

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

September 2016

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

Sarah, imprisoned mother of two, supported by Re-Unite<sup>1</sup>

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

Baroness J. Corston, 2007<sup>2</sup>

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

HMP & YOI Bronzefield Inspectorate report, 2016<sup>3</sup>

*There are particular challenges for homeless women, who are at greater risk of sexual violence, prostitution or engaging in unhealthy relationships in order to access accommodation... There is a close connection between offending and homelessness. Despite this, ex-offenders and those leaving prison do not always get the support they need.*

Communities and Local Government Committee report, 2016<sup>4</sup>

### Executive summary

The failure to solve a chronic shortage of suitable housing options for women who offend leads to more crime, more victims and more unnecessary and costly imprisonment. Safe, secure housing is crucial in breaking that cycle and the harm it causes to our communities, to the women involved and to their families.

- Many women lose their homes while in custody and 60% of women prisoners may not have homes to go to on release.
- Because women are often imprisoned further from their homes than men, they can have more difficulty in retaining a 'local connection', which is a common precondition for local authority housing.
- A lack of appropriate and safe accommodation increases the risk of (re)offending - without stable housing it is harder to engage in employment and training, or to access support services.
- Hostel accommodation may expose women to potentially risky situations.
- Suitable accommodation options for women, especially those with children or those affected by substance misuse, mental health problems, or domestic abuse are in short supply.

- Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women are overrepresented in prison and face additional barriers to housing.
- There is a lack of clarity and consistency about responsibility for the housing of women offenders.
- Women in prison need more timely advice about their housing options and support to sustain tenancies or apply for housing.
- Communication, cooperation and joined up working between prison authorities, probation services, housing providers, and local authorities needs to be urgently improved.

## Introduction and purpose of this briefing

Ensuring appropriate accommodation for people who offend is the foundation for successful rehabilitation, resettlement and risk management. It can provide the anchor for a previously chaotic life and act as a springboard for other crucial steps – such as getting and keeping a job, and accessing health care or drug treatment.<sup>5</sup>

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

A lack of suitable housing can be a driver to offending itself. A homeless woman may commit a crime out of desperation to have a roof over her head, albeit in a police or prison cell. Women in unsuitable accommodation may offend to obtain essential items of furniture, clothing, or food, often for their children.<sup>6</sup> Access to safe, affordable accommodation was identified as a top priority for successful resettlement at a Prison Reform Trust roundtable with women in HMP Holloway. As one woman said, “Without it you don’t have a chance.”<sup>7</sup>

The shortage of suitable accommodation for women, and the importance of addressing women’s housing needs, was emphasised in the *Transforming Lives* report based on action research by Soroptimist clubs in the UK.<sup>8</sup>

### Recommendations from Transforming Lives report:

- Local authorities and housing associations should give housing priority to women with vulnerabilities that put them at risk of offending – including women affected by abusive relationships, drug or alcohol problems, or poor mental health.
- Local strategies to reduce women’s offending and imprisonment should take account of women’s housing needs, including the needs of those with dependent children and the consequences for children of lack of stable, secure homes, drawing on data identified in local Joint Strategy Needs Assessments.
- The time limit for eligibility for Housing Benefit for sentenced prisoners should be extended from 13 weeks to 6 months to prevent short-sentenced women from losing their home.

This briefing builds on these recommendations and sets out to:

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

The statutory and policy frameworks differ in England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland but, as the problems are similar across the UK, the briefing takes a thematic approach.

### Key Facts

- In England and Wales, women are imprisoned on average 64 miles away from home and in 2010 more than 17,000 children were separated from their mothers by imprisonment.
- Of the 8, 818 women received into prison in England and Wales in 2015, 45% entered on remand, and most of these did not go on to receive a custodial sentence on conviction. Women are more likely than men to be on remand.
- Most women (80% in England and Wales) entering prison under an immediate custodial sentence are on sentences of less than 12 months, and 61% are in for 6 months or less (76% for women in Scotland).
- 19% of the women's prison population are from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, compared to 14% of the general women's population. Black British women made up 10% of the women's prison population compared to only 3% of all the overall women's population.
- 31% of women prisoners spent time in care as children, compared with 24% of men.
- 60% of women prisoners do not have homes to go to on release.
- Lack of housing affects employment and employment outcomes for women following short prison sentences are three times worse than for men. Fewer than 1 in 10 women have a job to go to on release.

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

## Why housing matters

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

Woman interviewed for evaluation of Scotland's Rough Sleepers Initiative.<sup>9</sup>

Housing is a basic human need. A home can provide a secure base from which to establish ourselves in society, enabling us to be rooted in our community and address other personal, family and social needs. A lack of housing can jeopardise a person's physical health and emotional wellbeing, as well as reducing opportunities for education and employment and participation in public life.

