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# A thematic inspection of the provision and quality of services in the community for women who offend

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An inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation  
September 2016

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1 Bridge Street West  
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M3 3FX

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# Foreword

The Corston Report 2007<sup>1</sup> gave an enormous boost to the visibility of the distinctive needs of women who offend. The Ministry of Justice and National Offender Management Service responded by promoting a considerable amount of activity, both regionally and locally.

We last inspected services for women in 2011<sup>2</sup>, some four years later. We found that a great deal had been achieved, although services were still inconsistent, and specific performance measures hard to come by. We foresaw that, with the impending changes to the probation service, the maintenance and development of women's services would depend upon funding. We recommended maintaining a specific focus on women and the development of effective outcome measures, supported by monitoring and evaluation.

In this inspection we have found a lack of strategic focus on women. There is no clear statement of the government's policy aims for women who offend or are likely to reoffend, and Community Rehabilitation Company contractual provisions specific to women are operational and basic, rather than strategic. There are no outcome measures specific to women, and the National Offender Management Service does not as yet publish information on performance against the few operational measures that exist.

Encouragingly, we saw slightly better mental health outcomes for women than for those sampled in 2011. We found a reduction in the availability of accommodation for women, however, and considerable uncertainty and anxiety about current and future funding of women's services. Since the implementation of the *Transforming Rehabilitation* programme, dedicated funding for women's community services has virtually disappeared, and provision is mixed and uncertain. It has been difficult to pin down the extent and sources of funding now available, but it is clear that specific funding for work with women who offend is tenuous at best, and often time-limited.

Women's centres are particularly vulnerable and some have already lost funding, yet they have an important role to play. We found cases where they had been pivotal in turning women away from crime and helping them to rebuild their lives, but often women who offend chose not to get involved, for a number of reasons. In our view, women's centres need both funding and strategic support, so that they fulfil their potential with this group of women.

The availability and range of provision in the community for women who offend is still inconsistent, but this is hardly surprising given the paucity of dedicated funding, and as the demands of implementing the *Transforming Rehabilitation* programme have diverted attention away from the development of services for women who offend.

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1 *The Corston Report: A report by Baroness Jean Corston of a review of women with particular vulnerabilities in the criminal justice system*, Home Office (2007)

2 *Thematic inspection report: Equal but different – an inspection of the use of alternatives to custody for women offenders*. HMI Probation (2011)

Almost a decade after the Corston report, we found funding reductions and uncertainties, a lack of strategic or operational focus on outcomes for women, and no better monitoring and evaluation than when we reported in 2011.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**Dame Glenys Stacey**

HM Chief Inspector of Probation

September 2016

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## Key facts

**14%** Proportion of convictions for indictable offences involving women, compared to 86% involving men<sup>3</sup>.

**10%** Proportion of offenders being supervised by the probation services who were women<sup>4</sup>.

**12.4 months** Average length of a community order for women, compared to 15.1 months for men<sup>4</sup>.

**25%** Proportion of community orders for women which were for an offence of theft and handling, compared to 13% for men<sup>4</sup>.

**73%** Proportion of community orders for women which ran their full course or were terminated early for good progress, compared to 68% for men<sup>4</sup>.

**+20** Percentage point increase in successful completions for women on community orders since 2006, +17 percentage point increase for men<sup>4</sup>.

**18%** The one-year reoffending rate for women, compared to 26% for men<sup>5</sup>.

**-2.7%** Percentage point fall in the one-year proven reoffending rate since 2003, compared to -2.0% for men<sup>5</sup>.

**7** Identified priority needs of women, covering substance misuse, mental health, emotion management, pro-social identity, control of daily life and having goals, family contact and social capital.

**3** Gender-specific contractual requirements for Community Rehabilitation Companies.

<sup>3</sup> *Women and the Criminal Justice System*, Ministry of Justice 2013

<sup>4</sup> *Offender Management Caseload Statistics*, Ministry of Justice December 2015

<sup>5</sup> *Proven Reoffending October 2013 to September 2014*, Ministry of Justice 2016

<sup>6</sup> *A thematic inspection of the provision and quality of services in the community for women who offend*

# Executive summary

## The inspection

The purpose of this inspection was to explore services for women who offend following the implementation of the *Transforming Rehabilitation* programme, and to examine the quality and effectiveness of the work with women commissioned, delivered or accessed by the Community Rehabilitation Companies and National Probation Service. Fieldwork for this inspection was conducted between November 2015 and January 2016. The inspection sample consisted of 72 cases of women who had been sentenced to a community order, suspended sentence order or released on licence.

## Contextual information

In June 2014, under the government's *Transforming Rehabilitation* programme, probation services were divided into a National Probation Service and 21 new Community Rehabilitation Companies. The public sector National Probation Service advises courts on sentencing all offenders, and manages those offenders presenting high or very high risk of serious harm, or who are managed under Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements. Community Rehabilitation Companies supervise most other offenders presenting low and medium risk of harm. Community Rehabilitation Companies operated as companies in public ownership until 01 February 2015 when they transferred to eight, mainly private sector, providers. Around 80% of cases are allocated to the Community Rehabilitation Companies and 20% to the National Probation Service.

In 2013/2014 there was £3.78m funding provided by the National Offender Management Service which was designated for community services for women. The funds were made available through Probation Trust contracts<sup>6</sup>. The National Offender Management Service have confirmed this now forms part of the Community Rehabilitation Company funding; services for women are no longer separately identified. This means the funding of provision for women who offend is no longer ring-fenced, and hence is now discretionary and dependant upon local commissioning arrangements by Community Rehabilitation Companies, together with specific provision funded by other partners, such as local authorities and Police and Crime Commissioners. There are no contractual penalties for those who do not fund bespoke services for women.

Earlier this year, in a targeted bidding process, the Ministry of Justice awarded £200k to five local areas to support the development of a 'Whole System Approach' to women in the criminal justice system.

There is no published data of the total amount of funding available across England and Wales for the provision of community services for women.

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<sup>6</sup> *Funding of women's centres in the community*: Briefing for the Justice Select Committee, National Audit Office (May 2013)

## Leadership, management and partnerships

Overall, we found a lack of focus on outcomes for women, both strategically and operationally. This is in contrast to the findings of our 2011 joint inspection, when we found a wealth of activity regionally and locally, following the strong lead then provided by the Ministry of Justice and the National Offender Management Service. The more immediate demands of implementing the *Transforming Rehabilitation* programme appear to have diverted attention from the development of practice and services for women who offend.

Our inspection found that, in the absence of any nationally specified approach, strategic leadership of the management of women in the community varied considerably. In some areas, senior managers were designated to lead the work with women who had offended. Others had women's team champions or dedicated single points of contact. In other areas, leadership was insufficient. Strategic management and accountability for women who had offended lacked clarity and was not a priority. We found that service provision for women was better in areas where there was dedicated leadership for women's offending.

The knowledge and skills of voluntary sector organisations working with women, and their commitment to wider outcomes, beyond reoffending, was impressive. Some voluntary sector organisations informed us, however, that funding was often uncertain and payment sometimes retrospective, and that this hindered the future planning of services.

We found that less than one in four responsible officers had received training and guidance in relation to female-specific case management. This was a concern given the finding from our 2011 joint inspection, that many practitioners lacked the awareness and underpinning knowledge to work with women effectively.

## Sentencing

Magistrates and District Judges (sentencers) were generally positive about their working relationships with the National Probation Service staff. They told us that they were normally able to obtain sufficient information from pre-sentence reports on women, to inform sentencing decisions<sup>7</sup>. They commented, however, that reports were not usually female-specific and did not differentiate the needs of women from those of men. This mirrored our findings, in that we found that it was not always possible to tell the individual's gender from reading the report.

Sentencers lacked information about interventions specifically designed for women, in particular rehabilitation activity requirements and local support services. Similarly, our *Transforming Rehabilitation* report (May 2016), which focused on both male and female cases, found that court staff were not sufficiently aware of what Community Rehabilitation Companies could offer, so as to advise the court appropriately in relation to rehabilitation activity requirements. This lack of communication was concerning.

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<sup>7</sup> Our *Transforming Rehabilitation Early Implementation 5 report, An independent inspection of the arrangements for offender supervision*: HMI Probation (May 2016), which focused on both male and female cases, found that written reports were generally good but that many oral reports provided insufficient information to aid the courts with sentencing.



Within our case sample, we found that responsible officers had worked hard to support women to comply with their court order. Where absences had occurred, they were responded to appropriately in over 90% of cases, for example by issuing warning letters or being returned to court where necessary.

### **Reducing reoffending**

We found some excellent individual examples of work being undertaken by responsible officers with women, and some very good partnership working. The quality of work by probation services to reduce offending by women (in both the Community Rehabilitation Companies and National Probation Service), however, varied considerably. We found an inconsistent approach to recognising and addressing the gender-specific needs of women who had offended at each part of their process through the criminal justice system. We also found that service provision for women in the community was of varying quality and availability.

The biggest gap in the availability of suitable interventions for women was in relation to accommodation. This was of concern given that issues with accommodation can be a significant barrier to progress in other areas of women's lives.

We found that most women were offered the opportunity to have a female responsible officer. Not all women, however, were offered the opportunity to report, have appointments or undertake their programmes of work in a female-only environment, despite Community Rehabilitation Company contractual requirements to do so where practicable. This was likely to have been a barrier to engagement for some women. We found relatively few examples of unpaid work being undertaken by women within the cases we inspected. Most unpaid work for women was completed within individual placements, usually charity shops, and, reassuringly, we did not find examples of women being placed as lone females within a mixed-gender group.

### **Protecting the public and managing vulnerability**

The work of probation services to manage the risk of harm women posed to others was done well in most cases. Where there was a predictable or preventable risk of harm to the public, victims, children or staff from women, we found that probation services and partners had taken all reasonable action.

There were 13 cases in the sample subject to Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements, and we found that these had been managed well.

We were concerned, however, to find that the work to manage and minimise the vulnerability of women who had offended had not been done sufficiently well in one in three cases in the sample. The weaker areas were in addressing domestic abuse, sexual exploitation, and other exploitation of women, such as obtaining drugs or alcohol for others.

