



Prison Reform Trust response to the Welsh Affairs Committee inquiry into prison provision in Wales – February 2018

The Prison Reform Trust (PRT) is an independent UK charity working to create 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 provides the secretariat to the All Party Parliamentary Penal Affairs Group and has an advice and information service for people in prison.

The Prison Reform Trust's main objectives are:

- reducing unnecessary imprisonment and promoting community solutions to crime
- improving treatment and conditions for prisoners and their families.

www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk

Introduction

The Prison Reform Trust welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Welsh Affairs Committee inquiry into prison provision in Wales.

We have chosen to concentrate our response almost exclusively on the opportunity for Wales to take a radically different approach to the treatment of women at risk of imprisonment. This is because on this issue we are fortunate to have had capacity to engage people locally and to understand more of the detail specific to Wales. Our broader policy position is that the growth in the use of prison for both men and women across England and Wales for most of the last three decades has created a situation in which the resources to provide a safe, decent, fair and constructive prison system have consistently lagged behind the demand for imprisonment.

That demand has been driven in part by the imprisonment of people who would be better dealt with in the community, and sometimes outside of the criminal justice system altogether. But it has also in the last decade or so been driven predominantly by a politically inspired growth in the severity of punishment, with higher maximum penalties for serious crime dragging up sentence length more generally, and the imposition of indeterminate sentences reaching epidemic proportion, with much longer periods of those sentences being served in custody.

Westminster governments have stoked demand for imprisonment, and then in response to the financial crisis dramatically cut the resources available, resulting in the collapse of safety and order which has been thoroughly documented both in the government's own statistics and in successive reports by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons. Not all prisons have been affected equally, and in Wales it is the older prisons in the public sector which have suffered most. But Welsh prisoners will also be held in English prisons that have been undermined by the drastic cuts imposed from Westminster, most recently made evident in the Chief Inspector's report on

HMP Liverpool. Good practice at HMPs Berwyn, Parc and Usk/Prescoed shows that poor conditions are not inevitable, but the outlook for prison funding is exceptionally bleak, with the Ministry of Justice required to make cuts of £400m in 2018/19 alone. A fundamental re-think of who goes to prison and for how long is overdue, and represents the essential foundation for a permanent solution to the crisis the prison service as a whole is facing.

For the past five years the Prison Reform Trust has had a focus on reducing women's imprisonment, supported first by the Pilgrim Trust and since 2015 by a major grant from the Big Lottery Fund. This has supported our UK-wide programme, 'Transforming Lives: reducing women's imprisonment', which has a [strong emphasis on local practice](#) and on engaging with women with personal experience of imprisonment. We are working with Welsh voluntary sector agencies including the North Wales Women Centre, Llamau, Safer Wales and Gibran to inform our understanding of Welsh women's experience of criminal justice.

An important strategic element of our Transforming Lives programme is its focus on interjurisdictional learning, because the statutory and policy frameworks as well as the political approach differ between England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland in a number of key areas. Although in Wales criminal justice is not devolved, most of the solutions to women's offending, and the basis for effective preventive strategies, lie outside the justice system. Powers in relation to violence against women and girls, housing, social care and some aspects of health provision are devolved and can play a critical role in supporting women with multiple or complex needs, helping to prevent them coming into contact with the criminal justice system. If they have been involved in offending, policies and services in these areas can support women to turn their lives around.

Our response is organised around the following themes:

- Women offenders in Wales
- A women's prison in Wales?
- Embedding a 'Whole Systems Approach'
- The importance of investing in women's services

Women offenders in Wales

1. Women comprise a minority within the criminal justice system, accounting for around 15% of the probation caseload and less than 5% of the prison population¹. The drivers to their offending differ significantly from men's and they often have more complex needs.² The Prison Reform Trust worked with the Soroptimists to collect evidence on criminal justice options and outcomes for women in Wales, published as a standalone Transforming Lives (Wales) [Country Report in 2014](#) and we commend this to the Committee, whilst providing as much updated information as possible here. Very little data is routinely published on the current landscape for women in

¹ Prison Reform Trust (2017) Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile Autumn 2017, London: Prison Reform Trust, p.34, available at <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Bromley%20Briefings/Autumn%202017%20factfile.pdf>

² Prison Reform Trust (2017) Why focus on reducing women's imprisonment?, London: Prison Reform Trust, available at http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Women/why%20women_final.pdf

contact with the criminal justice system in Wales and we hope this inquiry will encourage greater transparency. Otherwise the needs of Welsh women will continue to be overlooked.

