



## Home truths: housing for women in the criminal justice system

Revised June 2018

*The accommodation pathway is the most in need of speedy, fundamental, gender-specific reform and should be reviewed urgently.*

Baroness J. Corston, 2007<sup>1</sup>

*The Ministry of Justice and HMPPS should commission a review of accommodation outcomes for women being released from prison to gain a better understanding of the issues and develop solutions to improve outcomes.*

HMP & YOI Peterborough Inspectorate report, 2017<sup>2</sup>

*The Board spoke to many prisoners being released from Bronzefield and found that 50-60% were leaving as No Fixed Abode (NFA). Although a letter is given to local authorities, they do not see women coming out of prison as a priority. There is a desperate shortage of hostel and social housing. So many of these women could end up on the streets living rough and open to abuse.*

Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP and YOI Bronzefield, 2017<sup>3</sup>

*The main problem women have coming out of custody is accommodation... when you've got accommodation, every other thing will fall into place.*

Sarah, imprisoned mother of two, supported by Re-Unite<sup>4</sup>

*We believe that everyone leaving custody should have a safe and suitable home to go to on release; having somewhere to live gives people a stable platform from which to access health services, hold down a job and reduces the likelihood of them reoffending.*

Lucy Frazer MP, Parliamentary under Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice, 2018<sup>5</sup>

### Executive summary

*The prison had issued tents to two women who were released without anywhere to go to and the chaplaincy often gave out sleeping bags. The prison said the lack of social housing stock in the southeast and local authority housing departments' frequent downgrading of ex-offenders to 'low priority' were contributory factors.*

HMP & YOI Bronzefield Inspectorate report, 2016<sup>6</sup>

Since this briefing was first published in September 2016 there has been some progress and women may no longer be issued with tents. However, there remains a chronic shortage of suitable housing options for women leaving prison. Safe, secure housing is crucial in breaking the cycle of offending and the harm it causes to our communities, to the women involved and to their families.

- Many women lose their homes while in custody and 60% of women prisoners may not have homes to go to on release.
- Because women are often imprisoned further from their homes than men, they can have more difficulty in retaining a 'local connection', which is a common precondition for local authority housing.
- A lack of appropriate and safe accommodation increases the risk of (re)offending - without stable housing it is harder to engage in employment and training, or to access support services.

- Hostel accommodation may expose women to potentially risky situations.
- Suitable accommodation options for women, especially those with children or those affected by substance misuse, mental health problems, or domestic abuse are in short supply.
- Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women are overrepresented in prison and face additional barriers to housing.\*
- Responsibility for the housing of women offenders is not clearly designated.
- Women in prison need more timely advice about their housing options and support to sustain tenancies or apply for housing and social security benefits.
- Better communication, cooperation and joined up working between prison authorities, probation services, housing providers, and local authorities is needed.

## Introduction and purpose of this briefing

*Ensuring appropriate accommodation for people who offend is the foundation for successful rehabilitation, resettlement and risk management. It can provide the anchor for a previously chaotic life and act as a springboard for other crucial steps – such as getting and keeping a job, and accessing health care or drug treatment.*<sup>7</sup>

Accommodation is one of the ‘nine pathways’ officially recognised by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) as key to reducing reoffending for women (see Annex A). It is identified by people who offend as second only to employment in improving their chances of resettlement. Yet women in trouble with the law may find themselves declared intentionally homeless, deemed ineligible for housing, or cut off housing benefit and evicted for rent arrears. Without a home, it is that much harder to care for children, get a job or training placement, register with a GP and access health care, or arrange benefits.

A lack of suitable housing can be a driver to offending itself. A homeless woman may commit a crime out of desperation to have a roof over her head, albeit in a police or prison cell. Women in unsuitable accommodation may offend to obtain essential items of furniture, clothing, or food, often for their children.<sup>8</sup> Access to safe, affordable accommodation is commonly identified by women in prison as a top priority for successful resettlement as one woman said, “**Without it you don’t have a chance.**”<sup>9</sup>

The importance of addressing women’s housing needs, was emphasised in the *Transforming Lives* report based on action research by Soroptimist clubs in the UK.<sup>10</sup>

### **Recommendations from Transforming Lives report:**

- Local authorities and housing associations should give housing priority to women with vulnerabilities that put them at risk of offending – including women affected by abusive relationships, drug or alcohol problems, or poor mental health.
- Local strategies to reduce women’s offending and imprisonment should take account of women’s housing needs, including the needs of those with dependent children and the consequences for children of lack of stable, secure homes, drawing on data identified in local Joint Strategy Needs Assessments.
- The time limit for eligibility for housing benefit for sentenced prisoners should be extended from 13 weeks to six months to prevent short-sentenced women from losing their home.

\*For further information about the experience of Black, Asian and minority ethnic women in the criminal justice system, see Prison Reform Trust’s “Counted Out” report (2017).

This briefing builds on these recommendations and sets out to:

- Present the evidence on the unmet housing needs of women in contact with the criminal justice system.
- Highlight the link between addressing these housing needs and reducing reoffending.
- Identify the barriers that women often face in finding and maintaining stable accommodation.
- Provide examples of good and promising practice.
- Make recommendations for action at the local and national level.

The statutory and policy frameworks differ in England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland but as the problems are similar across the UK, this briefing takes a thematic approach. Since it was first published there have been a number of helpful developments including passage of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and creation of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). The Ministry of Justice has announced improvements to the Home Detention Curfew Scheme for early release but having stable accommodation is a precondition for that.

### Key Facts

- In England and Wales, women are imprisoned on average 64 miles away from home and in 2010 more than 17,000 children were separated from their mothers by imprisonment.
- 8,545 women were sent to prison in the year to September 2017 in England and Wales. Women are more likely than men to be on remand.
- Most women (72% in England and Wales) entering prison under an immediate custodial sentence are on sentences of less than 12 months, and 62% are in for 6 months or less (77% for women in Scotland).
- Black British women made up 10% of the women's prison population compared to only 3% of all the overall women's population.
- 31% of women prisoners spent time in care as children, compared with 24% of men.
- 60% of women prisoners do not have homes to go to on release.
- Lack of housing affects employment and employment outcomes for women following short prison sentences are three times worse than for men. Fewer than 1 in 10 women have a job to go to on release.

For a comprehensive briefing on factors affecting women's offending and imprisonment see Why Focus on Women's Imprisonment at [www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/women](http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/women); See also: Ministry of Justice (2008), PSO 4800: Women Prisoners.

## Why housing matters

*There are a lot of women with the same problem. Housing is a big worry - it would be good if we had somewhere to go. My children never had a settled life. I went to see housing right after the court case and I hope to get a move.*

Woman interviewed for evaluation of Scotland's Rough Sleepers Initiative.<sup>11</sup>

A lack of housing can jeopardise a person's physical health and emotional wellbeing, as well as reducing opportunities for education, employment and participation in public life. The average age of death for a woman who is homeless is 43.

Research suggests that people who commit offences are likely to have a "volatile" housing history and 15% of prisoners were homeless before entering custody, compared to 4% of the general population.<sup>12</sup> They have often lived in temporary accommodation and hostels and are more likely to lack community

links and connections.<sup>13</sup> St Mungo's noted in the *Rebuilding Shattered Lives* report that almost half (42%) of the homeless women they worked with had an offending history, and over a third (36%) had been to prison.<sup>14</sup> The same report noted earlier research that found 19% of women in prison were not in permanent accommodation before entering prison, and 10% had been sleeping rough.<sup>15</sup>

#### **Threshold Housing First Project for Women Offenders, North West England**

Threshold Housing First project can support up to 12 women with high and complex needs, who have experience of homelessness. While the service was initially designed to work with women who are former offenders, the remit has been widened to include all homeless women with complex needs.

The evaluation of the project found that Housing First services can be very effective for homeless people with multiple and complex needs. This includes people with repeated or long-term experience of homelessness.