### **Women's centres**

Funding was a major concern for women's centres at the time of our inspection. Community Rehabilitation Companies were at the stage of considering their budget allocations and commissioning priorities for the next financial year.

A number of women's centres had temporary or 'roll-on' contracts, mostly of three months duration. This led to uncertainty about future funding, staffing and the sustainability of services.

Some excellent and inspirational work was being undertaken within women's centres. Services were gender-specific and sensitive to the needs and diversity of women who offend. The proximity of the centres, however, and access to public transport were important factors in determining whether women could benefit from the services on offer. In some areas, women had access to women's centres within their communities, providing female-only environments, support and a range of programmes and interventions tailored to their individual needs. This was not an option for all women who had offended.

NB: Throughout this report all names referred to in practice examples have been amended to protect the individual's identity.

# Recommendations

## **The Ministry of Justice should:**

- make clear its strategic policy aims for women who have offended or are likely to reoffend
- make clear the sources and amounts of funding available to providers of services to women who offend, in particular the funds to support women's centres.

## **The National Offender Management Service should:**

- undertake a national review of compliance against the gender-specific contractual requirements in relation to women who offend, and where necessary hold service providers to account.

## **Community Rehabilitation Companies should:**

- regularly communicate information about rehabilitation activity requirement provision for women to sentencers, their own responsible officers, the National Probation Service and partner agencies
- make sure information about how the National Probation Service and other commissioners of services may purchase services is clear and well-communicated.

## **The National Probation Service should:**

- have structures in place to provide timely information to sentencers about the needs of women who offend and the interventions available locally
- make sure that pre-sentence reports take account of the specific needs of women who offend.

## **The Community Rehabilitation Companies and National Probation Service should:**

- provide clarity and focus to the strategic management, accountability and planning of services for women, for example by appointing a lead senior officer in each area
- develop a greater understanding of the profile of women who offend within the area, in order to inform needs-led responses and approaches to the work delivered
- make sure that responsible officers have appropriate gender-specific training so that they can recognise risk and protective factors relating to women's offending, take gender-factors into account when report writing and in determining the most suitable interventions for women
- offer women the opportunity to report, have their appointments, and undertake

their programmes of work in a female-only environment where practicable, in order to improve their attendance and remove barriers to engagement

- refer women who offend to women's centres for support and intervention wherever possible and appropriate, making sure that women referred to a women's centre are supported and encouraged in their attendance in order to improve take-up rates
  - monitor and evaluate the progress of women during their statutory orders or licences in order to demonstrate what outcomes have been achieved and to identify promising practice.
-

# **1. Introduction**

## Women's offending and sentencing

About 1 in 20 prisoners are women. On 31 December 2015<sup>8</sup>, the total prison population was 84,968, of which 3,825 (4.5%) were women. The proportion of men and women under probation supervision is different, but nevertheless only one in ten are women. On the same date, 241,144 offenders were being supervised by the probation service (including those subject to pre and post-release supervision), of which 23,851 (10%) were women.

Overall, women commit less serious offences and are given shorter sentences than men; 78% of female prison receptions were serving a sentence of less than 12 months, compared to 70% of male prison receptions (Ministry of Justice 2016), and the average length of community orders and suspended sentence orders was 12.4 months and 17.7 months for women, compared to 15.1 months and 18.5 months for men (Offender Management Caseload Statistics, Ministry of Justice 2015). Women who offend tend to commit acquisitive, rather than violent crimes.

The known drivers for women offending have not changed since we last reported in 2011. The factors consistently related to general recidivism are: antisocial personality (problems with impulse control, emotion regulation and hostility), antisocial peers, antisocial attitudes and substance abuse<sup>9</sup>. Violent crime is associated with alcohol abuse, while acquisitive crime and soliciting are linked to serious drug abuse.

While the same factors can be relevant for both men and women, the strength of the relationships can vary. So for example, a 2014<sup>10</sup> review of the evidence by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) notes that substance misuse had been found to have a stronger relationship with reoffending for women than for men, and a 2015 summary of evidence for the Scottish Government notes that other non-criminogenic needs such as abuse, trauma and depression are also particularly prevalent for women<sup>11</sup>.

Women have lower proven reoffending rates than men. So, for example, for those adult offenders who were released from custody, received a non-custodial conviction at court, or received a caution in the period July 2013 to June 2014, the one-year reoffending rates were 18.3% for women and 26.4% for men<sup>12</sup>.

A number of researchers have proposed that there are important differences in why women and men turn away from crime. Young women can offer moral as opposed to instrumental reasons for stopping offending and are more likely to emphasise relational aspects including parental attitudes, experiences of victimisation, the assumption of parental responsibilities and disassociation from offending peers. Underpinning women's moral reasoning is a general ethic of care and responsibility to others<sup>13</sup>.

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8 *Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2015*: Ministry of Justice (2016)

9 *A compendium of research and analysis on the Offender Assessment System (OASys) 2009-2013*: National Offender Management Service – Ministry of Justice Analytical Series (2015)

10 *Transforming Rehabilitation: a summary of evidence on reducing reoffending (second edition)*: Ministry of Justice (2014).

11 Sapouna M., Bisset, C., Conlong, A-M., and Matthews, B. (2015) *What Works to Reduce Reoffending: A Summary of the Evidence*.

12 *Proven reoffending statistics quarterly: July 2013 to June 2014*: Ministry of Justice (2016)

13 Sapouna M., Bisset, C., Conlong, A-M., and Matthews, B. (2015) *What Works to Reduce Reoffending: A Summary of the Evidence*.

Some factors (such as childcare provision or domestic abuse) make participation in probation work more difficult for women than for men, and it is broadly recognised that approaches to tackling women's offending need to be gender-specific. In 2011 we reported that the approach endorsed by many in the criminal justice system was to address issues in a holistic manner so as to have a realistic chance of diverting a woman from crime or help her desist from offending. Since then, a recently published review of research<sup>14</sup> suggests that the following reduces women's reoffending:

- substance abuse treatment, in particular in-custody or therapeutic community programmes that apply a cognitive behavioural intervention focusing on skill development
- a gender-responsive cognitive behavioural programme that emphasises existing strengths and competencies, as well as skills acquisition
- opioid substitute programmes (for example, methadone) in the community, which may reduce offending rates while the women are in treatment
- booster programmes that assist in maintaining treatment effects through community follow-up, which appear to contribute to improved outcomes
- gender-responsive approaches, which show promise relative to gender-neutral programmes.

Building on that review, in September 2015 the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) identified seven priority needs for support and intervention, based on the best evidence of 'what works' in reducing women's offending, keeping them safe and creating better lives. These priority needs were set out in *Better Outcomes for Women Offenders* (2015), the commissioning principles for women offenders, and are intended to promote dialogue with existing providers as well as informing new providers and other key stakeholders.

Below are the identified priority needs:

- substance misuse – stabilise and address individual need, in particular class A drug use, binge and chronic drinking
- mental health – expedite services that address mental health need, in particular anxiety and depression, personality disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and trauma
- emotion management – help women to build skills to control impulsive behaviour and destructive emotions
- a pro-social identity – be sensitive towards, about, and around women, and encourage them to help and be positive towards others
- being in control of daily life and having goals – motivate women to believe that they belong and fit in to mainstream society, where they can work to achieve their goals
- improve family contact – help women to build healthy and supportive family relationships, especially with their children
- resettle and build social capital – help women to find somewhere safe to live, to learn how to manage their money, access education, and improve their employability.

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<sup>14</sup> *Effective interventions for Women offenders: A Rapid Evidence Assessment*: National Offender Management Service (2015)

## Historical context

Concerns about the rise in the female prison population in the late 1990's led to a review of the initiatives then existing for working with women. The subsequent report signalled the start of the Women's Offending Reduction Programme, aimed at linking strategic initiatives across government departments to address offending by women and pursue suitable alternatives to custody.

In 2005 the Together Women Project (TWP) was launched, with funding specifically set aside for community projects to reduce offending by women, and address the needs of women at risk of offending. TWP also aimed to divert women from prison custody. TWP centres were established in the North West, and in Yorkshire and Humberside NOMS regions.

The profile of women's offending was raised significantly in 2007 with the publication of the Corston Report<sup>15</sup>. This followed a review of women within the criminal justice system after a number of self-inflicted deaths in prison. The recommendations made by Baroness Jean Corston set the agenda for working with women who offend. They included making community disposals the norm, developing a wider network of 'one-stop-shop' community provision for women, and improving high level governance and cross-departmental working for women who offend. Dedicated time-limited funding streams for working with women, including women's centres followed, and subsequently NOMS continued with dedicated funding streams to Probation Trusts.

In 2011 HMI Probation, together with HM Crown Prosecution Inspectorate and HM Inspectorate of Prisons, completed a joint thematic inspection '*Equal but different? - an inspection of the use of alternatives to custody for women offenders*'. This measured the degree of progress being made by Probation Trusts in relation to implementing the Corston recommendations. The inspection found that: 'although a great deal had been achieved, provision for women varied considerably and was inconsistent'.

At that time we reported that the strong lead given by the MoJ and NOMS had been successful in promoting a considerable amount of activity both regionally and locally in relation to women offenders, though measures to assess the progress were generally underdeveloped. It was apparent that, with forthcoming changes to the probation service, the sustainability and subsequent development of services for women who offend would depend upon funding and the engagement by probation services with local providers. It was recognised that a locally coordinated joint approach to the needs of women was paramount, with joint commissioning essential to the success of any such arrangements. The report's recommendations included maintaining a specific focus on women through the development of effective outcome measures, supported by monitoring and evaluation.