Arrest and sentencing

2. Home Office figures reveal that 8,280 women were arrested in Wales in 2016/17, down from 10,292 in 2014/15, a fall of 20% in two years.³ Reflecting national trends, the number of women sentenced for more serious indictable only and triable either way offences has fallen, however we have seen a marked rise in the number of women sentenced for less-serious summary offences. We know, for example, that annually, approximately 30% of all prosecutions for women were for TV licence evasion⁴ and a recent case highlighted the growing number of women sentenced to prison after falling behind on council tax payments.⁵

Use of Immediate Custody

3. Official statistics reveal considerable local variation in the use of imprisonment across Wales (see Appendix 1). The number of women sentenced to immediate imprisonment in Wales has increased from 530 in 2011 to 623 in 2016, an increase of 18% in 5 years. This was largely driven by an increase in the number of women receiving short custodial sentences of 6 months or less. In South Wales the number of women receiving such sentences increased from 197 in 2011 to 291 in 2016. The percentage increase in North Wales has been even more pronounced, rising from just 35 cases in 2011 to 88 in 2016, an increase of 151%.⁶
4. In thinking about future planning needs it should also be noted that between 2011-2016, the number of women in Wales serving longer custodial sentences (over 6 months) decreased from 210 to 165. The result is a transient, high churn women's prison population with very few long-term prisoners. This reflects the types of offences committed by women. Most women entering prison under sentence have committed a non-violent offence—nationally, more women were sent to prison in the year to June 2017 to serve a sentence for theft than for violence against the person, robbery, sexual offences, fraud, drugs, and motoring offences combined.⁷
5. Imprisonment is not only the most onerous penal measure available to the courts, especially for those who are primary carers, it has particularly poor outcomes for women and for the children left behind. A mounting body of evidence about the over-use and damaging impact of short prison sentences is now available.⁸ Decisive action is needed to reverse the significant decline in the use of community orders for women in England and Wales (see Appendix 2), with punishment in the community regarded as the preferable sentence, not a 'soft option' or 'viable alternative'.

³ Table A.05, Home Office Police powers and procedures England and Wales year ending 31 March 2017, London: Home Office

⁴ Ministry of Justice (2016) Women and the criminal justice system statistics 2015, London: Ministry of Justice, available at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/572043/women-and-the-criminal-justice-system-statistics-2015.pdf

⁵ Pasha-Robinson, L., 'Single mother unlawfully jailed for council tax debt, High Court rules', The Independent, 19 January 2017, available at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/single-mother-unlawfully-jailed-wales-bridgend-council-tax-debt-high-court-ruling-a7536231.html>

⁶ Parliamentary written question 71001, 26 April 2017

⁷ Table 2.4, Ministry of Justice (2017) Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2017, London: Ministry of Justice

⁸ See for example Baldwin, L. & Epstein, R. (2017) Short but not sweet: A study of the impact of short custodial sentences on mothers and their children, Leicester: De Montfort University

Women-specific [Community Sentence Treatment Requirements](#) are a welcome development but are in the early stages and in short supply.

Recall

6. Between Apr-Jun 2016 and Jan-Mar 2017, a total of 109 women from Wales were recalled to prison (48 women by National Probation Service Wales, and 61 by the Wales Community Rehabilitation Company)⁹. For further background about the rising incidence of recall for women, see the recent [Huffington Post article blog by PRT's Dr Tom Guiney](#). It is important to note that whilst it is particularly punitive and disruptive to recall Welsh women to prison, Wales has reported one of the lowest overall recall rates in the country.

Women in Prison

7. A recent Parliamentary Question by [Liz Saville Roberts](#) MP revealed that on 30 September 2017, there were 227 women with a Welsh origin address serving a custodial sentence in England¹⁰. Most women from South Wales, Gwent and Dyfed-Powys are held in HMP Eastwood Park near Gloucester. A Parliamentary Question by [Carolyn Harris](#) MP established that a total of 125 Welsh women were held there on 30 September (see Table 1 below).¹¹

Table 1: Welsh women in HMP Eastwood Park (30 September 2017) PQ

Sentence Status	Total
(1) Sentenced (< 12 months)*	50
(2) Sentenced (12m – <4 years)	38
(3) Sentenced (4 years +)	18
(4) IPP	≤5
(5) Life	≤5
(6) Recall	15
(7) Unknown	≤5
Total	125

⁹ Ministry of Justice, Freedom of Information Request 113548, available at https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/414637/response/1099104/attach/6/FOI_113548.xls

¹⁰ Parliamentary written question 118800, 20 December 2017

¹¹ Parliamentary written question 116828, 06 December 2017

* The sentence length categories are unclear from the written answer. We have assumed that the first group “Sent” refers to women serving sentences of less than 12 months; that “Sent 12m –” refers to women serving sentences of 12 months to less than four years; and that “Sent 4 y+” refers to women serving determinate sentences of four years or more. These categories mirror those used in prison population statistics.