Research suggests that people who commit offences are likely to have a "volatile" housing history and 15% of prisoners were homeless before entering custody, compared to 4% of the

general population.<sup>10</sup> They have often lived in temporary accommodation and hostels or been homeless and are more likely to lack community links and connections.<sup>11</sup> St Mungo's noted in the *Rebuilding Shattered Lives* report that almost half (42%) of the homeless women they worked with had an offending history, and over a third (36%) had been to prison.<sup>12</sup> The same report also noted earlier research that found 19% of women in prison were not in permanent accommodation before entering prison, and 10% had been sleeping rough.<sup>13</sup>

According to the Corston report, for women in the criminal justice system housing is “**probably [their] most significant resettlement need**”.<sup>14</sup> In a Ministry of Justice survey in 2012, 37% of newly sentenced prisoners stated they would need help in finding a place to live on release, and most of these needed a lot of help.<sup>15</sup> The group surveyed was mixed and the level of need was similar for women and men interviewed. Other research shows that women are more likely than men to lose a tenancy when they enter prison,<sup>16</sup> making them particularly vulnerable and destabilising families.<sup>17</sup>

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women face similar barriers in accessing services to help with resettlement and rehabilitation on release from prison as other women, but they are further disadvantaged by racial discrimination, stigma, isolation, cultural differences and, for some, language barriers.<sup>18</sup> The Lammy review of BAME individuals in the criminal justice system is due to report in spring 2017<sup>19</sup> with recommendations for ensuring equality in criminal justice agencies' responses.

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

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

## **Prevention of offending and reoffending**

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

*Woman at POPS' Farida Women's Centre, Manchester*

The correlation between homelessness and offending behaviour can become an ongoing cycle: spending time in prison increases the risk of homelessness, while a lack of stable accommodation increases the likelihood of offending and reoffending.<sup>20</sup> In one study almost half (46%) of homeless people surveyed said they had been in prison or a young offenders institution, and in another 60% of prisoners said that having a place to live would stop them reoffending.<sup>21</sup>

In a report for the Scottish Government, most of those surveyed said they had committed offences directly or indirectly as a result of their housing circumstances, and many said they had done so to be returned to custody.<sup>22</sup> The Angiolini Commission on Women Offenders in Scotland recommended:

**Inter-agency protocols on prison discharge and homelessness be introduced across Scotland with the twin aims of sustaining tenancies when women are in custody and securing access to safe accommodation for every woman prisoner upon release.<sup>23</sup>**

In Northern Ireland, O'Neill (2011) noted that accommodation problems, particularly homelessness, are frequently linked with offending.<sup>24</sup> She refers to research that found 36% of women prisoners in Northern Ireland did not know where they would live on release, 44% had had experience of living in a hostel, and 32% had been in care.<sup>25</sup> Women who return to unsuitable accommodation, for example with an abusive partner, or in a mixed hostel where they can be vulnerable to predatory men, or housed where there is easy access to drugs, may feel that committing another crime to return to prison is a safer option.

Reports on women's prisons by HM Inspectorate of Prison indicate that where prison staff are able to identify women's needs at an early stage, and have strong links with accommodation providers and other specialist services, women are more likely to be released into settled accommodation, increasing the likelihood of positive outcomes.<sup>26</sup>

## **Prison as a last resort**

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

*Support Worker, Women in Prison*

The law requires that prison should only be imposed when a lesser sanction cannot be justified. It also requires that where someone is a primary carer the impacts on children should be taken into account in sentencing. Only 5% of children with a mother in prison are able to stay in their own home.<sup>27</sup> Women may have been coerced into offending by an abusive partner<sup>28</sup> or may have committed a crime to support another person's addiction.<sup>29</sup> An individual should not be remanded or sentenced to custody because she lacks housing. Sentencers need to consider the possibility that imprisoning a woman may lead to loss of housing and a cycle of reoffending, and conversely not imprison a woman because she is homeless or of 'no fixed abode'. Pre-sentence reports need to contain sufficient information to enable courts to make appropriate decisions.

### **Anawim Women's Centre in Birmingham, England**

Anawim has secured funding to construct purpose-built accommodation for up to six women who are leaving prison. Prison in-reach and street out-reach teams will be situated within the same building alongside a crèche and money advice service, and women have access to Anawim's range of support services. The hope is that this facility will be used as an alternative to custody in appropriate cases.

## The impact of being held on remand

*We are looking to work with the judiciary to ensure that it realises that remanding people is not the best or kindest thing to do...we need to make it clear that other facilities will be available and that judges do not have to resort to remand and all the medication, addiction, housing and other issues that follow...<sup>30</sup>*

Women without secure housing, or of 'no fixed abode', may be refused bail and remanded in custody as a result.<sup>31</sup> Nearly half of women entering custody do so on remand, and the majority of them do not go on to receive a custodial sentence.<sup>32</sup> Women on remand spend an average of four to six weeks in prison<sup>33</sup>, which can jeopardise their accommodation through rent arrears, for example, and have a devastating impact on their children.