The government Advisory Board for Female Offenders was established in March 2013 alongside the publication of the then coalition government's *Strategic Objectives for Female Offenders*<sup>16</sup>. The Board meets four times a year, bringing together key stakeholders, criminal justice partners and senior officials from across government

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15 The Corston Report: A report by Baroness Jean Corston of a review of women with particular vulnerabilities in the criminal justice system, Home Office (2007)

16 *Strategic Objectives and Female Offenders*: Ministry of Justice (2013)



to provide expert advice and challenge on the development and delivery of policy to improve the treatment of female offenders. This includes: early intervention and diversion, and the development of local Whole System Approaches to female offenders, rehabilitation services for female offenders, and ensuring a women-centred and rehabilitative women's custodial estate. The Board has overseen the development of Whole System Approach initiatives in a small number of local areas including within some areas visited on this inspection. Examples include Wales - Women's Pathfinder Project, and Greater Manchester (see examples of innovative practice in Chapter 3).

HMI Probation is represented on the Board, and the findings from this inspection will be presented for discussion.

### **Drivers of current practice**

In April 2011, the public sector equality duty came into force<sup>17</sup>, created under the *Equality Act 2010*. Section 10 of the *Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014*<sup>18</sup> restated the equality duty, and required the Secretary of State for Justice to consider the particular needs of women. The equality duty would also apply to providers of services who are commissioned and managed by contract by Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) or the National Probation Service (NPS), receiving payment that has come through the route of the MoJ public purse.

The NPS, and other commissioners of services may choose to purchase services from a CRC that in turn can subcontract service delivery to specialist service providers. In April 2015 a formal process was put in place between the CRCs and NPS, with available services and interventions and their costs detailed on individual 'rate cards' for each area. From 01 May 2015 those services included: unpaid work, accredited programmes, resettlement services, and other discretionary services often referred to as 'elective services'. At the time of our inspection this process was at an early stage of implementation and it was too early to judge its effectiveness.

CRCs receive three main payments under their new contracts: a fee for service (for the satisfactory completion of activities), a fee for use, to cover work done for others (including where the NPS commissions the CRC to provide services) and – in due course - payment by results, triggered by reductions in reoffending after two years<sup>19</sup>. None of these payments differentiate services provided for women, as opposed to all service users. NOMS have put in place three gender-specific contractual requirements which CRCs must meet in relation to the management of women who offend. Women should be given the option, 'where practicable', of:

- having a female responsible officer
- attending meetings or appointments in a female-only environment
- not being placed in a male-only environment for unpaid work or attendance requirements.

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17 <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/private-and-public-sector-guidance/public-sector-providers/public-sector-equality-duty/what-equality-duty>

18 *Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014*: Parliament UK (2015)

19 The first cohort commenced on 01 October 2015. Any payments due will be made during 2017-2018.

NOMS can monitor these gender-specific requirements, but no nationally collated management information is available as yet in relation to either compliance, or take-up.

### **Call for evidence and survey responses (see Appendix C - Inspection methodology)**

Overall, respondents to our call for evidence were positive about interventions tailored to women's specific needs, but were anxious about future funding and the mainstreaming of existing services for women.

They told us:

- women who offend are more likely to have been victims of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, or exploitation. They are more likely to have mental health problems and are more likely to self-harm than men
- women are a distinct group of offenders within the criminal justice system with specific needs that cannot be met through general systems designed with men in mind
- women tend to be lower risk cases: are less likely to be serious or violent offenders, are more likely to be acquisitive offenders, committing offences such as shop theft, or less serious fraud crimes
- interventions that work are less confrontational than some interventions effective for men. They focus upon the future: are optimistic; look to build positive relationships; are mindful of trauma, abuse and victimisation; and are based within the desistance paradigm, stressing strengths, maturation and self-worth
- interventions that work with women who offend are based around confidence and self-esteem building: increasing skills in relationships and parenting, improving physical and mental well-being, and tackling substance misuse.

The organisations who contributed to our call for evidence are listed at Appendix B.

All but one respondent to our survey reported that the work they do with women differs from the work with men. There was a general recognition of the principles of the Corston report that women had different offence profiles; usually less serious offences of an acquisitive nature, posed a lower risk of serious harm and were significantly more likely to have experienced trauma or violence, been victims of abuse, sexual abuse and exploitation than male offenders.

Some CRC and NPS respondents said that they offered women-only induction and offered female responsible officers on request. One respondent summed up their approach as:

*“We treat women as women first and offenders second.”*

Interventions were offered on a one-to-one basis and through groupwork sessions. By providing a safe women-only space, interventions address specific needs such as building self-esteem, improving employability, developing a positive structure to life, and parenting skills.

Most (26 out of 31 cases) reported that there were women's centres operating locally. Referrals to women's centres came through the CRCs or NPS, or by self-referral. Women's centres offered a diverse range of services to women who offend, and other women with complex and multiple needs.

All said they delivered or accessed specific rehabilitation activity requirements (RARs) for women, and most (24 out of 31 cases) had dedicated resources for women. Some respondents noted that rural isolation was a barrier to accessing female-specific interventions, as well as the smaller caseload of women making some interventions less feasible. Many CRCs reported that women specific RARs, often delivered from women's centres, were popular with staff and service users.

Views differed on how *Transforming Rehabilitation* affected work with women, with 12 respondents reporting no change, 12 reporting deterioration, 6 reporting improvement, and 1 non-response. Respondents who had seen improvements in work with women noted that partnerships were stronger, more providers were available and processes and procedures had improved.

Four respondents reported staff confusion about accessing services for women post *Transforming Rehabilitation*, and commented that the 'rate card' was a barrier to accessing services. One respondent said that work with women was no longer ring-fenced but came from the general budget for interventions. Two respondents commented that the specific budget from NOMS for work with women had ended and was now discretionary.

The organisations who responded to the survey are listed at Appendix B.

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## **2. Leadership, management and partnerships**

We considered the impact of strategic leadership in relation to working with women who offend. We looked at the way in which progress made, and outcomes for women were monitored and evaluated, in order to inform the effectiveness of the work.

We also looked at the support given by managers to responsible officers in their work with women, both in terms of management oversight of their cases, and the training they had received.

We considered the role partnerships play in the way probation services work with women.

## Key findings

### Leadership and management

Our 2011 inspection found that a considerable amount of work had been undertaken at a strategic level to make sure that the specific needs of women were taken into account within the criminal justice system, and that work needed to be consolidated, and the required changes embedded into practice. We found a wealth of activity regionally and locally, following the strong lead then provided by the MoJ and NOMS. We recognised that the maintaining the women's agenda would be challenging given budget constraints, significant organisational change and conflicting priorities, but crucial if the investment already made was to be fully realised.

Since that time, probation services have undergone major change with the implementation of the *Transforming Rehabilitation* programme. Probation leaders have been necessarily focused on designing and implementing change to the operating models for probation services.

We found that, in the absence of any nationally specified approach, the strategic approach to the management of women in the community varied considerably. Some areas had senior managers with lead responsibility for the work with women, together with middle manager leads for women in each Local Delivery Unit cluster. Others had women's team champions, with responsibility for awareness-raising and sharing information. We found some examples of strategies and action plans for women. In other areas, however, there was no dedicated person or team champion. The leadership, management and accountability for women who offend lacked clarity and was not viewed as a priority.

There was a lack of focus on outcomes for women, both strategically and operationally. Some responsible officers monitored the progress of individuals but very few received sufficient information about outcomes. There was little evidence of any follow-up to the progress of women beyond completion of their statutory orders or licences. This was compounded by the fact that once a case managed by the CRC was closed, the responsible officer could no longer gain access to the electronic record to track any progress made.

Overall, more attention needed to be given to understanding the profile of women who offend, in order to inform needs-led responses and approaches to the work delivered. The monitoring and evaluation of the progress of women, both during and beyond their statutory orders or licences, needed much more rigour, in order to know what was effective in working with those women. This was a concern, given the recommendation from our 2011 inspection that Probation Trusts should: 'continue to maintain an additional focus on women in order to embed strategic developments in operational delivery through the development of effective outcome measures supported by monitoring, evaluation and managerial oversight'.

Less than one in four of the responsible officers we interviewed had received training and specialist guidance in relation to female-specific case management, for example, in the risk and protective factors linked to women's offending, gender specific considerations when report writing and in determining the most appropriate interventions. This was disappointing, given the finding from our 2011 inspection, that many practitioners lacked the awareness and underpinning knowledge to

work with women effectively. Nevertheless, in 86% of the cases we assessed, management oversight of the work had helped responsible officers to assist women to reduce their reoffending, manage their risk of harm and vulnerability and abide by their sentences.

We found a general lack of understanding of the rate card relied on by the NPS and others to commission services from a CRC, with confusion both in terms of its content, and how and when services could be purchased. This endorses what we were told by some respondents to our survey which we sent to all CRC and NPS areas in England and Wales.

The knowledge and skills of the voluntary sector in working with women, and their commitment to wider outcomes for those women, beyond reoffending, was impressive. We found that statutory and non-statutory organisations such as domestic abuse, drug and alcohol services had made a positive contribution to the work with women in almost all cases where it was required.

## **Funding**

For the majority of women's centres we visited, we found there was uncertainty about the future sustainability of services for women. Recommissioning or decommissioning processes were sometimes underway. A few services reported that they were already receiving less funding. Others were unsure of future funding and were subject to 'roll-forward' contracts (mostly three to six months) while the future of their services was considered, leading to apprehension about future funding and the sustainability of services. There was, therefore, a risk of skilled staff being lost. Some voluntary sector organisations told us that their funding was paid retrospectively (often quarterly in arrears) which led to more uncertainty and hindered future planning.

In one area, we found confusion among responsible officers as to whether they could still refer women to the women's centre. Mostly, senior managers in CRCs stated a commitment to the future funding of women's services, though at the time were unable to offer clarity about the extent of the contracts, or timescales for contracts being confirmed.

We were concerned that these funding difficulties were likely to result in the reduction or loss of services within communities to support women who offend. One women's centre reported a 50% reduction following changes to their contract. This meant reduced funding, staffing and a long waiting list for services.

It was of note that the sustainability of women's centres was still a concern; this had also been a finding from our inspection of 2011 *Equal But Different?*: 'sustainability was a key concern for all the centres. Where data focusing on achievement of outcomes was lacking, this hampered the centres' prospects for obtaining future funding'.

