



Ministry
of Justice

Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan 2022–25

January 2023

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Ministry
of Justice

Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan 2022–25

Presented to Parliament

by the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice

by Command of His Majesty

January 2023



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Ministerial Foreword

When women with experiences of violence, poor mental health and addiction are left unsupported, society pays the price.

Families can be torn apart.

Communities can face more crime.

And taxpayers end up covering the cost of the services they use – including police, courts and eventually, prisons and probation.

When all these things happen, the harmful cycle of female offending continues.

More than four years on from the publication of the Female Offender Strategy, this Government remains committed to its three aims – earlier intervention and improved community sentences, reducing the number of women going to prison, and making custody more effective. And we have seen tangible progress towards meeting them.

Recognising the vital role women’s community organisations play in supporting vulnerable individuals, we have launched grant competitions to invest up to £24 million over the next three years for women in or at risk of contact with the criminal justice system.

In fact, we have already invested around £9.5 million in this sector since June 2018, on top of awarding almost £46 million to organisations to deliver tailored support to women between 2021 – 2025.

The female prison population is falling – there were 4,123 women behind bars as of June 2012 compared to 3,253 in June 2022 – a decrease of 21%. But we also want to see fewer women serving short sentences. That's why we're trialling Problem Solving Courts, including one that focuses exclusively on women and handing down robust community sentences to address the underlying drivers of offending.

For those women who commit a serious crime – and who need to serve a custodial sentence – we will improve the support provided, including reducing the instances of self-harm through therapeutic services and piloting social workers in prisons to support mothers.

We will also update our strategy with a fourth aim – the effective resettlement of female prison leavers back into communities, to reduce the risk of reoffending. That means we will be focusing on the interventions that are known to work – a home, access to treatment for substance misuse, and a job.

As part of this, we are rolling out Employment Hubs, Advisory Boards and Employment Leads in 10 female prisons to link offenders with job opportunities on the outside.

The Government wants to prevent women from ending up entangled in the criminal justice system and make sure those that do can get their lives back on track.

Both goals ultimately benefit everyone – offenders, their families and the wider community where there will be fewer victims and safer streets.

Executive summary

Women in contact with the criminal justice system are amongst the most vulnerable in society. Many experience trauma, domestic abuse, mental health problems or have a history of alcohol and drug misuse. Factors that can lead men and women to commit crime, and to reoffend, can vary significantly. An approach that takes account of the different needs and backgrounds of women is most effective in addressing their offending behaviour.

This Delivery Plan sets out how Government will deliver four key priorities to reduce women's offending over the period of the 2022–25 Spending Review. Action to deliver many of these commitments is already underway.

1. Fewer women entering the justice system and reoffending

In some cases, a women's offending could have been prevented through earlier intervention, including through diversion from the criminal justice system and into support.

We will aim to:

- Bring statutory and voluntary partners together to address the needs of this group of women, diverting them away from offending behaviour and reducing demand on services. As part of this we have launched a competition for up to £21m multi-year grant funding to support vital community services for women, and up to £3.6m to incentivise local partnership working.
- Work with Home Office, College of Policing, National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), and the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC), to ensure police forces understand and respond effectively to the needs of vulnerable women, including developing a tactical toolkit by March 2023.
- Work with police and Liaison and Diversion (L&D) partners on better identifying and diverting women out of the criminal justice system into support, where appropriate, including undertaking a review of the L&D women's service.
- Work with non-police prosecutors to explore options for addressing the high number of women prosecuted for offences such as TV licence evasion.

2. Fewer women serving short custodial sentences with a greater proportion managed successfully in the community

We want to see more women managed effectively in the community, where the offence committed allows it, with women remaining closer to their families and support networks and engaging with rehabilitative support to prevent re-offending.

We will aim to:

- Work with courts to raise awareness and increase understanding of the specific issues faced by women who offend.
- Seek to encourage alternatives to remand in custody where it is in the interests of justice to do so, including ending remand for own protection solely on mental health grounds, as set out in the draft Mental Health Act Reform Bill.
- Ensure courts have evidence-based and robust community sentencing options that provide women with those opportunities to address the underlying drivers of their offending and turn their lives around. As part of this we will trial Problem Solving Courts (PSCs), including one site in Birmingham that will focus exclusively on women.

3. Better outcomes for women in custody

We are committed to providing appropriate support and environments that will enable women to address the root causes of their offending behaviour so that they pay their debt to society, are rehabilitated and will not re-offend upon their release.

We will aim to:

- Improve safety for all women in custody and reduce the severity and instances of self-harm through the expansion of therapeutic services and exploring how we can reduce the need for women to move between prisons.
- Professionalise the prison and probation workforce through training, guidance and the introduction of new roles, better enabling them to meet the needs of women in custody.
- Provide women in custody with equivalent health care to that which they would receive in the community, agreeing next steps for taking forward the recommendations of the joint NHS England and HMPPS Women's Prisons Health and Social Care Review.
- Ensure that the women's prison estate offers decent accommodation that supports rehabilitation, continuing work to deliver new facilities in women's prisons, through a combination of Open and Closed places.

4. Protecting the public through better outcomes for women on release

We will work to reduce reoffending rates for women leaving custody, focusing on what we know works: a home, a job and access to treatment for substance misuse.

We will aim to:

- Raise the level of numeracy, literacy, skills, and qualifications of women so that they are more likely to secure jobs or apprenticeships on release, rolling out Employment hubs, Employment Advisory Boards and Employment Leads in all women's prisons to provide better employment support.
- Help women into safe and secure accommodation upon release so that they can continue addressing the causes of their offending, recruiting up to nine Strategic Housing Specialists by the end of January 2023.

- Develop a Resettlement Passport that provides women with the key information and services that they need to adjust to lead a crime-free life to address known drivers of repeat offending.
- Ensure support is in place so prison leavers can continue with the substance misuse or mental health treatment they need upon release, including recruiting Health and Justice Coordinators to all Probation Regions.