## The impact of short sentences

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

National Offender Management Service <sup>34</sup>

Most women entering prison serve very short sentences, in England and Wales 61% of sentenced women entering prison were serving six months or less, and in Scotland it was 76%<sup>35,36</sup>. Research by Shelter confirms that this significantly exacerbates housing problems.<sup>37</sup> While remand prisoners lose their Housing Benefit after 52 weeks, for sentenced prisoners it is 13 weeks.<sup>38</sup> Women serving short sentences rarely have access to the support provided to those serving longer sentences, making it hard to resolve housing problems and sustain tenancies. Housing related services can help improve housing outcomes for those who serve short sentences<sup>39</sup>, but research has shown that many prisoners do not know of the existence of such services and, of those that do, very few actually access this support.<sup>40</sup>

## The role of local authorities\*

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

Oldham Probation Officer, June 2016

Local authorities in England, and the Housing Executive in Northern Ireland, have a duty to provide accommodation to homeless applicants in priority need. What is considered 'priority', however, is open to interpretation and varies greatly; in some areas, people with convictions are seen as priority need, whilst in other parts of the country, they are regarded as 'intentionally homeless'.<sup>41</sup> Some Local Authorities may even differentiate between crimes when determining 'intentional homelessness'. Scotland abolished the priority need test in 2012, and all councils now have to provide accommodation to anyone who is unintentionally homeless; individual councils must be satisfied that applicants meet this criteria.<sup>42</sup> The *Housing (Wales) Act 2014* places local authorities under a legal duty to help find accommodation for everyone who

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

seeks assistance. This is reducing homelessness across Wales, however concern has been expressed that because released prisoners no longer have specific priority, there may be confusion about whether local authorities have a duty to house them.<sup>43</sup>

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

Women are often imprisoned far from their local community, making it harder to liaise with relevant housing organisations and meet eligibility criteria. This is a particular problem for Welsh women, as they are held in prisons in England, and staff may not be familiar with Welsh legislation or be in touch with services in Wales.<sup>44</sup> Homelessness applications can only be made in an area where the applicant has a local connection, and being in prison in a certain location does not qualify someone for housing in that area. Women's prisons have to deal with a particularly large number and spread of local authorities and often inconsistent policies.

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

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

Women who are not housed appropriately by their local authority face a lengthy and complex appeals process, and by the time a decision is made, many will have disengaged with support services, some having gone back to prison. The lack of clarity about responsibility for ensuring that women have satisfactory accommodation on release from prison has been a long-running problem.<sup>45</sup> One prison recently noted that agencies and hostels previously accepting referrals from women in custody now require women to approach local authorities themselves following release.<sup>46</sup> This puts women at much greater risk of homelessness. In some areas, finding housing itself may not be the problem, but the housing provided must be suitable for women with multiple needs and often must be available at short notice.<sup>47</sup>

A transparent, coordinated approach, and greater cooperation and information sharing between local authorities, prisons and other agencies, would improve women's resettlement prospects.

## Support to retain tenancies

*If women have arrears, they should advise them how to pay them back, not put them into rough areas where they will get in trouble again.... I need support and advice - accommodation in a good area - not lots of drugs.*<sup>48</sup>

At a recent Prison Reform Trust roundtable with local authority representatives, the importance of helping women hold onto their tenancies was highlighted, and adequately funded debt advice organisations were seen as essential in supporting this.<sup>49</sup> It was also suggested that some women lose their tenancies due to the antisocial behaviour of others residing with them (e.g. vulnerable children), and that specialist support is crucial to enable women to remain housed whilst coping with these challenges. Research has demonstrated the cost effectiveness of partnership work to support individuals to retain their tenancies.<sup>50</sup>

## Barriers to housing

Finding and sustaining accommodation can be a challenge for anyone leaving prison, but women prisoners face specific barriers and are therefore particularly vulnerable. This is emphasised in the Scottish Government's (Angiolini) Commission on Women Offenders (2012), the Corston Review for England and Wales (2007) and Northern Ireland's Reducing Offending Among Women strategy (2013-2016).<sup>51,52</sup>

## Lack of suitable accommodation

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

Support Worker, Women in Prison

The lack of social housing across the UK affects the housing prospects of women leaving prison. The final HM Inspectorate report of HMP & YOI Holloway found that although women's accommodation needs were identified on arrival into the prison, and there were officers working to find appropriate housing for women on release, much of the accommodation available was in hostels, while some women were released without an address.<sup>53</sup> While in-prison housing support should be an integral part of a woman's resettlement, it is often last-minute, and some women are unsure on the morning of their release if they have accommodation for that evening. Furthermore, practical issues such as the lack of internet provision in prisons, and limited access to phones, can complicate arrangements.