According to the Corston report, for women in the criminal justice system housing is “[probably \[their\] most significant resettlement need](#)”.<sup>16</sup> In a Ministry of Justice survey in 2012, 37% of newly sentenced prisoners stated they would need help in finding a place to live on release, and most of these needed a lot of help.<sup>17</sup> The group surveyed was mixed and the level of need was similar for women and men interviewed. Other research shows that women are more likely than men to lose a tenancy when they enter prison,<sup>18</sup> making them particularly vulnerable and destabilising families.<sup>19</sup>

The recent HM Inspectorate of Prisons report on HMP Peterborough (women) recommended that Community Rehabilitation Company staff need to form relationships with local authorities and housing providers across a wide geographical area. The report found that only 30% of women released lived reasonably close to the prison, in Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire or Hertfordshire. The remainder were released to addresses further afield, including Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk, London and the Midlands. Women from Essex were particularly vulnerable to homelessness, but the report notes emerging evidence of attempts to influence strategic thinking within that region.<sup>20</sup>

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women face additional barriers in accessing services to help with resettlement and rehabilitation on release from prison due to racial discrimination, stigma, isolation, cultural differences and, for some, language barriers.<sup>21</sup> The Lammy review reported in September 2017<sup>22</sup> with recommendations for ensuring equality in criminal justice outcomes. The Government Response in December 2017 noted the “[worrying disparities affecting BAME women in the Justice System... some groups have specific needs compared to the rest of the offender population](#)”<sup>23</sup>

#### **Debbie's story from Tomorrow's Women Glasgow (TWG), Scotland**

Debbie has a history of drug and alcohol misuse and has been in and out of prison. Following several months in a psychiatric hospital, Debbie was under pressure to return to her previous tenancy despite receiving threats of violence from a local gang member. The TWG housing advisor approached another Housing Association to arrange a transfer to an area where Debbie had family support. The negotiation was difficult due to Debbie's fragile mental health and her history of offending, but TWG continued to facilitate meetings with all involved agencies. TWG evidenced that Debbie was well supported and would be more likely to sustain a tenancy in a safe area where she had family. Debbie moved into her new tenancy and has since thrived. With stable mental health, Debbie now has supervised visits with her child, attends regular TWG activities, and is not using alcohol or drugs. She has not committed any more offences.

## Prevention of offending and reoffending

*Women need somewhere nice and safe so that they don't reoffend. Women are passed from pillar to post and told, 'Try phoning this number'. Some of them don't even have a phone. No housing means no proper wash or anything; they spiral downwards.*

Woman at POPS' Farida Women's Centre, Manchester

The link between homelessness and offending behaviour can become an ongoing cycle: spending time in prison increases the risk of homelessness, while a lack of stable accommodation increases the likelihood of offending and reoffending.<sup>24</sup> In one study almost half (46%) of homeless people surveyed said they had been in prison or a young offenders institution, and in another 60% of prisoners said that having a place to live would stop them reoffending.<sup>25</sup>

In a report for the Scottish Government, most of those surveyed said they had committed offences directly or indirectly as a result of their housing circumstances, and many said they had done so to be returned to custody.<sup>26</sup> The Angiolini Commission on Women Offenders in Scotland recommended:

*Inter-agency protocols on prison discharge and homelessness be introduced across Scotland with the twin aims of sustaining tenancies when women are in custody and securing access to safe accommodation for every woman prisoner upon release.<sup>27</sup>*

The inter-agency protocols have been replaced by a set of Scottish Sustainable Housing on Release for Everyone (SHORE) standards<sup>28</sup> which were launched in December 2017. These standards should ensure that housing needs are addressed immediately on admission to prison, throughout custody and that support is delivered through the gate on release.

### **Denise's Story, Stirling Council tenant**

Denise was sentenced to three years in prison, however to ensure she was able to keep her flat and not accrue rent arrears, the Council sublet her property for temporary homeless accommodation while Denise was in prison. Denise's belongings were placed in storage by the council and her flat was re-furnished. When released from prison, Denise was able to return back to her flat free of any rental debt and with her belongings.

In Northern Ireland, O'Neill (2011) noted that accommodation problems, particularly homelessness, are frequently linked with offending.<sup>29</sup> Research has found 36% of women prisoners in Northern Ireland did not know where they would live on release, 44% had experience of living in a hostel, and 32% had been in care.<sup>30</sup> Women who return to unsuitable accommodation, for example with an abusive partner, or in a mixed hostel where they can be vulnerable to predatory men, or housed where there is easy access to drugs, may feel that returning to prison is a safer option.

Reports on women's prisons by HM Inspectorate of Prison indicate that where prison staff are able to identify women's needs at an early stage, and have strong links with accommodation providers and other specialist services, women are more likely to be released into settled accommodation, increasing the likelihood of positive outcomes.<sup>31</sup> A recent inspectorate report of HMP Peterborough found that too many women were being released with no fixed accommodation:

*A combination of factors, including the complexity of some women, shortages in social housing and the wide catchment area of the prison were responsible.<sup>32</sup>*



## Prison as a last resort

*We are aware of a woman who had been imprisoned for theft, subsequently released homeless, was recalled for breach of Anti-Social Behaviour Order for sleeping in a park and then later released homeless again. Our prisons are being used in place of social housing, it can't go on.*  
Support Worker, Women in Prison

Prison should only be imposed when a lesser sanction cannot be justified, and where someone is a primary carer the impacts on children should be taken into account in sentencing.<sup>33</sup> Only 5% of children with a mother in prison are able to stay in their own home.<sup>34</sup> Women may have been coerced into offending by an abusive partner<sup>35</sup> or may have committed a crime to support another person's addiction. An individual should not be remanded or sentenced to custody because she lacks housing. The courts need to consider the possibility that imprisoning a woman may lead to loss of housing and a cycle of reoffending. Pre-sentence reports need to contain sufficient information to enable courts to make appropriate decisions.

### **Dawn House - Anawim Women's Centre in Birmingham, England**

Anawim opened new purpose-built accommodation – Dawn House - for up to six women who have recently left prison for up to six months. Prison in-reach and street out-reach teams are situated within the building alongside a crèche and money advice service, and women have access to Anawim's range of support services. The aim of Dawn House is to give the women skills and confidence to prepare for employment, training and education so that they can reintegrate into the community.

Women without secure housing, or of 'no fixed abode', may be refused bail and remanded in custody as a result.<sup>36</sup> Nearly half of women entering custody do so on remand, and the majority of them do not go on to receive a custodial sentence.<sup>37</sup> In Scotland almost two thirds of women admitted to prison each year are on remand (1,805 remand, 1,030 sentenced). In England and Wales women on remand spend an average of four to six weeks in prison<sup>38</sup> (under four weeks in Scotland), which can jeopardise their accommodation through rent arrears, for example, and have a devastating impact on their children.<sup>39</sup>

The Justice Committee of the Scottish Parliament is conducting an inquiry into the use of custodial remand, including women's unmet needs for accommodation.<sup>40</sup>

## The impact of short sentences

*The majority of women receiving custodial sentences are subject to short sentences of six months or less, which is long enough to lose accommodation but often too short to gain another home.*

National Offender Management Service<sup>41</sup>

Most women entering prison serve very short sentences, in England and Wales 71% of sentenced women were serving six months or less<sup>42</sup>, and in Scotland it was 77%.<sup>43</sup> Research by Shelter confirms that this significantly exacerbates housing problems.<sup>44</sup> While remand prisoners lose their housing benefit after 52 weeks, for sentenced prisoners it is 13 weeks.<sup>45</sup> Women serving short sentences rarely have access to the support provided to those serving longer sentences. Housing related services can help improve housing outcomes for those who serve short sentences,<sup>46</sup> but research has shown that many prisoners do not know of the existence of such services and, of those that do, very few actually access this support.<sup>47</sup>

## The role of local authorities\*

*You need to be really really really high priority to get anything. They [local authority and housing agencies] put barriers up all the time. They want to know all the risks. Women who are homeless are not even offered anything unless they meet all the criteria. If there's violence, any anti-social behaviour on their record, it's almost impossible – we hit barriers all the time.*

Oldham Probation Officer, June 2016

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 now requires local authorities to help all eligible applicants rather than just those in priority need. This includes a “duty to take steps to prevent homelessness” and a “duty to take steps to relieve homelessness”. Councils will have to help all those who are homeless to secure suitable accommodation, regardless of whether they are ‘intentionally homeless’ or priority need. This should mean that all eligible households are offered help to find a home. It should also ensure that the true scale of homelessness is recorded.<sup>48</sup> The Act includes a ‘Duty to Refer’ requiring all public bodies including probation and prison services to make referrals to local authorities if they are working with people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

### **Housing First pilot, Tri-borough area, London**

This MHCLG funded pilot is run by Standing Together, Advance and St Mungo’s to improve housing pathways for women in the tri-borough (Hammersmith and Fulham, Westminster, and Kensington and Chelsea) who are experiencing multiple disadvantage and domestic abuse. The Housing First pilot is to support women with multiple disadvantages into stable housing and deliver specialist domestic abuse support. The pilot also has “The Green Room” (delivered by St Mungo’s) which is a short-term night shelter for rough sleeping women with a specialist domestic violence worker in post.