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## 3. The sentencing of women

During the course of the inspection fieldwork we interviewed sentencers, legal team managers and court probation officers to ascertain their views of the work undertaken with women who had offended, and its impact.

We asked sentencers how they were kept informed about the availability and provision of services for women in their communities. We also sought their views about the impact of *Transforming Rehabilitation* on sentencing and community provision for women.

## Key findings

### Court reports

The courts were advised of sentencing options and the needs of women who had offended by means of a pre-sentence report (PSR) in just over two in three cases in the sample.

In the course of this inspection, we looked to see whether reports considered the gender-specific needs of women. While we saw some good individual examples of both full PSRs and the shorter Fast Delivery Reports, we found that insufficient effort was made to understand and explain the gender-specific needs of the woman in two in three cases. Similarly, recommendations to sentencers considered gender-specific needs well enough in just over one in three cases. Indeed, we saw examples of PSRs where it was not possible to tell the individual's gender.

Sentencers told us that in their experience reports were not usually female-specific and did not differentiate the needs of women from those of men. Notwithstanding this, sentencers felt that, for the most part, they were able to obtain sufficient information from PSRs to inform sentencing decisions.

In some areas, we found that up to 80% of reports to the court were either Fast Delivery Reports or oral reports, provoking mixed views from sentencers. In some areas they were preferred, as sentencers felt they enabled more discussion about the case. Others felt full written PSRs should be provided, especially in more complex women's cases.

Whichever format of report was used, we considered it important that key matters were fully assessed and presented in reports to the court: specific needs, diversity issues, risk of reoffending, risk of harm and vulnerabilities of women. In our view this was necessary in order to effectively inform the sentencing of women.

### Rehabilitation Activity Requirement (RAR)

The RAR was introduced by the *Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014*. It replaced the former Supervision and Activity Requirements for all relevant sentences for offences committed on or after 01 February 2015. It gave greater flexibility to providers of probation services to determine the rehabilitative interventions delivered to offenders. A relevant order imposing a RAR must specify the maximum number of days for which the offender may be instructed to participate in activities. In effect, the court sentences the offender to a specified number of RAR days, and probation services then determine the type of activity to be undertaken.

In most of the areas we visited the process of developing the 'menu' of RAR provision, for both men and women, was still underway at the time of our inspection fieldwork between November 2015 and January 2016. While there were clearly some good intentions for services for the future, many responsible officers and sentencers remained unclear as to what provision for women existed in their communities.

In some areas, RAR was delivered within the women's centre, and this was seen as a positive approach by sentencers. Sentencers, however, generally felt they had insufficient information on the availability of RAR provision in the community,



and that there were very few activities specifically for women. One magistrate commented:

*“All we are told is what is suggested to us on RAR days, for example, 20 in a community order. I have not seen one personally that gives specific women-related RAR.”*

We noted a good example of gender-specific RAR activity being undertaken within a supported accommodation placement. An inspector noted:

*“There was a range of female-specific interventions available at the supported accommodation to address the woman’s needs. A structured 12 session programme was undertaken as part of her RAR activity.”*

A number of sentencers expressed concerns about a ‘disconnect’ in communication when sentencing RAR. The recommendations for sentencing were made within the PSR by the NPS; the court then sentenced the offender to a specified number of RAR days, and provision of the activity was then determined by the CRC. The lack of three-way communication, and the absence of feedback about women’s progress and outcomes following sentencing, was of concern to sentencers.

While it was accepted by sentencers that the changes were still being embedded, they did expect to have received better information about RAR provision. Some felt that recently produced brochures of activities, and information on websites, was too basic. RAR is further referenced in Chapter 4 (Interventions and reducing reoffending).

### **Breach proceedings**

We found that considerable efforts had usually been made to support women to complete their court orders. Where appointments had been missed, responsible officers had responded appropriately in more than 90% of cases, for example by issuing warning letters or referring back to court. We saw only one case where breach action should have been taken in response to missed appointments, and had not been. Similarly, our 2011 thematic inspection reported that where required, breach action was usually taken efficiently, with appropriate judgements being made in most cases.

Sentencers in some areas, however, commented that breach had dwindled for both men and women, since the introduction of *Transforming Rehabilitation*. They had been given little information about the reasons for this. This lack of communication with sentencers was an issue, as some feared that an unexplained change to the number of breach proceedings may undermine their confidence in community sentences. Our *Transforming Rehabilitation Early Implementation 5* report (May 2016), which focused on a larger case sample (311) of both male and female cases, of which 50 were female, found that enforcement proceedings, where required, were

taken in most cases. During that inspection, a number of CRC responsible officers told inspectors they had been told not to 'revoke and resentence' because it would lead to a financial penalty for their CRC.

### **Communication with sentencers**

Sentencers were positive about their working relationships with NPS staff, especially those based within the court and those who had regular contact with them.

As outlined above, concerns were expressed about communication in relation to RAR provision, and breach proceedings. Sentencers also felt they lacked information about outcomes for women, and the progress they were making following their court orders. They said they would welcome regular updates of aggregate information and trend data. Suggestions included regular newsletters, joint meetings, or informal feedback sessions.

We found the following examples of good practice in relation to communications with sentencers and joint working between agencies:

#### **Probation Liaison Committee: Camden**

The Camden Probation Liaison Committee was attended by the District Judge and six magistrates, together with NPS senior managers. There were bi-monthly newsletters for magistrates, with updates on probation service matters. Good links existed between the legal team and probation staff. Within the court there was a community advice desk, with a debt clinic, housing advice and signposting to services. Early morning awareness-raising sessions were about to be introduced, and this was welcomed by sentencers.

#### **Probation liaison meetings: Wrexham**

In Wrexham, probation/magistrates liaison meetings were held twice per year, covering a range of topics. Sentencers had a very clear understanding of the profile of women who offended in their area and the types of offences they committed. They felt that good information was provided about voluntary sector services and also substance misuse services. A mental health worker was present when the court was sitting, and sentencers were able to consult with probation court duty staff if specific information about a case was required.

#### **Links with mental health services: Brighton and Bristol**

There were strong links with mental health teams in both Brighton and Bristol. In Brighton, mental health workers together with police community liaison officers met with service users where necessary, either in police custody or in the magistrates court. In Bristol, sentencers felt they received good and timely information from the mental health team. This gave them the confidence to consider recommendations for community sentences for women with complex mental health needs.

## **Diversion Schemes and problem-solving courts**

We saw a number of examples of diversion from prosecution and diversion from court schemes, operating in the areas we visited during the course of this inspection. Sentencers, probation staff and service users were positive about these schemes.

### ***Example of innovative practice: Rhyl Women's Pathfinder project***

*In St. Asaph, a worker from the women's centre attended the local police custody suite daily to 'triage' all women who were arrested and had admitted their offence. The aim was to divert women away from the criminal justice system at the point of arrest. Those that agreed to up to six sessions of support through the women's centre received a conditional caution rather than progress through court.*

*The diversion cases and others referred to the Women's Pathfinder project were also subject to case conferencing. This was convened at the women's centre and chaired by the CRC or NPS manager with lead responsibility for women. A range of statutory and non-statutory partners attended and helped facilitate access to services, for example mental health, substance misuse, and family support. A lead agency was identified to coordinate the support and interventions delivered.*

*The Women's Pathfinder project was collecting data to demonstrate the effectiveness of the scheme and although at an early stage of development (less than three months) the examples noted looked promising. A formal evaluation of the model being delivered across a number of sites in Wales is being carried out by the University of South Wales. We considered this type of scheme to be a pleasing development since our 2011 inspection.*

### ***Example of innovative practice: Salford Problem-Solving Court***

*In Salford, women at risk of a custodial sentence or with complex needs, attended a sentence planning meeting at the women's centre, hosted by the TWP. The meetings were chaired by the PSR author and attended by local support organisations. The centre also had a crèche to facilitate the engagement of women with young children. At the end of the meeting the probation officer would draft an intervention plan, often involving other agencies. This was then presented to court in the PSR. If the woman received the proposed community order, the cases were reviewed every four weeks, in order to monitor the woman's progress and review the sentence plan.*

## 4. Reducing reoffending

We reviewed assessments, plans, interventions and the outcomes for women within our case sample. We expected to see that sufficient effort was made to understand and address the gender-specific needs of the case. The impact of the work in reducing reoffending was assessed, and we listened to women's views about the work of probation services to reduce reoffending.

## **Key findings**

We found that the type and quality of work to reduce reoffending varied considerably, and that there was inconsistency of approach to recognising and addressing the gender-specific needs of women who had offended.

There were some excellent individual examples of work being undertaken with women. Sometimes responsible officers and staff within women's centres were described by women as going:

*“above and beyond”*

to support them to stop offending and to move forward with their lives.

In relation to the NOMS gender-specific requirements, covered in the Introduction, we found that most women were offered the opportunity to have a female responsible officer. This was often the default position.

Not all women, however, were offered the opportunity to report or attend appointments or undertake programmes of work in a female-only environment. In some areas women reported directly to a women's centre, or to a probation office during female-only time slots. In other areas, women reported to a probation office at the same time as men. In one of the cases we reviewed, a woman was asked to attend the probation office during the one hour 'woman only' reporting slot. This did not fit with her childcare responsibilities and demonstrated the limitations of this approach.

## **Assessment**

Assessment of the risks associated with reoffending was done sufficiently well in the large majority of the cases in the sample. Responsible officers had paid good attention to factors such as accommodation, financial management, drug and alcohol misuse, and attitudes to offending. This compared favourably with our 2011 inspection. We found, however, that assessments accurately identified gender-specific factors linked to offending behaviour in just over half of the inspected cases. This meant that while assessments were mostly done well in respect of factors that make someone more likely to offend, they did not necessarily consider specific factors relating to the offender as a woman.

## **Planning**

We found that less than half of sentence plans sufficiently addressed the gender-specific and other factors associated with offending. Not all plans built upon known protective factors (such as strong family relationships, employment or stable accommodation) to address the woman's offending behaviour.