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

*Prison Inspectorate report on HMP Holloway, 2016*<sup>54</sup>

Too often women on release end up in hostels that place them at risk of future offending behaviour, for example due to access to drugs: “A lot of women would rather sleep on the streets than go into a hostel”.<sup>55</sup> Research for the Scottish Government found that much of the accommodation for women leaving custody was not fit for purpose, and where there are suitable options, places are scarce. The Women in Criminal Justice in Scotland conference also noted that women are commonly released at weekends or during holiday periods, when it is harder to ensure support will be available.<sup>56</sup>

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

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

Available hostels are often occupied by men who have committed more serious crimes and are not appropriate for vulnerable women leaving prison.<sup>57</sup> With a scarcity of social housing and limited places in hostels, the pressures on local authorities, councils, and housing providers are considerable.

### **Mary’s story from Gibran, Wales**

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

Most women in the criminal justice system are considered ‘low-risk offenders’. In England and Wales this means that Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) are responsible for their resettlement (rather than the National Probation Service) and they commission other organisations to find suitable accommodation. Targets are given to these support organisations to provide housing, but in many cases housing is simply not available for women.

## Emergency accommodation

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

Low quality housing is a further concern. Women in emergency accommodation can feel helpless and may be reluctant to ask for repairs to be carried out for fear of being evicted. Support workers describe poor levels of cleanliness and facilities for the “lucky” few who are allocated accommodation.<sup>58</sup> Those who turn down an offer because it is sub-standard risk being labelled ‘intentionally homeless’ which disqualifies them from future local authority support.

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

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

### **Bail Accommodation and Support Service (BASS)**

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

From St Mungo's, Rebuilding Shattered Lives report (2014)<sup>59</sup>

Bail Accommodation and Support Service (BASS) can be offered to individuals who are on bail or eligible for release on Home Detention Curfew (HDC) but who do not have an address, or need additional support. Currently commissioned by the Ministry of Justice from Stonham Homegroup, BASS accommodation offers supervision, a structured regime, and has a curfew.<sup>60</sup> Some properties are for single occupancy, others for parents who can be reunited with dependent children, and support is provided to move people on to stable housing. BASS has limited spaces for women, and occupancy levels are not published; there are concerns that the service has been under-used in some areas, despite unmet need for bail accommodation in particular.

### **Approved Premises (APs)**

Approved Premises (APs) are residential units that normally house medium to high-risk offenders who are subject to restrictions and curfews, a breach of which can result in recall to prison. All APs are single-sex, with 94 for men, but only 6 for women of which none are in Wales or London. APs are only available as an option to women who are under Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), although this does not in itself guarantee a place, as spaces are limited. The lack of AP provision for women means they can be placed far from home, making their resettlement into the community much harder. The Justice Committee recommended more small Approved Premises across the UK for women deemed medium to high-risk, so that they can receive safe, secure and supervised accommodation.<sup>61</sup>

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

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

### **Affordable housing**

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

Service User, the Women's Community Project, Cambridge Centre<sup>62</sup>

Finding affordable private rental accommodation is a challenge for many, but it is almost impossible for women leaving prison. The cost of private rental housing can be a major barrier for women, particularly if they are unemployed or in low-paid work and/or dependent on benefits. Women leaving prison may lack references from previous landlords and the money for up-front costs, including estate agent fees, reference checking, first month's rent and deposit. Some local authorities, housing associations, and charities have Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) schemes to assist with payment of deposits. However, the availability of these schemes is varied and limited, and landlords will not always accept this method of payment. If DHP is available, it is provided after the property has been identified, and delays in payment can result in losing the property. Organisations such as My Space Housing Solutions<sup>63</sup> which act on behalf of prisoners on release, taking on the tenancy in the name of the charity, and offering ongoing support, can be a lifeline.

Affordable accommodation may become even scarcer, according to homelessness charity Shelter, as the Housing and Planning Bill (2015-2016) contains proposals that could result in a loss of around 180,000 low-rent homes.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, secure tenancies are to be phased out and replaced with 2-5 year fixed-term tenancies. This reduction in security of tenure has particular implications for women with children and those at risk of domestic abuse.

### **Complexities of the benefits system**

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

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

The Under-Occupancy Charge\* reduces Housing Benefit by 14% if a person has one spare bedroom and by 25% if they have two or more spare bedrooms.<sup>65</sup> Imprisoned women may lose

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\* Commonly known as the Bedroom Tax, introduced by the *Welfare Reform Act 2012*

custody of their children and then be liable to pay for a spare bedroom. A person is not allowed to downsize until they have paid any rent arrears. Alternative accommodation is rarely available, and even if a woman is re-housed, there is the further cost of moving and furnishing her new home. Local authorities in Scotland, England, and Wales are able to mitigate the bedroom tax through Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs), but as this is at the discretion of individual authorities, its availability can be a 'postcode lottery'.<sup>66</sup>

A Prison Reform Trust briefing on the links between debt and women's offending noted concerns about the Under-Occupancy Charge expressed at a roundtable event at Anawim women's centre in Birmingham.<sup>67</sup> Women's service providers said the so-called 'bedroom tax' can put pressure on women to get lodgers, putting them in potentially dangerous situations. In addition, women who have experienced domestic violence, and have been forced to move from one refuge to another, often have their benefits suspended.