8. The picture for women in North Wales is even more complex with a smaller number of women (28) distributed throughout the prison estate according to their sentence length and security category, although the majority were held at HMP Styal.¹²

Table 2: Prison distribution of women from North Wales 2010 -2017 [David Hanson PQ 109550]

Prison	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Askham Grange		< 5	< 5		< 5		< 5	< 5
Bronzefield					< 5	< 5		
Downview							< 5	
Drake Hall	< 5	< 5	< 5	< 5	< 5	< 5	< 5	< 5
East Sutton Park					< 5			
Eastwood Park						< 5		
Foston Hall		< 5	< 5		< 5			
Low Newton					< 5	< 5	< 5	< 5
Morton Hall	< 5							
New Hall	< 5		< 5	< 5	< 5	< 5		< 5
Peterborough (Female)	< 5	< 5						
Styal	5	< 5	13	12	9	13	27	22
Total	11	8	20	14	21	22	36	28

9. Welsh women are imprisoned further from home and receive fewer visits, which adversely affects their ability to maintain relationships and family contact. While women are held on average 64 miles from home (compared to 50 miles for men), for many women the distances are much greater, adding to the difficulty and expense of prison visits. A woman from Fishguard sent to HMP Eastwood will be 148 miles from home, a woman from Aberystwyth sent to HMP Styal will be 127 miles from home.¹³ The complexity of the journeys and the lack of public transport compound the difficulty of visiting. The devastating impact on both women and their children of separation through the mother's imprisonment cannot be overstated, and the fact that there is still no centrally collected data on the number of children affected is indicative of continuing neglect. A scheme to support contact between Welsh women imprisoned in HMP Eastwood Park and their children, provided by PACT, was very positively evaluated but is being discontinued for lack of funding.¹⁴

Is a women's prison needed in Wales?

10. On the basis of the available evidence, PRT and others have consistently argued that the absolute priority for the future of the custodial estate in England and Wales should be to plan for fewer women in custody. We are hopeful that the long-promised government strategy on female offenders will have this strategic focus, and note that there is a Welsh Government representative on the Ministerial Advisory Board on

¹² Parliamentary written question 109550, 02 November 2017

¹³ Prison Reform Trust (2014) Transforming Lives: reducing women's imprisonment, London: Prison Reform Trust and Soroptimist International, p.43

¹⁴ Rees, A., Staples, E. and Maxwell, N. (2017) Evaluation of visiting mum scheme: final report June 2017, Cardiff: Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre

Female Offenders chaired by Justice Minister Dr Philip Lee. The minister has stated “our strategy is to keep people out of custody”¹⁵ and the 2015 Conservative Manifesto included a commitment to ‘*improve the treatment of women offenders, exploring how new technology may enable more women with young children to serve their sentence in the community.*’

11. A series of inquiries and reports in recent decades have all concluded that prison is rarely a necessary, appropriate or proportionate response to women who get caught up in the criminal justice system.¹⁶ It is estimated that the average cost of keeping a woman in prison for a year is £42,760 compared to a Community Order cost of £2,800 per year and an average of £1,360 per woman for standalone holistic community-based services.¹⁷ Outcomes for women in prison remain poor. Nearly half of women are reconvicted within one year of leaving prison (48%). This rises to 61% for sentences of less than 12 months and to 78% for women who have served more than 11 previous custodial sentences. Women released from prison are more likely to reoffend, and reoffend sooner, than those serving community sentences.¹⁸
12. The poor outcomes for so many women sent to prison, both during and after their incarceration, show that the government’s stated ambition for safe, secure and rehabilitative custody cannot be met with the resources currently available. A person-focused system is needed for the small number of women for whom the seriousness of their offending and assessed risk to the community makes custody unavoidable. We are not convinced that there has been a proper analysis of the number of these last resort cases likely to arise in different regions, and it would be wrong to take a decision about the need for a prison for women in Wales until that has been done, and a new strategy explicitly designed to reduce the use of custody has been implemented.

Proximity to home?

13. An analysis is needed of where prisons for that minority of serious female offenders may be required geographically. The current female estate is a product of historical accident rather than planning, with a variety of locations for prisons decided on the basis of their availability and, as often as not, their unsuitability for occupation by male prisoners. However, if proximity to home were a genuine government objective, one has to ask why HMP Holloway was closed. Around half the women in prison at any one time (i.e. around 2,000 women) are from the London area and they are now sent further from home than previously.
14. It may take many years to reach a genuinely planned estate for women, but there should at least be a plan, and it should be based on the premise that remaining close to home is the most important consideration for all but a tiny fraction of women in custody. The question of transport links must also be considered—which poses particular challenges in Wales.