How we will measure and report on progress

We will use relevant measures to monitor changes in a range of outcomes for each priority area. Where it is not possible to say what is causing an outcome, we will look at all the data and evidence we have to try to understand outcomes.

New data and evidence will be provided as it becomes available. We will provide updates every six months at a minimum. Published data and evidence will be made available via a dedicated page on GOV.UK.

Introduction

This Delivery Plan sets out how Government will deliver four key priorities to reduce women's offending over the next three years. These are:

- Fewer women entering the justice system and reoffending
- Fewer women serving short custodial sentences with a greater proportion managed successfully in the community
- Better outcomes for women in custody
- Protecting the public through better outcomes for women on release.

Our commitments

The following section shows our commitments for each of the four priorities, setting out the aim of our work, what we have done so far and what we will do over three years. We will review progress regularly with our external Expert Group of charities and agencies and the inter-ministerial Women in the Criminal Justice System Board, which have been established as part of our new governance arrangements.

Women in contact with the criminal justice system are amongst the most vulnerable in society. Many experience trauma, domestic abuse, mental health problems or have a history of alcohol and drug misuse. Prisoners with disabilities are overrepresented amongst the female offender population, and whilst most girls in care and care leavers do not become involved with criminal activity, they also remain overrepresented in the criminal justice system. Female offenders are also more likely than male offenders to be the main carer for dependent children.

Evidence shows that sex shapes experiences of custody and justice. Factors that can lead men and women to commit crime, and to reoffend, can vary significantly, as can the way men and women respond to interventions designed to address their offending behaviour. There is evidence that an approach that takes account of the different needs and backgrounds of women, including those of ethnic minority women who are overrepresented in the criminal justice system, is most effective in addressing their offending behaviour.

We will publish a review of our progress in delivering the commitments in this delivery plan in a year's time.

Alongside this Delivery Plan we are publishing two related progress reports on the Farmer Review for Women (2019) and on the National Concordat on women in or at risk of contact with the Criminal Justice System (2021). Outstanding commitments from both the Farmer Review and the Concordat will be taken forward under this Delivery Plan.

1. Fewer women entering the criminal justice system and reoffending

Overview

Many of the women who come into contact with the criminal justice system have experienced domestic abuse, mental health problems or have a history of alcohol and drug misuse. They often commit non-violent, low-level offences, for which many receive short custodial sentences. They are also over-represented in prosecutions for specific offences, particularly non-police prosecutions. In the year ending in June 2022 women accounted for 75% of defendants prosecuted for TV licence evasion, 69% of defendants prosecuted for truancy of a child, and 58% of defendants proceeded against for benefit fraud, where the defendant's gender was known, in 2021.¹ In the year ending June 2022, women sentenced for theft, summary non-motoring offences and miscellaneous crimes against society also accounted for over half (58%) of all women given custodial sentences of less than 12 months (compared to 47% of men).²

In some cases, their offending could have been prevented through earlier intervention, including through diversion from the criminal justice system and into support. Failure to intervene early and to divert where appropriate can result in convictions, which in turn can lead to a loss of accommodation and employment, disruption to families and children and the beginning of a cycle of intergenerational offending.

Effective intervention and diversion requires a joined-up response by a wide range of government departments and statutory agencies, particularly the police and health service, who will often encounter vulnerable women at risk of offending. Services need to be alert and responsive to the trauma, including domestic abuse and sexual violence, that many of these women have faced. Services that are trauma-responsive have staff trained to understand the prevalence and impact of trauma and ensure that those accessing the service are not re-traumatised by any aspect of their experience.

To give effect to our commitments, in cooperation with the police we will produce a tactical toolkit of best practice to deal with vulnerable women. NHS England (NHSE) is also carrying out a review of the performance of its Liaison and Diversion approach to women. Women's community sector organisations have a vital role to play in providing the

¹ Criminal Justice System statistics quarterly: June 2022 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

² Ibid

necessary services and interventions to meet the needs of women and we will continue to invest in these services.

Statutory and voluntary partners working together more effectively

Aims of this work:

Many women in or at risk of contact with the criminal justice system have multiple and complex needs and make repeated demands on health and other statutory services. We know that bringing these services and charities together to work in partnership to address the needs of this group of women can improve outcomes, including diverting them away from offending behaviour and reducing demand on services.

What we have done so far:

- Invested £9.5 million in women’s community sector services across England and Wales since June 2018. We have also awarded over £45 million to charities to deliver wraparound support in the community to women between June 2021 and March 2025.
- Set out the case for improving and encouraging collaboration at a national and local level through our Concordat.
- Published the Women in the Criminal Justice System data tool in January 2021, which is used by national and local organisations to investigate data and trends, such as the most common offences and prosecution outcomes, across geographic areas.
- Held workshops with Local Criminal Justice Boards to increase awareness of available data that can be broken down by police force area to identify local priorities and compare effectiveness in tackling problems in similar areas.
- Published the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan (March 2022), which recognises the need to ensure victims of domestic abuse are identified and offered support within the criminal justice system.
- Published Our Vision for the Women’s Health Strategy for England (December 2021), setting out our overarching ambitions of improving the health and wellbeing of women and girls in England, and improving how the health and care system listens to women.

We will:

- Undertake a grants competition for up to £24m multi-year grant funding to support vital community services for women and encourage more joined up local partnership working to address women’s needs.
- Support adults facing multiple disadvantages through the Changing Futures programme led by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). The programme aims to reduce offending and reoffending (among other outcomes) through locally-led initiatives that coordinate support around the person, such as enhanced service hubs in Lancashire that bring together housing, drug

treatment, health and mental health support, so people facing multiple problems get the joined-up help they need to change their lives for the better.