Universal Credit, already in place in some areas, combines certain benefits (including Housing Benefit, Child Tax Credit and Income Support), and is due to be rolled out across the UK from 2017. There is some concern that this will disadvantage people in prison; as yet no arrangements are in place to support prisoners' access to Universal Credit.<sup>68</sup>

Access to welfare benefits, advice and support for women returning to the community needs to be improved.<sup>69</sup> Even basic information when someone enters or leaves prison about what they may be entitled to, and when their next payment is due, would help. Practical barriers, such as proof of ID, should also be addressed.

### **Women with particular needs**

Section 10 of the *Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014* requires that the particular needs of women in the criminal justice system are identified and addressed. St Mungo's *Rebuilding Shattered Lives* report (2014) found that the complexity of women's needs, often rooted in a history of violence and abuse, frequently stemming from childhood, is not generally understood by mainstream services.<sup>70</sup> Trauma and abuse can lead to substance misuse and/or involvement in prostitution which in turn can lead to offending to fund addiction or for survival.

#### **Grace House, Foundation66**

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

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

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

Margaret, quoted in Howard League for Penal Reform's What is Justice? working papers<sup>71</sup>

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

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

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

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

Quote from a mother in a St. Mungo's research report, 2013<sup>72</sup>

A major study found that two-thirds of imprisoned women are mothers of children under the age of 18.<sup>73</sup> Women are far more likely than men to be the primary carer for their children and are less likely to have a partner at home caring for their children while they are in prison.<sup>74</sup> Only 5% of children with a mother in prison remain in the family home during her imprisonment.<sup>75</sup> Women who do not have care of their children are often assessed as single and not allocated housing suitable for a family, making it incredibly difficult to regain the care of children.<sup>76</sup> Prison Reform Trust's discussion paper *Sentencing of Mothers* (2015) highlights the damaging cycle that some women find themselves in: "When I got out of prison I was in a catch-22 ... If your child doesn't live with you, you can't get accommodation, but you can't get your child back unless you've got accommodation."<sup>77</sup>

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

Appropriate housing is essential in enabling women to raise and care for their children in a safe, clean, and suitable environment, and providing it can save costs in the longer term. Anawim and Midland Heart Housing Association in Birmingham undertook a cost-benefits analysis of the support they provide to 13 women involved in offending, concluding that "if only two children are prevented from entering the social care system for one year, the monetary benefits are almost double the cost of the housing and support for all 13 women." Anawim recommends that local authority housing and other social housing providers need to review their current allocation policy to allow women to be reunited with their children.<sup>78</sup>

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

Woman at POPS' Farida Women's Centre, Manchester

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

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

As well as a change of living and care arrangements for children, families may also experience financial constraints during a parent's imprisonment. In a joint thematic review by HM Inspectorate of Prisons, HM Inspectorate of Probation and Ofsted (2014), it was noted that not enough consideration is given to offenders who had children, particularly those who are primary care givers, and specifically how this would impact their accommodation needs.<sup>79</sup> As a volunteer at POPS 2nd Chance café in Manchester puts it, "They forget kids when it comes to housing".

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

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

*Support Worker, Women in Prison*

Poor mental health is common among women in the criminal justice system: 49% of women prisoners in a Ministry of Justice study were assessed as suffering from anxiety and depression, compared to 23% of men in prison<sup>80</sup>, significantly higher than for the population in general. Moreover, women prisoners are more than twice as likely as male prisoners to have attempted suicide at some point in their life.<sup>81</sup> According to Lord Bradley's review, custody can exacerbate mental ill health, heighten vulnerability, and increase the risk of self-harm and suicide.<sup>82</sup> Women may require particular consideration when it comes to housing to ensure that they are in a supportive environment attuned to their needs. The Prison Reform Trust report *Too Little, Too Late: An Independent Review of Unmet Mental Health Need in Prison* (2009) revealed that many people who should have been diverted into mental health or social care from police stations or courts are entering prisons, and then being discharged into the community without any support.<sup>83</sup>

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

Jane is 58 and has been in and out of custody over the last 4 years, often for very short sentences. She has complex issues, particularly around alcohol. Having resided in a Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) property with no major issues, the property was broken into, and Jane lost everything; she attributes her subsequent offending behaviour to this. Due to her alcohol misuse, Jane found herself excluded from many Belfast hostels. Housing Rights made referrals, and Jane was linked in with homelessness charity Depaul's Housing First project. She was connected to an addictions service that works within prisons. When Jane was in custody, referrals were made to a number of hostels, and on the morning of her release, through Housing Rights liaising directly with NIHE, Jane was placed in temporary accommodation in Belfast, with a key worker in the hostel. Depaul will continue to work with her and Jane is on the waiting list for permanent social housing.