¹⁵ Hansard HC, 5 December 2017, c888

¹⁶ 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); the Scottish Government’s Commission on Women’s Offenders in 2012; Prison Reform Trust and Soroptimist International GBI’s Transforming Lives report in 2015

¹⁷ Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (2014) Resettlement provision for adult offenders: Accommodation and education, training and employment, London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons

¹⁸ Hedermann, C. and Jolliffe, D. (2015) The Impact of Prison for Women on the Edge: Paying the Price for Wrong Decisions. *Victims & Offenders An International Journal of Evidence-based Research, Policy, and Practice*, 10 (2), 152-178

15. There follows a clear implication that women's prisons should be able to accommodate prisoners for the whole of the custodial part of their sentence, offering opportunities for progression within the same site, including both release on temporary licence and facilities for independent living in conditions of minimal security in the later part of a sentence. Only a small number of women in prison need to be held in conditions of high security.
16. In the 2016, White Paper '*Prison Safety and Reform*' the Ministry of Justice set out its commitment to build 5 new "community prisons" for women.¹⁹ While no further information has been forthcoming and the status of this commitment is unclear we understand that Wales was earmarked as a possible location for one such facility, possibly on the site of the proposed new prison in Port Talbot. The problem with this announcement is that it implied that the remainder of prisons for women will not be "community prisons". There is a real concern that the prisons that close to make the running costs available for the new prisons will be open prisons, and that the new community prisons will effectively be filled with women who would already be judged suitable for open conditions or for daily release on temporary licence. The more considered approach should be to identify, on the basis of a postcode analysis, where the demand for capacity will be, and then to invest in a mixture of existing and new sites to provide the multifunctional, local capacity to meet that demand.
17. There is an unhappy history of accommodation for women being tacked on to male prisons—Durham and Winchester both being examples where such units had to be closed. So the prospect of returning to that practice is bound to generate concern. Indeed, the most recent report by the HM Chief Inspector of Prisons has cast serious doubt on the model used at HMP Peterborough:

*'HMP & YOI Peterborough remains the only prison in England and Wales that holds both women and men on a single site. In the past we were confident that the challenges of this arrangement were well managed, but at this inspection we had concerns that instability on the male side was affecting the prison's ability to focus sufficiently on the relatively more settled female prison.'*²⁰
18. Again, an estate that was not overwhelmed by the volume and turnover of short term and remand prisoners would have the opportunity to manage the reception of people from court and their early days in custody more safely and effectively. There is no need for a small female estate dealing with prisoners facing lengthy sentences to follow the historic male model of large "local" prisons parcelling people up for long term training prisons. Continuity of a woman's care from community to prison and back again offers a much better prospect. Similarly, the requirements of security open up different options for the female estate. Most women are held in much higher security environments than their offences warrant and escape is rarely the concern.
19. PRT has urged the Ministry of Justice and HMPPS to accept that the planning of the custodial estate for women must start from first principles of who these prisons are going to be for, the purpose they will serve, where they need to be and what they need to be like. A significant capital spend should only be considered in the context of a long-term plan informed by a whole of government strategy to reduce the unnecessary use of imprisonment. We recommend that the Welsh Affairs Committee call for a "Welsh female offender strategy first, estate strategy second". There is an opportunity now to embed a new approach, one that will deliver better

¹⁹ Ministry of Justice (2016) *Prison Safety and Reform*, London: HMSO, para 242

²⁰ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2017) *Report on an unannounced inspection of HMP & YOI Peterborough (Women)*, London: HMIP, p.5

outcomes for women, their children, families, and communities rather than build a new prison for women.

Building a 'Whole Systems Approach' in Wales.

