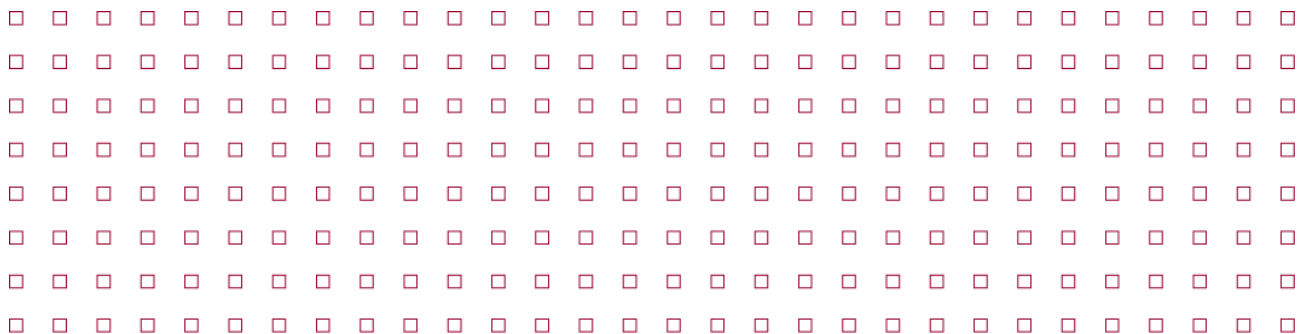




Ministry  
of Justice

# Update on delivery of the Government's strategic objectives for female offenders

27 March 2014





## **Update on delivery of the Government's strategic objectives for female offenders**

Women are a minority group within the criminal justice system. Offending behaviour by women sometimes differs to men, and women require a different specific approach from government.

We recognise the particular needs of women offenders and women who may be at risk of offending and this document sets out our progress over the last year in helping women to move away from crime.

A few key facts about women in the Criminal Justice System are:

Since 2007 women have made up 1 in 20 of the prison population.

In 2012 women made up 25% of those sentenced in all courts. Women serve shorter sentences than men: in 2012, the average custodial sentence length for indictable offenders was 10.8 months for females, compared to 17.6 months for males.

In the community, women accounted for 15% of the population under supervision in 2012.

Women also reoffend less than men. In the year ending March 2012, the proven reoffending rate for female offenders was 19% compared to 28% for men.

There are 12 women's prisons in England, none in Wales, and there are 6 Mother and Baby Units. Since 2009 the Government has been providing funding, either through grants or Probation Trusts, for provision in the community dedicated to women.

In March 2013 the Ministry of Justice published its strategic objectives for female offenders. These set out our intention to make sure that:

- there are robust and effective sentencing options in the community that will enable female offenders to be punished in the community where appropriate;
- community sentencing options address the specific needs of female offenders, where these are different from males;
- the women's custodial estate is tailored to their needs; and
- the Transforming Rehabilitation reforms support better life management to reduce women's reoffending.

During the Parliamentary passage of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 the (then) Minister of State for Justice, Lord McNally, undertook to provide an update on the progress made in delivering these strategic objectives. Details of key achievements, which have been agreed across Government, are below:

## **Robust and effective sentencing options in the community for women which addresses their gender-specific needs**

Under our Transforming Rehabilitation reforms, community provision for low and medium risk offenders will be delivered by Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) on a broadly payment by results basis. It will be for individual providers to decide how to address the rehabilitation of offenders, based on local need.

Key achievements include:

- Publication of a stocktake of women's community services, which reviewed the spread and availability of community services specifically for women. This established that gender-specific provision has been increasing, which provides the groundwork for the expansion of community support to women on release from short-sentences in 2014 and beyond. In 2013/14, a total of £5.8 million (including £3.78m ring-fenced for the provision of women's services) is being spent through Probation Trust contract and partnership arrangements on specific services for female offenders.
- We have developed an Enhanced Community Provision pathfinder scheme in Greater Manchester which will provide sentencers with sentencing options and to support increased diversion of female offenders from custody, where appropriate. To make sure that sentencers have the confidence in the pathfinder scheme, as well as other non-custodial options, we held a workshop for bench chairs in Greater Manchester. Information from this workshop will be used to develop procedures for engaging sentencers more effectively with the needs of female offenders.
- Alongside the work in Greater Manchester, we have also been working with the Probation Service in Wales to explore how they can develop a distinct approach to working with female offenders.
- We have been working with criminal justice partners to improve awareness of the gender-specific needs of female offenders, including developing a DVD for circulation amongst police, judiciary and other front line practitioners within the criminal justice system to raise awareness.

## **Tailoring the women's custodial estate to women's needs**

NOMS has had in place gender-specific standards for women's prisons since 2008. These were updated in 2012 and will be reviewed in 2014, which will include the alignment of support and services for women who have been abused, raped, involved in prostitution or experienced domestic violence. In addition, this year we published a review of the women's custodial estate which announced a reconfiguration of the way women's prisons are run. This included, in recognition of the specific needs of female offenders, the development of a different operating model for 'through the gate' services under the

Transforming Rehabilitation reforms. In practice this means that all women's prisons have been designated as resettlement prisons. They will all, except for the open prisons, have more than one 'through the gate' service provider in each. This will facilitate continuity of service provision for women from their home CRC. As part of these plans, we anticipate that the vast majority of women in custody will have their resettlement needs met by their home CRC.