- Continue to support the delivery of DLUHC's Supporting Families programme, which works with local areas to offer support to families facing multiple disadvantages including women in the criminal justice system and their families. With an additional £200m investment over the next three years already confirmed, the programme will aim to support a further 300,000 vulnerable families. Supporting Families is committed to driving strong multi-agency local partnerships in every local authority and helping build mature local and national data systems.
- Publish guidance for local areas on how they can make sure organisations are working together to address the complex needs of women in or at risk of contact with the justice system, by the end of January 2023.

Policing

Aims of this work:

The Ministry of Justice, Home Office, College of Policing, National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), and the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) will work together to ensure police forces understand and respond effectively to the needs of vulnerable women when they first come into contact with the police.

What we have done so far:

- Published guidance for police forces on working with vulnerable women, setting out information on their particular needs and guidance on working effectively with them (2018). In 2019, forces were invited to complete a questionnaire on the impact of the guidance, which identified examples of good practice and areas for further work.
- The NPCC has established the Women in the Criminal Justice System Working Group to co-ordinate and focus the police's work with vulnerable women.

We will:

- Through the NPCC leadership, develop a Tactical Toolkit by the end of March 2023, to enable Forces to more easily identify and access existing practice. This will be followed by the development of national evidence-based guidance to promote innovative and effective initiatives to improve policing's response to women in or at risk of contact with the criminal justice system.
- Review the use and effectiveness of Out of Court Disposals (OOCs) in responding to the particular needs of women, including opportunities to attach women specific conditions such as referral to a women's centre for support to address her needs.

Diversion

Aims of this work:

We know that in some cases, where a woman first comes into contact with the police, the best outcome for the community, as well as the individual and her family, is to divert her into support to address the issues underlying her offending behaviour. NHS England commissioned Liaison and Diversion Services to identify people who have mental health, learning disabilities, substance misuse issues or other vulnerabilities when they first come into contact with the criminal justice system as suspects, defendants or offenders. We will work with police and L&D partners on better identifying and diverting women out of the criminal justice system into support, where appropriate.

What we have done so far:

- Each L&D service across England has appointed a women's lead to ensure that the distinct needs of women in the criminal justice system are taken into account in decisions and women are signposted to support, where appropriate. **17,710** women used L&D services in financial year 2018/19.³

We will:

- Undertake a review of the L&D women's service to identify best practice and produce a lessons learned report, which will offer information and support to areas who wish to further develop their L&D women's service. The review will contribute to ongoing service development during 2023.
- Publish guidance by the end of April 2023 to support women to understand what happens at each stage of the criminal justice system, from arrest to sentencing, including the role of practitioners that women will encounter and the meaning of terminology they are likely to hear. The guidance will benefit all women in contact with the criminal justice system, while also reflecting the specific needs of those from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Non-Police Prosecutions

Aims of this work:

We will work with non-police prosecutors to explore options for addressing the high number of women prosecuted for offences such as TV licence evasion, identifying vulnerability and signposting women into support.

³ Women and the Criminal Justice System 2019 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

We will:

- Work with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the BBC to explore options for the piloting of enforcement officers signposting women to support, in order to understand the effectiveness of this approach.

| | What we will measure | Current position |
|-----------|---|--|
| 1. | Number of women first time entrants into the criminal justice system (first time cautions, first time sentencing) | In 2021, 17,332 adult women received their first caution or conviction. ⁴ |
| 2. | Number of women arrested across England and Wales ⁵ | In the financial year 2020/21, 85,759 women were arrested across England and Wales. ⁶ |
| 3. | Number of women prosecuted by non-police prosecutors for offences where they are overrepresented compared to men (truancy, TV licence evasion, benefit fraud) | In 2021, 3,370 women were proceeded against for truancy of a child, 36,335 women were proceeded against for TV licence evasion, and 137 were proceeded against for benefit fraud offences. ⁷ |
| 4. | Number of women dealt with via use of Out of Court Disposals (OOCs) | In 2021, 9,566 women received a caution and 2,057 received a Penalty Notice for Disorder. ⁸ |

⁴ First time entrants (FTE) into the Criminal Justice System and Offender Histories: Year ending December 2021 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

⁵ Projected increase in police numbers may have an impact on this metric.

⁶ Police powers and procedures: Stop and search and arrests, England and Wales, year ending 31 March 2021 second edition – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

⁷ Criminal Justice System statistics quarterly: December 2021 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

⁸ Criminal Justice System statistics quarterly: December 2021 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

2. Fewer women serving short custodial sentences with a greater proportion managed successfully in the community

Overview

We want to see more women managed effectively in the community, where the offence committed allows it, with women remaining closer to their families and support networks and engaging with rehabilitative support to prevent re-offending.

Over half of adult women (58%) and almost half of adult men (47%) released from custody between April to June 2016 reoffended within a year.⁹ An effective community sentence means women will be less likely to lose their accommodation and employment, enabling them to receive targeted support to address needs, reducing the likelihood of reoffending, and limiting the disruption to women's families and children.

Since the publication of the Female Offender Strategy in 2018, the proportion of women given a community sentence has increased slightly from 5% to 6%.¹⁰ The Sentencing White Paper set out our ambition to build confidence in community sentencing options and we are clear that we want to see more women managed effectively in the community. To achieve this, courts need more information about the particular issues faced by the women before them, and the availability and suitability of different sentencing options. We are also piloting new sentencing options such as the Problem-Solving Court in Birmingham specifically for women.

We know the risk of suicide can be higher when prisoners are on remand. In women's prisons, the number of self-harming incidents among women on remand increased by 26% between 2020 and 2021.¹¹ We will therefore look at ways to encourage alternatives to remand to custody based on a woman's individual circumstances. Courts can already take into account an individual's specific circumstances and needs, such as being a primary carer, in its considerations of whether to grant bail.