20. Planning for women offenders in Wales requires a long-term commitment to the development of a Whole Systems Approach in Wales.
21. One of the curious features of imprisonment is that its cost is neither known nor considered by the communities which create the demand for it. It is a “free good” in the criminal justice system, with no local accountability or incentives for controlling demand or expenditure. The public is informed only in the broadest terms of the cost of imprisonment and there is no local benefit to reducing it. Yet the intergenerational costs of women’s imprisonment are considerable.²¹ A study of “justice reinvestment” pilots shows that local authorities are able to influence demand, and we urge that further work be undertaken to make the local costs and drivers of imprisonment transparent, and to allow for the reinvestment of at least a portion of savings from its reduction to be invested locally rather than absorbed centrally.
22. In areas such as Greater Manchester, local authorities and community agencies have been collaborating, with local leadership and governance, to redesign the criminal justice response to women in constructive ways that reduce reoffending and improve women’s outcomes. The problem solving court, a problem solving approach by the police, and community-based women’s services all play key roles.²² The number of women being imprisoned in the Manchester area has declined significantly as a result.²³ Wales represents a promising area to consider absorbing the responsibility and funding for imprisonment as part of the devolution deal in its next iteration and we understand that the Welsh Government-appointed Commission on Justice in Wales, chaired by Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd will have a remit to examine this in more detail.²⁴
23. We believe this would promote far greater transparency about the costs and consequences of imprisonment and inspire consideration of how to provide a service to the public and local courts which both commands their confidence and achieves best value for money. It would help focus minds on the reality that offenders from Wales, including those in custody, remain the responsibility of local services and are most likely to desist from crime if those services and agencies collaborate effectively both during and after their sentence. This is particularly pressing when:
 - Short sentences have the worst reoffending outcomes. More than half (51%) of all women leaving prison are reconvicted within 12 months—for those serving sentences of less than 12 months, the reconviction rate rises to 62%. The extent to which community sentences outperform short spells in prison with respect to reoffending is greater for women than for men (9.7% v 7%). Women released from custody are also more likely to reoffend, and reoffend sooner than those serving community sentences.²⁵

²¹ For examples of costings see Prison Reform Trust (2016) *Leading Change: the role of local authorities in supporting women with multiple needs*, London: Prison Reform Trust

²² Guiney, T. and Earle, J. (2017) *Fair Cop? Improving outcomes for women at the point of arrest* A Discussion Paper, London: Prison Reform Trust

²³ Parliamentary written question 71001, 26 April 2017

²⁴ Welsh Government, *Written Statement—Update on the Commission on Justice in Wales*

<http://gov.wales/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2017/updateoncommjustinwales/?lang=en>

²⁵ Table 6.07, 6.09 and 6.10, Ministry of Justice (2016) *Women and the criminal Justice system 2015*, London: Ministry of Justice

- The impact on children of parental involvement in the criminal justice system, especially prison, can be traumatic: they are twice as likely as their peers to have poor mental health, and are more at risk of poverty, poor health, and insecure housing and finances. The impacts of maternal imprisonment are especially marked.²⁶ The last Criminal Justice Joint Inspection review of resettlement recommended more focus on the specific needs of women as parents.²⁷
- The provision of safe and suitable accommodation is essential—see the evidence collated in [Home Truths—housing for women in the criminal justice system](#), and all the recent HMIP inspection reports on women’s prisons.²⁸
- The increased recognition of domestic abuse as a driver to women’s offending makes it imperative to improve join-up between services for women as victims and as offenders.

24. Wales has been at the forefront of developing a distinct approach for women and there is a real opportunity to build upon these successes. In 2013, the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) in Wales funded the establishment of the IOM Cymru Women’s Pathfinder Project which was informed by the landmark Corston Report. The aim of the Pathfinder was to ‘design and deliver a women-specific, whole system, integrated approach to managing women who come into contact with the Criminal Justice System (CJS) in Wales’. In 2014 the Diversion Scheme started to be operated by police in Cardiff, with women’s service provider Gibran, and in 2015/16 it was rolled out in each of the four Welsh Police Force areas (Newport in Gwent with Newport Women’s Aid; Merthyr Tydfil in South Wales with Safer Wales; Haverfordwest in Dyfed Powys with Gwalia and St Asaph in North Wales with North Wales Women’s Centre).

25. A recent evaluation of the pathfinder by the Welsh Centre for Crime and Social Justice analysed outcomes for the 722 women who participated in the Diversion Scheme during the study period.²⁹ The evaluation found that:

- The professionals (police and providers; front-line and management) involved in the Scheme were overwhelmingly positive both about the intended aims or purpose of the Scheme and about its successes.
- The women were overwhelmingly positive about the Scheme and described multiple benefits of their referral into it.
- The IOM analysis found that the women who participated in the Diversion Scheme experienced improvements across a range of dimensions including increases in agency, hope, resilience and well-being and decreases in impulsivity and practical problems. The biggest improvements were for offending behaviour and mental health.
- A cost-benefit analysis indicated that investing 0.51% of the current police budget spent on female offending delivers 235% on investment. In other words, for every £1 spent on the Diversion Scheme the police recoup £2.35

²⁶ See for example, Minson, S. et al (2015) Sentencing of mothers: Improving the sentencing process and outcomes for women with dependent children, London: Prison Reform Trust

²⁷ Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (2017) An Inspection of Through the Gate Resettlement Services for Prisoners Serving 12 Months or More, A joint inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation and HM Inspectorate of Prisons, London: HMIP

²⁸ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2017) HM Chief Inspector of Prisons annual report: 2016 to 2017, London: HMSO

²⁹ Holloway, K., Williams, K., and Brayford, J. (2017) Evaluation of the Pan-Wales Women’s Triage (The Diversion Scheme), Pontypridd: Welsh Centre for Crime and Justice

back into their budget. Whilst of course the investment has to be made up front, by the second year the Scheme should be both paying for itself and generating additional savings which police can use for other activities.