## **Interventions and reducing reoffending**

Within our sample, the greatest demand for interventions were in the areas of accommodation, thinking and behaviour, relationships, lifestyle and associates, emotional well-being, attitudes to offending and substance misuse.

We found that appropriate interventions to address offending behaviour were delivered in two in three cases. We found, however, that gender-specific factors, for example childcare needs, had not been considered at all in one in three cases.

We considered, in particular, that probation services needed to do more to support women to address their attitudes to offending, thinking and behaviour and their lifestyle and associates. This echoes our findings in Chapter 3 on sentencing, where we found that the RAR provision was underdeveloped and poorly understood.

Around half of the 72 women whose cases we reviewed had been referred to a women's centre; this represented an improvement in the referral rate since our 2011 inspection. Two in three women did not actually attend, however, and this poor take-up rate is of concern. The reasons women gave for not attending included distance from home, refusal to engage with supervision and inconvenient opening days or times for example, when attending college courses. For others it related to the suitability of the programmes on offer. One woman said:

*“I was offered but I’m really not good in groups so I would much rather do them on my own”.*

Just over three-quarters of the women in our sample had not been convicted or cautioned for an offence committed since the start of their community sentence or release on licence. Of the 17 women who had reoffended, the seriousness and frequency of their proven offending had mostly stayed the same.

The impact of the work undertaken with women to reduce the likelihood of them reoffending was mixed. Most impact had been made in relation to emotional well-being (including mental health and behavioural issues), where we found women had made positive progress in two in three relevant cases. Probation services had contributed appropriately to this outcome for women, for example by making referrals to specialist agencies. This was promising progress, as in our 2011 report we were disappointed to find that, in our judgement, the mental health services provided to the women in our sample were unsatisfactory in more than half the individual cases examined (53%).

In respect of accommodation, education, training and employment, financial management, relationships (including domestic abuse), and substance misuse around half of the women made progress, while the other half did not. Of significance within those findings was that for 13 women their accommodation situation had deteriorated over the course of their sentence. The biggest gap in the availability of suitable interventions for women was in relation to accommodation. This was of concern given that issues with accommodation can be a significant barrier to progress in other areas of women's lives.

## **What women said about probation services and work to reduce reoffending**

We commissioned User Voice, a charity led by ex-offenders, to undertake interviews with women service users (with their informed consent) on our behalf.

During the course of the fieldwork, User Voice interviewed 28 women who were being supervised by probation services.

The majority of the women interviewed felt that their involvement with probation services had helped to reduce their likelihood of reoffending.

*“I feel I am being supported now, I feel like I am being listened to. Things that go wrong now I have my probation officer there to help me sort it out.”*

*“Probation helped me realise that I can have so much more from life. I just want to keep my head down, get my stuff done and move on.”*

All of the women interviewed said that having a good, positive relationship with their responsible officer was important to them. It was also important that they felt listened to and understood, and the majority of the women confirmed this to be the case.

*“My relationship is very good, I knew her before I was sent to prison so was able to build up a good relationship with her, I trust her and she has helped with my alcohol issues, I don’t know what I would do without her.”*

*“I was really blessed, I had two amazing probation officers who came [to the women’s centre] to see me. They were so supportive towards me, I really felt they took my needs into consideration.”*

Two women said, however, that their responsible officers had offered no help in reducing their risk of reoffending.

*“I think I can stay clear from reoffending but my probation officer treats [me] like an offender and it’s taken [for granted] that I will reoffend again. I did offend but there were mental*

*health circumstances and was told that I had to engage with mental health services, I feel I'm being labelled."*

*"Didn't want to help me at all, all she wanted was to tick boxes, not interested in what needed, I would turn up, fill in a form, she would say nothing and then I left. I was so depressed; I hated it to the point where I didn't want to come."*

Overall, we felt this represented an improvement in relationships since our 2011 inspection. At that time few women spoke positively about their responsible officer, and it seemed that the relationship between many women and their responsible officer was fairly superficial.

### **Unpaid work**

Since February 2015, unpaid work has been delivered by CRCs alongside other sentence requirements. As well as delivering punishment, unpaid work provides an opportunity for providers of probation services to engage positively over a period of time with those who have offended.

In January 2016, we published our thematic inspection of the delivery of unpaid work<sup>20</sup>. In the course of the inspection we found that, in general, women seemed content with their placement, but with small numbers of women in the sample (12), detailed quantitative analysis of findings by gender was not possible. Instead, our aim was to give a general picture of the operation of unpaid work. Ten of the women in that sample were in shop placements and two on group placements.

During the course of this thematic inspection, we saw ten cases where women had been sentenced to an unpaid work requirement as part of their order. In one area, sentencers could not recall any unpaid work requirements being made for women.

Of those women that were sentenced to unpaid work, most work was undertaken in individual placements, usually charity shops. We saw some good examples of women's needs being taken into account in the completion of their unpaid work hours. For example, in a case where the woman had a job involving varied shift-work patterns, her responsible officer made sure that the time her unpaid work hours were completed was flexible and could be varied accordingly.

We noted one case where a woman was placed within a mixed group to complete her unpaid work hours. Such a placement was acceptable, as the woman was not a lone female within the mixed group.

Reassuringly, we did not note any cases where a woman had been placed as a lone female within a mixed group.

In Brighton and Salford, we saw promising examples of women completing their unpaid work hours within women's centres, or working alongside volunteers to assist with community activities. The women involved were making good progress.

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<sup>20</sup> *A Thematic Inspection of the Delivery of Unpaid Work*. HMI Probation (2016)



### **Case Study Unpaid work – Women’s Community Project, Scarborough**

*Maria was convicted of benefit fraud and sentenced to a 12 month community order, including unpaid work hours. She was referred to the Women’s Community Project (WCP) by her responsible officer. Maria had three young children including a new baby, and was distressed by the thought of leaving her baby. It was therefore difficult for her to attend an unpaid work group, and she was not deemed suitable for a charity shop placement, due to the nature of her offence. The WCP, however, were able to offer Maria an unpaid work placement and provide on-site crèche facilities for her baby. The WCP offered flexible hours to fit around the children, and Maria was able to complete her hours over three days each week.*

*Following assessment, it was identified that Maria had skills to offer and was motivated to make amends for her crime. She was offered the opportunity to develop a new initiative at the WCP, an in-house shop selling donated items to other women. Maria took the opportunity, and the shop was so successful that the WCP developed the initiative into a town centre retail outlet to raise funds for the sustainability of the project. Maria was also attending an accredited course of study in setting up a business. Maria’s self-esteem improved, and she developed new skills in enterprise while completing her unpaid work.*

## **5. Protecting the public and managing vulnerability**

We looked at assessments, plans, interventions and outcomes for women within our case sample, to see how consideration was given to managing the risk of harm posed to the public, known or potential victims, children and staff. We also assessed whether the work was sufficiently focused on managing and minimising the vulnerability of women who had offended.

## Key findings

### Managing the risk of harm to others

The great majority of women whose cases we reviewed were assessed as posing either medium or low risk of harm to the public. There were eight high risk of harm cases in the sample, and no very high risk cases. We found that, in respect of women who posed a high risk of harm to the public, the risk level had been correctly identified by the responsible officer throughout the period of supervision in all cases. Risk of harm had also been correctly identified in most cases where women posed a medium or low risk of harm to the public.

There were 13 cases in the sample subject to Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), and we found that all of these were being managed at the correct level.

The assessment of the risk of harm women posed to others was done well enough in almost all cases; this was a strength and compares favourably with our 2011 inspection, where we found only 28% of risk of harm assessments were done sufficiently well.

In respect of planning to manage and minimise the risk of harm posed by women to the public, victims and staff, we found plans to be good enough in two in three cases. Plans to protect children at risk of harm were better; of the 36 relevant cases in the sample, 3 in 4 of these plans were done sufficiently well. The strongest aspects of planning in relation to risk of harm related to managing mental health issues, low self-esteem, and having children in care or other parent/carer needs.

With regard to interventions, we found that the work delivered focused well enough on protecting those at risk of harm from women in three-quarters of relevant cases, and that responsible officers responded appropriately to changing circumstances, making suitable adjustments when required.

In most of the cases we reviewed, there was no evidence of serious harm being caused to others by the women since their sentence or release on licence. Where there was a predictable and preventable risk of serious harm to others we found that, in the large majority of cases, probation services and their partners had taken all reasonable action to protect the public.

### Managing the vulnerability of women

Overall, we found that work in relation to managing the vulnerability of women who offended was insufficient. Areas of weakness included planning to address domestic abuse, sexual exploitation, and other types of exploitation, such as obtaining drugs or alcohol for others. Planning to address these areas was done well enough in less than half of relevant cases.

An inspector commented:

*“Her vulnerability was not really recognised, or acted upon. This was a case crying out for women’s centre involvement.”*

Planning to manage and minimise vulnerability was somewhat better in the areas of addressing mental health issues, low self-esteem and having children in care or other parent/carer needs. In these areas we found planning to be sufficient in two in three relevant cases.

The work delivered was sufficiently focused on managing and minimising the vulnerability of women in three in four cases in the sample. We found that responsible officers responded appropriately to changing circumstances, making suitable adjustments when required.

An inspector said:

*“Though not assessed or planned for, the work of the responsible officer did recognise her possible vulnerability in respect of her ex-husband, for example, through exploring with her how to communicate with him regarding child contact without having to meet directly.”*

We found women’s vulnerability had decreased in one in three relevant cases, since the start of their sentence or release on licence. An example was of a woman who now had better accommodation, away from the street drinkers and drug dealers she knew, and was complying well with the requirements of her sentence. For one in three women whose cases we reviewed, however, we found their vulnerability to have increased. An example was of a woman who had self-harmed in order that she would be returned to hospital.

We considered that all reasonable action had been taken by probation services and others to manage and minimise the vulnerability of women in two in three of the relevant cases we reviewed. For the remaining cases, the work needed to improve.

### **Use of Approved Premises**

Approved Premises (AP) offer residential provision in order to provide enhanced levels of protection to the public and reduce the likelihood of further offending. There are 6 women’s APs in England providing a total of 112 placements. Three are managed by the NPS and three are independently managed by other organisations. There are no APs in Wales.