⁹ MoJ (2018). Supporting data tables: Female offender strategy. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/female-offender-strategy>

¹⁰ Criminal Justice System statistics quarterly: June 2022 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

¹¹ Safety in custody: quarterly update to June 2022 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Working with courts

Aims of this work:

Sentencing is a matter for the independent judiciary, but we will work with courts to raise awareness and increase understanding of the specific issues faced by women who offend, including those of ethnic minority backgrounds. We will do this by sharing up-to-date information on the suitability and availability of community sentence options, and evidence of good and effective practice.

What we have done so far:

- We conducted interviews with district judges and magistrates to explore their views and experiences about sentencing women. This was used to develop practitioner guidance, and a pilot to improve the quality and timeliness of pre-sentence reports (PSRs).
- We have developed guidance for practitioners completing PSRs on women. This highlights key areas for practitioners to consider when assessing the diverse needs of women and making a robust proposal for a community sentence based on a woman's individual circumstances.

We will:

- Develop, deliver and maintain briefing materials that support regular information sharing sessions, starting in early 2023, for the judiciary and all those who work in courts. The materials will raise awareness of the specific issues faced by women who offend and increase understanding of the possible implications and opportunities of sentencing.

Remand

Aims of this work:

We will seek to encourage alternatives to remand in custody where it is in the interests of justice to do so. On average, female offenders commit less serious offences than male offenders and often pose a low or medium risk of serious harm to the public. In 2021, 25% of all self-harming incidents in female prisons took place on remand.¹²

What we have done so far:

Ensured we have a Bail Information Officer in every women's prison with prisoners on remand from England and Wales to provide advice to courts about bail, based on a woman's individual circumstances.

¹² Safety in custody: quarterly update to June 2022 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

We will:

- Commence first hearing bail report pilots in Cardiff and Ipswich magistrates' courts by the end of 2022 to ensure those courts receive advice from the Bail Information Service (BIS) on all women defendants. Ensure that BIS takes into account cultural factors and sensitivities in helping to ensure the prioritisation and appropriate use of bail for women from minority groups and those who are foreign nationals. Increase the use of electronic monitoring where this can reduce remand to custody.
- Remove the power of courts to remand defendants to prison for their own protection solely on the grounds of mental health. Clauses were included in the draft Mental Health Bill published on 27 June 2022 which is currently undergoing pre-legislative scrutiny.

Community sentences

Aims of this work:

We aim to reduce the proportion of all women sentenced to immediate custody, especially on short sentences. Our A Smarter Approach to Sentencing White Paper (September 2020) set out our plans for tougher, better monitored and more effective community sentencing options, which provide appropriate punishment but also address the underlying drivers of offending and offer support for those who want to turn their lives around. We will ensure courts have evidence-based and robust community sentencing options that provide women with those opportunities.

What we have done so far:

- In April 2021, we started a PSR pilot in 15 magistrates' courts in England and Wales, which includes focusing on female offenders for fuller written PSRs, amongst other cohorts that are understood as having more complex needs.
- We have legislated in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 to enable the piloting of PSC approaches for different cohorts, including women. PSCs will offer an intensive community sentence with specific components as an alternative to custody.
- Changes to electronic monitoring mean that courts have more flexibility and a greater range of technologies available to them to support robust community sentencing disposals. In 2021, we completed the introduction of the Alcohol Abstinence and Monitoring Requirement to directly tackle alcohol related offending, this imposes an alcohol ban for up to 120 days and uses alcohol tags to monitor compliance.
- The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 doubles the maximum length of curfew to two years and increases the maximum daily hours from 16 to 20 (whilst maintaining the weekly maximum of 112 hours), providing courts with the option to focus curfew into days where offenders may be free of other commitments. The Act also enables probation to amend curfew hours and places; shifting start/end times and changing addresses in a more timely manner than a return to court would otherwise require.

We will:

- Explore options for increasing residential provision that could be used as part of a robust community order as an alternative to a short custodial sentence, allowing a woman to stay closer to her family and community with support to address needs underlying her offending behaviour.
- Trial PCSs, including one site in Birmingham that will focus exclusively on women.
- Learning can be drawn from the other types of PSC pilots that will also see female offenders, in particular the Substance Misuse PSCs (Crown Court).
- We will publish an evaluation of the PSR pilot in spring 2023 and at that point will consider next steps.
- By mid-2024 the national roll out of Community Sentence Treatment Requirement sites will be completed and in addition to providing Mental Health Treatment Requirement pathways for all adults, will also include bespoke women's pathways.

| | What we will measure | Current position |
|-----------|---|--|
| 1. | Sentencing outcomes (%) for women, incl. % sentenced to immediate custody and receiving a community order | In 2021, 83% of sentenced women received a fine, 6% received a community sentence, 2% received immediate custody, 3% a suspended sentence, while the remaining 4% were either otherwise dealt with or conditionally discharged. ¹³ |
| 2. | Number of women sentenced to custody for <6/12 months | In 2021, 2,905 women were sentenced to an immediate custodial sentence of 12 months or less, majority of which (2,573) received a custodial sentence of 6 months or less. ¹⁴ |
| 3. | Number of sentenced women received into custody on a sentence <6/12months | In 2021, 1,976 women were received into custody on a sentence of 12 months or less, of which 1,564 were sentenced to 6 months or less. ¹⁵ |
| 4. | % of female defendants bailed/remanded in custody | In 2021, 25% of female defendants at Crown Court were remanded in custody, 51% were on bail. In Magistrates Courts, 14% were on bail, while 1% were remanded in custody. ¹⁶ |

¹³ Criminal Justice System statistics quarterly: December 2021 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Offender Management Statistics quarterly: October to December 2021 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

¹⁶ Criminal Justice System statistics quarterly: December 2021 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

| | What we will measure | Current position |
|-----------|---|--|
| 5. | % sentencing outcomes for women remanded in custody | In 2021, 13% of women remanded in custody at Magistrates Court were sentenced to immediate custody, 6% received a community sentence, 6% received a suspended sentence, and 3% were fined. At Crown Court, 56% received immediate custody, 6% received a community sentence, 17% received a suspended sentence, and less than 1% were fined. ¹⁷ |

¹⁷ Ibid

3. Better outcomes for women in custody

Overview

There will always be some women who have committed crimes of such gravity that custody is the only sentencing option open to the court. We are committed to providing appropriate rehabilitative support and environments that will enable women to address the root causes of their offending behaviour and to mitigate the chances of re-offending upon their release.