Local authorities in England, and the Housing Executive in Northern Ireland, have a duty to provide accommodation to homeless applicants in priority need. What is considered ‘priority’, however, is open to interpretation and varies greatly. The Homelessness Reduction Act now states that Housing authorities have a duty to help secure accommodation for any applicant threatened with homelessness on leaving custody, irrespective of priority need.<sup>49</sup> Local authorities in Scotland now have a duty to provide accommodation to anyone who is unintentionally homeless.<sup>50</sup>

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 places local authorities under a legal duty to help find accommodation for everyone who seeks assistance. This is reducing homelessness across Wales, however concern has been expressed that because released prisoners no longer have specific priority, they may be placed lower down the waiting list. In 2015/16, 921 men and women leaving prison were accepted as homeless under the relief duty of the Act.<sup>51</sup> No separate data for women is available.

Women are often imprisoned far from their local community, making it harder to liaise with relevant housing organisations. This is a particular problem for Welsh women, as they are held in prisons in England, and staff may not be familiar with Welsh legislation or be in touch with services in Wales.<sup>52</sup> Homelessness applications must be initially made in the area where the applicant has a local connection, and being in prison in a certain area does not qualify someone for housing in that area. Women’s prisons have to deal with a particularly large number and spread of local authorities and often inconsistent policies.

\* See also: Leading change: the role of local authorities in supporting women with multiple needs, published by Prison Reform Trust with ADASS, Centre for Mental Health, Education Policy Institute, October 2016

**Women in Prison (WiP)** works with some women who are subject to the Integrated Offender Management (IOM) schemes in their local authorities. This is a coordinated effort by multiple agencies to tackle persistent offending through joined-up working. An individual subject to IOM is allocated a probation officer, a police officer, a housing officer, and often a key worker from a voluntary sector organisation. There is recognition that housing is a pre-requisite for breaking the cycle of offending but having an IOM Housing officer does not guarantee housing provision. WiP has experienced many instances of IOM clients not being housed. This makes reoffending more likely, either with the direct intention of going back to prison to avoid homelessness or as a result of the severe difficulties a woman finds herself in through homelessness.

Due to housing shortages women who are accepted as eligible for local authority housing may be offered accommodation outside their existing community, in some cases, a considerable distance away. While this may work for some women, especially those fleeing domestic violence or wanting to make a fresh start away from destructive influences and networks, they face significant challenges establishing themselves without the support of family, friends, and any service providers they may have been linked with. Turning down such offers can mean that a local authority has discharged its duty to the applicant. For women with strong ties in their local community (e.g. jobs or volunteer placements, childcare commitments or support networks), being relocated to a new area is a high price to pay for housing.

**Unlock** has a designated page on its website about offenders' housing rights and specifically how to apply for local authority housing: [www.hub.unlock.org.uk/knowledgebase/applying-council-housing](http://www.hub.unlock.org.uk/knowledgebase/applying-council-housing)

Local housing authorities are required to produce a homelessness strategy for their area no less than every five years, with the support of social services (Homelessness Act 2002 s.1(4) (6)), and councils should ensure that women with multiple needs, and those returning home from prison, are included. Women who are not housed appropriately by their local authority face a lengthy and complex appeals process, and by the time a decision is made, many will have disengaged with support services, or gone back to prison. Responsibility for ensuring that women have satisfactory accommodation on release from prison has been evaded for too long.<sup>53</sup> However, the Homelessness Reduction Act requires that housing advice be made available to people whilst in custody, and that housing authorities collaborate with prisons, together with probation providers, to provide accessible advice on housing options available to them on release.<sup>54</sup> Housing provided must be suitable for women with multiple needs and for women to be reunited with children and often must be available at short notice.<sup>55</sup> Greater cooperation and information sharing between local authorities, prisons, probations and other agencies, would improve women's resettlement prospects and must be driven by offender managers.

### **Support to retain tenancies**

Research has demonstrated the cost effectiveness of partnership work to support individuals to retain their tenancies.<sup>56</sup>

*If women have arrears, they should advise them how to pay them back, not put them into rough areas where they will get in trouble again.... I need support and advice - accommodation in a good area - not lots of drugs.<sup>57</sup>*



The importance of helping women hold onto their tenancies has been highlighted, supported by adequately funded debt advice organisations.<sup>58</sup> If some women lose their tenancies due to the antisocial behaviour of others residing with them (e.g. vulnerable children), specialist support must be provided to enable women to remain housed whilst coping with these challenges.

## Barriers to housing

Finding and sustaining accommodation can be a challenge for anyone leaving prison, but women prisoners face specific barriers and are therefore particularly vulnerable. This is emphasised in the Scottish Government's (Angiolini) Commission on Women Offenders (2012), the Corston Review for England and Wales (2007) and Northern Ireland's Reducing Offending Among Women strategy (2013-2016).<sup>59,60</sup>

### Lack of suitable accommodation

*Housing Officers working for Local Authorities' Housing Departments are sometimes simply unable to provide the housing needed for applicants on a day-to-day basis. There is no doubt that national housing policy has to change in order to provide the social housing that is desperately needed in order for councils to carry out their duties.*

Support Worker, Women in Prison

The lack of social housing across the UK affects the housing prospects of women leaving prison, as prison inspectorate reports confirm. In-prison housing support should be an integral part of a woman's resettlement but some women are unsure on the morning of their release if they have accommodation for that evening. Barriers such as lack of internet provision in prisons, and limited access to phones, make it even harder for women to secure housing in advance of release.

*Workers strove to find accommodation, although due to the lack of affordable social housing, particularly for the majority of women being released in London, much accommodation continued to be in hostels. Different local authority practices also affected the support available, for example, one authority considered women prisoners to be 'intentionally homeless'.*

Prison Inspectorate report on HMP Holloway, 2016<sup>61</sup>

Too often women on release end up in hostels that place them at risk of future offending behaviour, for example due to access to drugs: "A lot of women would rather sleep on the streets than go into a hostel".<sup>62</sup> Research for the Scottish Government found that much of the accommodation for women leaving custody was not fit for purpose, and where there are suitable options, places are scarce. Women are commonly released on Fridays ahead of the weekend, this causes added pressure as many support agencies close for the weekend.<sup>63</sup>

Available hostels are often occupied by men who have committed more serious crimes and are not appropriate for vulnerable women leaving prison<sup>64</sup>. Most women in the criminal justice system are considered 'low-risk offenders'. In England and Wales this means that Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) are responsible for their resettlement (rather than the National Probation Service) and they commission other organisations to find suitable accommodation.

### **Housing for Women – The Re-Connect Project, London**

The Re-Connect project will provide a refuge for women leaving prison with multiple and complex needs, including mental health, substance and alcohol misuse, and safety from domestic abuse. Supported by the Big Lottery Fund, the project will provide a home for up to five women in London over a six month period, giving them accommodation and intensive practical and emotional support with the aim to improve their self-confidence and health, reduce reoffending, and bridge the gap to independent living. Women will be referred to Re-Connect by prisons near London (HMP Bronzefield and HMP Downview) through their resettlement teams. The project has a strong person-centred focus, and will support a woman with a wide range of presenting issues in her life both practically and emotionally. This intensive specialist service will offer a period of stability from which to progress to independent living.

### **Mary's story from Gibran (now include), Wales**

When Mary presented as homeless on the day of her release, the Housing Association had no information about her, despite the fact that a referral had already been made (under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 someone being released with no fixed abode can be referred to Housing 56 days prior to release). Gibran supported Mary with a new application, but Housing placed her in a B&B and she only managed a few days. Gibran assisted Mary further to find private rental accommodation in Cardiff and supported her in applying for a Budgeting Loan to pay for the rental bond on the tenancy. Gibran also helped Mary access a range of benefits, including housing benefit and Employment Support Allowance, and provided food vouchers and a clothing grant while she awaited benefit payments. Now that Mary is in settled accommodation, Gibran is supporting her to register with her local GP so she can receive ongoing support for her mental health.

