer there
- **SI Southampton** members are volunteering to help Women's Wisdom and to raise funds for them
- **SI Greater London** has made donations to The Wise Project and supported many charitable events. SI members will be volunteering as mentors and befrienders for women released from prison.

WALES

SI Wales and the Prison Reform Trust held a reception in the Pierhead Building in Cardiff Bay on 15 May 2013 to mark the publication of the Action Pack to Reduce Women's Imprisonment. Soroptimists representing clubs across the country attended and speakers included Jane Hutt AM (Vale of Glamorgan), Professor Mike Maguire (University of Glamorgan), Jan Hemlin (then UKPAC chair), Jenny Earle and Juliet Lyon CBE, (Prison Reform Trust).

SI Wales South held an Action Research meeting on 8 December 2013 which was attended by all 19 SI clubs in South Wales as well as Wendy Hyett, project manager of IOM Cymru, and representatives from women's centres (Hafan Cymru, Changing Lives and Gibran) and magistrates.

At the invitation of the IOM Cymru team, **SI Wales South** members participated in the Women's Pathfinder Project Workshop (9 December 2013) and the Women Offenders Executive Summit (27 March 2014). In addition, Soroptimists were represented at the launch of the Criminal Justice Liaison Services (CJLS) Policy Implementation Guidance²⁰⁷ (27 November 2013) and a symposium on Transforming Rehabilitation (17 December 2013).

Some clubs in Wales South received presentations from third sector organisations involved with offenders in their localities and Clive Chatterton, a former women's prison governor.

NORTHERN IRELAND

The **SINI** working group received positive and constructive responses from all the organisations and individuals contacted, with some indicating that ongoing support/collaboration from SINI would be welcome (e.g. NIACRO). The working group intend to recommend to SINI that further work is done, including follow through with other voluntary sector organisations working with women offenders (e.g. Barnardo's, Extern, women's centres), with whom contact has already been established but where there has not been sufficient time to follow through. A specific project may then be identified.

SCOTLAND

SI Scotland and the Prison Reform Trust held a reception in the Scottish Parliament on 12 June 2013 to mark the publication of the Action Pack to Reduce Women's Imprisonment. Soroptimists representing clubs across the country attended and speakers included Kenny MacAskill MSP (then Cabinet Secretary for Justice); Rhoda Grant MSP (Highlands and Islands); Sarah Roberts (Families Outside); Wendy Spencer (218/Turning Point); Jan Hemlin (UKPAC); Juliet Lyon (Prison Reform Trust).

The Scottish Working Group on Women's Offending (SWGWO) has been immensely supportive of the Soroptimists' project. Anne Pinkman, the chair of this group, has invited a UKPAC representative to attend the group to represent Soroptimists, and coordinated production and circulation of a leaflet²⁰⁸ providing statistics on women in the criminal justice system in Scotland.

National conference, April 2014

A national conference was jointly held by SI Scotland North and Scotland South.

Fife open meeting, February 2014

SI Kirkcaldy and SI Dunfermline held a joint open meeting on 24 February 2014 with speakers including:

- Baroness Linklater of Butterstone
- Dan Gunn, retired Director of Operations Scottish Prison Service
- Angela Simpson, Women Offenders Team, Fife Council
- Colette Wormleighton, the Willow Project, Edinburgh
- Jacky Close, Families Outside, Dundee
- Lyn Herbert, Solicitor (Chair).

A UKPAC representative represented Soroptimists at a meeting organised by the **Robertson Trust**. This follows on from the discussions Soroptimists had with the Trust about their plans to develop community-based centres in Scotland to support vulnerable women, girls and families. Discussion covered:

- the existing landscape in Scotland in terms of the support currently available for vulnerable women, girls and families
- any particular challenges/issues that vulnerable women, girls and families experience
- gaps in services for these groups and any opportunities to build on existing community-based approaches to supporting them
- whether there are any particular communities where there is the need, appetite and capacity to develop a community-based centre.

Members of **SI Glasgow City** have agreed to support Tomorrow's Women Glasgow through an initial two-year funded project with supplies for the centre's daily breakfast service. The club's charities fund will also provide regular monies to TWG as an emergency fund for the service users.