26. Criminal Justice Liaison services help to identify need at the point of arrest, make appropriate referrals, and inform pre-sentence reports. These need to be available across Wales and need to have services with which to liaise and into which to refer.
27. The PRT Transforming Lives programme has found a real appetite in Wales for greater multi-agency working and a widespread recognition that early intervention can significantly reduce the need for imprisonment. On the 20 February 2017 the Prison Reform Trust and the North Wales Police and Crime Commissioner co-hosted a roundtable to examine recent increases in the number of women from North Wales sentenced to short sentences of immediate imprisonment. This was attended by 20 participants representing a broad section of agencies from across North Wales including the Police and Crime Commissioner, the police, HM Prisons and Probation, the Welsh Government, Her Majesty's Court Service, the Magistracy, the North Wales Women's Centre and other local third sector organisations. As a result of this work the North Wales Criminal Justice Board has agreed an action plan to reverse the rise in short jail sentences given to women.³⁰

Investing in Women's Services

28. Because women are such a small minority of those in the criminal justice system, and of the prison population, they are easily overlooked in criminal justice policy, planning, and services. For this reason, the Prison Reform Trust, alongside supporters including the Soroptimist UKPAC, was pleased to help secure the first statutory safeguard for women's criminal justice services in Section 10 of the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014. This obliges the Secretary of State for Justice to address the specific needs of women in the provision of offender supervision and support.
29. However, it is clear that dedicated women's services in England and Wales have been adversely affected by the Transforming Rehabilitation and other reforms including cuts to local authority, social care and health budgets. This is to be regretted when there is strong evidence that specialist women's services, working as part of a structured community intervention can improve women's outcomes:
 - A careful analysis by Hedderman and Jolliffe³¹ found that women released from prison are twice as likely to reoffend as a comparable cohort of women given community orders. Propensity score matching using information on over 3,000 women's current offence and criminal history was used to create a sample of 320 women who had been sentenced to prison who were equivalent on all measured variables to 320 women who received a community sentence. Twelve months after release those from prison were found to have committed significantly more and more costly offences and were more likely to be sent back to prison. The overall additional cost of prison in this sample was conservatively estimated to be £3.6m.

³⁰ Website of the Police and Crime Commissioner for North Wales. Action plan to reverse shock rise in short jail sentences given to women, available at:

<http://www.northwales-pcc.gov.uk/en/News/News/Action-plan-to-reverse-shock-rise-in-short-jail-sentences-given-to-women.aspx>

³¹ Hedermann, C. and Jolliffe, D. (2015) The Impact of Prison for Women on the Edge: Paying the Price for Wrong Decisions. *Victims & Offenders An International Journal of Evidence-based Research, Policy, and Practice*, 10 (2), 152-178

- In 2015 the Justice Data Lab³² assessed the impact on re-offending of support provided to female offenders by women’s centres throughout England. The one year proven re-offending rate for 5973 offenders who received support provided by women’s centres throughout England was 30%, compared with 35% for a matched control group of similar offenders from England. This was based upon analysis of information that has been supplied by 39 women’s centres throughout England to the National Offender Management Service.
30. Despite the growing evidence base about the effectiveness of women’s centres, funding is precarious and this vital community infrastructure is at risk. Once it is gone it is difficult and costly to re-establish. The sustainability of women’s community services has long been a concern, a point recognised by the Justice Committee in its March 2015 follow-up report on women offenders: *“We are concerned that funding appears to be a recurring problem for women’s centres and that future funding arrangements have not been put on a sound basis as we recommended...we reiterate our recommendation that sustainable funding of specialist women’s services should be a priority.”* The recent HM Inspectorate of Probation’s thematic review of services in the community for women who offend (2016) found that *“Women’s centres are particularly vulnerable and some have already lost funding, yet they have an important role to play. We found cases where they had been pivotal in turning women away from crime and helping them to rebuild their lives.”* Women in minority groups are likely to be particularly badly affected by weaknesses in the provision of specialist, gender-specific local services.³³
31. We have argued that the funding allocated to new women’s prisons provides a chance to make both the modest capital investment needed in the community and to give sufficient certainty on resource funding. This can attract the cross-sector support that characterises women’s centres where they exist already. Because women’s centres are both cheaper to establish and to run, and can lever in funding from diverse sources, the capital and revenue spend earmarked for new prisons could achieve a much broader impact geographically, in terms of the number of individuals affected, and the range of potential benefits and savings achieved. The women’s prison population could be significantly reduced, with associated savings across government, and the prospect of much less disruption and much better outcomes for women involved in low level offending in Wales. Women’s centres offer not just radically lower running costs than custody, but also a range of benefits to service users and their children far beyond the criminal justice arena, with scope to derive revenue from the access they provide to women in need of support.