## **Emergency accommodation**

Many local authorities struggle to provide long-term, stable housing for those in need, and this leads to increased pressures on temporary and emergency accommodation. As people are forced to stay longer in temporary accommodation, those in desperate need of emergency housing are being turned away.

Low quality housing is a further concern. Women in emergency accommodation can feel helpless and may be reluctant to complain or ask for repairs to be carried out for fear of being evicted. Support workers describe poor levels of cleanliness and facilities for the “lucky” few who are allocated accommodation.<sup>65</sup> Those who turn down an offer because it is sub-standard risk being labelled ‘intentionally homeless’ which disqualifies them from future local authority support.

*After 6 weeks I managed to get a place, hats off to probation, they really pulled out the stops for me, but I put the key in the door and it was a shell. No carpets, no cooker, no beds, nowhere to sit... and I was thinking, oh my god, what am I going to do? I broke down. I went to stay with my auntie for 2 days while I made money just for the bare essentials... In a way, that's why I committed... I'm not saying that's an excuse but in a way that's why I started to commit crime again so soon. To furnish my flat.*

Jane, imprisoned mother of 5 children aged between 5 and 15 years old

## Bail Accommodation and Support Service (BASS)

*We need more female bail hostels; in Luton there was one male one but none for women so it was more of a struggle to find accommodation on release.*

From St Mungo's, Rebuilding Shattered Lives report (2014)<sup>66</sup>

Bail Accommodation and Support Service (BASS) can be offered to individuals who are on bail or eligible for release on Home Detention Curfew (HDC) who do not have an address, or need additional support. BASS accommodation offers supervision, a structured regime, and has a curfew but has limited spaces for women, and occupancy levels are not published. There are concerns that the service has been under-used in some areas, despite unmet need for bail accommodation.

A new BASS contract from June 2018 will expand provision to include prisoners released without accommodation. In Manchester an initiative centred on supporting women who have offended utilising BASS bed space is being piloted between probation and women's centres to assess whether there would be a future demand for this use of BASS accommodation.<sup>67</sup>

### **Glasgow Women's Supported Bail Service, Turning Point Scotland and Aberlour**

Turning Point Scotland and Aberlour work in partnership to support women in the criminal justice system and provide an alternative to remand in the use of community options designed to address the underlying causes of women's offending. The service enables women to maintain family relationships and engage with support services in the community.

Working with the agency Y People, the Supported Bail Service now have 10 temporary furnished flats and work with around 30 women a month.

## Approved Premises (APs)

Approved Premises (APs) are residential units that normally house medium to high-risk offenders leaving prison who are subject to restrictions and curfews, a breach of which can result in recall to prison. All APs are single-sex, with 94 for men, but only 6 for women of which none are in Wales or London. APs are only available to women who are under Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), although this does not in itself guarantee a place, as spaces are limited. The lack of AP provision for women means they can be placed far from home, making their resettlement much harder. The Justice Committee recommended more small Approved Premises across the UK for women deemed medium to high-risk, so that they can reside in safe supervised accommodation nearer their home.<sup>68</sup> In May 2017, the Supreme Court found that the lack of APs and bail hostels for women constitutes unlawful sex discrimination against women.<sup>69</sup> The fact that children are not allowed to visit or stay in APs is also in need of review.

### **Recommendation from Transforming Lives report:**

A national review of Approved Premises for women should be undertaken urgently, with ring-fenced funding made available to plug the gaps identified.

## Affordable housing

*I can't get a flat without a reference. The council will give me half the bond but I've been declared bankrupt so I can't get a loan. I can't claim benefits because I don't have an address. I'm trapped.*

Service User, the Women's Community Project, Cambridge Centre<sup>70</sup>

Finding affordable private rental accommodation is almost impossible for women leaving prison. The cost can be a major barrier, particularly for women who are unemployed or in low-paid work and/or dependent on benefits. Women leaving prison may lack references from previous landlords and the money for up-front costs, including estate agent fees, reference checking, first month's rent and deposit.

### Shine, Scotland

Shine is a national mentoring service to women in prison (either on remand or sentenced), on release, and those on community-based supervision. Helping women to access and sustain safe housing is an integral part of the work of Shine, as well as providing practical support to assist access to benefits, food parcels, and, support and treatment from addiction services.

Some local authorities, housing associations, and charities have Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) schemes to assist with payment of deposits. However, the availability of these schemes is varied and limited, and landlords will not always accept this method of payment. If DHP is available, it is provided after the property has been identified, and delays in payment can result in losing the property.

Organisations such as My Space Housing Solutions<sup>71</sup> which act on behalf of prisoners on release, taking on the tenancy in the name of the charity, and offering ongoing support, can be a lifeline.

## Complexities of the benefits system

Local housing officials may not always understand that prison sentences are often completed in the community. A prisoner sentenced to six months will likely be out in three by which time they may have lost their housing benefit and therefore accommodation. Since April 2016, housing benefit claims can only be backdated for a maximum of one month, regardless of circumstances, rather than the six months previously allowed.

Since 2012, under-35s are only eligible to receive a 'shared accommodation rate'. Landlords need the approval of existing tenants which can pose problems for women leaving prison. The rate does not apply to people over 25 who have lived in homeless hostels for three months or more; in cases where there are accepted rehabilitation or support services to help settle back into the community; or when someone has left prison and their housing has been arranged under the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangement (MAPPA).

The Under-Occupancy Charge\* reduces housing benefit by 14% if a person has a spare bedroom and by 25% if they have two or more spare bedrooms.<sup>72</sup> Imprisoned women may lose custody of their children and then be liable to pay for a spare bedroom. A person can not downsize until they have paid any rent arrears, and a woman working to be reunited with her children may not wish to downsize.

Alternative accommodation is rarely available, and even if a woman is re-housed, there is the further cost of moving and furnishing her new home. Local authorities in Scotland, England, and Wales are able to mitigate the bedroom tax through DHPs but as this is at the discretion of individual authorities, its availability can be a 'postcode lottery'.<sup>73</sup>

A Prison Reform Trust briefing on the links between debt and women's offending noted concerns about the Under-Occupancy Charge.<sup>74</sup> Women's service providers said the so-called 'bedroom tax' can put pressure on women to get lodgers, putting them in potentially dangerous situations. In addition, women who have experienced domestic violence, and have been forced to move from one refuge to another, often have their benefits suspended.

Universal credit combines certain benefits (including housing benefit, child tax credit and income support), and is being rolled out across the UK. There is concern that this will disadvantage women<sup>75</sup> and adversely affect people in prison; as yet no arrangements are in place to support prisoners' access to universal credit.<sup>76</sup> Access to welfare benefits, advice and support for women returning to the community needs to be improved.<sup>77</sup> Even basic information when someone enters or leaves prison about what they may be entitled to, and when their next payment is due, would help. Practical barriers, such as proof of ID, should also be addressed.

The government has recognised this problem, and has stated that "[they are working] to improve the process with the aim of enabling a claim in advance of release".<sup>78</sup>

## Supported Housing

Supported Housing provides residents with care, support or supervision. From April 2020, short-term supported housing will be funded directly through a new-ringfenced grant to local authorities, rather than through housing benefit. The government are consulting about the funding arrangements for women's refuges as there are concerns that pooled funding for local supported housing puts them at risk.<sup>79</sup> Women's Aid are concerned that a 'one size fits all' model for the provision of specialist supported housing and short-term housing will adversely affect women's refuge funding.<sup>80</sup> Replacement of housing benefit with universal credit also presents challenges to providers of short-term supported housing.<sup>81</sup>

In March 2018, the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) committed to work with councils to consider how to build up more suitable supported accommodation for female offenders in London.<sup>82</sup>

## Women with particular needs

*The excess mortality rate for women after release from prison is far higher than for men, almost entirely due to drug related deaths. Many women are likely to have experienced domestic and/or sexual abuse which could mean that returning to the family home is not safe. A significant percentage are also likely to have caring responsibilities which has an impact on their housing needs.*

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness Report 1, July 2017<sup>83</sup>

Section 10 of the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 requires that the particular needs of women in the criminal justice system are identified and addressed. St Mungo's Rebuilding Shattered Lives report (2014) found that the complexity of women's needs, often rooted in a history of violence and abuse, frequently stemming from childhood, is not generally understood by mainstream services. Trauma and abuse can lead to substance misuse and/or involvement in prostitution which in turn can lead to offending to fund addiction or for survival.