SI Glasgow City members would like to explore the content of information and education related specifically to women offenders which is provided to Scottish magistrates, sheriffs and Justice of the Peace officers. Initial approaches to educational establishments are in process. This could lead to advocacy work by club members depending on the information received and analysed.

SI Perth is looking at how Soroptimists can support the work of OWLS (One-stop Women's Learning Service). There are volunteering opportunities for members to be involved with the various activities and group work.

SI Stirling will support the HMP & YOI Cornton Vale family hub until the prison closes in 2018, and will encourage other local groups such as Rotary to do so as well. In April 2014, SI Stirling were invited to give a presentation on women in prison to a local Rotary Club.

SI Crieff have supported HMP & YOI Cornton Vale since 2009-10, visiting prisoners and staff and providing much-needed equipment, including: toys for the family unit; cots and sensory equipment for the mother and baby unit; and sanitary wares and toiletries for women on remand.

SI clubs in **Scotland North**, led by region chair Billie Wealleans, attend the Cross Party group on Children and Families affected by Imprisonment, convened by Mary Fee MSP.²⁰⁹

There is an appetite in a number of clubs across Scotland to continue to work in this area.

REGION CHAIRS AND OFFICERS OF UKPAC October 2013-October 2014

ROLE	NAME
Chair	Jan Hemlin
Vice Chair (South Lancashire Rep)	Margaret Molyneux
Treasurer	Eileen Griffiths
Secretary	Jan Doyle
Website/Promotion	Heather Knott
Cheshire, North Wales and Wirral	Sue Challoner and Helen Owen
London Anglia	Jean Thorpe
London Chilterns	Yinka Soetan
Midland Arden	Patricia Martin
Midland Chase	Sue Nickson
Midland East	Barbara McDonald
NW England & Isle of Man	Ruth Bruce
Northern England	Gill Smith
Northern Ireland	Joanna McVey
Scotland North	Billie Wealleans
Scotland South	Margaret Mowat
South East England	Ann Reeves
South West and Channel Islands	Irene Hockin
Southern England	Christine White
Wales South	Kay Richmond
Yorkshire	Chris Clark
Lobbyists	
Northern Ireland	Irene Miskimmon
Scotland	Audrey Harvey
Wales	Farida Patel

ANNEX 2 - CONTRIBUTORS

The following individuals and agencies, amongst others, provided information to Soroptimists by completing questionnaires, giving interviews, taking part in group discussion or speaking at local and regional events:

ENGLAND

Central government and national agencies

The Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP, Secretary of State for Justice

Helen Grant MP, (then) Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice with responsibility for women in the justice system

The Rt Hon Simon Hughes MP, Minister of State for Justice and Civil Liberties

Ministry of Justice

National Offender Management Service (NOMS)

Crown Prosecution Service

Police

Avon and Somerset Police

Cheshire Police

Cumbria Constabulary

Derbyshire Constabulary

Devon and Cornwall Police

Essex Police

Greater Manchester Police

Hampshire Police

Hertfordshire Police

Humberside Police

Kent Police

Leicestershire Police

North Yorkshire Police

Northumbria Police

Nottinghamshire Police

South Yorkshire Police

West Midlands Police

West Yorkshire Police

Police and Crime Commissioners

PCC for Suffolk

PCC for Essex

PCC for Kent

PCC for West Midlands

PCC for Staffordshire

Deputy PCC for Nottinghamshire

Deputy PCC for the West Midlands

Assistant PCC for Lancashire

Prisons

Volunteers and the chaplain at HMP New Hall
Volunteers and the chaplain at HMP Askham Grange
[Midland Chase] prisons
HMP East Sutton Park
A representative from prison education, SE England
HMP Styal prisoners and staff
HMP Eastwood Park
HMP Send – women’s prison Family Link
HMP Peterborough

Magistrates

A Cheshire magistrate
Norwich magistrates
Courts in Midland Chase region
Magistrates in Yorkshire
Magistrates’ Association in SE England/local magistrates
East Kent magistrates
South Lancashire judges and magistrates
[Hertford] magistrate
Hampshire magistrates
Magistrates from Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire
A selection of West Midlands courts