Since publication of the women's custodial estate review document NOMS have already established a unit at HMP/YOI Peterborough for female foreign national offenders. This will be developed over coming months into a hub for women with identified immigration needs. In addition, a Central Case Supervision System for women with the most complex needs in custody has been established. This system will provide direction for the care and supervision of these women to make sure that they benefit from the most appropriate interventions and regimes available for their particular needs.

Further key recommendations which are now being implemented include:

- Working with local partners to develop employment opportunities for appropriately low-risk women across the entire women's prison estate and encourage regional employers to work with women's prisons. This will help women learn the right skills in prison and on licence and make the right employment links to where they will be resettled.
- Improving prison capacity near to urban areas so that women are as close as possible to where they will live on release and better able to keep in contact with their families where appropriate. This includes refurbishing existing provision at HMP/YOI Eastwood Park which is expected to be complete by summer 2015, and HMP/YOI Foston Hall, which is expected to be complete by the end of this year. We will also modify available buildings at HMP/YOI Drake Hall to improve capacity. This work is expected to be complete by the end of this year.

## **Female offenders in Transforming Rehabilitation**

The Government's priority for criminal justice reform is the Transforming Rehabilitation programme. Provisions in the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 introduce a new requirement for those serving short sentences in custody to receive supervision and support on release. Compared to the overall offending population, women are overrepresented among those serving short sentences, so they will benefit particularly from this change. To make sure that the needs of women are met as part of these reforms we have introduced the following safeguards:

- We amended the Offender Rehabilitation Bill to make sure that contracts with future providers under the Transforming Rehabilitation identify any specific provisions which

are intended to meet the particular needs of female offenders, as part of the rehabilitation and supervision services they provide. In practice this 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.

- We are including three gender specific outputs in contracts with future CRCs. This will mean that providers will need to give female 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.
- In consultation with the Advisory Board on Female Offenders, we have made guidance available so that future probation providers fully understand the particular needs of female offenders and how to respond to them. This guidance includes information and data on female offenders' likelihood of having: childcare responsibilities (women are more likely to be lone parents), a history of domestic violence and sexual abuse or having been a victim of human trafficking or involvement in prostitution. It also signposts providers to specialist organisations which can provide more specific support on these issues.
- We have committed to continuing to fund women's community services which have been commissioned by Probation Trusts for 2013/14 for the transitional period of the Transforming Rehabilitation programme. We expect existing providers of women's services to continue to receive funding from CRCs until March 2015 unless there are concerns about performance or there is insufficient demand.

## **Advisory Board on Female Offenders**

The creation of an advisory board on female offenders was announced alongside the strategic objectives in March 2013. Chaired by the Minister responsible for women in the criminal justice system, currently Simon Hughes MP, the Board brings together for the first time key stakeholders, criminal justice partners and senior officials from across Government to address the needs of female offenders. Members are providing expert advice and challenge as we deliver our strategic objectives.

The Board met four times in 2013 and has considered a range of issues. An important function of the advisory board is to work across Government to make sure that the needs of female offenders and those at risk of offending are embedded in policy-making. Examples of current cross-departmental working include:

- Supporting the Department for Communities and Local Government in the development of a range of schemes focused on helping vulnerable 18-24 years olds into accommodation and work. This includes a pilot scheme which looks at developing better local service delivery and integration between children's services, housing teams, health and the criminal justice system. We expect these schemes to include work with and improved accommodation outcomes for all offenders, including female offenders.
- Setting up, in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions, an officials' sub-group of the Social Justice Cabinet Committee (SJCC) to understand the offence profile of female offenders and consider preventative measures to help women manage the problems which may lead them into the criminal justice system. The sub-group has an initial emphasis on understanding the nature of the relationship between debt and finance issues and vulnerable women at risk of offending. It will report to the SJCC and the Advisory Board in the summer.
- Engaging with the Department for Work and Pensions over the links and interfaces between the new CRCs and the Work Programme Providers (and other agencies locally) which provide Day One support to help meet offender employment needs. Work Programme provision is tailored to individual needs including the specific needs of female offenders.
- With the Department of Health (DH), Home Office and NHS England, developing and testing a model for youth and adult liaison and diversion services at police custody and courts. The service will assess and refer individuals with a range of vulnerabilities, including mental health problems and substance misuse. Liaison and diversion services have operated across in England for many years. However DH have committed £25m funding this year to test a new Liaison and Diversion model in 10 areas in England. The new model offers an opportunity to test and evaluate a standardised approach.
- Work by NOMS with NHS England to develop a specific female offender personality disorder strategy. We are creating three new personality disorder treatment services for female offenders – starting in the Midlands and involving Foston Hall and Drake Hall prisons and Crowley House approved premises - with the potential for one additional service.
- Alongside the Home Office taking forward actions points relevant to female offenders on the cross Government Action Plan: "Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls", which contains 152 actions in total to tackle violence against women. We have inserted four female offender-specific actions into the 2014/15 Action Plan on training, Transforming Rehabilitation, and support for female prisoners who are victims of domestic violence.