³² Ministry of Justice (2015) Justice Data Lab Reoffending Analysis: Women’s Centres Throughout England, London: MoJ

³³ Prison Reform Trust (2017) Counted Out: Black, Asian and minority ethnic women in the criminal justice system, London: Prison Reform Trust

Appendix 1: Use of custody for women in Wales, 2011–2016

Chart 1: Use of immediate imprisonment for women by police force area in Wales, 2011–2016

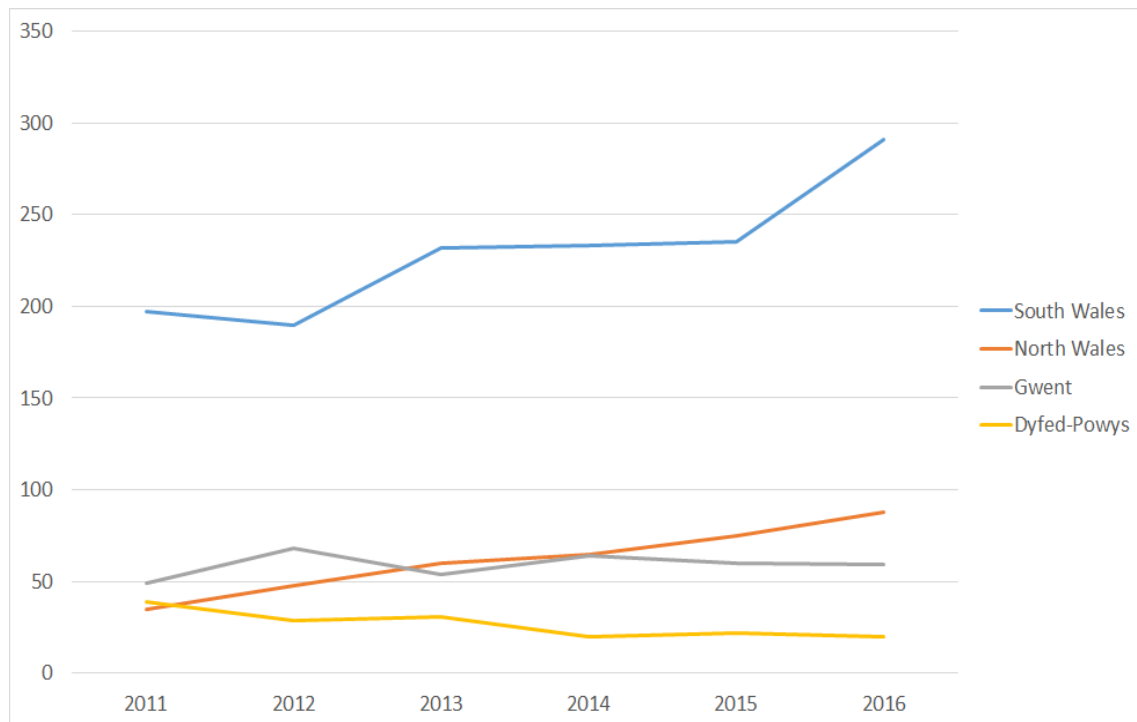
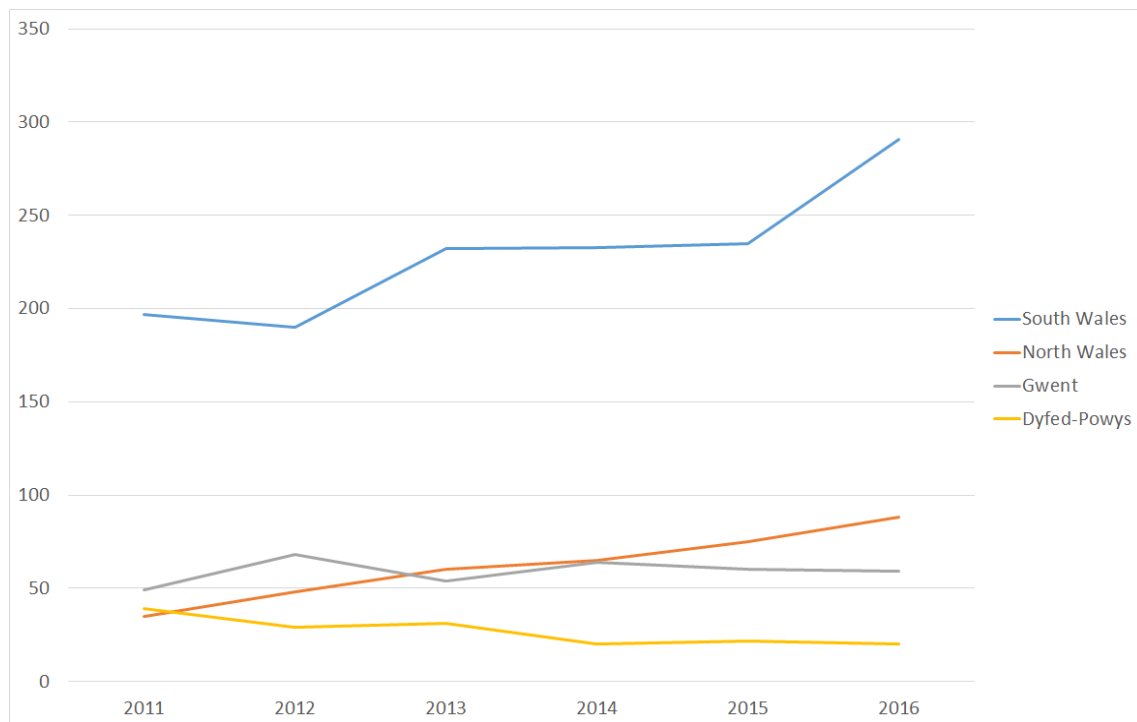