### **Prostitution**

Many women in the criminal justice system have been involved in prostitution, and support to exit prostitution is recognised as a pathway out of offending (Annex A). In one prison study, 21% of women said that they had been involved in prostitution, the majority linking it to drug addiction (76%), and over a quarter (26%) to having been abused.<sup>84</sup> Housing is a critical factor for women who wish to exit prostitution. A safe and secure home of their own helps women develop a stable lifestyle, seek employment, and have their children back.<sup>85</sup> A case study from Ipswich Police found that many of the women involved in street prostitution didn't have access to housing, education, or basic health services.<sup>86</sup> The *Challenge of Change* report by Drugscope and AVA (Against Violence and Abuse) stressed the need for women-only provision.<sup>87</sup>

**The Chrysalis Project** is a partnership between **Commonweal and St Mungo's** and provides a three-stage resettlement programme for women who want to exit prostitution. It provides access to emergency accommodation for a full assessment of needs; a chance to stabilise their prostitution activity and any substance misuse in a women-only hostel; and longer term accommodation in a one-bedroom flat for those women who are able to live more independently and are engaging in treatment. Women are supported throughout, and evaluation indicates that the likelihood of reoffending is greatly reduced.

### **Domestic abuse**

Nearly half (46%) of women in prison report having suffered domestic abuse, and one third have experienced sexual abuse.<sup>88</sup> On leaving prison, women often have no other choice but to return to their previous home and partner. If they disclose their experience of abuse, women may qualify as priority need for housing and receive help to move house or to remove their partner from the home. However, many women do not have the confidence to talk about their abuse or are fearful that child protection agencies may become involved.<sup>89</sup> Agenda (Alliance for Women and Girls at Risk) recommended in evidence to the Communities and Local Government Committee Homelessness Inquiry (2016) that women fleeing or, currently experiencing, domestic abuse should be entitled to housing automatically, rather than having to meet any additional test of vulnerability.<sup>90</sup> It is also important that women's refuges are able to provide for women with mental health and substance misuse problems.<sup>91</sup> For women in prison, their needs should be assessed before being released from custody and potentially back into the hands of an abusive partner. Women should be offered specialist support that enables them to disclose their experiences and concerns about home life.

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

The *Housing (Wales) Act 2014* addresses the needs of victims of domestic abuse and emphasises the importance of a multi-agency approach in which housing providers play a key role.<sup>92</sup> This and the new *Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015* are key to ensuring that some of Wales' most vulnerable women receive the support they need.

### **Women with learning disabilities and difficulties**

Women in prison are thought to have higher rates of learning disability than their male counterparts. There is a lack of research, but studies suggest that around 8% of women prisoners have an IQ below 70 and as many as 32% of them are borderline disabled (this compares to 7% and 24% of men respectively).<sup>93</sup>

Sorting out accommodation, particularly from prison, requires a certain level of literacy that many women simply do not have, and they are often left struggling to negotiate their way through a system of lengthy application forms and interviews.<sup>94</sup> They should receive appropriate expert support while they are in prison, and support in the community to keep their tenancies. *No One Knows* (2008) is an in-depth study of the experiences of prisoners with learning disabilities and difficulties at all stages of the criminal justice system. It highlights the additional challenges that people with learning difficulties face and their need for support, including with housing.<sup>95</sup>

### **Foreign national women in prison**

11% of women in prison are foreign nationals, many of them on remand. They are not a homogenous group but include many different nationalities, as well as asylum seekers and refugees who are subject to complex regulations and whose immigration status affects their housing options. Language barriers present a further hurdle, and service providers may need to provide interpreter services or translated information as well as be aware of the rights of migrant women released into the community. Accommodation options vary from faith based places for those who do not have recourse to public funds, to the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodation for those who have claimed asylum, or privately paid shared accommodation.<sup>96</sup>

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

Maria is an EU National with limited command of the English language. She was a victim of domestic violence, imprisoned for injuring her partner in a domestic incident. Whilst Maria was in prison, she struggled to cope with the consequences of the domestic violence she had suffered. Language barriers prevented her benefiting from the generic support programmes in prison. Hibiscus provided support in Maria's own language which helped her to cope with the

effects of domestic abuse and being in custody. When Maria's custodial sentence ended, she was detained by the Home Office and served with a deportation order. Her application for immigration bail was considered, but she needed a suitable address for it to be granted. It was very difficult to find accommodation, and Maria did not have anyone who could provide her with a release address. Hibiscus worked with an organisation that supports victims of domestic violence who offered Maria a place in their safe house. This was provided as a release address for immigration bail, and the judge approved Maria's release after six months of being in immigration detention. At this stage, the most important matter for Maria was to be reunited with her daughter.

