

## Centres of Excellence

### A proposal for investment in a network of women's centres in England and Wales

#### Background

1. On the 3 November 2016, the Ministry of Justice published a White Paper 'Prison Safety and Reform' setting out the government's vision for reform of the prison estate in England and Wales. In relation to women, the White Paper committed to publishing a strategy to "improve the safety and reform of female offenders in custody and in the community", and to "the creation of five small community prisons for women". Relevant paragraphs set out below for convenience.

#### ***A framework for criminal justice reform***

*28. A greater focus on outcomes in reforming offenders will lead to more tailored approaches. We know, for example, that many female offenders are often vulnerable members of society. There is evidence that a specific approach is most effective in helping women to address the issues that may be underlying their offending and to turn their lives around. In early 2017 we will publish a strategy setting out how we will improve the treatment of female offenders in custody and in the community. This will look at how we can reduce the number of women offending and ending up in custody, including through early and targeted interventions.*

#### ***Creating community prisons for women***

*255. As well as making improvements in the male estate we will start to improve how we manage the specific needs of women prisoners through the creation of five small community prisons for women. Community prisons will focus on preparing women for release, in a similar way to resettlement prisons. They will mean that more women are held closer to their homes and given the support services they need to help them address what are often multiple and complex needs. Within these prisons there will be very close links with the providers of services in the community. Their smaller size will help improve the effectiveness of the resettlement services and support provided. We will seek to use land adjacent to existing sites to get economies of scale, whilst maintaining the feel of separate institutions that will be important for prisoners' experiences.*

2. The White Paper proposals were discussed at a specially convened Advisory Board on Women Offenders (ABFO) roundtable on the 28 November 2016 and the standing ABFO meeting on the 12 December 2016.
3. There has been little further detail announced about the community prisons and publication of the overall strategy for custody and community has been delayed until the summer. However, this delay and the establishment of Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) provides an opportunity to develop more detailed and joined-up proposals for the women's centres and services to support early interventions and community sentencing.

#### Prison Reform Trust Proposal

4. On the 25 January 2017 PRT's Director, Peter Dawson, and Chair James Timpson attended a roundtable convened by the Justice Secretary. Peter welcomed the White Paper and encouraged the Justice Secretary to consider what more the MOJ could do to complete a national network of women's centres. Significant parts of that network exist now, but there are major geographical gaps, including London, the South East and the North East. Women's centres provide gender-informed, 'whole systems approach' interventions with women at risk of both committing and becoming victims of crime, as well an option

for courts looking to deal most constructively with those who have already become enmeshed in the criminal justice system.

5. While detailed information on the overall financial envelope available for women in the criminal justice system is not publicly available, the proposed support for women's services, both capital and revenue, is currently disproportionately weighted towards investment in new custodial facilities. On the basis of the best available evidence, our proposal is that the Ministry of Justice should allocate between 25%- 50% of the funding currently earmarked for new women's community prisons to pump prime the MOJ Female Offender Strategy through a national network of women's centres that enable both criminal justice and non-criminal justice agencies to intervene earlier and more constructively, reducing both harm and cost.
6. While different delivery options exist the MOJ may wish to consider a 'centre of excellence' model with a network of regional hubs in England and Wales intended to embed Whole Systems Approach working, encourage innovation in early intervention, gender informed working and community sentencing, and strengthen the evidence base for reducing women's offending. In turn, these centres would support smaller 'spoke' sites providing holistic support to women in their local communities. We are aware of approximately 50-60 women's centres providing both universal and targeted services to women in England and Wales although that number has decreased in recent years as many have experienced financial difficulties. In some regions, existing provision provides the obvious candidates for regional hubs, in others, for example London, the South West and the North East, investment in new women's centres is needed to ensure there is consistent and reliable national provision. This proposal works with the grain of existing MoJ funding opportunities, that expect providers to use MoJ funding to lever in support from other statutory and non-statutory sources.
7. The White Paper and the funding allocated to new provision for women 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, 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.
8. Assuming the success of early interventions and greater use of community orders where appropriate the women's prison population could be significantly reduced, with associated savings across government.

### The Evidence for Women's Centres

9. In recent decades a series of inquiries and reports have concluded that prison is rarely a necessary, appropriate or proportionate response to women who come into contact with the justice system. The available evidence suggests that women's centres are far more effective in addressing women's offending:
  - In 2015 the Justice Data Lab 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 (NOMS).
  - A careful analysis by Hedderman and Jolliffe (2015) found that women released from prison are twice as likely to reoffend as a comparable cohort of women given community orders. Propensity score matching (PSM) 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 also to be more likely to be sent back to prison. The overall additional cost of prison in this sample was conservatively estimated to be **£3.6 million**.

- There is also evidence from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) that women are more likely to comply with a community order or period of licence supervision than men, which justifies confidence that many will engage constructively with an out of court disposal order with conditions.

10. The economic case for this proposal is compelling. The annual cost of housing a woman in prison for a year is in the region of £38,000 - £46,000, in contrast the average cost of a community order is £2,800 and approximately £1,500 for support in a women's centre. MoJ investment is likely to be matched by other budget-holders. Recent analysis by the Women Centred Working project has found that a women's centre providing holistic, gender informed services is likely to be attractive to Local Authorities, NHS England / Public Health England and independent trusts and foundations supporting the voluntary and community sector. The analysis below **excludes** the avoided cost of prison custody, but still shows savings of around £32,000 annually per woman.

| Costs per woman over two years              |               | Local Authority savings over two years     |                |
|---|---------------|--|----------------|
| Engagement, advocacy and support work       | £2,852        | Drugs misuse services                      | £4,541         |
| Supervision, risk assessment and management | £412          | Retaining custody of child (avoiding care) | £52,676        |
| Women Centre overhead                       | £640          | Domestic violence-related services         | £11,824        |
| Freedom Programme                           | £200          |  |                |
| Multiagency steering group                  | £16           |  |                |
| <b>TOTAL COSTS</b>                          | <b>£4,120</b> | <b>TOTAL SAVINGS</b>                       | <b>£69,041</b> |

Source: Women Centred Working: Taking Forward Women Centred Solutions (April 2016)

## Conclusion

11. We recognise the need for modernisation of the women's prison estate and the case for a small community prison for women in London following the closure of HMP Holloway. However, we are concerned that without a comprehensive strategy for prison closure and community solutions the building of five new women's prisons could increase the number of women held in custody and does not address the high rates of reoffending amongst short-sentenced women. A re-balancing of the total funding envelope for women in the criminal justice system would allow the MoJ and the newly formed HMPPS to strengthen delivery against the objectives already set out by the Secretary of State for Justice and her predecessors. The availability of durable women's services would encourage greater use of community options which are proven to reduce women's offending and reduce breach, recall and remand rates that have artificially inflated the women's prison population, with wider impacts on children and families.
12. It is undoubtedly true that other parts of central and local government would stand to benefit significantly from an MoJ initiative of this kind, but the funding secured for the new custodial units represents a very unusual opportunity at a time of general reductions in public expenditure. A central government investment in this vital infrastructure would reduce harm and cost specifically within the criminal justice system, but also across a broad swathe of central and local government interests. But it does require a lead – we urge the Ministry of Justice to provide it.

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