

The Rt. Hon. Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Justice
Ministry of Justice
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1 December 2015



Your planned closure of HMP Holloway, the largest women's prison in Europe, will undoubtedly send an important message to courts to use imprisonment as a punishment of last resort for women. This is our understanding of your intent, underlined by a constructive meeting last week with your Justice Minister, Caroline Dinéage.

Encouraged by your invitation to think radically, I write with a challenging proposition. Closing Holloway could enable you and strategic partners, including MOPAC, Islington Borough Council, women's voluntary organisations, the Troubled Families programme, NHS London, the Metropolitan Police and MTC Novo, to put in its place an effective alternative to women's imprisonment. A comparatively small part of the Holloway site could be used to establish a women's centre providing support and supervision for women caught up in the justice system. A further option would be to add residential accommodation for vulnerable women in need of somewhere safe to live. Our consultations with women at Holloway indicate that safe housing would be their priority need.

Across 32 London boroughs there are only two women's centres in operation. Holloway Women's Centre would give central and North London courts the option to make a community order which would enable women to gain access to, amongst others, mental healthcare, drug and alcohol treatment, debt advice, skills training and parenting support. As with other women's centres profiled in the Corston review and those we have visited more recently, the support of experienced staff would help women gain confidence to escape domestic violence and coercion and take responsibility for their lives and for their children.

To the right of the entrance to HMP Holloway before you enter the prison walls, there is an excellent, modern visitors' centre with crèche facilities. This building, opened in 1996, was funded by charitable foundations and trusts. It was developed by a much-admired penal reformer, Una Padel who ensured, before her early death from cancer, that each London prison had such a centre. Symbolically and practically this would form the hub of a community facility for women.

I look forward to discussing this proposition with you and colleagues. The Prison Reform Trust would be pleased to help in any way we can to make sure that the closure of Holloway has a positive and tangible outcome.



Juliet Lyon