## The importance of community support for women

Many women's centres provide housing advice and referral as part of their practical and emotional support for women in the community, often working in partnership with external housing providers, probation services, and local authorities. A key worker's help in navigating the complexity of local authority and other housing provision can make all the difference. Agenda (Alliance for Women and Girls at Risk) highlights the need for a gendered approach to supporting women who are homeless. The causes of women's homelessness and their experiences of being homeless are quite distinct from those of men. Mainstream homelessness services are often male-dominated environments, which women can find intimidating and are therefore less likely to use, especially women with experiences of violence and abuse.<sup>97</sup> Holistic women-only services can help women to build trusted relationships and become more confident in, and connected to, their local communities. An evaluation of sixteen women's community justice services in Scotland identified safe and secure housing as a key factor in improved outcomes "that support women to make and sustain changes in their lives."<sup>98</sup>

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

In a structured approach to rehabilitation, many women's centres such as ISIS Women's Centre in Gloucester use the 'nine pathways': housing, health, drugs and alcohol, finance, family and relationships, domestic abuse, sex working, education, thinking and behaviour.<sup>99</sup> This allows for an assessment of all of a woman's needs and how they interact. If, for example, a woman has lost custody of her children, housing should allow for the possibility that she will be reunited with them. Proximity to other services such as healthcare is also of great benefit.<sup>100</sup> Women's centres are successful because they address multiple needs from an early stage and seek to offer each woman integrated, long term, non-judgmental support until she is ready to move on. They also help to reduce reoffending: the Anawim's women centre in Birmingham has a reoffending rate of 1%<sup>101</sup>, a stark contrast to the national women's reoffending rate of 45%.<sup>102</sup>

*She [NIACRO worker (Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders)] helped me with filling in forms to get my sickness benefit, she helped me with housing. She actually took me out to look at houses and things that were frightening me which were wee tiny things and she calls at my house. She's on the other end of a phone if I need her and I've never had that support before. She's incredible.*  
58 year old woman <sup>103</sup>

## The cost benefit to getting it right

Unstable housing situations reinforce a cycle of crime at a cost to individuals, communities, and ultimately society. Previous research in Scotland has demonstrated significant costs to the public purse from homelessness and reoffending<sup>104</sup>. Studies have shown the importance of community support structures and accommodation in helping promote desistance<sup>105</sup>, and the importance of gender-specific services and support for women is now well-established.<sup>106</sup> The cost to the Scottish Government of each case of homelessness is estimated to be £26,000 per year. For local authorities to evict, re-house and re-let (excluding legal costs) costs an estimated £23,856 per tenancy. If 10 instances of homelessness could be prevented each year, the saving for national government and local authorities would be £260,000 and £238,560 respectively.<sup>107</sup> Welsh charity Gibran's Going Home project worked with 460 women over 5 years across each of Wales' 22 local authorities to help resettle women coming out of prison. The project not only resulted in fewer crimes being committed, and fewer families disrupted, but also brought a cost saving of £44.5million.<sup>108</sup>

### **Ella's story from Anawim women's centre, Birmingham**

Ella is 43 and has two children. She was referred to Anawim due to mental health needs. Ella suffered physical and mental abuse, which led to depression and alcohol abuse and her subsequent offending. Anawim helped secure accommodation with Midland Heart and provided ongoing support. This has reduced Ella's substance abuse and led to improvements in her mental and physical health, her education and financial management, and ultimately her reoffending. She has also regained custody of her children. The annual cost of Ella's support and accommodation was £5,857. If Anawim had not intervened, it would have cost the authorities around £32,708, a cost-saving of £5.58 for every £1 invested in Ella's support.

The provision of women's centres, where individualised support is offered, not only reduces reoffending but also costs significantly less in the long run. Revolving Doors Agency undertook a financial analysis of women's centres and concluded that **“an investment of £18 million a year in women's centres could save almost £1 billion in five years.”**<sup>109</sup>

## Conclusion

Access to safe, affordable, and stable accommodation that meets the specific needs of women who offend is essential to enable them to rebuild their lives. It is also a key element in reducing offending and reoffending. While there are some positive housing services already in place, these services are not consistent throughout the UK and are often under-funded. A more joined-up, integrated approach needs to be in place, involving resettlement staff in prisons, offender managers and responsible officers, local authority housing departments, and voluntary sector organisations to ensure that women in trouble and at risk are given the necessary support.

## Recommendations

### Government should:

- Implement a cross-government strategy to ensure that the 'housing pathway' out of offending is delivered effectively by service providers in the criminal justice system. This should include:
  - an audit of the housing support currently provided to women offenders, including women in prison and in the community, underpinned by a detailed needs analysis
  - development of model interagency protocols on the sharing of information and responsibility for housing women affected by the criminal justice system
  - investigating possible links between the disproportionate use of custodial remand for women and their unmet housing needs
  - promoting innovative responses to women's housing needs.
- Extend the time limit for Housing Benefit eligibility for sentenced prisoners from 13 weeks to six months to prevent short-sentenced women from losing their homes, and extend the scope for payment of arrears.
- Invest in women's centres to provide a 'one-stop' place of safety where women can receive practical housing advice and help alongside financial management and employment as well as emotional support.
- Work with local authorities to ensure funding of suitable accommodation for women leaving prison, particularly those with drug and alcohol addictions, mental health concerns, or learning disabilities. This should include suitable bail accommodation and support and maintain their tenancy while in prison.