Evidence shows that ensuring safety is essential to prisoners being able to address their offending needs. We know that women in custody are particularly vulnerable, with a higher prevalence of mental health issues than male prisoners; and a self-harm rate seven times higher than that for men, with young women (18–24 years old) accounting for 36% of all incidents in 2021 despite representing approximately 10% of the female prison population.¹⁸ Although the average number of self-harming incidents per individual female prisoner is up from 6.6 in June 2012 to 11.5 in 2022, the number of female prisoners who self-harm fell by 10% in the past decade.¹⁹ We know, too, that ethnic minority women can have these same complex needs, but often experience additional disparities arising from their ethnicity, faith, culture, or language needs. Women in custody are also more likely than male prisoners to be primary carers for dependent children.²⁰

We aim to reduce levels of self-harm by testing a bespoke approach to managing young women with enhanced levels of support and increasing our specialist support for some of the more complex women in custody. We will also increase support for women newly received into custody, a time of heightened risk of self-harm and suicide.

Research shows that for a prisoner who receives visits from a family member the likelihood of reoffending upon release is 39% lower than for those who do not.²¹ We are committed to improving family relationships, as well as support for pregnant women and mothers in custody. We will pilot social workers in prison, to test the extent to which they improve relationships and child safeguarding, and we will increase family support provision in women's prisons. We will train our workforce to provide support appropriate to the needs of women in our care, and through new facilities will improve the environment of our

¹⁸ Safety in custody: quarterly update to December 2021 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

¹⁹ Safety in custody: quarterly update to June 2022 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

²⁰ Female offenders and child dependants (publishing.service.gov.uk)

²¹ Landmark review places family ties at the heart of prison reform – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20110201125714/http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/docs/research-factors-reoffending.pdf>

women’s prisons to support wellbeing and rehabilitation. To support our aim to achieve better outcomes for women in custody, we will invest up to £14m in bolstering resources, including expanding therapeutic services, between 2022 and 2025.

Safety

The aims of this work:

It is essential that women feel safe in custody if they are to engage effectively in rehabilitative activity. We know that the early weeks in custody are a particularly difficult time for women, with a higher risk of self-harm and suicide, and that young women (18–25 year olds) face particular challenges. We will improve safety for all women in custody and reduce the severity and instances of self-harm through the expansion of therapeutic services and exploring how we can reduce the need for women to move between prisons.^{22 23 24}

What we have done so far:

- Set up a Self-Harm Task Force to tackle high rates of self-harm in women’s prisons.
- Trained staff in women’s prisons to understand how to work effectively with women who have experience of trauma, such as domestic abuse or sexual violence. Funded additional psychology support to work with the most vulnerable women to reduce undesirable behaviour such as self-harm or violence towards others.
- Introduced a bespoke Offender Management in Custody model (OMiC) for women, providing every woman with a key worker who is there to guide, support, and coach an individual through their time in prison.

We will:

- Develop and publish a Young Women's (18–25) Strategy that spans the whole of the criminal justice system, including best practice guidance to support young women in custody.
- Develop and test a bespoke approach to managing young women in two prisons, including providing a ‘step-down’ approach to bridging the gap between the high level of support provided in Youth Custody services and adult custodial provision.
- Expand therapeutic services to meet the needs of the most vulnerable women in our care by the recruitment of additional psychology staff by March 2023.
- Seek to reduce the distance from home and self-harm linked to the impact of moves between prisons for women by exploring options for HMP/YOI Downview and HMP/YOI Drake Hall to receive women from the courts.

²² Identified needs of offenders in custody and the community from the Offender Assessment System, 30 June 2021 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

²³ Safety in custody: quarterly update to December 2021 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

²⁴ Female offenders and child dependants (publishing.service.gov.uk)

- Develop and pilot an enhanced approach to supporting women in their first weeks in custody, when they are often at their most vulnerable.

Our workforce

The aims of this work:

It is essential that we have a highly skilled workforce that understands and is able to meet the complex needs of women in custody, including mental health and substance misuse issues, and backgrounds of abuse.

We will professionalise the prison and probation workforce through training, guidance and the introduction of new roles, better enabling them to meet the needs of women in custody.

What we have done so far:

- Published a Policy Framework setting out the duties, rules, expectations for the delivery of services and general guidance for prison and probation staff who work with female offenders.
- Appointed a dedicated Safety Lead in HMPPS to provide strong leadership in tackling the high levels of self-harm in women's prisons
- Introduced training for all prison and probation staff on how to support the particular needs of women. These can include helping a woman to address past traumatic experiences (e.g. domestic abuse) and re-build self-confidence, and enabling mothers to continue to play an active parenting role whilst separated from their children.

We will:

- By March 2023, introduce a new process to attract and select new Prison Officers with the right experience and skills to work specifically in women's prisons.
- Improve access to support for domestic abuse or sexual violence by the recruitment of specialist workers in women's prisons.
- Work with partners to develop a pilot for up to three social workers in women's prisons to support mothers in custody, increase uptake of Mother and Baby Unit (MBU) places, support women through family court processes and prepare mothers for resettlement with their children.
- In 2023, introduce additional family engagement workers in prisons to support women in maintaining healthy family relationships during their sentence and prepare for resettlement.
- Complementing wider cultural competency training for HMPPS staff through the Race Action Programme, we will develop training for staff working with foreign national offenders and ethnic minority women in offender management and rehabilitation, to increase awareness of the impact of culture, faith, and sustaining family relationships.

