

## ***Frequently Asked Questions - Residential Women's Centre (Ministry of Justice)***

### **What is the Residential Women's Centre?**

The Residential Women's Centre is a 12-bed centre, which will provide local women who have committed low level offences with specialist support to address the root causes of their offending behaviour.

### **What sort of women will live at the Centre?**

Women from the Swansea area who have committed low level offences will be considered. They will be assessed to ensure they do not present a risk of harm to the public and that they will benefit from the services on offer. The women will have agreed to engage with the opportunity and the court will decide that this is the best option for them.

### **What is the Centre made up of?**

The Residential Women's Centre will provide a home for 12 women who will stay for up to 12 weeks at a time. In addition, it will provide day services for other local women in the community. The day centre provision will be on an appointment basis so there will be a limited number of women attending at any given time.

### **Who will run the Residential Women's Centre?**

The Residential Women's Centre will be staffed 24/7 with Probation Service staff who are trained and experienced in working with women in contact with the Criminal Justice System.

The Residential Women's Centre would like to build and maintain positive relationships with the local community. We expect this to continue through the development of the site and when the Centre opens.

The Residential Women's Centre team is working with probation professionals, women with experience of the justice system, key local partners and the local South Wales Police Designing Out Crime team to develop the Centre.

### **What will the women be doing at the Centre?**

During their stay at the Centre resident women will have a busy timetable. They will attend interventions as required to help them address the causes of their offending behaviour, for example one-to-one mental health therapy, counselling to address their trauma from previous abuse and support to overcome addictions.

The women will be encouraged to take part in additional activities going on at the Centre such as exercise classes, gardening, cooking and other wellbeing interventions, which will help address their needs and prepare them for leaving the Centre and settling back into life in the local community.

The service will also provide longer-term support for women to help them find a job and maintain family relationships as they transition from the Centre to life back in their communities.

### **What restrictions will there be on the women living at the Centre?**

Women will agree to a behaviour agreement when they join the Centre. This will include rules about their behaviour on and off the site. There will be a strict nighttime curfew and the site will be drug and alcohol free. Failure to comply will lead to action being taken such as their place being withdrawn and a return to court.

### **Will family members of the women be able to visit? If so, how will this be managed and where will it take place?**

Yes, but all visits will be pre-arranged and visitors will need to be approved by the Centre. The Centre will provide family rooms for visits as well as video conferencing

facilities, and women will have access to phones to help them to keep in touch with their families.

### **Will children be able to stay with their mothers at the Centre?**

The Residential Women's Centre will support women to maintain contact with children, their families and local communities by encouraging contact and visits as appropriate. During the first 12 months after opening we will be considering how we could accommodate children with their mums. This will be done on a case-by-case basis and will take into account both the needs of the child and the mother.

### **Is the Residential Women's Centre a type of prison?**

No, the Residential Women's Centre is not a prison. It is a women's centre with a residential provision providing effective, holistic support for vulnerable women already living within the Swansea area.

There are many examples of women's centres in towns and cities across England and Wales. Some women's centres also have accommodation onsite or nearby in order to provide more intensive support. Our model will focus on women in contact with the justice system and is based on existing best practice.

### **How will safety and security be managed?**

We have considered the neighbours of the Residential Women's Centre and want them to be confident that the Centre will be managed effectively. Probation Service staff who will be working at the Centre 24/7 have considerable experience working with women who have committed offences. In addition, there will be a strict policy of no alcohol or drugs onsite and a zero-tolerance approach to anti-social behaviour.

There will be a number of security measures including CCTV on the outside of the building, appropriate-lit entrances (in accordance with environmental regulations) and alarm systems. The residential unit will be staffed 24/7, the Centre will have a

night-time curfew as well as individuals potentially having individual curfews as part of their court order. Pre-agreed visitors will only be allowed to visit at set times.

The Centre will work with neighbours and local businesses to ensure any concerns are dealt with promptly by the Centre and reported to the local neighbourhood policing teams where required.

Plans for the Residential Women's Centre have included early consultation with the local neighbourhood police and the Centre will continue to work closely with them.

### **How will an increase in traffic be managed?**

It is not anticipated that there will be an increase in traffic from the previous use of the site. Residents at the site will not have vehicles, and part of our commitment to the environment will be for residents, staff and Centre users to access the site by public transport, bike or by walking, wherever possible.

### **What is the purpose of having a Residential Women's Centre within the local community?**

Women attending the Centre will be from the Swansea area. The Residential Women's Centre will enable women to stay closer to those who support them, in a safe environment, so that they can focus on the task of making positive changes to their lives and support them to live crime free lives. Evidence shows that maintaining family and community relationships is an important factor in preventing re-offending.