Probation²¹⁰

Avon and Somerset Probation Trust
Cumbria Probation Trust
Derbyshire Probation Trust
Devon and Cornwall Probation Trust
Hampshire Probation Trust
Kent Probation Trust
Lancashire Probation Trust
Merseyside Probation Trust
Northamptonshire Probation Trust
Northumbria Probation Trust
Nottinghamshire Probation Trust
Probation and Housing, Sevenoaks Council
Staffordshire and West Midlands Probation Trust
Thames Valley Probation Trust
Yorkshire Probation Trust

Women’s community services

Tomorrow’s Women Wirral and other women’s centres in Cheshire and Wirral
Halton Women’s Centre, Runcorn
Stepping Stones, Luton
Safer Places women’s refuge, Hertford

Living Room centre for people with addictions, Hertfordshire
 [Midland Chase] women's centres
 Lancashire Women's Centres
 Together Women Project, Bradford
 WomenCentre (Evolve), Halifax and Huddersfield and other women's centres in Yorkshire
 Brighton Women's Centre
 Rising Sun Domestic Violence and Abuse Service, SE England
 Porchlight (homelessness charity), SE England
 Turning Point (alcohol and drug treatment service), SE England
 East Kent Rapeline
 Women's centres in Huddersfield, Bolton, Birkenhead and Bootle
 Eden House Women's Centre, Bristol
 Women's Wisdom (women's employment group), Southern England
 Aurora New Dawn (domestic violence victim support), Southern England
 POW (Prostitute Outreach Work), Nottingham
 Dawn Project, Cambridge Women's Resource Centre
 CHANGES project, Nottingham Women's Centre
 Zinithya Trust, Leicester
 New Dawn New Day, Leicester
 Gloucester Women's Centre
 Isis Women's Centre, Swindon
 Sandwell Women's Aid, Mariposa Project
 Anawim women's centre, Birmingham
 A women's centre in Cumbria

Others

Health and Wellbeing Boards, Safeguarding Children Boards and MPs in Midland Chase
 [Southern England] MPs
 Greg Clark MP, Tunbridge Wells
 Yorkshire youth justice practitioners
 SE England IMB members
 SE England Community Liaison Officer
 SE England local councillor
 Derby City Council
 Kent County Council
 Human Trafficking and Modern Day Slavery, SE England
 U3A (University of the Third Age), SE England
 CAB (Citizen's Advice Bureau), SE England
 PACT and Just People
 POPS (Partners of Prisoners)
 Action for Prisoners' Families
 Catholic Diocese of Liverpool
 Anglican Mothers' Union – Manchester Diocese
 North Somerset Children's Services
 Mitch Egan CB, Criminal Justice Consultant

Inquest
[Health and Social Care], Leicester
Severn Health Surgery, Leicester
Children's Services, North Somerset
National Treatment Agency (for substance misuse)
Institute for Criminal Policy Research, Birkbeck College

WALES

Information was provided to SI members by many organisations and individuals, including:

- Integrated Offender Management (IOM) Cymru
- Gibran
- Changing Lives
- Hafan Cymru
- magistrates
- Gwent Police
- PCC for Gwent
- Dyfed-Powys Police
- PCC for Dyfed-Powys
- South Wales Police and the PCC for South Wales (via IOM)
- Aneurin Bevan University Health Board
- Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board
- Cardiff & Vale University Health Board
- Cwm Taf University Health Board
- Hywel Dda University Health Board
- Powys Teaching Health Board
- women's services in North Wales.

NORTHERN IRELAND

SINI's research included an exchange of letters with the Justice Minister, David Ford MLA, and meetings with:

- Deputy Director of the Criminal Justice Service (DOJNI)
- Probation Board of Northern Ireland (PBNI) Inspire project manager
- representatives from Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO) - NIACRO also helped with follow up queries by email
- plus a questionnaire completed on behalf of PSNI.