### **Grace House, Foundation66**

A women-only residential service which provides drug and alcohol support for women with substance misuse problems and complex needs, including domestic violence, offending behaviour, sexual exploitation, homelessness and eating disorders. Grace House is open to national multi-agency referrals.

Many women leaving prison are keen to stay away from people and places that may draw them back into drug and alcohol misuse; the need for supported accommodation that provides a safe and understanding environment for women is paramount at least for transitional periods.

*In the hostel, I could not stay clean. There's hundred and odd people there, they're outside the hostel drinking, they're all sat over the wall facing the hostel. There's loads of them, they're all injecting, they're all drug users and I couldn't get away from it.*

Margaret, quoted in Howard League for Penal Reform's What is Justice? working papers<sup>84</sup>

### **Rita's Story from Women in Prison, England**

Rita served a short sentence in prison. She has a history of mental health needs and has no contact with her family due to previous abuse. Shortly before her release, her accommodation plan broke down. Rita's mental health advocate liaised with services in Essex, but Rita was not deemed priority need. Rita then attended an appointment with a homelessness charity, but their hostel was full. Rita presented to the Local Authority to negotiate an emergency bed. The housing officer did not accept that she met the priority need criteria as she was not on medication for her mental health. Rita faced sleeping rough and told her support worker she had suicidal thoughts. Knowing Rita's history of suicide attempts, Rita's support worker asked her to speak to a community mental health coordinator. Rita was given an emergency assessment with a psychiatrist and was transferred as a volunteer patient to a psychiatric ward until her housing was resolved. Her support worker linked Rita with a specialist mental health charity and arranged ongoing support for her mental health.

### **Women as mothers/care-givers**

*Well, my plan is in the future that I have a home, that I have my son back. Everything that I'm doing is for me and for my son, especially my son. Yes I did horrible things and I need to make up with my son. I want to be a better mother; I want to make a better home for my son.*<sup>85</sup>

A major study found that two-thirds of imprisoned women are mothers of children under the age of 18.<sup>86</sup> Women are far more likely than men to be the primary carer for their children and are less likely to have a partner at home caring for their children while they are in prison.<sup>87</sup> Only 5% of children with a mother in prison remain in the family home during her imprisonment.<sup>88</sup> Women who do not have care of their children are often assessed as single and not allocated housing suitable for a family, making it incredibly difficult to regain the care of children:<sup>89</sup> *"When I got out of prison I was in a catch-22 ... If your child doesn't live with you, you can't get accommodation, but you can't get your child back unless you've got accommodation."*<sup>90</sup>

**The United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (known as the Bangkok Rules)** state that non-custodial sentences for pregnant women and women with dependent children should be utilised where possible and appropriate, and that the best interests of the child or children must be taken into account.

Appropriate housing is essential in enabling women to raise and care for their children in a safe, clean, and suitable environment, and saves costs and mitigates harm in the longer term. Anawim and Midland Heart Housing Association in Birmingham undertook a cost-benefits analysis of the support they provide to 13 women involved in offending. It concluded that “if only two children are prevented from entering the social care system for one year, the monetary benefits are almost double the cost of the housing and support for all 13 women.”<sup>91</sup> Local authority and other social housing providers should review their current allocation policy to allow women to be reunited with their children.

*A lot of services rely on an address being in place. Hostels are not ideal, especially for women with children. Women only hostels are better than mixed ones. A family hostel for women with children would be good – little flats so that it's as normal for the children as possible.*

Woman at POPS' Farida Women's Centre, Manchester

#### **Bethany's Story (15-year old) from a Person Shaped Support (PSS) peer support group in Liverpool**

“Mum was in prison for 6 months. We had a house and were living there together; our relationship was close. She got put away and lost everything – the house, the dog, furniture, and me. I had to go and live with my granddad. She couldn't pay the rent when she was away, and when she got out, the landlord evicted her. She had nowhere to live so she had to move back in with my nan (from her side). I'm with my granddad from my dad's side. She's a grown woman, and she feels like a child trapped in my nan's house. She's never been able to bring me up as her child. Her main issue is the house because she doesn't feel like an independent woman. She's lost control of me (her daughter) and her life.”

As well as a change of living and care arrangements for children, families may also experience financial constraints during a parent's imprisonment. A joint thematic review by HM Inspectorate of Prisons, HM Inspectorate of Probation and Ofsted (2014), found that not enough consideration is given to offenders who have children, particularly those who are primary care givers, and specifically how this would impact their accommodation needs.<sup>92</sup> As a volunteer at POPS 2nd Chance café in Manchester puts it, “They forget kids when it comes to housing”.

### **Women with mental health problems**

*There is very limited housing provision catering specifically for women with complex mental health needs. As a result, some women are caught in a cycle of going between prison, hospitals, and homelessness, only being picked up by mental health services when in prison.*

Support Worker, Women in Prison

#### **Jane's story from Housing Rights, Northern Ireland**

Jane is 58 and has been in and out of custody over the last four years, often for very short sentences. She has complex issues, particularly around alcohol. Having resided in a Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) property with no major issues, the property was broken into, and Jane lost everything; she attributes her subsequent offending behaviour to this. Due to her alcohol misuse, Jane found herself excluded from many Belfast hostels.

Housing Rights made referrals, and Jane was linked in with homelessness charity Depaul's Housing First project. She was connected to an addictions service that works within prisons. When Jane was in custody, referrals were made to a number of hostels, and on the morning of her release, through Housing Rights liaising directly with NIHE, Jane was placed in temporary accommodation in Belfast, with a key worker in the hostel. Depaul will continue to work with her and Jane is on the waiting list for permanent social housing.

Poor mental health is common among women in the criminal justice system and time spent in prison can exacerbate mental ill health, heighten vulnerability, and increase the risk of self-harm and suicide.<sup>93</sup> The Prison Reform Trust report *Too Little, Too Late: An Independent Review of Unmet Mental Health Need in Prison* (2009) revealed that many people who should have been diverted into mental health or social care from police stations or courts are entering prisons, and then being discharged into the community without any support.<sup>94</sup>

## Prostitution

Many women in the criminal justice system have been involved in prostitution, and support to exit prostitution is recognised as a pathway out of offending (Annex A). In one prison study, 21% of women said that they had been involved in prostitution, the majority linking it to drug addiction (76%), and over a quarter (26%) to having been abused.<sup>95</sup> Housing is a critical factor for women who wish to exit prostitution. A safe and secure home of their own helps women develop a stable lifestyle, seek employment, and have their children back.<sup>96</sup> Research with Ipswich Police found that many of the women involved in street prostitution received no help with housing, education, or basic health needs.<sup>97</sup> The Challenge of Change report by Drugscope and AVA (Against Violence and Abuse) stressed the need for women-only provision.

### The Amari Project, London

This project has followed on from the Chrysalis Project which ended in 2016. The Amari Project is designed to help women who are fleeing sexual exploitation and is a partnership between **Commonweal** and **Solace Women's Aid**. Accommodation is provided for around 18 months, helping women who are moving on from emergency housing in refuges or shelters find their feet and prepare for the next step in their transition. Vital emotional, practical, and community support is provided to tenants, helping them recover from trauma, regain their independence, maintain their tenancies, and get back into education or employment.

## Domestic abuse\*

Between half and three-quarters of women in prison report having suffered domestic abuse, and one third have experienced sexual abuse.<sup>98</sup> On leaving prison, women often have no choice but to return to their previous home and partner. If they disclose their experience of abuse, women may qualify for priority housing and receive help to move house or to exclude their partner from the home. The new Public Health England guidance on Standards to Improve Health and Wellbeing for Women in Prison recommends that women who are at risk of domestic violence and abuse should be supported to access secure, safe and appropriate housing on release from prison.<sup>99</sup> Women serving short sentences are otherwise at high risk of returning to an abusive relationship.<sup>100</sup>

However, many women do not have the confidence to talk about their abuse or are fearful that child protection agencies may become involved.<sup>101</sup> Agenda (Alliance for Women and Girls at Risk) recommended in evidence to the Communities and Local Government Committee's Homelessness Inquiry (2016) that women fleeing, or currently experiencing, domestic abuse should be entitled to housing automatically, rather than having to meet any additional test of vulnerability.<sup>102</sup> It is also important that women's refuges are able to provide for women with mental health and substance misuse problems.<sup>103</sup> For women in prison, their needs should be assessed before being released from custody and potentially back into the hands of an abusive partner. Women should be offered specialist support that enables them to disclose their experiences and concerns about home life.

