

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb a Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol](#) ar [Profiadau menywod yn y system cyfiawnder troseddol](#)

This response was submitted to the [Equality and Social Justice Committee](#) consultation on [Women's experiences in the criminal justice system](#)

WECJS 18

Ymateb gan: Gwasanaeth Carchardai a Phrawf EM yng Nghymru | Response from: HM Prison and Probation Service Wales





Gwasanaeth Charchardai
a Phrawf EM yng Nghymru

HM Prison & Probation
Service in Wales

29/09/2022

Sent via email

To the Equality and Social Justice Committee,

Re: HMPPS in Wales Response to the Inquiry into Women's experiences of the Criminal Justice System.

Thank you for the opportunity to input into your inquiry considering Women's experiences of the Criminal Justice System.

At HMPPS in Wales, we know that the needs of people entering the Justice System are complex, and that often vulnerable people will enter the system and require support to make better choices and break cycles of offending. This becomes even more important when we consider women in the Justice system.

We know that often women who commit crimes have very complex and multi-levelled needs, including managing mental health problems, struggling with self-harm, and handling difficult family lives. Many experience chaotic lifestyles which are often the product of a life of abuse and trauma, with around 60% of female offenders having experienced domestic abuse. These challenges become even harder for women that are under 18, disabled, struggling with multiple health issues, from an ethnic minority, who have experienced sexual violence or abuse or are battling with drug and alcohol problems.

In Wales, there is also the additional challenge of not having a prison close to home, with the average female prisoner being located 100 miles away from their families. This requires a higher level of interventions to maintain links with families and local communities, including access to housing and healthcare on release.

We cannot meet this challenge alone, and work closely with the Welsh Government, Police and Crime Commissioners, Area Planning Boards, Third Sector Organisations, and others to create networks of support that women can use as a platform to improve their lives.

Please find below our evidence for your inquiry. Do not hesitate to get in touch if you have any additional questions.

We look forward to continuing to work in partnership to improve the lives of women in the Justice System, as well as to support victims of crime.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Jennings
Exec Director
HMPPS in Wales

1. The Female Offending Blueprint

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and Welsh Government Women's Justice Blueprint (2019) has been created to transform the support available to women in Wales who are in, or at risk of entering, the Criminal Justice System. The blueprint prioritises safety, reducing reoffending and addressing gaps in interventions for women at all levels of the system. Together, we want to reduce the number of women in prison and on probation, alongside creating a strong network of organisations ready to help the women and families who are already in the system. As part of this work, we are also creating a new evidence base to inform the project as it grows and develops.

1.1 Women's Pathfinder Whole System Approach (and 18-25 Early Intervention Service)

In partnership with the South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner, Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner and the Welsh Government, we have created the Women's Pathfinder Whole System Approach and 18-25 Service. Together, we have identified a lack of support for women who are not in scope of statutory services, with help only available following more significant offending.

This project identifies and fills these gaps in support for women across all stages of their interaction with the Criminal Justice System, with a focus on key transition points at entry and exit. Key services introduced as part of this approach includes:

- **An early intervention and prevention service** (for those outside the scope of statutory services).
- **A function to join up agencies and stages of the system** through:
 - Supporting transition arrangements and providing continuity throughout the system.
 - Coordinating the multi-agency response to support where more than one agency is involved with a service user (on an individual case basis).
- **The Y2A pathway** which helps young females aged 16-17 who are being supported by Youth Offending Services or are transitioning to adult services in Cardiff, Bridgend, Cwm Taf and Gwent.
- **The BAME pathway** which provides frontline specialist support and a tailored early intervention service to BAME women involved with or at risk of involvement with criminal justice services.
- **A Mentoring service** which introduced a new Safer Wales Volunteer and Mentor Support Officer to provide additional support to develop, recruit, train, and place volunteer mentors within the service.
- **IDVA/IDSA** that provides support for Welsh women in prisons in England (HMP Styal and HMP EWP) who are resettling back into Wales.
- **Transport for Wales Employment pathway** that works with probation and Transport for Wales to design an employment pathway for women in contact with the justice system.

