

Women's Justice Board Minute

Held on 29 April 2025

Attendees

- Lord Timpson (Chair), Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending, Ministry of Justice
- Claire Fielder, Director, Youth Justice and Offender Policy, Ministry of Justice
- Laura Thompson, Interim Deputy Director, Women in the Criminal Justice System
- 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
- Kate Green, Deputy Mayor of Greater Manchester for Policing and Crime
- Lady Edwina Grosvenor, Founder and Chair of One Small Thing
- 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)
- Rt Hon David Gauke, Chair of the Independent Sentencing Review (attended for Agenda Item 4 only)

Apologies

- Anne Fox, Chief Executive, Clinks

Welcome

1. Lord Timpson welcomed Board members to the meeting and formally introduced Laura Thompson, as the Ministry of Justice's new Interim Deputy Director, Women in the Criminal Justice System.

Agenda Item 1: Action log and update on activity to date

2. Laura Thompson provided an overview of progress. Key achievements were as follows:
 - i. Holding the first Partnership Delivery Group (PDG) meeting in late March



- ii. Developing a long list of deliverables with Board members, on which the PDG provided feedback.

Agenda Item 2: Next steps for delivery and ways of working

3. Claire Fielder led a discussion on next steps for the Board, including finalising the deliverables and taking them to the PDG for government departments and external members to action.
4. The following areas were covered:
 - i. **Engagement:** The importance of meaningful stakeholder engagement at a Board level and at an official and ministerial level was stressed. There was a desire for a wide range of stakeholder groups to be incorporated into engagement planning, including the academic and legal sectors and key groups such as victims. There was also a desire from members to be kept updated with relevant work, including the Independent Review of Criminal Courts and Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) policy work.
 - ii. **Workstreams:** Some members felt that working on four distinctive workstreams (i.e. early intervention and diversion, community solutions, pregnant women and mothers of dependent children, and young adult women) was restrictive at times. Claire Fielder clarified that the workstreams model for organising the Board's work remained flexible and open to refinement and invited suggestions on alternative approaches. It was acknowledged that informal monthly meetings that Board members were having between meetings would be helpful in maintaining connectivity across the workstreams.
 - iii. **PDG:** Members expressed an interest in being involved in cross government conversations on the deliverables and for opportunities for to and from between the Board and PDG/other government departments when developing the deliverables.
 - iv. **Funding:** Members enquired if savings (e.g. if in future a women's prison were to be closed) could support women in the CJS, such as funding specialist probation staff. Lord Timpson highlighted that funding was subject to spending reviews and allocations, stressing the need for the Board's work to focus on financially sensible, low-cost or cost-neutral suggestions.

Agenda Item 3: Workstream prioritisation

5. Lord Timpson chaired a discussion on refining a longlist of deliverables that had been developed by WJB members and officials across the Board's four workstreams. The aim of the discussion was to agree a shortlist of deliverables for each workstream to prioritise for delivery, taking account of previous comments on prioritisation by WJB members and feedback from PDG members.



6. Members agreed that there were too many deliverables and some with low potential impact. They expressed a desire to distil the delivery priorities even further and work on “big ticket items”/ “circuit breakers”, such as those that could reduce arrests, remand, breach and recall.
7. Lord Timpson noted that the Board would need to build in a level of flexibility when developing priorities to be able to tie in with the Spending Review and other work such as the Independent Sentencing Review and the Independent Review of the Criminal Courts.
8. On **early intervention and diversion**:
 - i. It was agreed that work to divert women away from the CJS should include repeat offending.
 - ii. Members emphasised the importance of:
 - a. Women's services expertise in enabling early intervention and diversion.
 - b. Behaviour change and encouraging police to understand their role in de-escalation, through appropriate training.
 - c. Police consideration of women's specific circumstances in decision-making and improving how police responded to women who are both suspects and victims.
 - d. Accountability and performance measures in ensuring appropriate police-initiated diversion.
 - e. Integration and join-up between L&D services and local health agencies to ensure services worked most effectively for women in or at risk of contact with the CJS. Some members felt current provision did not fully understand or respond to the needs of women, particularly needs that were less visible.
 - f. Promoting Whole System Approaches (WSAs) that enabled early intervention and diversion, building on evidence from existing work such as the Greater Manchester Model.
 - g. Shared strategic needs assessments for women in local areas. The Women's Risk Needs assessment was highlighted in having a role to play in facilitating join up across services working with women in contact or at risk of contact with the CJS.
 - iii. Members agreed that the Board should take forward work to:
 - a. Support policy-initiated diversion, including exploring opportunities to increase accountability amongst police forces.
 - b. Ensure coverage of health support for women on entry to the CJS, including effective Liaison & Diversion pathways.
 - c. Promote WSAs, including exploring opportunities to support co-commissioning.
9. On **community solutions**:
 - i. Members noted that:



- a. Magistrates did not always have a good knowledge of community options available for women. Early training for magistrates on the needs of women in the CJS and community options to support them was seen as crucial.
 - b. There was learning from existing Problem Solving Court (PSC) models that would be helpful in the Board's work, as well as learning from Scotland. Scotland PSCs ran on a different model, including using deferred sentences.
 - c. Work on diversion by probation (breach and recall) would be considered post-Sentencing Review.
 - ii. Members agreed that the Board should take forward work to:
 - a. Understand barriers to community sentences and develop actionable solutions.
 - b. Support existing MoJ initiatives to fully account for women's needs, such as the Bail Information Service.
 - c. Promote the use of PSCs for women.
 - d. Promote existing community-based support services for women.
 - e. Build practitioner (including magistrate) confidence on community options and make it easier for them to choose community options.
10. On **pregnant women and mothers of dependent children**:
- i. Members commended positive collaboration with HMPPS on this workstream.
 - ii. Members highlighted:
 - a. That there were significant data gaps on mothers and their children in the CJS. Lord Timpson mentioned the MoJ's push for digital solutions and encouraged the Board to consider technological options to support with any data gathering on mothers.
 - b. The need for identifying what improved outcomes would look like for women on probation.
 - iii. Members agreed that the Board should take forward work to:
 - a. Understand the current data picture on mothers in the CJS and identify and fill any key gaps.
 - b. Explore opportunities to achieve improved outcomes for pregnant women and mothers with dependent children under probation supervision, seeking the input of women with lived experience.
 - c. Support access to suitable accommodation for women in the CJS and their children.
11. On **young adult women**:
- i. It was noted that:



- a. Young women were often overlooked in youth crime initiatives, which tended to focus on young men. It was agreed a bespoke approach for this cohort was needed.
- b. There may be opportunities to align work with the Home Office, particularly given the Government's focus on tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).
- c. Racial disparities in the criminal justice system are echoed amongst younger age groups.
- ii. Members agreed that the Board should take forward work to:
 - a. Explore the distinct ways in which young women become criminalised, supported by existing evidence from women's community and voluntary sector organisations. Strengthen the response to young women in relation to areas such as VAWG, modern slavery and sexual exploitation.
 - b. Consider the specific needs of young women with experience of local authority care.
 - c. Support the diversion of young women away from the CJS at the police stage, aligning with the Board's work on early intervention and diversion.

Agenda Item 4: Update on the Sentencing Review

- 12. The Rt Hon David Gauke, Chair of the Independent Sentencing Review, attended for a closed session covering the work of the review relating to female offenders.
- 13. Lord Timpson noted that the Sentencing Review would be published soon and committed to providing clear communications to Board members on government plans following the review.

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- 14. The Sentencing Guidelines Bill in relation to pregnant women was discussed. The need to consider racial disparities in the system through the Board's policy work was also raised by members.

Close

- 15. JT thanked members for coming and expressed gratitude to the meeting organisers. The next meeting was confirmed to be in the diary for late July.

Action 1: The Board agreed to further refine the deliverables list and content, with the support of officials and in line with the workstreams prioritisation discussion.

Action 2: The Secretariat would engage with the PDG to agree ownership of each of the deliverables and next steps for delivery. The Secretariat would



facilitate opportunities for Board members to be involved in cross-government and PDG conversations on the Board's deliverables, as appropriate.

Action 3: The Secretariat would ensure members are kept informed of relevant developments on the Sentencing Review, Criminal Courts Review, and other relevant areas of interest.

Action 4: The Secretariat would progress planning on wider engagement to support with the delivery of the Board's aims, taking into account member views and requests for engagement activity with specific sectors and groups.