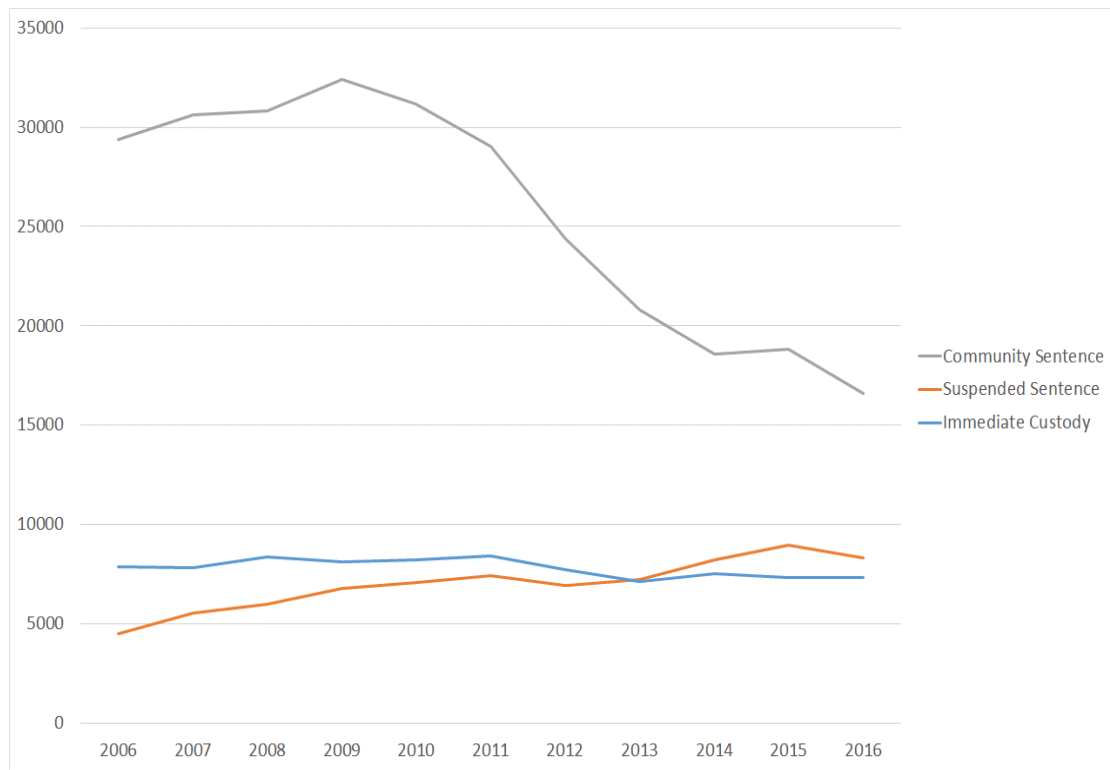
Chart 2: Use of short sentences of immediate custody for women in Wales, 2011–2016



Source: Ministry of Justice (2017) Freedom of Information request 112108

Appendix 2

Chart 3: Sentencing outcomes for women in England and Wales, 2006–2016



Source: Ministry of Justice (2017) Justice Data Tool, Offender Management Statistics Quarterly, London: Ministry of Justice