- With the Home Office developing Integrated Offender Management (IOM) approaches for female offenders. IOM is a partnership based, crime reduction approach which tackles offenders who commit the most crime in a local area, or whose offending causes most damage to the local community.
- Making sure that offenders whose crimes are linked to drug addiction are made to attend their drug treatment appointments when they are released. Many prisoners are only in custody for a very short time, with women disproportionately more likely to receive a short custodial sentence than men. Time spent in prison can therefore often only be a very small part of the overall treatment journey. That is why it is important for reducing offending that interventions started in prison are continued 'through the gate' into the community to build on progress made earlier. To underpin this, we amended the Offender Rehabilitation Bill to introduce a new condition to attend drug appointments to be linked to a prisoner's licence or supervision after sentence.
- Making sure that we can keep track of someone's path to sobriety by removing the "trigger offence" filter to the power to test for Class A drugs on release, and also extending the power to include Class B drugs. This means that all offenders on the new drug appointments supervision condition, attached to a licence or after sentencing, will be eligible for drug testing. A survey of prisoners has shown that female prisoners are more likely than males to use Class A drugs in the four weeks before custody.
- Supporting the Department for Communities and Local Government with the Troubled Families programme which aims to turn around the lives of 120,000 troubled families in England by 2015. The 3 year programme has a number of specific objectives including reducing crime and anti-social behaviour, getting adults on the path to work, and children back into school. Local authorities are able to use their local criteria to identify families who are causing particularly high costs to local agencies – this could include families with female offenders or women at risk of offending. The family plan drawn up by the key worker will address their needs as part of the work with the family as a whole. The next phase of the Troubled Families programme was announced in June 2013. This will extend the programme to an additional 400,000 families over an intended five year period.
- The award of a grant of £720k for 2014/15 for national infrastructure support for the voluntary sector for a partnership led by Clinks. This is for work directly connected with the reduction of reoffending and rehabilitation of adult offenders and is for 2014/15 only. One of the activities funded is the provision of support to specialist organisations providing services to vulnerable or minority groups, such as female offenders. This will be delivered by Women's Breakout, one of the members of the partnership and the Advisory Board on Female Offenders, which previously received Government infrastructure funding from 2011-2014 to provide a voice and support for organisations working to support female offenders



## The year ahead

We will continue to press forward on delivering our strategic objectives for female offenders in the coming year. The introduction of our Transforming Rehabilitation reforms in autumn 2014 will be an important milestone in our work to address the needs of these women. A lot of work will also be taking place on the implementation of the physical changes needed for us to reconfigure the women's custodial estate. In particular, subject to successful planning permission applications, we will start work on the refurbishment and modification works required at HMP/YOIs Drake Hall, Styal, Foston Hall and Eastwood Park over the summer and intend to establish the proposed new open units at HMP/YOIs Styal and Drake Hall by the end of the year.

Research findings have shown that six out of ten female prisoners lived with dependent children under 18 before custody, compared to under five in ten of male prisoners. Research findings also suggest that maintained family contact can be an important factor in stopping women reoffending in the future. **We will work to support women to maintain links with their children and family whilst they are in prison.**

Finding suitable housing remains an ongoing issue for women leaving prison, particularly as they are more likely than men to be a single parent. Research findings suggest that around four in ten male and female prisoners reported a need for help to find accommodation on release from prison. Clearly the 'through the gate' provision which is part of the Transforming Rehabilitation reforms has an important role to play here. **We will make sure that more women are finding suitable housing immediately on release as well as to make sure that women can be reunited with their families where appropriate.**

**We will work to make sure that women's prisons have the strongest possible focus on employment and that the community employment initiatives which are being developed make the maximum sustainable links with employers in the surrounding communities.** Where risk levels permit, we want to build and improve on current practices which allow suitable female prisoners to be released on temporary licence for the purposes of finding work outside the prison or developing training and employment links.

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We will continue the successful and useful Advisory Board on Female Offenders. This year each quarterly meeting will have a particular focus, starting with Wales in April. We

will also be considering the Troubled Families programme, and how it relates to female offenders who are also mothers. We will be discussing the progress and development of the 10 liaison and diversion models and monitoring the state of play in relation to the Transforming Rehabilitation reforms.

All Government departments, stakeholders and criminal justice partners are important - both through the advisory board and outside of it - in supporting the delivery of our strategic objectives. The criminal justice system alone cannot address all the factors associated with women's offending. Partnership working and a true cross Government approach is essential to help us rehabilitate female offenders and to support women to get their lives back on track. We look forward to working with colleagues as we further deliver our objectives in the coming year.

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