The geographic locations of the existing six women’s APs (Liverpool, Bedford, Birmingham, Preston, Reading and Leeds) meant that not all areas we visited had proximate access to them. Of the cases we reviewed, we saw very few where women had been referred to an AP.

The small number of women’s APs has implications and challenges for effective resettlement. Women are more likely to be placed further away from their home areas than men, and those with caring responsibilities are likely to struggle to maintain links with their children and other family connections.

While we did not inspect APs as part of this inspection, we did see an example of good work and progress made by a woman within our sample who had been referred to an AP.

### ***Case Study: Approved premises***

*Sheila was 45 years old with over 20 previous convictions. She was released on licence for an offence of robbery and was accommodated in AP. The case featured child safeguarding concerns and she presented a high risk of serious harm to the public and known adults, with additional risks to staff. During the five months in the AP, Sheila was supported through a range of programmes which addressed relationships, emotional well-being, alcohol misuse and the practicalities of becoming stable in the community. Throughout the period of residence, the responsible officer was in close liaison with both Sheila and AP staff and worked constructively through MAPPA to secure independent accommodation and manage the range of risks in the case. Sheila made progress in stabilising her substance misuse and mental health. She was demonstrating an increased ability to manage herself, building a more positive view of herself and others and taking steps towards independent living. Her risk level had been reduced, and she had not reoffended at the time of our inspection.*

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## **6. Abiding by the court sentence or licence**

We looked to see whether women had abided by their sentence or licence, and that they attended appointments and programmes of work as required. We expected consideration to be given to individual diversity needs, recognising and addressing any barriers to engagement. We also looked at the support given to women to enable them to engage, and to see whether responses to absences or failures to attend were appropriate in the circumstances.

## Key findings

There were absences in women attending their required appointments in eight out of ten cases in the sample. Where absences occurred, however, we did find they were responded to appropriately in almost all cases. This often involved considerable effort and persistence by responsible officers, supporting women to engage and attend their appointments and programmes of work. We saw evidence of responsible officers adapting the timing of appointments, making flexible arrangements to accommodate childcare needs or the shift-work patterns of the women. We found that responsible officers worked well to overcome any barriers to engagement with women and took their individual diversity needs into account.

The women who were interviewed by User Voice said that responsible officers were flexible and accommodating in relation to women's circumstances, in order to make sure they completed their orders.

A woman commented:

*“My probation officer is brilliant; she is so supportive. I know that she listens to me and will always do her best for me. If I can't make my appointment then all I have to do is ring her and we re-schedule.”*

Not all women were offered the opportunity to report, have appointments or undertake their programmes of work in a female-only environment, however, and this may have been a barrier to engagement for some women.

A woman said:

*“Coming here [women's centre] is so much better than going to the probation office, it's less intimidating.”*

Where necessary, appropriate enforcement action, including warning letters and returning women to court, had been taken in almost all of the cases we reviewed. We saw only one case where we felt breach action should have been taken, and had not been; this was because the woman had missed too many of her required appointments.

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# 7. Women's centres

We undertook formal visits to women's centres in the following inspection sites:

- Brighton – Inspire Women's Centre and Brighton Oasis Project (substance misuse service for women, and counselling service for women involved in the sex industry)
- Bristol - Eden House
- London – The Minerva Project, Hammersmith
- Rhyl Women's Centre
- Salford – Together Women Project
- Scarborough – The Women's Community Project.

We looked at various models of operation, and approaches to engaging and working with women who were being supervised by probation services. We considered how outcomes for women were being demonstrated, and we listened to women's views.



## Key findings

We found some excellent and inspirational work being undertaken in women's centres. Services were gender-specific and sensitive to the needs and diversity of women. Where this worked best, women had access to a range of specialist services through a 'one-stop-shop' approach. Interventions were aimed at addressing the women's needs as a whole, rather than offending behaviour in isolation, and, partner agencies worked together to provide individualised plans and support for women.

There was no single model of referral, but a wide variety of approaches to engaging and working with women at the centres. These varied from a model where all women who had offended were automatically referred to the women's centre direct from court, and undertook all of their reporting, assessment and interventions there, to models where the referral of a woman to the centre was at the discretion of the responsible officer.

In some areas the women's centres operated as community centres, open to all women, with regular drop-ins, lunch clubs and activity sessions, as well as specific programmes to address offending behaviour as part of the court order. In others, attendance by women who had offended was by appointment only as part of their statutory court order. There was a different focus between areas where a 'standard service' was offered by probation services to women on court orders, with referral to a women's centre being considered as an 'add-on', to those areas where the women's centre was the intervention.

Some of the women's centres opened five days per week, others once per week, or once per fortnight. The operating model was determined by a range of factors including, historical context, strategic priorities, available resources and demand for services.

We saw evidence of data collection and reporting on the progress women made in some centres, and the use of systems for women to self-assess their progress. The monitoring of progress, however, was inconsistent and needed to be more robust, in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of the work.

At a number of the women's centres we visited, women continued to attend the centres in a voluntary capacity after their court orders had finished, and many women valued this continuity of support. Some of them trained to work with and assist other women, for example, as peer mentors, sometimes with accreditation, gaining skills and qualifications to assist them in the future.

### **Example of notable practice: Together Women Project Salford**

*The Salford TWP provided a gender-specific one-stop shop for women who had offended. TWP worked with women in a holistic manner offering a service individually tailored to their needs. All women were allocated a key worker who completed an assessment with the woman, and then together they agreed a package of support focusing on areas of need and how the project could help to make positive changes. The women had regular reviews with their key workers to track progress made and determine any further support required. The centre was open to women daily from Monday to Friday for drop-in. The women were able to access the facilities in the centre, such as using the internet; they also met with peers and key workers.*

*A range of courses were run at TWP, including Freedom domestic abuse awareness training, anger management, Positive You (confidence and self-esteem building) and Transform (offending behaviour). The project had two volunteer counsellors, each seeing eight women per week for individual sessions. A CRC probation officer and two probation service officers were based at the centre, together with three TWP key workers. A NPS probation officer also attended the centre weekly. The local criminal justice mental health liaison team provided a mental health screening service and interventions for women who attended TWP. A problem-solving court for women, held at the pre-sentence stage, was also hosted at the centre.*

### **Example of notable practice: social enterprise – ‘Miss Elaine’s’, Scarborough**

*The WCP in Scarborough managed a social enterprise called Miss Elaine’s, trading as a boutique-style shop. This provided a supported learning environment for vulnerable women, enabling them to develop skills and experience in the retail industry, and to build confidence and self-esteem. The aim of the project was to increase the employability of vulnerable women and improve their financial independence. The women were involved in a range of tasks, and in all aspects of the business. Miss Elaine’s encouraged the integration of women with varied skills and life experience and had a peer mentoring and support culture. The name and logo design were also chosen and designed by the women involved.*

## Strengths

We found strengths and examples of good practice in the women's centres we visited. Women had either direct access to specialist services, or opportunity for referral to them. These included mental health services, support for drug and alcohol misuse, debt counselling, benefits and other financial advice, family support including parenting, domestic abuse services, and education, training and employment. The 'one-stop-shop' approach to accessing services for women was a key strength. The use of holistic interventions, where the work undertaken with women was tailored and personalised to their needs, and the availability of wraparound services in support of women attending the centres were also key strengths. Interventions to help with confidence and self-esteem, relationships, emotional well-being and substance misuse supported women and built good foundations for offending behaviour work.

One woman said:

*"I go to the centre, it's great, I see my probation officer there too. I've done self-esteem classes and stuff like that, it's helped me so much. I get help with housing here as well and they help me fill out forms, they are just really supportive."*

Programmes leading to educational or skills-based qualifications were available within some women's centres. Examples included the City and Guilds numeracy and literacy, and employability and personal development courses, run at Scarborough women's centre in conjunction with York College.

The availability of crèche facilities in some centres clearly made the engagement and attendance of women with young children much more feasible. Opportunities to take part in parenting support and nurturing groups, and to have access to health visitors, were clearly welcomed by the women. An example was the ten-week Nurturing programme run at Salford TWP, aimed at helping improve relationships and emotional well-being within families.

A woman commented:

*"I was referred to [the women's centre] which is excellent. I was a bit worried at first because everyone knew who I was and what I had done, but I was treated normally and not judged, I felt so safe and comfortable. I was able to do courses so I could find employment and get help with my CV. It also has a crèche so I could leave my child and go and do what I had to do. There is a real sense of community amongst us, we help and support each other."*

Women were also being supported by others who had been through similar experiences. In a number of centres women had trained as peer mentors once their court order was completed, and stayed on in a voluntary capacity to assist others.

In areas where women who had offended were routinely referred to women's centres, we found individual diversity needs were more likely to be taken into account within assessments, planning and the delivery of interventions. Interventions were also more likely to be gender-specific and appropriate to address individual needs.

We found some very strong commitment from staff and managers within women's centres; staff were knowledgeable and skilled in their work with women, developing close and caring working relationships with them. We saw examples of staff going 'above and beyond' to assist women and their families in some very complex and difficult circumstances.

## **Concerns**

There were a number of concerns in relation to the current and future provision of women's centres.

We found inconsistency in the way women who had offended could access support from a women's centre. This ranged from areas where there was no access to women's centres at all, to areas where the women's centre was 'on the doorstep', with all women who had offended referred to it. The proximity of the centre and access to public transport were important factors in women being able to access services. In London, for example, we found that while a women's centre operated in Hammersmith, none of the women whose cases we reviewed in Camden & Islington accessed it, preferring not to travel within London. Some of these differences may be historical, resulting from certain areas having received specific funding for women's centres over a long number of years. A woman said:

*"I can't believe that they don't have these types of centres everywhere for women, I would be lost without mine."*

We found strategic differences between areas in the way women's services were thought about or prioritised, and this also had an impact on the availability of women's centres. We saw good examples of focus on services for women in areas which had senior managers with specific responsibilities for women's offending, action plans for women, and dedicated single points of contact within teams, giving specialist advice and support to other staff in relation to women who had offended. Provision for women was less evident in areas where there was an absence of dedicated leadership for women's offending.