SCOTLAND

Information was provided to Soroptimists by the following, amongst others:

- Criminal Justice Authorities
- Criminal Justice Social Work Departments
- Local Authorities
- Police
- Health Service

- Scottish Working Group on Women's Offending (SWGWO)
- Sacro
- Circle Scotland
- Families Outside
- Positive Prison/Positive Futures

- a Scottish Executive representative
- Police Scotland
- NHS Fife
- Fife Police

- Perth Prison
- prison visitors
- HMP & YOI Cornton Vale
- NHS Scotland.

ANNEX 3 - POLICY BACKGROUND

A series of inquiries and reports, most notably the 2000 report of the Prison Reform Trust's Committee on Women's Imprisonment (the Wedderburn Report), the 2007 Review of Women with Particular Vulnerabilities in the Criminal Justice System (the Corston Report), the 2011 report of the Women's Justice Taskforce (Reforming Women's Justice), and the Scottish government's Commission on Women Offenders in 2012, have all concluded that prison is rarely a necessary, appropriate or proportionate response to women who get caught up in the criminal justice system. The Justice Select Committee concluded from its inquiry into women offenders that "prison is an expensive and ineffective way of dealing with many women offenders who do not pose a significant risk of harm to public safety." The Committee called for "a significant increase in residential alternatives to custody as well as the maintenance of the network of women's centres" which are seen as "more effective, and cheaper...than short custodial sentences."²¹¹ However, despite cross-party support in all jurisdictions for alternative approaches there has been limited progress. Where effective services have been developed, there are real concerns about their sustainability due to limited, short-term funding streams.

The Prison Reform Trust's programme to reduce women's imprisonment is providing fresh momentum for reform, and working alongside civil society organisations such as the Soroptimists and the National Council of Women has allowed new voices to be heard. This collaborative work has also brought an important local dimension to the endeavour which is critical because it is local police, courts and support services that hold the key to changing women's lives for the better as much as national policy frameworks and laws.

Baroness Corston's report to government set out a blueprint for the reform of women's justice in England and Wales²¹² covering the following themes:

- improve health services and support for women offenders
- make community disposals the norm and develop a wider network of one-stop shop community provision for women offenders and those at risk of offending
- reserve custody for serious and violent women offenders and place those in small, local units within 10 years
- improve prison conditions
- improve high level governance and cross-departmental working for women offenders and those at risk of offending.

The Corston report's findings were accepted almost entirely by the (then) government in Westminster, and have influenced the development of women's justice in Northern Ireland²¹³ and the 2012 Commission on Women Offenders chaired by Dame Elish Angiolini, whose recommendations were accepted in large part by the Scottish government.²¹⁴

The UN Committee overseeing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has expressed concern about the disproportionate imprisonment of women for non-violent offences, and recently urged the UK Government to implement the recommendations of the Corston and Angiolini reports and improve community services for women.²¹⁵

ENDNOTES

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- 37 'Police fail to recognise that abuse often lies behind women's offending' the *Guardian*, 1 April 2014
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Soroptimist International is dedicated to advancing women's equality and improving the lives of women. Following the doubling of the women's prison population between 1995 – 2010, the Soroptimist UK Programme Action Committee (UKPAC) decided to work in partnership with the Prison Reform Trust to reduce women's imprisonment. Community solutions that enable women to address the causes of their offending are more effective and less damaging for their children and families. Many women in prison have themselves been victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

Soroptimists sought information from police, probation, criminal justice social workers, magistrates, sheriffs, health professionals and women's community services across the UK, about what happens locally to women who offend or are at risk of offending.

This report, based on the information gathered, profiles progress and good practice whilst identifying constraints, gaps and shortcomings in local service provision. It is intended as a spur to action, highlighting opportunities to reduce the women's prison population and share learning across jurisdictions. It makes recommendations which, if implemented, would reform women's justice and transform outcomes for women and their communities.

Most of the solutions to women's offending lie outside prison walls in treatment for addictions and mental health problems, protection from domestic violence and coercive relationships, safe housing and employment. Community sentences enable women to take control of their lives, care for their children and address the causes of their offending.

As a Soroptimist perhaps the key message I brought away from this project was that tackling women's offending is not just a matter for the justice system but for society as a whole to address.

Member, SI Lancashire

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