\*See also: Prison Reform Trust (2017) *There's a reason we're in trouble: Domestic abuse as a driver to women's offending* publication

In 2014, Welsh homeless charity **Llamau** was awarded NOMS Innovation Funding to explore the successful rehabilitation of Welsh women offenders. Llamau's Llwybrau project looked specifically at support for women who have already offended, or are at risk of offending, and have also experienced domestic abuse, and assessed the feasibility of utilising existing Domestic Abuse One Stop Shops to support women offenders. The report highlighted the importance of good working relationships between local authorities and housing organisations, including social and private landlords, and the need for agencies and organisations to have an understanding of women's offending and the criminal justice system and to be able to access specialist knowledge when required.

Prison Reform Trust's *There's a Reason We're in Trouble* briefing on domestic abuse highlighted the impact of funding cuts to women's services, including refuges. The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Domestic Abuse Fund has given £20 million to 76 projects to provide accommodation-based and specialist support to victims of domestic abuse.<sup>104</sup> Some of the funded projects, including the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham and Nottingham City Council, are using their allocation to support female offenders – recognising that domestic abuse is a driver to women's offending.

#### **Maria's story from Hibiscus Initiatives, England**

Maria is an EU National with limited command of the English language. She was a victim of domestic violence, imprisoned for injuring her partner in a domestic incident. Whilst Maria was in prison, she struggled to cope with the consequences of the domestic violence she had suffered. Language barriers prevented her benefiting from the generic support programmes in prison. Hibiscus provided support in Maria's own language which helped her to cope with the effects of domestic abuse and being in custody. When Maria's custodial sentence ended, she was detained by the Home Office and served with a deportation order. Her application for immigration bail was considered, but she needed a suitable address for it to be granted. It was very difficult to find accommodation, and Maria did not have anyone who could provide her with a release address. Hibiscus worked with an organisation that supports victims of domestic violence who offered Maria a place in their safe house. This was provided as a release address for immigration bail, and the judge approved Maria's release after six months of being in immigration detention. At this stage, the most important matter for Maria was to be reunited with her daughter.

The Muslim Hand's '(In)visibility' report on the voices of Muslim women prisoners found that housing was a main source of anxiety for the women. A faith-based housing option was recommended as additional support for vulnerable Muslim women post-release, especially as 79% of the women interviewed had experienced abuse from their partners.<sup>105</sup>

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 addresses the needs of victims of domestic abuse and emphasises the importance of a multi-agency approach in which housing providers play a key role.<sup>106</sup> This and the new Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 are significant levers to ensure that some of Wales' most vulnerable women receive the support they need.

## Women with learning disabilities and difficulties

Women in prison are thought to have higher rates of learning disability than their male counterparts. There is a lack of research, but studies suggest that around 8% of women prisoners have an IQ below 70 and as many as 32% of them are borderline disabled (this compares to 7% and 24% of men respectively).<sup>107</sup>

Sorting out accommodation, particularly from prison, requires a level of literacy and understanding that many women simply do not have, and they are often left struggling to negotiate their way through a system of lengthy application forms and interviews.<sup>108</sup> They should receive appropriate expert support while they are in prison, and support in the community to keep their tenancies. The PRT report *No One Knows* (2008) is an in-depth study of the experiences of prisoners with learning disabilities and difficulties at all stages of the criminal justice system. It highlights the additional challenges they face and their need for support, including with housing.<sup>109</sup>

## The importance of community support and key workers for women

Many women's centres, where they exist, provide housing advice and referral as part of their practical and emotional support for women in the community, often working in partnership with external housing providers, probation services, and local authorities. A key worker's help in navigating the complexity of local authority and other housing provision can make all the difference.

The causes of women's homelessness and their experiences of being homeless are in many ways distinct from those of men. Mainstream homelessness services are often male-dominated environments, which women can find intimidating and are therefore less likely to use, especially women who have experienced male violence.<sup>110</sup> Holistic women-only services can help women to build trusted relationships and become more confident in, and connected to, their local communities.

An evaluation of sixteen women's community justice services in Scotland identified safe and secure housing as a key factor in improved outcomes **“that support women to make and sustain changes in their lives.”**<sup>111</sup>

**Tomorrow's Women in Glasgow** has a Housing Advisor based within a multi-agency team which is helpful for increasing the sustainability of tenancies. Also in Glasgow, 218 is a joint Turning Point Scotland and Glasgow Addiction Service initiative that supports women involved in the criminal justice system to address a range of needs including substance misuse, physical and mental health, and other needs such as housing and childcare. The service has a 12-bed residential unit and a day service programme which provides a range of group sessions and one-to-one support. There is access to a clinic which deals with mental and physical health issues, a dietician, chiropodist, dentist, doctors and nurses. One independent study showed that police-recorded offending in women who engaged in 218's support was reduced by 21%.

Many women's centres such as the Nelson Trust Women's Centre, Gloucestershire use the 'nine pathways': housing, health, drugs and alcohol, finance, family and relationships, domestic abuse, sex working, education, thinking and behaviour.<sup>112</sup> This allows for an assessment of all of a



woman's needs and how they interact, including around children, housing, and healthcare. Women's centres are successful because they address multiple needs from an early stage and seek to offer each woman integrated, long term, non-judgmental support until she is ready to move on. They also help to reduce reoffending: the Anawim's women centre in Birmingham has a reoffending rate of 1%,<sup>113</sup> a stark contrast to the national women's reoffending rate of 45%.<sup>114</sup>

*She [NIACRO worker (Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders)] helped me with filling in forms to get my sickness benefit, she helped me with housing. She actually took me out to look at houses and things that were frightening me which were wee tiny things and she calls at my house. She's on the other end of a phone if I need her and I've never had that support before. She's incredible.*

58 year old woman<sup>115</sup>

### **The cost benefit to getting it right**

Unstable housing can reinforce a cycle of crime at a cost to individuals, families, and communities. Research in Scotland has demonstrated significant costs to the public purse from homelessness and reoffending.<sup>116</sup> Studies have shown the importance of community support structures and accommodation in helping promote desistance,<sup>117</sup> and the importance of gender-specific support for women is now well-established.<sup>118</sup> The cost to the Scottish Government of each case of homelessness is estimated to be £26,000 per year. For local authorities to evict, re-house and re-let (excluding legal costs) costs an estimated £23,856 per tenancy. If 10 instances of homelessness could be prevented each year, the saving for national government and local authorities would be £260,000 and £238,560 respectively.<sup>119</sup> Welsh charity Gibran (now include) Going Home project worked with 460 women over 5 years across each of Wales' 22 local authorities to help resettle women coming out of prison. The project not only resulted in fewer crimes being committed, and fewer families disrupted, but also brought an estimated cost saving of £44.5million.<sup>120</sup>

Revolving Doors Agency undertook a financial analysis of women's centres and concluded that **“an investment of £18 million a year in women's centres could save almost £1 billion in five years.”**<sup>121</sup> Women Centred Working estimated a cost of £4,120 to support one woman to achieve positive outcomes over a two year period compared to the cost of £69,041 for local authority services.<sup>122</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Access to safe, affordable, and stable accommodation that meets the specific needs of women is essential to reduce the risk of offending and to enable them to rebuild their lives. While there are some positive housing services in place, there is patchy and inconsistent provision across the UK. A more joined-up, adequately funded integrated approach needs to be in place, involving resettlement staff in prisons, offender managers and responsible officers, local authority housing departments, and voluntary sector organisations to ensure that women in trouble and at risk are given the necessary support.