### **What are the benefits to hosting a Residential Women's Centre in the community?**

There are a number of benefits to hosting a Residential Women's Centre at this specific location including:

- **Reducing crime** – the Centre will help prevent further crime by addressing women's needs linked to their offending, which in turn will prevent further offending and lead to safer communities.

- **Reduction of the impact on local services** – the Centre will promote joined up working of local services, bringing together justice, health, housing providers, substance misuse services and local charities. Evidence shows that support from women’s centres can reduce demands on services such as health and housing by enabling more survivors of abuse to access support and reduce the number of children entering the care system.
- **Keeping local families together** – keeping women close to home enables them to stay close to their family and children. As well as supporting the women in changing their lives, this will have a positive impact on their children, reducing the effect of having a mother or loved one imprisoned a long way from home.
- **Improving the wellbeing and life outcomes for local women and their families** - by improving the skills, health (mental and physical) and relationships of women, they are more likely to become productive members of local communities.

### **Why has Swansea been chosen to host the Residential Women’s Centre?**

- For adult women, the South Wales Police Force Area has the highest number of women sentenced to immediate custody of 12 months or less in Wales. 145 women were given such sentences in the year ending June 2022, which is 67% of the 217 women sent to prison for short term sentences across Wales over the same period.
- Swansea has a high number of women who offend. The women who will be attending the Centre are already living within the Swansea area and hosting the Centre in Swansea means that it will be operating at or near capacity.
- Swansea has a long-standing history of supporting vulnerable people in the community. The Residential Women’s centre will add to this, providing access to the services required to help vulnerable women turn their lives around.

### **Why has Trehafod been chosen as the site for the Residential Women’s Centre?**

The Ministry of Justice carried out an extensive site search, working closely with a number of key partners including Welsh Government, Police and Crime Commissioners, Local Authorities and third sector organisations, to find a suitable site for the Centre.

The criteria includes; affordability, accessibility by public transport, access to existing services and meeting the requirements of the Centre in terms of building size, availability of outdoor space, and strong local partnerships.

The Ministry of Justice considered sites in other areas of South Wales, however none of the available properties were deemed suitable. Trehafod provides a space that meets the above requirements.

### **Why are these women not being sent to prison?**

The women who will be attending the Residential Women's Centre do not need to be sent to prison as the offences they have committed and the risk they pose to others means they are suitable to receive a community sentence.

Evidence suggests women who are supported by justice organisations and women's centres in the community are less likely to reoffend. These women are better supported on a robust community sentence, avoiding the damaging effects of being sent away to prison for such short periods of time, such as disruptions to family life, negative impacts on children and increased suffering of mental health conditions.

The impact on women from Wales is exacerbated by the fact that there are no prisons for women in Wales (and currently no plans to build any). If sentenced to custody, they can find themselves a long way from their home and families which has a negative impact on their rehabilitation.

**The Ministry of Justice applied for planning permission for the Residential Women's Centre as classification C2A, which is the same as it would be for a prison, does this mean that there is an intention or risk that the property could be turned into a prison at a later date?**

The MoJ understands the concerns of local people surrounding the classification of the application (C2A). There is no intention to move away from this being a Residential Women's Centre, and if Planning and Environment Decisions Wales (PEDW) approve the application then the MoJ would have no objection to PEDW imposing a restrictive condition on the use of the site that reflects our proposals.

### **What consultation has been done with the local community?**

When the initial planning application was submitted, the MoJ followed the required statutory and local authority planning guidelines in relation to local community consultation. As a result of the nature of concerns during the consultation stage of the application the MoJ undertook additional engagement with local councillors and the community as a means of seeking to answer some of those concerns. This included a letter drop to approximately 300 local houses, a day-long drop-in session near to Trehafod, ongoing engagement and response to incoming public enquiries and preparing an FAQ document, which was emailed to councillors to share with local people, handed out at the drop-in session, emailed to local residents who have opted in to receive more information and has also been made available on-line.

The MoJ has kept local residents, councillors, the local authority and local police up-to-date with developments including site maintenance and next steps for the project. The MoJ plans to continue keeping residents and local stakeholders up-to-date at each phase and will incorporate community relations in any future developments.

### **What is the status around the planning permission for the Trehafod site?**

The MoJ submitted a planning application for development of the site to Swansea Local Authority in July 2022. On 4<sup>th</sup> October 2022, our planning application was determined by the Swansea planning committee. Despite the Planning Officer's recommendation to approve the application, the application was refused by the planning committee. The reasons were residential amenity, and fear of crime and anti-social behaviour.

The MoJ has since been considering the reasons for refusal, seeking advice and considering what the next steps might be. With careful consideration, we have decided to appeal the planning committee's decision via Planning and Environment Decisions Wales (PEDW).

**For more information please contact a member of the Residential Women's Centre team at [RWCWales@justice.gov.uk](mailto:RWCWales@justice.gov.uk)**