Funding was a major concern to women's centres at the time of our inspection. CRCs were at the stage of considering their budget allocations and commissioning priorities and arrangements for the next financial year.

## **What women said about women's centres**

The majority of the women interviewed by User Voice were in agreement that women's centres played a key role in reducing their likelihood of reoffending through developing positive relationships with other women, as well as having a real sense of community.

Of the 28 women interviewed, 24 had been referred to a women's centre for intervention or support. The women collectively praised the centres for supporting them, as well as providing a safe and secure environment for them. Many of the women stated that the centre had a positive impact on them and their lives because of the access and support they offered in helping them to live a life free from offending, and to increase their confidence and self-esteem. They also welcomed the training and education opportunities provided through the women's centres, with the aim of finding suitable employment in the future.

*"It [The women's centre] saved my life, if it wasn't for them I don't think I would still be alive today, it's been such a positive experience for me, all women are so supportive of each other, we are all here for one another, we look out for each other. It's such an amazing place. I seen my probation officer here so I felt safe, I did all my group work here which gave me confidence, I suffer from borderline personality disorder so it was really hard for me to walk through the doors, but the women helped me. I know I won't reoffend because I don't want to let the women down, nor myself, it's a fantastic community."*

*"Yeah I see my probation officer at the centre, it works well and I get the support I need not only from the centre but from the other women too, we support each other. The only thing for me is it is a bit of a trek, could do with it closer."*

*"It's just the environment, never been to anything like this before ..... its safe and the way they can help us and speak to you, it's a great place."*

*"It's been the best thing that has happened to me being referred to the centre. I was nervous attending for the first time but everyone was so helpful and made me feel relaxed and safe."*

*You make new friends you're not judged on your offence and made to feel like part of a community."*

Three of the women interviewed had been offered a referral to a women's centre, but had refused the offer; this was due to the location of the centre or the nature of the support available to them. One woman had arranged all her interventions herself without the help of her responsible officer, with her progress discussed in her monthly appointments.

The women who were interviewed felt strongly that women's centres should be more widely available, to allow women to comply with their sentence in an environment in which they feel safe and secure.

*"I think it's a disgrace that I was not made aware of this centre, it should not have been left to me to find it."*

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## **8. The views of women who offend**

Central to this thematic inspection are the experiences of women supervised by probation services. User Voice completed 28 one-to-one interviews with women in Brighton, Bristol, Camden & Islington, Salford, Scarborough and Wrexham as part of this inspection. The interviews were semi-structured in nature.

## Key findings

There was considerable agreement among the women interviewed that seeing a duty officer at appointments was detrimental to their motivation for compliance, due to the need to repeat their information, and the feeling that they were talking with a stranger. One woman said:

*“My experience was quite negative as I don’t actually see my probation officer, she is always off sick so I end up seeing the duty officer. I don’t like this because I want to see her, she is the person I am putting my trust into not a duty officer who changes from week to week.”*

Nineteen of the women interviewed by User Voice had been referred to a women’s centre, and were then able to access a number of programmes and interventions aimed at reducing the likelihood of reoffending. The women felt that these programmes were useful and provided them with the support they needed, in particular, relating to education, training and employment.

More than half the women interviewed felt that their needs had been considered when their sentence plan was developed. Three women, however, said they did not feel that their needs had been addressed, in particular their specific needs as women.

All of the women interviewed said their responsible officers were flexible and accommodating of their circumstances, in order to make sure they completed their orders, and that this enabled them to overcome most barriers to engagement.

### The experience of being supervised by probation services

Three in four of the women interviewed described their overall experience with probation services as being positive. The majority stated that having a good relationship with a responsible officer who was understanding and empathetic towards their needs, as well as being referred to a women’s centre, had contributed to their experience being positive.

*“Probation has been good for me because of the contact that I get from her. She phones to make sure I am ok. She has been to see me at my house when I have been poorly, helped me get my accommodation. It’s been really good.”*

*“As well as not reoffending, probation also helped me get my kids back and a roof over our heads. It’s good to have a routine again.”*



*“It’s been so positive, got my flat, kids back with me, coming off child protection, it’s all great and I have the support of everyone at the women’s centre.”*

Six of the women, however, described being supervised by probation services as a negative experience, due to feeling they were being judged by their responsible officer, or the lack contact with them.

*“There was nothing positive about probation, she was very judgemental, all she could see was the crime, couldn’t see me behind it. It was an awful experience, I just wanted to finish it and move on with my life.”*

*“My overall experience was poor. I think probation officers need to have more training, particularly around mental health. They need to be more compassionate and understanding and really want to help. Perhaps have an individual needs assessment, look at the person and the crime rather than just the crime.”*

### **The impact of *Transforming Rehabilitation* on women**

The majority of women interviewed said they had not experienced any change in the level of service they received from their responsible officer, since the implementation of *Transforming Rehabilitation*.

Two of the women interviewed felt their experience of probation services had changed for the better, as they were now more focused on women’s needs and there were improvements in communication.

*“I think it has got better, they seem to be doing a lot more for women now, more services, more support, that’s what we need and a good probation officer who listens and meets us half way.”*

Two women did, however, feel that the level of service they received had deteriorated particularly around communication.

*“I always have difficulty now in trying to contact my probation officer and I think that’s because they are too busy now. ‘Cos of all these changes my probation has changed twice, I had such a good relationship before and one I have to start again.”*

*“I was getting on well with my probation officer, really starting to trust her and open and then bang I get a new one. Now I’m back to square one, I was sexually abused when I was younger so it takes me a while to trust.”*

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# Appendices

- A. Glossary
- B. Acknowledgements
- C. Inspection methodology
- D. Role of User Voice
- E. Role of the inspectorate and code of practice

## Appendix A: Glossary

Approved Premises	Premises approved under Section 13 of the <i>Offender Management Act 2007</i> , managed either by the National Probation Service or by independent organisations
CRC	Community Rehabilitation Company: 21 such companies were set up in June 2014 to manage most offenders who present a low or medium risk of serious harm
Child Protection	Work to make sure that that all reasonable action has been taken to keep to a minimum the risk of a child coming to harm
HMI Probation	HM Inspectorate of Probation
Integrated Offender Management (IOM)	A multi-agency approach involving the police and probation services for managing locally identified priority offenders
Intervention	Work with an individual that is designed to change their offending behaviour and/or to support public protection
LDU	Local Delivery Unit: an operation unit comprising of an office or offices, generally coterminous with police basic command units and local authority structures
MAPPA	Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements: where probation, police, prison and other agencies work together locally to manage offenders who pose a higher risk of serious harm to others
NPS	National Probation Service: a single national service which came into being in June 2014. Its role is to deliver services to courts and the parole board; and to manage specific groups of offenders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• those presenting a high or very high risk of serious harm</li> <li>• those managed under MAPPA arrangements</li> <li>• those with an RSR score over 6.89%those eligible for deportation</li> <li>• those subject to deferred sentence</li> <li>• those where there is a 'public interest' in the case.</li> </ul>
NOMS	National Offender Management Service: The single agency responsible for both prisons and probation services

<i>Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014</i>	Implemented in February 2015, and applying to offences committed on or after that date, the <i>Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014</i> (ORA) is the Act of Parliament that accompanies the <i>Transforming Rehabilitation</i> programme
PSR	Pre-sentence report. This refers to any report prepared for a court, whether delivered orally or in a written format
Probation Trust	Until May 2014, probation services were delivered by Probation Trusts, working under the auspices of NOMS
Rehabilitation Activity Requirement	Rehabilitation Activity Requirement (RAR): a requirement within a community order or suspended sentence order introduced by the <i>Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014</i> , which requires the offender to attend appointments and/or participate in activities for the purpose of their rehabilitation. This replaces the separate supervision and activity requirements under the Criminal Justice Act 2003
Responsible officer	In the language of offender management, this is the term for the officer with lead responsibility for managing a specific case from 'end to end'
RoSH	Risk of Serious Harm: a term used in OASys. All cases are classified as presenting a low/ medium/ high/ very high risk of serious harm to others. HMI Probation uses this term when referring to the classification system, but uses the broader term risk of harm when referring to the analysis which has to take place in order to determine the classification level. This helps to clarify the distinction between the probability of an event occurring and the impact/severity of the event. The term Risk of Serious Harm only incorporates 'serious' impact, whereas using 'risk of harm' enables the necessary attention to be given to those offenders for whom lower impact/severity harmful behaviour is probable
Together Women Project	In 2005 the Together Women Project (TWP) was launched, with funding specifically set aside for community projects to reduce offending by women, and address the needs of women at risk of offending
<i>Transforming Rehabilitation</i>	The government's programme for how offenders are managed in England and Wales from June 2014

## Appendix B: Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all those who took part in this inspection: the staff and managers of the Community Rehabilitation Companies, the National Probation Service, and women's centres; magistrates, District Judges, and most particularly women who had been involved in the criminal system and who told us of their experiences.

We are grateful to the below listed individuals and organisations who contributed to the inspection by way of:

- interviews with key contacts
- reference group meeting held on 28 October 2015
- round-table discussion with the voluntary sector on 28 October 2015
- responses to our call for evidence
- responses to our survey.