## Recommendations

### Government should:

- Include in the Women Offenders Strategy a plan and timeline to ensure that the ‘housing pathway’ out of offending is delivered effectively. This should be a collaboration between MOJ, HMPPS, DWP and the MHCLG. It should include:
  - an audit of the housing support currently commissioned and provided to women offenders, (for example NPS, CRCs and prisons) including women in prison and in the community, underpinned by a detailed needs analysis
  - development of model interagency protocols on the sharing of information and responsibility for housing women affected by the criminal justice system
  - investigating possible links between the disproportionate use of custodial remand for women and their unmet housing needs
  - promoting innovative responses to women’s housing needs
  - improved access to housing benefit/universal credit.
- Ensure that the new cross-government group to reduce reoffending announced by Secretary of State for Justice on 6 March 2018 makes gendered-housing solutions for those leaving prison a priority.<sup>123</sup>
- Extend the time limit for housing benefit eligibility for sentenced prisoners from 13 weeks to six months to prevent short-sentenced women from losing their homes, and extend the scope for payment of arrears.
- Invest in women’s centres to provide a ‘one-stop’ place of safety where women can receive practical housing advice and help alongside financial management and other support.
- Work with local authorities to ensure funding of suitable accommodation for women leaving prison, particularly those with children, and those needing help with drug and alcohol addictions, mental health concerns, or learning disabilities. This should include support to maintain their tenancy while in prison.
- Ensure that women who need financial aid leave prison with immediate access to universal credit and/or other appropriate benefits

### Local authorities should:

- Provide appropriate single-sex housing for women on their release from prison, which has direct access to health and other services that women need to facilitate reintegration into the community.
- Provide advice and support to enable women to sustain tenancies through short periods of imprisonment.
- Ensure the new personalised plans under the Homelessness Reduction Act for those facing homelessness should include (or is accompanied by) a principal point of contact for women’s services
- Ensure that imprisonment is not regarded as intentional homelessness for housing eligibility purposes.
- Take particular account of a woman’s housing needs where she has children.
- Give housing priority to women with multiple needs that may put them at risk of offending, including women affected by abusive relationships, drug or alcohol problems, or mental health needs.

### **Sentencers should:**

- Be made aware of the serious housing impacts of custodial responses to women's low-level offending.
- Make every effort to use their powers and discretion to divert women away from prison and consider appropriate community-based programmes, particularly primary carers.
- Avoid remanding into custody due to lack of satisfactory housing.

### **Prisons and probation services should:**

- Make accommodation outcomes a key performance indicator.
- Pre-sentence reports need to contain sufficient information to enable courts to make appropriate decisions.
- Ensure that women receive basic housing information at the point of induction and throughout their sentence, including information about housing benefit and universal credit. This should also be provided to women on remand.
- Mitigate as many practical barriers as possible, e.g. enabling access to phones and internet as appropriate and ensuring information is accessible.
- Offer housing services as a core element of a woman's rehabilitation programme, including liaison with housing providers, and support to enable women to sustain a tenancy or apply for housing. These services should be expedited for women on short sentences, and for women with children.
- Ensure that housing officers based within prisons share their housing assessment promptly with the local authority to which a woman is returning, prior to her release.
- Ensure, in partnership with statutory services and third sector agencies, that 'through the gate' support is available for woman in the lead up to, and at the point of, release. A woman should be given reasonable notice of the confirmed date for her release and be met at the gate by an appropriate support agency.
- Maintain and monitor accurate accommodation data on women's housing situations and options.

### **Other agencies that supervise and support offenders should:**

- Assess a woman's housing needs at every stage of the criminal justice process in order to put in place an action plan that includes housing. Early intervention, as well as the appropriate sharing of information between agencies, is paramount.

### **Housing providers should:**

- Ensure that their eligibility criteria do not exclude women with criminal convictions or women leaving prison.
- Provide personnel with training on the impact of imprisonment on women and the drivers to their offending.
- Help women hold onto their tenancy, particularly where women are in coercive relationships or where rent arrears may accrue during a period in custody.

### **Criminal justice inspectorates and regulators should:**

- Monitor, and report on, the provision of housing services and options for women the barriers to women's housing and the relevance of positive housing outcomes for women's resettlement.

## **Annex A: National Offender Management Service (NOMS) - Nine Pathways to Reduce Reoffending**

A report by the Social Exclusion Unit in 2002 on Reducing Re-offending by Ex-Prisoners identified a number of social factors which influence the likelihood of reoffending. These were adopted by NOMS in 2004 as the seven 'Pathways' to enable a structured assessment of offenders' risks and needs and a framework for addressing them. The Corston Report (2007) recommended that these pathways be adapted to address the specific needs of women, particularly in relation to abuse (domestic violence and sexual abuse) and prostitution. There are therefore 9 recognised Pathways to Reduce Reoffending for women:

### **Pathway 1: Accommodation**

Many women will have long-standing, complex housing problems and will need considerable help if they are to establish somewhere stable to live on release.

### **Pathway 2: Education, training and employment**

Education, work and training should provide an integrated service to the woman based on her needs. Governors in prisons should ensure that during contract negotiations women's particular ETE needs are recognised.

### **Pathway 3: Health**

There must be an effective partnership between the prison and healthcare, which ensures that each partner fulfils their respective functions in relation to securing and maintaining the health of their women prisoners.

### **Pathway 4: Drugs and alcohol**

There are strong links between many women's substance misuse and previous experience of trauma and a strong correlation between drug or alcohol misuse, previous abuse and self-harm.

### **Pathway 5: Finance, benefit and debt**

Women should be able to access advice on managing and reducing their debt and understanding their entitlement to benefits.

### **Pathway 6: Children and families**

Women should be given support and information to assist them in understanding the effects of their imprisonment on their separated children, how to tell their children of their imprisonment and how to support them.

### **Pathway 7: Attitudes, thinking and behaviour**

Programmes for women should include a greater emphasis on emotional regulation and relationships in addition to the other offending risk factors. Women should be assessed for and are able to access appropriate offending behaviour programmes to meet their needs.

### **Pathway 8: Abuse**

Individual needs such as support, advocacy and a safe place to go on release should be established at an early stage. A range of supportive interventions should be available to women who disclose abuse or domestic violence. Links should be established between establishments and agencies and organizations that can offer support to women, including Women's centres and domestic violence area coordinators.

### **Pathway 9: Prostitution**

Women should be given every support if they ask for help to build a new life away from prostitution. Staff should receive awareness training in the issues that face women who work as prostitutes.

## **Annex B - Organisations that help with housing of women in the criminal justice system**

(NB - this list is by no means exhaustive)

**Advance (Minerva project), West London** - [www.advancecharity.org.uk](http://www.advancecharity.org.uk)

Advance's Minerva Project offers women one-to-one support, group work, and diversionary activities.

**Agenda (Alliance for Women and Girls at Risk), Mapping the Maze, England and Wales**

<https://www.mappingthemaze.org.uk/>

Mapping the Maze aims to identify what and where services exist for women experiencing homelessness, substance misuse, poor mental health, offending and complex needs.

**Anawim, Birmingham** - [www.anawim.co.uk](http://www.anawim.co.uk)

Anawim works with women in prison and on release. Anawim also partners with the Re-Unit Birmingham Programme to support women with children.

**AVA (Against Violence and Abuse), UK wide** - [www.avaproject.org.uk/](http://www.avaproject.org.uk/)

AVA's Project has pioneered work around multiple disadvantages, including improving access to housing for women affected by multiple disadvantage who are experiencing gender-based violence.

**BASS Stonham, England and Wales** - [www.stonham-bass.org.uk](http://www.stonham-bass.org.uk)

BASS is a government contract that provides housing for people on bail or released from prison on Home Detention Curfew (HDC).

**Brighter Futures (Chepstow House), Staffordshire** - [www.brighter-futures.org.uk](http://www.brighter-futures.org.uk)

Chepstow House provides women with help and support by creating detailed action plans to stop offending or reoffending.

**Brighton Women's Centre (BWC), Brighton** - <http://www.womenscentre.org.uk/>

BWC supports women with multiple and complex needs in the Criminal Justice Service and women who are homeless or insecurely housed in East and West Sussex.

**Catch 22 (in partnership with Commonweal Housing), England and Wales** - [www.catch-22.org.uk](http://www.catch-22.org.uk)

Catch 22 provides mentoring for young people and adults and support to secure a tenancy and cope with problems that prevent independent living.

**Depaul (Housing First), Northern Ireland** – [www.ie.depaulcharity.org](http://www.ie.depaulcharity.org)

Depaul's Housing first service seeks to support homeless people with complex needs and place them in permanent housing. There is a specific focus on people in the criminal justice system.

**DiversityInCare, London** - [www.diversityincare.org.uk](http://www.diversityincare.org.uk)

DiversityInCare supports women who are classed as 'intentionally homeless' on release from prison. It has 5 supported housing units.