Health and Wellbeing

The aims of this work:

Women in custody have high levels of health needs, including mental health and substance misuse issues, and many have experienced domestic and/or sexual abuse. Some cohorts, such as pregnant women, care experienced women and ethnic minority women, have particular health and wellbeing needs, and the tragic deaths of two babies in prisons in recent years has reinforced how important it is that we provide these women with the care they should expect. We are committed to providing women in custody with equivalent health care to that which they would receive in the community. Effectively addressing health and wellbeing is essential to improved outcomes and resettlement on release from custody.

What we have done so far:

- Published a Strengthening Prisoners' Family Ties Policy Framework (January 2019), setting out rules and guidance for prison staff on supporting prisoners to maintain and develop relationships with family, friends and other key people in their lives.
- Reviewed the operation of Mother and Baby Units (MBUs) and management of our most complex women, and published a new policy framework setting out expectations and guidance for staff in prisons on pregnancy, MBUs and working with mothers separated from children up to the age of two.
- Introduced Pregnancy and MBU Liaison Officers in all women's prisons to ensure effective care for this cohort of women and their babies.
- Delivered 25 of the 33 recommendations in Lord Farmer's Review for Women, aimed at supporting women to maintain and strengthen their relationships with their families, children, and other significant relationships in the community.
- Responded to the findings from the Chief Social Worker review of MBUs. The review, published on 24 November 2022, considered applications to MBUs between 2018–2020 and included the findings of a survey of social workers on their knowledge, attitudes, and experience of working with mothers in prison.

We will:

- Complete and publish the joint NHS England and HMPs Women's Prisons Health and Social Care Review and agree next steps for taking forward its findings and recommendations.
- Introduce health and perinatal managers in closed women's prisons by March 2023, to provide leadership to ensure that women receive timely and appropriate care.
- Develop operational guidance to enable staff to understand better the relationship needs of ethnic minority women, where these differ from the majority prison population.
- Work with the Department for Education to consider options to improve the visibility of children of prisoners within the education system, while working to collectively to improve our understanding of the scale of the issue.

- Through the Better Outcomes for Linked Data (BOLD) Project we will explore data sharing to improve our understanding of the number of children with parents in prison and how parental incarceration impacts children's outcomes, including education, employment and future offending.

Prison conditions

The aims of this work:

We know that the physical conditions in which women live can have a significant impact on outcomes, and that women in particular need to feel safe in order to engage effectively with the often-complex issues underlying their offending behaviour, including mental health, domestic and sexual abuse, and substance misuse. We are committed to a women's estate that offers decent accommodation that supports rehabilitation.

What we have done so far:

- We are designing and procuring new facilities that will support women to develop life skills and address their needs effectively. The designs are informed by the lived experiences of women in custody and will help women engage in rehabilitative activity.

We will:

- Develop Design Standards for new accommodation in the women's prison estate that will support effective rehabilitation, building on our learning from current work developing new facilities in the women's estate.
- Continue work to deliver new facilities in women's prisons, through a combination of Open and Closed places. New open provision at a greater number of sites will enable women to progress within their establishment without the need to move further from home, allowing them to maintain family ties and support networks. This will improve opportunities for education and employment closer to home, and increase stability, which is important for women in custody.
- Develop the principles for our longer-term ambition to introduce smaller, trauma-responsive custodial environments for women on short sentences. This will focus on how to provide community-based provision in a prison setting, with a focus on addiction issues and complex needs, and on keeping women close to home.

| | What we will measure | Current position |
|-----------|---|--|
| 1. | Self-harm rate per 1,000 in female establishments | In 2021, the self-harm rate in female prisons was 3,697 self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners. ²⁵ |
| 2. | Number of self-harm incidents per individual | In 2021, female prisoners who self-harmed, did so on average 10.6 times. ²⁶ |
| 3. | % of female prison population who self-harm | In 2021, there were 1,114 female prisoners who self-harmed – this represented 33% of the female prison population. ²⁷ |

In addition to these, we will monitor Measuring Quality of Prison Life (MQPL) scores on relationship with staff, wellbeing, development, and contact with family in women’s prisons. His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) healthy prison test outcomes for safety and respect in women’s prisons will also be reviewed, as and when they are inspected.

²⁵ Safety in custody: quarterly update to December 2021 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Offender Management Statistics quarterly: October to December 2021 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

4. Protecting the public through better outcomes for women on release

Overview

Just 4% of female prison leavers were in employment six weeks post-release in 2020/21, compared to 10% of male prison leavers.²⁸ This fourth priority sits within wider government work on reducing reoffending through effective resettlement by focusing on what we know works: a home, a job and access to treatment for substance misuse. Through this Delivery Plan we will build on that work by focusing on the particular issues that women face. We will ensure that the support that women receive in custody to overcome their complex needs continues into the community.

We will provide them with tailored support through Resettlement Passports, bringing together the essentials that prison leavers need to lead crime-free lives on release. We will help them into work by rolling out Employment Hubs, Employment Advisory Boards and Employment Leads in all women's prisons. We will ensure that no woman subject to probation supervision leaves prison homeless by continuing to roll out the temporary accommodation service.

Education and Employment

Aims of this work:

Women in custody need a tailored offer that considers their different needs, including that they are more likely to be the main carer for a child, or to have complex needs, such as a history of abuse or mental health issues, which can prevent them from fully engaging with support. We will take action to raise the level of numeracy, literacy, skills, and qualifications of women so that they are more likely to secure jobs or apprenticeships on release.

What we have done so far:

- Reformed prison education to give governors more control over education in their prisons, so that they can tailor this to the needs of women.
- Established a dedicated employment broker for the women's estate in the New Futures Network (NFN) team. NFN is a specialist team within HMPPS that is responsible for employment. It develops partnerships between employers, prisons and probation to help businesses fill skills gaps and support prison leavers to find employment.

²⁸ Community Performance Annual, update to March 2022 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

- The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has work coaches based in all women's prisons who provide employment support throughout the sentence, and support to access benefits in preparation for release.

