

Our ref: DB/10/20

14 October 2020

The Rt Hon Robert Buckland QC MP
Secretary of State for Justice
Ministry of Justice
102 Petty France
Westminster
LONDON SW1H 9AJ

The Rt Revd Rachel Treweek
Bishop of Gloucester & Anglican Bishop
for HM Prisons
The Bishops' Office
2 College Green, Gloucester, GL1 2LR
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Dear Secretary of State

Thank you for your desire to work for the well being of all people. To that end I am now sending you the Report and Recommendations resulting from the work of the Safe Homes for Women Leaving Prison initiative and would like to request a meeting between you and representatives of the initiative. I fully appreciate that this may need to be over Zoom.

I have also written to The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

The partner organisations of this initiative are the London Prisons Mission, the Prison Reform Trust, HMP & YOI Bronzefield and the church of St Martin in the Fields. During the last twelve months they have conducted extensive consultations with public, private and voluntary sector agencies not only in London but also far beyond in order to identify realistic and sustainable solutions to the plight of vulnerable women presently too often discharged from prison to no fixed abode. As you know, and as has been acknowledged in the Government's recent white paper 'A Smarter Approach to Sentencing', when such women are homeless, they are at risk of abuse, have difficulty resuming or beginning healthy lives, are very likely to reoffend and thus return to prison at further cost to public funds. It is good to see that the white paper acknowledges that 'the positive impact of addressing their needs is significant' (Annex B paragraph 399).

We look forward to an opportunity to discuss this report and the many practical recommendations we have made to improve outcomes for women and communities. Specifically, we seek your urgent response to our request that you work closely with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to:

.../...

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- review the operation and effectiveness of the ‘duty to refer’ in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, particularly in relation to the housing needs of women in the criminal justice system, in consultation with all the women’s prisons;
- develop a cross government strategy to ensure that no woman is discharged homeless from prison, ensuring that the necessary commitments are set out in the Concordat promised in the Female Offender Strategy to operationalise the whole systems approach;
- ensure that responsibility for arranging a woman’s accommodation on release is clearly designated within each prison, as recommended by Lord Farmer, with a target time period for women to be in settled accommodation post-release, and ensure specialist support through and beyond the gate is funded;
- authorise and promote the use of video links for pre-release communication between women in prison and housing providers, including local authority housing officers.

Further recommendations are in the enclosed report, addressed to the different agencies with a role to play in ensuring safe homes for women leaving prison, while Appendix 2 contains some models of good practice and further insights from leading voluntary sector providers.

I would be grateful if you could offer a date and time when it would be convenient for a meeting to take place either in person or over Zoom.

In the meantime this comes with my thanks and good wishes as we navigate these challenging times.

Yours sincerely

+ Rachel Gloucester:

With co-signatories:

John Plummer, Coordinator, London Prisons Mission

Peter Dawson, Director, Prison Reform Trust

Dr Jenny Earle, Programme Director, Transforming Lives. Reducing Women’s
Imprisonment

Revd Catherine Duce, Assistant Vicar for Partnership Development,

St Martin in the Fields

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