### Local authorities should:

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

### Sentencers should:

- Be made aware of the serious housing impacts of custodial responses to women's low-level offending.
- Make every effort to divert women away from prison and consider appropriate community-based programmes instead, particularly in cases where a short custodial sentence might otherwise result.
- Avoid remanding into custody due to lack of satisfactory housing.

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

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

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

- Assess a woman's housing needs at every stage of the criminal justice system in order to establish an appropriate rehabilitation action plan which includes housing including support to maintain tenancies. Early intervention, as well as the appropriate sharing of information between agencies, is paramount.

### **Housing organisations should:**

- Ensure that their eligibility criteria do not exclude women with criminal convictions or women leaving prison.
- Ensure that personnel receive training on the impact of imprisonment on women.
- Ensure that there is a focus on helping women hold onto their tenancy, particularly where women are in coercive relationships or where rent arrears may accrue during a period in custody.

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

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

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

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

### **Pathway 1: Accommodation**

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

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

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

### **Pathway 3: Health**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Pathway 8: Abuse**

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

### **Pathway 9: Prostitution**

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

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

(NB - this list is by no means exhaustive)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Chrysalis project, London** - [www.commonwealhousing.org.uk](http://www.commonwealhousing.org.uk)

The Chrysalis project is a partnership between Commonweal Housing and St Mungo's which provides accommodation and support as women exit prostitution.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Gibran, Wales** - [www.gibran-uk.co.uk](http://www.gibran-uk.co.uk)

Gibran supports women in prison and in the community to address a range of needs including housing.

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

**Hafan Cymru, Wales** - [www.hafancymru.co.uk](http://www.hafancymru.co.uk)  
Hafan Cymru provides temporary supported housing and also has shared housing options for young women as well as two refuges for women who experience domestic abuse.

**Hibiscus Initiatives, England**- [www.hibiscusinitiatives.org.uk](http://www.hibiscusinitiatives.org.uk)  
Hibiscus Initiatives empowers Black, Minority Ethnic and refugee migrant groups serving a custodial sentence, released into the community or returned to their home country

**Home Group, England, Scotland, and Wales** - [www.homegroup.org.uk](http://www.homegroup.org.uk)  
Home Group is one the UK's largest provider of supported housing and related services.

**Housing for Women, London** - [www.hfw.org.uk](http://www.hfw.org.uk)  
Housing for Women provides secure, affordable housing and related services to women who have suffered domestic abuse, been trafficked, or have been released from prison.

**Housing Rights, Northern Ireland** - [www.housingrights.org.uk](http://www.housingrights.org.uk)  
Housing Rights provides advice and representation to people who are at risk of homelessness. They work with women in prison as well as in the community.

**Llamau, Wales** - [www.llamau.org.uk](http://www.llamau.org.uk)  
Llamau offers a range of services to support homeless young people and vulnerable women.

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

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

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

**Re-Unite, England and Wales** - [www.re-unite.org.uk](http://www.re-unite.org.uk)  
Re-Unite works with women offenders to offer them appropriate housing so that they can be re-united with their children.

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

**Shelter England** - [www.england.shelter.org.uk](http://www.england.shelter.org.uk) / **Shelter Cymru** - [www.sheltercymru.org.uk](http://www.sheltercymru.org.uk) /  
**Shelter Scotland** - [www.scotland.shelter.org.uk](http://www.scotland.shelter.org.uk)  
Each of the Shelter organisations in England, Scotland, and Wales offers specialised support for women affected by the criminal justice system.

**St Mungo's, England** - [www.mungos.org](http://www.mungos.org)  
St Mungo's is a homelessness charity working with people in prison as well as in the community. They have a range of services specifically for women.

**Threshold, Greater Manchester** - [www.thp.org.uk](http://www.thp.org.uk)

Threshold supports those leaving custody with housing needs and has specialist provision for women. Threshold also works with Re-Unite to work specifically with women offenders with children.

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

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

**Tomorrow's Women, Glasgow** (part of Glasgow Criminal Justice Authority) - [www.glasgowcja.org.uk](http://www.glasgowcja.org.uk)

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

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

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

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

The Treasures Foundation provides accommodation and support to women with a history of drug abuse and offending.

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

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

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

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

**Women's Breakout, England and Wales** - [www.womensbreakout.org.uk](http://www.womensbreakout.org.uk)

Women's Breakout is a membership organisation of 58 organisations that form a network of service providers. Women's Breakout shape national and local approaches to working with women who present with vulnerabilities and are in contact with, or at risk of becoming involved in, the Criminal Justice System.

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

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

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Prison Reform Trust, 15 Northburgh Street, London EC1V 0JR  
020 7251 5070 [womensprogramme@prisonreformtrust.org.uk](mailto:womensprogramme@prisonreformtrust.org.uk)

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Women in Prison Ltd. Unit 10, The Ivories, Northampton St, London N1 2HY. Charity number: 1118727