- **The Revolving Door pilot** - a joint initiative involving South Wales Police, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales, Gwent Police, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent, HMPPS and Future4. The pilot provides a targeted approach for those who have committed a number of low-level offences and where there is risk in escalation of offending behaviour. The pilot was launched from July 2021.
- **Increased support for Women in North Wales.** In Dyfed Powys, the 'Offender Diversion Scheme' funded by the Dyfed-Powys Police and Crime Commissioner went live in November 2019, with intervention support provided by Pobl. The 'Checkpoint' diversion scheme also went live in November 2019, funded by the North Wales Police and Crime Commissioner. Both diversion schemes incorporate specific support pathways for women. The of volume of diversion referrals across North Wales can be found in Annex A (5.3)

A breakdown of the number of women supported by the Women's Pathfinder WSA can be found in Annex A (5.1).

1.2 Key recommendations

- **Expand the Women's Pathfinder Whole System Approach Service across Wales.** An independent evaluation of the Women's Pathfinder WSA and 18-25 Early Intervention Service undertaken by Cordis Bright (2022) found that women using the service would likely not have had any other support during that stage of their involvement with the CJS. The women involved felt more comfortable with support that was perceived as independent from the CJS. The evaluation also identified improvements in personal outcomes for those referred, including more positive outcomes for mental health and wellbeing, physical health, and family relationships. Feedback from participants can be found in Annex A (5.2).
- **Provide support at the earliest opportunity.** As a sector we should not wait for women to be embedded in the justice system to provide support and guidance. The earlier women at risk of entering the justice system can be identified and helped, the more families can stay together, and lives be improved.

2. Keeping Families Together

We know the impact a custodial sentence can have on families. As there are no women's prisons in Wales, on average women in custody will be 100 miles from their homes. Creating systems which support women to build and maintain family ties is essential to reducing re-offending. To provide this support, in partnership with Welsh Government we have jointly funded the Pact Visiting Mum Service, which supports women from Wales who are serving prison sentences in England to maintain contact with their children (where in the child's best interest to do so). A link to an evaluation of the Pact Visiting Mum Service can be found in Annex A (5.4).

2.1 Key Recommendations

- **Increase cross border support:** Women who live in Wales completing custodial sentences in England need practical support to maintain relationships and to reintegrate into their communities. This includes support for families to visit prisons in England, care pathways that allow treatments started in one country to continue in the other and links to local housing organisations. Support needs to be placed on a sustainable footing with multi-year funding secured.
- **Collaborative procurement:** As evidenced by the work taken place to date on the blueprints, as a sector we can drive greater consistency in the service offer for women who are in or at risk of entering the criminal justice system in Wales by taking a collaborative procurement approach. This enables better integration of key women's contracts, as well as providing space for innovation and flexibility to suit the local demographic.
- **Secure housing:** As part of the blueprint, a pilot has been commissioned to test a new housing model for women. As a sector, we should support further research into innovative housing solutions that provide the wrap around support needed to break cycles of offending and keep families together.

3. Women's Rehabilitation and Residential Centres

Reducing the number of women sentenced to custody, with a particular focus on short custodial sentences (where a community-based alternative is a feasible option) is a key priority of the Women's Justice Blueprint. Evidence suggests that the majority of women who receive a short custodial sentence in Wales have committed non-violent offences. Women also tend to commit less-serious offences than men, so are more likely to receive a short prison sentence.

Short prison sentences often do not provide sufficient time to enable the full complement of rehabilitative activity to be undertaken. This can present a significant challenge for Welsh women, who are held an average of 100 miles from their homes, creating additional barriers in being able to maintain contact with children and families, and exacerbating impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences, of which parental imprisonment is one.