We will:

- Roll out Prison Employment Leads, Employment Hubs and Employment Advisory Boards in all female prisons to increase the number of women leaving prison with a job.
- Ensure all women's prisons have an ID and Banking Administrator to ensure women have ID and a bank account on release.
- Hold an employment conference in January 2023 to increase awareness of employment opportunities and the different challenges that women face when leaving prison. At the event, we will gather feedback and capture best practice to develop women-specific guidance for Employment Advisory Boards so that they are able to positively impact the lives of women prison leavers, reduce re-offending and meet employers' recruitment needs.
- Develop curriculum guidance to ensure it is gender responsive, trauma informed and include provision that supports prisoners to develop wellbeing, confidence, motivation and resilience building skills.
- Enable all female prisoners to develop personal learning plans so they can track their education and skills achievements throughout their sentences, by March 2025.
- Deliver the Employment Innovation Fund over a three-year period, to enable Governors to work with more employers and training providers to repurpose workshops, deliver sector specific skills training to meet the changing needs of the economy and smooth the path from prison to employment.
- As part of the Government's 10-year drugs plan, DWP has committed to invest £21m to expand Individual Placement and Support for Drug and Alcohol Dependency across England by 2025 to support those in treatment, including male and female offenders, to overcome barriers to employment; and £8m in wider employment support, including a peer mentoring programme to help individuals with a dependency move into recovery and closer to work.
- Invest in expert support in prisons, such as Head of Education, Skills and Work specialists (HESWs), who will work to improve education and employment results.
- Introduce Support Managers for those with additional learning needs to all women's prisons by March 2024, helping to ensuring that those prisoners can access education, skills and work opportunities.

Accommodation

Aims of this work:

Accommodation upon release is vital in ensuring that women leaving custody can continue addressing the causes of their offending. We will ensure that no female offenders subject

to probation supervision leave prison homeless, and that probation supervision in the community addresses concerns about inappropriate accommodation. We will also smooth the return to society by making best use of Open prison places and Release on Temporary Licence, which allows some prisoners to leave prison for a day or overnight, including to find and attend work, and rebuild family ties.

What we have done so far:

- Launched a new temporary accommodation service (Community Accommodation Service-Tier 3 (CAS3)) in five probation regions in July 2021. This service offers up to 12 weeks accommodation for homeless prison leavers and assistance to help them move into settled accommodation.
- Between 1st July 2021 and 17th June 2022, c2,400 individuals, who would have otherwise been homeless, were accepted on to CAS-3 in those five regions. Of these places 94% were for male residents, and 6% were for female residents.
- Engaged with local authorities in Wales, together with Welsh Government, for delivery of the service in Wales through grant funding.
- Updated the policy for Release on Temporary Licence to enable more prisoners who are main carers to leave prison for short periods to maintain ties with their families.
- The Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has reflected the needs of female offenders in an updated version of the Homelessness Code of Guidance for local authorities in July 2021.
- Gender data is now being captured by DLUHC, to improve our understanding of the issues around housing for women.

We will:

- Ensure that a minimum 10% of beds delivered through the Community Accommodation Service (Tiers 1, 2 and 3) are allocated to women in women-only properties so that they feel safe, especially those with backgrounds of abuse.
- DLUHC will invest over £2bn to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping, demonstrating a commitment to programmes like Accommodation for Ex-Offenders, a local authority-led scheme to help prison leavers into rented accommodation.
- Recruit up to nine F.T.E Strategic Housing Specialists across women’s prisons to improve housing outcomes for prison leavers.
- Create more Open prison places providing a greater geographical spread and increase the number of women categorised to Open conditions where appropriate, to help them resettle into the community.

Resettlement Passports

Aims of this work:

We will develop a Resettlement Passport that provides women with the key information and services that they need to adjust to lead a crime-free life to address known drivers of

repeat offending. Each Passport will be a personalised document covering mental health, drugs, education, skills, work, accommodation and family ties. It will organise, plan, and record the information and services that prisoners, prison leavers and professionals working with them need access to, starting on entry into prison and continuing through to their resettlement into the community once they are released.

What we have done so far:

- In the Prisons Strategy White Paper (2021), we reiterated the government’s commitment to developing a Resettlement Passport and consulted on the guiding principles, priorities and areas of focus to help shape the Resettlement Passport.
- The concept of Resettlement Passports was welcomed by stakeholders in the consultation. Respondents recognised the importance of having a coordinated approach to transitioning to life outside prison, which the Resettlement Passport will be designed to achieve.
- We are taking an iterative approach to Passport development, working with initial prisons to trial implementation of a manual prototype in the first instance.

We will:

- Continue to develop the design of Resettlement Passports, including testing with prison and probation staff, charities, and prisoners to ensure it adapts to challenges faced by certain groups, including female offenders.

Continuity of Healthcare

Aims of this work:

If support is not in place to ensure prison leavers can continue with the substance misuse or mental health treatment they need upon release, this can reverse any progress made. This is especially the case for female offenders who are more likely to have complex needs and more likely to have served a short sentence, reducing the time available to engage with support. We will improve continuity of health care, ensuring women leaving prison have a dedicated point of contact to support them in engaging with the NHS services that they need.

What we have done so far:

- Started rollout of NHS RECONNECT by NHS England, a care after custody service, which supports prison leavers in England to remain engaged with the right treatment when they leave prison.
- Completed the introduction of Alcohol Monitoring on Licence to England and Wales. This can be imposed as a condition for those being released from prison on licence, where alcohol misuse has been a factor in their offending.

- Provided laptops and licences to all English prisons so that prisoners can attend initial drug treatment appointments with community treatment providers virtually prior to release to increase the numbers engaging with community treatment on release.

