



Women's Justice Board Minute

Held on 21 January 2025

Attendees

- Lord Timpson (Chair), Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending, Ministry of Justice
- Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice – Rt. Hon. Shabana Mahmood MP (agenda item 1 only)
- Claire Fielder, Director of Youth Justice and Offender Policy, Ministry of Justice
- Dame Vera Baird, Hon Professor at LSE, ex Victims' Commissioner
- Michaela Booth, National Lead for Patient and Family Engagement, Practice Plus
- Bernie Bowen-Thomson, Chief Executive, Safer Wales
- Anne Fox, Chief Executive, Clinks
- Kate Green, Deputy Mayor of Greater Manchester for Policing and Crime
- Dr Tom McNeil, Chief Executive, JABBS Foundation
- Dr Shona Minson, Research Associate, Centre for Criminology, Oxford
- Pia Sinha, Chief Executive, Prison Reform Trust
- Katy Swaine Williams, research and policy consultant (currently Hibiscus and Centre for Women's Justice)

Apologies

- Lady Edwina Grosvenor, Founder and Chair of One Small Thing

Agenda Item 1: Opening Remarks and Introduction

1. Lord Timpson welcomed members to the Board and facilitated a round of introductions.
2. Lord Chancellor delivered opening remarks¹ setting out the Board's purpose and ambition, to reduce the number of women in prison and increase the number supported effectively in the community.

¹ The transcript of the Lord Chancellor's remarks can be found here:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/lord-chancellors-opening-remarks-to-the-first-meeting-of-the-womens-justice-board>



Agenda Item 2: Practical Considerations and Terms of Reference

3. Board members emphasised the importance of collaborative working and drawing upon each members specialist expertise and knowledge to champion particular priorities and deliver results.
4. There was a discussion on how to work effectively with delivery mechanisms (particularly the Partnership Delivery Group), with a focus on ensuring conversations inform delivery.
5. Members supported the four identified initial areas of focus in the Terms of Reference: early intervention and diversion, community solutions, pregnant women and mothers with young children and young adult women.
6. There was a discussion on whether the priority areas should include under 18-year-olds, with agreement to focus on 18-25-year-olds for now due to the separate youth custody system. This could be revisited as work progresses.
7. Members raised the need to not only look at and engage with Intensive Supervision Courts (ISC)/Problem Solving Courts (PSC) but also other courts (such as family courts) and with the judiciary. They also raised the need to recognise the link between the family justice system and the criminal justice system (CJS), noting that many solutions lay outside the CJS.
8. The importance of aligning efforts with work on tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG) was emphasised. VAWG needed to be captured in the Board's early priorities, particularly with the link to the manifesto commitment.
9. The need for the Board's work to specifically include Black, minoritised and migrant women was also emphasised by non-Governmental members of the Board.
10. Members agreed the Board's work needs to be evidence led and look at long-term solutions. Given the spending review, it was agreed the Board considers work up to 2029, but also beyond that given the complexities of the system.

Agenda Item 3: Roundtable Discussion

11. Lord Timpson chaired a discussion on the Board's initial priorities and potential opportunities.
12. During discussion on early intervention and diversion, the following points were made:
 - i. Examples of good diversion practice were highlighted alongside the importance of taking a relational approach and promoting opportunities for police to see the benefits of community based diversion.



- ii. Evidence existed of positive outcomes of voluntary engagement with diversion schemes.
 - iii. Drivers of women's offending were well-evidenced, including adverse childhood experiences, poverty and VAWG.
 - iv. Women could be diverted from the CJS at different points, including at point of sentencing. Diversion before police involvement should be considered as well as potential for diversion after a first offence. Role of local authorities, schools, health and other agencies in identifying women and girls in the pipeline to CJS and intervening to divert them before police involvement was noted.
 - v. It was suggested Police and Crime Commissioner funding should be tied to effective diversion. Also interest in looking at how police-initiated diversion could be incentivised.
 - vi. The link between VAWG and women's offending was highlighted. A question was asked about how, when a woman entered police custody, they were diverted into relevant support services if they disclosed they were a victim?
 - vii. The need for trauma-informed training for police, especially regarding women charged with Assault of an Emergency Worker, was highlighted.
 - viii. The role of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services and the Home Office in increasing the effectiveness of police-initiated diversion was noted as was the need to ensure Liaison & Diversion services are operating effectively for women.
 - ix. Need to consider whether changes in legislation were required to, for example, to ensure women-specific provision or to provide a suitable defence for women subject to domestic abuse or coercive control.
 - x. Current work outside the CJS noted that could provide useful learning, such as successful models of early help in the whole family space, including in kinship and foster care
 - xi. The need to develop a common set of success metrics on women in the CJS, to enable progress to be measured.
13. During the discussion on community solutions, the following points were made:
- i. There was a data gap in terms of how magistrates are sentencing women. To make real progress magistrates would need to give more community sentences.
 - ii. The need to improve sentencer confidence and trust in alternatives to custody was emphasised.



- iii. The problem of subjectivity within sentencer decision-making was raised and how different members of the judiciary may view the seriousness of cases differently. The importance of understanding the consequences of sentencing decisions was highlighted, with a focus on magistrates being given the opportunity to understand the outcomes of different decisions.
- iv. A desire to consider how up-tariffing affects women and to explore opportunities for deferred sentencing.
- v. A desire to look at good practice internationally and in the UK (including PSCs). PSC models worked successfully where they were multi-agency and had local judicial leadership. There was transferrable learning from PSC models for developing whole system approaches.
- vi. There was transferable learning from specialist domestic abuse courts, family drug and alcohol courts and youth courts as they involve multi-agency working.
- vii. There could be issues with community sentence treatment requirements (CSTRs) where there are multiple intersecting needs. Evidence was available on what comprises an effective CSTR.
- viii. Important that the purpose of community solutions was understood and what they aimed to achieve. Community pay back could result in further discrimination, stigma and exclusion from society.
- ix. Support provided during a community sentence needed to extend beyond the time period of a community sentence, noting women's services fill a large gap in provision, including specific health support.
- x. Evidence about the effectiveness of women's centre provision needed to be shown in a more granular way.
- xi. Needed to explore options that could result in rapid change, for example, legislation to encourage the use of community sentences.
- xii. Needed to investigate the effectiveness of pre-sentence reports for women.

Agenda Item 4: Next Steps & AOB

- 14. Lord Timpson thanked members for their attendance, summarised the discussion and emphasised that members should take time to reflect on the meeting and send in any referenced examples and evidence.
- 15. Claire Fielder stated that the Secretariat would consider next steps for the workstreams and logistics for future meetings and engagement.



Action 1: The Board endorsed the initial priorities for the Board and agreed to update the Terms of Reference in line with key areas discussed.

Action 2: The Board agreed to developing workstreams for the Board and the supporting Women's Justice Partnership Delivery Group around the four initial areas of focus. To support this, members agreed to provide additional views on areas not discussed in detail in the meeting (i.e. pregnant women, mothers with young children and young adult women) and provide the Secretariat with evidence of best practice and learning.

Action 3: The Board requested that a plan for wider engagement with key internal and external stakeholders be developed by the Secretariat for agreement.