### **Interviews with key contacts:**

- The Rt. Hon. the Baroness Jean Corston; House of Lords
- Frances Crook OBE; Chief Executive, the Howard League for Penal Reform
- Eila Davies; Head of Women and Equalities, Equality, Rights and Decency Group, National Offender Management Service
- Jenny Earle; Programme Director, Reducing Women's Imprisonment, Prison Reform Trust
- Keith McInnis; HM Inspector, HM Inspectorate of Prisons
- Jackie Russell; Director, Women's Breakout
- Sean Sullivan; Inspection Team Leader, HM Inspectorate of Prisons
- Sue Taylor; Deputy Director, Rehabilitation Services, National Offender Management Service

### **Reference Group attendees:**

- Eleanor Butt; Policy Adviser, the Howard League for Penal Reform
- Becky Clarke; Senior Lecturer, Department of Sociology, Manchester Metropolitan University
- Jan Doyle; Soroptimist International of Great Britain & Ireland
- Jenny Earle; Programme Director, Reducing Women's Imprisonment, Prison Reform Trust
- Dr Thomas Guiney; Senior Programme Officer, Reducing Women's Imprisonment, Prison Reform Trust
- Professor Loraine Gelsthorpe; Professor in Criminology and Criminal Justice,

Director of the Centre for Community, Gender and Social Justice, University of Cambridge

- Jennifer Henry; HM Assistant Inspector, HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate
- Robyn Malan de Merindol, Senior Policy Support, Women's Team, Equality, Rights and Decency Group, National Offender Management Service
- Keith McInnis; HM Inspector, HM Inspectorate of Prisons

### **Round-table discussion participants**

- Jenny Earle; Programme Director, Reducing Women's Imprisonment, Prison Reform Trust (Chair)
- Sophie Gibson, Brighton Women's Centre
- Dr Thomas Guiney; Senior Programme Officer, Reducing Women's Imprisonment, Prison Reform Trust
- Jan Fishwick; Chief Executive, Parents and Children Together (PACT)
- Michele Nicholson; founder, Key Changes – Unlocking Women's Potential
- Dr Kate Paradine; Chief Executive, Women in Prison
- Jackie Russell; Director, Women's Breakout
- Katharine Sack-Jones; Director, Agenda – the alliance for women and girls at risk
- Esther Sample; Women's Strategy Coordinator, St Mungo's
- Melanie Sheehan; Programme Manager, Advance Minerva

### **Call for evidence respondents**

- Action for Children
- ADVANCE Minerva
- Asha Women's centre
- Brighton Women's Centre
- Clinks
- Coaching Inside and out
- Derbyshire National Probation Service
- Fry Housing Trust
- Gibran (UK) Ltd
- Hibiscus Initiatives
- Howard League for Penal Reform
- Magistrate's Association
- NACRO
- Prison Reform Trust

- Safe Choices
- Safe Ground
- Soroptimist International
- Tomorrow's Women Wirral
- Women in Prison
- Women Centre Services (Calderdale & Kirklees)
- Women's Breakout

### **Survey respondents**

Respondents included a variety of CRC and NPS senior managers and practitioners, responding as:

- Barking, Dagenham & Havering LDU, London
- Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire, Cambridgeshire & Hertfordshire CRC
- Bradford and Calderdale LDU
- Bristol Gloucester Somerset and Wiltshire CRC
- Cannock Office in Staffordshire NPS
- Cheshire & Greater Manchester CRC
- Cumbria NPS
- Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Rutland CRC
- Durham Probation Service
- East and West Lincolnshire NPS
- Hampshire and Isle of Wight CRC
- Humberside, Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire CRC
- Hull LDU
- Integrated Offender Management Cymru Women's Pathfinder Project
- Kent, Surrey & Sussex CRC
- London Probation Service
- Merseyside CRC – covering Sefton, Wirral, Liverpool, St Helens & Knowsley
- Norfolk and Suffolk CRC
- North & North East Lincolnshire – Humberside
- North and North East Lincolnshire LDU
- North Yorkshire NPS
- Northumbria CRC
- NPS Telford
- NPS North East
- Redcar and South Bank NPS



- South Yorkshire CRC
- Staffordshire and West Midlands CRC
- Telford Probation Office
- Warwickshire and West Mercia CRC
- West Yorkshire CRC
- York and North Yorkshire NPS

## The inspection team

<b>Lead Inspector</b>	Sue McGrath, <i>HMI Probation</i>
<b>Inspection Team</b>	Helen Davies, <i>HMI Probation</i> Krystyna Findley, <i>HMI Probation</i> Joy Neary, <i>HMI Probation</i> Les Smith, <i>HMI Probation</i>
<b>HMI Probation Support Services</b>	Kevin Ball, <i>Senior Research Officer</i> Pippa Bennett, <i>Support Services Manager</i> Oliver Kenton, <i>Research Officer</i> Lynne Osborn, <i>Support Services Officer</i> Alex Pentecost, <i>Head of Operations</i>
<b>Assistant Chief Inspectors</b>	Helen Davies, <i>HMI Probation</i> Alan MacDonald, <i>HMI Probation</i>

## Appendix C: Inspection methodology

The key components of this thematic inspection were:

### Part one: pre-fieldwork

- A review of research/analytical papers, policy documents and guidance documents about women who offend in England and Wales.
- A call for evidence sent out to a range of interested parties in August 2015, and was posted on the HMI Probation website and Twitter account.
- A survey sent to all CRC and NPS areas in England and Wales generating 31 responses, 15 from CRC and 16 from NPS staff.
- Informal visits to five local areas to view and discuss work and practice with women as follows:
  - Cheshire and Greater Manchester CRC – visit to Wigan Women’s Centre
  - Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Rutland CRC – visit to Nottingham Women’s Centre
  - Hampshire and Isle of Wight CRC – discussions with staff and managers at CRC Headquarters, Winchester
  - Warwickshire and West Mercia CRC – visit to Willowdene Farm, Shropshire; ASHA Women’s Centre, Worcester; and Youth Support Services Ltd, Worcester
  - West Yorkshire CRC – visit to Wakefield Well Women Centre
- In October 2015, a reference group meeting was held, comprising representatives of organisations and bodies involved in working with women who offend, and academics. The meeting considered the progress of the inspection and its early findings from the preparatory work. A round-table discussion with voluntary sector representatives was also convened. In the same timeframe, inspectors conducted a number of telephone interviews with key contacts associated with women’s offending.

### Part two: Inspection fieldwork (November 2015 - January 2016)

The fieldwork was informed by the above preparation work, and included visits to six CRC and NPS sites, which covered a mix of urban and rural areas as follows:

- Brighton
- Bristol
- Camden & Islington
- North Wales
- North Yorkshire
- Salford

The fieldwork visits comprised:

- interviews with 14 CRC senior managers and 8 NPS senior managers
- focus groups which comprised 20 CRC and 27 NPS staff; the focus groups included probation officers, probation service officers, trainee probation officers, administrators and partnership staff
- reviews of 72 cases; as well as case file assessments, the reviews included interviews with the responsible officers in 56 cases, and an interview with a manager in one case. In 15 of the cases there was no one available for interview
- discussions with sentencers and court staff, including two District Judges, ten magistrates, two legal team managers, and six court probation staff. Numbers varied by area according to availability
- site visits and discussions with women's services, including women's centres
- interviews with women who were being supervised by probation services.

We commissioned User Voice, a charity led by ex-offenders, to undertake the interviews with women service users (with their informed consent) on our behalf. Interviews were completed with 28 women (See Appendix C for further information about User Voice).

### **Inspection fieldwork - the case profile**

We examined 72 cases from six areas in England and Wales, of women who had been sentenced to a community order, suspended sentence order or released on licence between March and September 2015. This was not a statistically representative sample; our case inspection is intended to generate illustrative findings. Of these women:

- 61 (86%) were white
- the youngest woman in the case sample was aged 19 years, the oldest was 52 years; they averaged 32 years of age with 25-39 year-old women forming the largest group (57%)
- 51 (71%) were of no religion; 16 (22%) were Christian; and 2 (3%) were Muslim
- 44 were heterosexual; 4 were lesbian; in 18 cases sexual orientation was not recorded on the case file; and 6 preferred not to say
- 15 (22%) were recorded by the responsible officer as having a disability; 10 of these as having issues with emotional state or mental health
- 28 (39%) were serving a community order; 15 (21%) a suspended sentence order; and 29 (40%) were on licence
- 47 (65%) were being managed by a CRC and 25 (35%) were being managed by the NPS
- most commonly the women had committed a violent offence or a theft
- we deliberately included higher risk cases from the long lists sent to us by the relevant agencies, so as to see more complex casework; 8 had been classified as high risk of serious harm to others; 44 medium; and 20 low risk
- 13 cases were managed under MAPPA.

## Appendix D: Role of User Voice

User Voice is an ex-offender led charity founded in 2009. They have so far engaged over 20,000 people, and they are experts at gaining insight into the lives and views of the most marginalised and vulnerable people in and around the criminal justice system. User Voice is uniquely able to do this because all their frontline work is delivered by ex-offenders.

User Voice understands that offenders want to talk to people who have 'walked in their shoes' and experienced similar life events.

Only at the point that an individual female is comfortable and feels safe enough to share their experiences will they interview them. The interviews are always semi-structured in order to allow a more conversational tone to permeate the interaction. The interviews are also designed in such a way as to be generative and positive. It is one of their core principles that being interviewed should not be an avenue to further trauma but instead an opportunity to explicate to another concerned person, who understands, your experience and perspective.

During the inspection, User Voice facilitators only engaged with service users who had chosen to participate and they were supported to disclose what and how they disclosed. Informed consent is essential and as such we take pains to explain to all those with whom we engage the purpose and reasoning for the work we do. It is explained to participants that they can disengage from the consultation at any time, without reason or recourse.

Service users volunteered to participate and all interviewers were ex-offenders trained in research and group facilitation.

We assured those who chose to participate that they would not be personally identified in the report.

For more information please contact:

User Voice  
20 Newburn Street  
London SE11 5PJ  
Tel: 020 3137 7471  
Email: [info@uservoice.org](mailto:info@uservoice.org)  
Website: [www.uservoice.org](http://www.uservoice.org)

You can read their publications here:

<http://www.uservoice.org/our-work/library/publications/>

## Appendix E: Role of the inspectorate and code of practice

Information on the Role of HMI Probation and Code of Practice can be found on our website:

<http://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprobation/about-hmi-probation/>

The Inspectorate is a public body. Anyone wishing to comment on an inspection, a report or any other matter falling within its remit should write to:

HM Chief Inspector of Probation  
1st Floor, Manchester Civil Justice Centre  
1 Bridge Street West  
Manchester  
M3 3FX



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