**Eden House, South Gloucestershire/Bristol** - [www.edenhouseproject.org](http://www.edenhouseproject.org)

Eden House is a one stop shop (including housing) for women involved with, or at risk of becoming involved with, the criminal justice system.

**Emerging Futures CIC, Manchester** - [www.emergingfutures.org.uk](http://www.emergingfutures.org.uk)

Emerging Futures offers safe and stable accommodation in same-sex houses and has recently opened a women-only house in North Manchester.



**Gibran,(now include) Wales** - [www.include-uk.com](http://www.include-uk.com)

This organisation supports offenders in Wales, and offers a wide range of services to women to address their needs including housing.

**Grace House, Foundation66 (Phoenix Futures), London** - [www.phoenix-futures.org.uk](http://www.phoenix-futures.org.uk) Provided by Foundation66, Grace House is a women-only residential service which addresses a range of needs, including substance misuse, offending behaviour and homelessness.

**Hafan Cymru, Wales** - [www.hafancymru.co.uk](http://www.hafancymru.co.uk)

Hafan Cymru provides temporary supported housing and also has shared housing options for young women as well as two refuges for women who experience domestic abuse.

**Hibiscus Initiatives, England**- [www.hibiscusinitiatives.org.uk](http://www.hibiscusinitiatives.org.uk)

Hibiscus Initiatives empowers Black, Minority Ethnic and refugee migrant groups serving a custodial sentence, released into the community or returned to their home country

**Home Group, England, Scotland, and Wales** - [www.homegroup.org.uk](http://www.homegroup.org.uk)

Home Group is one the UK's largest provider of supported housing and related services.

**Housing for Women, London** - [www.hfw.org.uk](http://www.hfw.org.uk)

Housing for Women provides secure, affordable housing and related services to women who have suffered domestic abuse, been trafficked, or have been released from prison.

**Housing Rights, Northern Ireland** - [www.housingrights.org.uk](http://www.housingrights.org.uk)

Housing Rights provides advice and representation to people who are at risk of homelessness. They work with women in prison as well as in the community.

**Jane's Place, Burnley** – <https://safenet.org.uk/#janesplace>

The Recovery Refuge offers safe and secure temporary accommodation for women and children at risk of domestic abuse, who have additional complex needs such as mental or physical health, drug or alcohol use, self-harming, offending behaviours, sex working, grooming, trafficking, or a combination

**Llamau, Wales** - [www.llamau.org.uk](http://www.llamau.org.uk)

Llamau offers a range of services to support homeless young people and vulnerable women.

**Nelson Trust Women's Centres, Gloucestershire, Swindon, Wiltshire** - [www.nelsontrust.com](http://www.nelsontrust.com) Formally known as ISIS Women's Centres, the Nelson Trust Centres offer safe woman-only spaces where a range of problems, including housing, can be addressed.

**Nacro, England and Wales** - [www.nacro.org.uk](http://www.nacro.org.uk) / **Sacro, Scotland** - [www.sacro.org.uk](http://www.sacro.org.uk) /

**Niacro, Northern Ireland** - [www.niacro.co.uk](http://www.niacro.co.uk)

Lead multiple housing services across the UK and offers accommodation, housing-related support, and other interventions.

**Re-Unite, England and Wales** - [www.re-unite.org.uk](http://www.re-unite.org.uk)

Re-Unite works with women offenders to offer them appropriate housing so that they can be re-united with their children.

**SHE Project, East Lancashire** - [www.traceymcmahonblog.com/the-womens-project/SHE](http://www.traceymcmahonblog.com/the-womens-project/SHE) (Support & Housing East Lancashire), supports women leaving custody to access community-based interventions and long-term affordable housing.

**Shelter England** - [www.England.shelter.org.uk](http://www.England.shelter.org.uk) / **Shelter Cymru** - [www.sheltercymru.org.uk](http://www.sheltercymru.org.uk) / **Shelter Scotland** - [www.scotland.shelter.org.uk](http://www.scotland.shelter.org.uk)

Each of the Shelter organisations in England, Scotland, and Wales offers specialised support for women affected by the criminal justice system.

**SHINE** [www.shinementoring.org](http://www.shinementoring.org)

Shine is a national mentoring service for women offenders throughout Scotland. It provides support to women in prison, on release from prison and women on community supervision

**St Mungo's, England** - [www.mungos.org](http://www.mungos.org)

St Mungo's is a homelessness charity working with people in prison as well as in the community. They have a range of services specifically for women.

**Threshold Housing First Project, Greater Manchester** – [www.thp.org.uk/](http://www.thp.org.uk/)

The Threshold project aims to provide suitable long-term housing for women who have recently left prison, or are currently subject to supervision in the community, alongside intensive support from specialist workers.

**Together Women, Yorkshire and Humberside** - [www.togetherwomen.org](http://www.togetherwomen.org)

Together Women provides specialist intervention and supported accommodation for women in the criminal justice system, including a project in partnership with Foundation ([www.foundationuk.org](http://www.foundationuk.org)).

**Tomorrow's Women, Glasgow** - <http://www.womenssupportproject.co.uk/>

Tomorrow's Women Glasgow is a community justice centre which aims to divert women from custody and prevent reoffending through a range of holistic support including housing.

**Transformed Living, London** - [www.transformed-living.org](http://www.transformed-living.org)

Transformed Living provides supported cluster housing to women in the criminal justice system.

**Treasures Foundation, London** – [www.treasuresfoundation.org.uk](http://www.treasuresfoundation.org.uk)

The Treasures Foundation provides accommodation and support to women in London (Newham) with a history of drug abuse and offending.

**Turning Point (218 Service), Glasgow** – [www.turningpointscotland.com](http://www.turningpointscotland.com)

The 218 Service is for women with a range of complex needs. It offers a residential unit as well as a range of individual and group programmes.

**Vision Housing, London** – [www.visionhousing.org.uk](http://www.visionhousing.org.uk)

Vision Housing helps homeless people leaving prison find housing within the private rental sector and also offers a wide range of specialist support.

**Women in Prison, England** - [www.womeninprison.org.uk](http://www.womeninprison.org.uk)

WiP supports women affected by the criminal justice system both in prison and the community, including providing housing advice and support.

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### **All-Party Parliamentary Group on Ending Homelessness**

The APPG was set up in response to growing numbers of people rough sleeping and upward trends in the number of homeless applications. The APPG looked at homelessness prevention for three key groups: care leavers, prison leavers and survivors of domestic violence.

The first report was published in July 2017, and refers to this briefing and the Prison Reform Trust.

Recommendations for prison-leavers include:

- The MoJ should hold a wider inquiry to determine the mix of needs faced by the offender population in prisons and in the community, and the number of offenders being released from prison with no fixed abode.
- The MoJ should increase the amount of Discharge Grant available to prisoners on release.
- The MoJ should obligate prison Governors to introduce integrated transition plans for all prisoners and introduce measurable housing outcomes for CRCs.
- Local authorities and Job Centre Plus to develop partnerships with their local prisons to allow for data sharing of prisoner information.
- Prison Governors, at their discretion, to extend and make better use of release on temporary licence (ROTL).

**Full report available here:**

[https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237534/appg\\_for\\_ending\\_homelessness\\_report\\_2017\\_pdf.pdf](https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237534/appg_for_ending_homelessness_report_2017_pdf.pdf)

### **Re-Unite Ten Year Review – Testing a Housing Solution for Mothers in the Criminal Justice System (2017).**

The Re-Unite project is a combined housing and support initiative designed to support women leaving prison in gaining access to their children. The model was piloted in South London 2007-2010 then replicated by Women's Centres and Housing Associations across the country. In this review the Commonwealth Housing charity said "through this work we have learned how damaging mothers' imprisonment is on the whole family." Women identified as eligible were provided with stable family housing and the support needed to re-establish good relationships with their children and reintegrate into the community. Core lessons and values of the Re-Unite model include:

- A gender and family-sensitive approach to housing for women offenders
- Recognition of the special housing needs and vulnerabilities of women with children entering the housing system.

**For the full report see - <https://www.commonwealhousing.org.uk/our-projects/re-unite>"**

The Prison Reform Trust works to create a just, humane and effective penal system. To subscribe to PRT's monthly e-newsletter visit [www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/newsletter](http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/newsletter)

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Women in Prison provides support and advocacy for women affected by the criminal justice system and campaigns to prevent the damage caused by imprisonment to women and their families.

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