3.1 Key recommendations

- **Build a new residential women's centre in Wales.** The MoJ has committed £10M to developing the Residential Women's Centre which will strengthen community-based provision for women and keep women closer to their homes. The Residential women's centre will pioneer an approach to women who commit low level offences, by offering bespoke support to around 50 women a year who have been diverted from a potential prison sentence of up to 12 months. Women who are diverted to the centre will have one to one mental health therapy and counselling to address trauma and addictions, as well as long-term support to secure employment and maintain family relationships when transitioned back into their community from the centre.

- **Support the planning permission process for the proposed residential women’s centre.** The Ministry of Justice has worked closely with Welsh Government, Local Authorities, Police and Crime Commissioners and other local partners to find a suitable site, which is currently subject to planning permission. An initial application was not supported by the local planning committee, and the final decision has been deferred. Ongoing support from the Welsh Government and other partners is vital to the Women’s Centre opening.
- **Create more female-only reporting and co-location arrangements** by opening new locations in more rural locations across Wales. This is based on evidence that women respond better to rehabilitative services delivered in a holistic and female only, trauma informed environment.
- **Strengthen early intervention and diversion opportunities** to reduce escalation in complexity at the earliest point and provide a meaningful alternative to custody. This includes increasing the number of Women’s Pathfinder Partnership Integration Coordinators, which is currently at six.
- **Increase the number of health pathways for women in the Justice System.** This will provide better support for women’s physical and mental health needs, including substance misuse strategies, by commissioning and supporting health pathways into health care services, both from custody in England and in Wales. This would include primary care, mental health services, maternity, and residential and community rehabilitation services for women in Wales. In addition, it would be beneficial to develop a funded pathway for women to access rehab spaces. We have identified a gap in this area that sometimes means women have to travel as far as Scotland to access rehab spaces.
- **Grow the evidence base.** In order to better monitor data and trends in relation to the sentencing outcomes of women across Wales, the Blueprint project has also established a new, multi-agency pan Wales Women’s Partnership report. Evidence gathered through this work has enabled the team to identify individual court areas, such as Swansea Magistrates Court and Merthyr Tydfil Magistrates Court, where targeted activity to reduce female custodial sentences would be beneficial. This should be expanded across Wales. In addition, we can improve the data available by testing a process to improve information sharing from women’s services into the Pre-Sentence Report writing process, which will support effective sentencing proposals.

4. Annex A

4.1 Table 1 highlights the volume of women, who were supported by the Women’s Pathfinder WSA across each of the key stages of the Justice System from April 2020 to March 2022.

Timeframe	South Wales	Gwent	Total
Apr-Jun 2020	196	74	270
Jul-Sept 2020	193	100	293

Oct-Dec 2020	160	76	236
Jan-Mar 2021	185	108	293
Apr-Jun 2021	211	123	334
Jul-Sep 2021	235	75	310
Oct-Dec 2021	214	88	302
Jan-Mar 2022	137	64	201
Total	1,531	708	2,239

4.2 Women's Pathfinder Whole System Approach Client Feedback:

- '[Caseworker] wrote me a letter for court and that really helped... she explained to them how remorseful I was and how much it was affecting me. It helped the people at court to understand my situation better.'
- '[Caseworker] has given me a sense of pride and helped me to come along and be where I am now, where I never thought I'd be. I wouldn't do anything to jeopardise this.'
- The timing was a massive factor... [caseworker] reached out at just the right time. If I hadn't been given support in the cell that day, I would have lost all hope.'

4.3 Number of diversion referrals across Wales

Area	Apr - Jun 20	Jul - Sep 20	Oct - Dec 20	Jan - Mar 21	Apr - Jun 21	Jul - Sep 21	Oct - Dec 21	Jan - Mar 22
North Wales	87	97	73	93	60	63	55	61
Dyfed-Powys	11	9	*	13	8	*	8	13
South Wales and Gwent	92	124	102	115	131	132	91	80
Total	190	230	177	221	199	200	154	154

4.4 PACT visiting Mum evaluation [Final-PACT-report-Final-version.-12.7.17.pdf \(cardiff.ac.uk\)](#).