We will:

- Work with NHS RECONNECT to continue roll-out to ensure women leaving prison have a dedicated point of contact to support them in engaging with NHS services.
- Recruit Health and Justice Partnership Coordinators to all Probation Regions to improve pathways into healthcare services across the Probation system, including improving continuity of care in their area so that those leaving prison can access treatment and support.
- Roll out additional laptops and licences to prisons to increase the number of prisoners able to attend initial appointments with community drug treatment providers virtually prior to release and increasing access to tele-recovery services.

| | What we will measure | Current position |
|----|---|---|
| 1. | Proven Reoffending Rate for women | The proven reoffending rate for women between January and December 2020 was 19% . ²⁹ |
| 2. | % of women in employment six months post release | In 2021/22 4% of female prison leavers were in employment six weeks post-release from custody. ³⁰ |
| 3. | % of female prison leavers in accommodation three months post release from prison | In 2021/22 63% of female prison leavers had accommodation three-month post release. ³¹ |
| 4. | Number of women released on Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) | In 2021, 345 female prisoners were released on temporary licence. ³² |
| 5. | Number of women recalled into custody | In 2021, 1,454 women were returned to custody after a licence recall. ³³ |
| 6. | Number of women released on Home Detention Curfew | In 2021, 891 women were released on Home Detention Curfew. ³⁴ |

²⁹ Proven reoffending statistics: October to December 2020 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

³⁰ Community Performance Annual, update to March 2022 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

³¹ Ibid

³² Offender Management Statistics quarterly: October to December 2021 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ibid

How we will measure progress

We will use available data and evidence to understand whether the delivery plan is affecting outcomes for women. This includes:

- a. Evidence from government evaluations of relevant projects;
- b. Data from national published statistics; and
- c. Evidence and information from local areas and partners who are delivering projects and interventions.

We will use relevant measures to monitor changes in a range of outcomes for each priority area. Outcomes could include offending behaviour (such as arrest, prosecution, and reoffending rates), wellbeing (such as mental and physical health and relationships) and resettlement (such as access to employment and housing on release from prison). We know that there are many factors that will influence outcomes, for example increases in police numbers may have an effect on the numbers of people arrested. Where it is not possible to say what is causing an outcome, we will look at all the data and evidence we have to try to understand how an outcome in one area may affect outcomes in other areas. For example, if more women are arrested, does this result in more being prosecuted?

The data and evidence we will use

Where there is a large enough group of women taking part in a project or programme that we are evaluating, we will use findings from those **evaluations** to understand whether they are affecting outcomes for the women participating. In some cases, we will be able to say whether the project has had an impact on a certain outcome, such as reoffending, and to assess whether the project is cost effective. In other cases, findings will focus on the quality of the project, how the participants feel about taking part and how well the project is running.

We will use **national published statistics** to monitor changes in outcomes for all women entering the criminal justice system. We will focus on areas such as the numbers of women being arrested, prosecuted and the types of sentences they are given, whether they reoffend and whether they have housing and work when they are released from prison. We know that there are several factors that are likely to affect changes that happen over time, especially as we recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, and this data will not tell us what is causing the change but will highlight where the changes are occurring. We will use national statistics to monitor changes across each priority area, as well as to look at changes related

to specific projects. We will use data going back over a 5-year period, initially starting in 2018.³⁵

We will also work with local delivery organisations to review any data or evidence they collect and gather **data and evidence from other sources** such as academic research and evidence reviews. We will collect evidence of best practice where it is not possible to evaluate individual projects (e.g., where advice and guidance has been provided to external bodies to improve their ways of working with women).

How we will address data gaps

We currently have a wide range of national data, which is updated quarterly and split by sex (i.e. male and female). The Ministry of Justice also plans to publish an Evaluation and Prototyping Strategy that reflects our strong commitment to maintaining and developing a robust evidence base that can tell us what works, for who, how and why. We have an ‘open by default’ commitment relating to publication of evaluations, including interventions for female offenders.

However, we know that there are gaps in our data and evidence that we are working to address in the following ways:

- We are organising a cross Government Analytical Working Group for work that includes female offenders. Members will be able to share findings from their work with the group.
- We worked on improving data for the most recent Women in the Criminal Justice System statistical publication³⁶ (published in November 2022), including the publication of a dashboard that includes more detailed data breakdowns.
- We are working closely with our governance group and other external stakeholders to identify new evidence sources that will help inform our understanding of outcomes for female offenders.
- We have commissioned an evidence review exploring how ethnic minority and foreign national women experience disparities within the criminal justice system. This will help to identify with more certainty what disparities exist and identify areas where further work is needed.

³⁵ Most of our published data is reported with a 1-year time lag. We will initially provide data from 2018–2022.

³⁶ Women and the Criminal Justice System 2021 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

How we will report on progress

Updates on data and evidence will be provided through a publicly available GOV.UK page. New data and evidence will be provided as it becomes available. We will provide updates every six months at a minimum.

The platform will include:

- National statistics
- Data from relevant statistical publications
- Published survey data
- Published evaluations
- Other research publications

Scope

This delivery plan covers all adult women in or at risk of contact with the criminal justice system and its geographical scope covers England and Wales.

The Welsh Context

Justice services in Wales are delivered by a range of local, regional, and national agencies working together. While the UK Government retains responsibility for justice and policing, most services related to the wellbeing and resilience of women in Wales have been devolved to the Welsh Government.

The complexity of the landscape in Wales means that Justice in Wales is delivered as a partnership between devolved and non-devolved organisations. To support this the UK and Welsh Governments developed the Blueprint for Female Offending³⁷ (May 2019). It sets the framework for devolved and non-devolved services to work together to deliver efficient and effective services to ensure positive outcomes for both individuals and the community.

In light of this joint work, which aligns with the principles of this delivery plan, progress in Wales will largely be delivered and reported against the framework of the Blueprint rather than this delivery plan.

³⁷ Ministry of Justice and Welsh Government (2019). Female Offending Blueprint for Wales. Available at: <https://gov.wales/supporting-female-offenders>

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