

**Women's
Justice
Board**

Women's Justice Board recommendations for reducing women's imprisonment

Report to the Deputy Prime Minister and Lord Chancellor

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Introduction – challenges and solutions

Women are a minority in the criminal justice system (CJS), comprising just 4% of the prison population and 17% of those serving community sentences.¹ The case for a gendered approach to women in, or at risk of, contact with the CJS – different to that in use for the male majority – is well documented. The seminal report by Baroness Corston, *A review of women with particular vulnerabilities in the Criminal Justice System* (2007) concluded that women had been marginalised in a system largely designed by men for men for far too long, and it was time to bring about a radical change. The report proposed a women-centred, holistic and individual approach and the government's 2018 Female Offender Strategy built on that foundation.

Whilst acknowledging some progress, we lament that the radical change Baroness Corston sought has not come about. Here we set out the steps to be taken to return to the Corston Plan and build upon it, and we welcome the Deputy Prime Minister and Lord Chancellor's request that we make our recommendations in this report.

Women in contact with the CJS are often among the most vulnerable in society.² Many have multiple and complex needs, often derived from the traumatising experience of domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG). They are often primary caregivers and many have fallen through the safety net of statutory services. The government aims to reduce the women's prison population sufficiently to close a women's prison, in other words about 400 fewer women in prison at any one time. This is welcome as prison is ineffective at reducing crime and often very harmful. At the same time, the women's prison estate is under pressure. We need to divert more women from prison, support more in the community and prevent far more from entering the CJS at all.

The Corston vision, which we are determined to see taken forward, is to end women's imprisonment in all but the more serious cases. In most cases women should be supported in the community to overcome the causes of their offending, keeping families together, tackling VAWG and ill health, and improving life chances. We must also pay attention to longer sentenced women. Recent reviews remind us how women and girls who suffer abuse and exploitation can find themselves punished rather than protected.³ Putting a stop to needless and damaging criminalisation of victims requires changes to systems and cultures.

We must place women's insights at the heart of this work. There are structural barriers to support and justice for Black, Asian, minoritised and migrant women – including trafficking victims – resulting in unacceptable disparities in treatment and outcomes.⁴ Women's Justice

¹ Ministry of Justice and HM Prison and Probation Service, 29 January 2026, [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly – July to September 2025](#)

² Sheeran, E. (2022) [Identifying Women's Pathways to Offending and the Primary Prevention and Early Intervention Opportunities for Women at Risk of Offending in Wales](#)

³ See for example: Dame Vera Baird KC (2024) [The Baird Inquiry: An independent report into the experience of people who are arrested and taken into custody by Greater Manchester Police with a focus on women and girls](#); Casey, L. (2023) [Baroness Casey Review: Final Report – An independent review into the standards of behaviour and internal culture of the Metropolitan Police Service](#)

⁴ Women's Justice Reimagined (2025) [Ending racial disproportionality in the criminal justice system: recommendations from the Women's Justice Reimagined partnership and the APPG on women affected by the criminal justice system](#)

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Board members are committed to working with government and frontline agencies to address this, using an intentionally anti-racist approach.

Many proposals in the Independent Sentencing Review (ISR) and Independent Review of the Criminal Courts (IRCC) will contribute to reducing women's imprisonment, provided focused attention is given to gender-informed implementation. The government's missions on halving VAWG and ensuring safer streets will help prevent some of the causes of women's offending. Investment in early help for families, work by Mayoral Combined Authorities and in Wales to provide crisis support through one 'front door', and local plans connecting services to new health initiatives such as neighbourhood health hubs under the NHS 10 year plan⁵, will all contribute to our aims as long as they are closely linked with local women's specialist services run by women for women, providing gender-specific, trauma-informed and culturally appropriate support for women facing compounding disadvantages.⁶ Success will require consistent investment in these services, including smaller organisations supporting Black, Asian, minoritised and migrant women. Impact will be strongest where regional, Welsh and locality-based progress is recognised and built upon, such as the Women's Justice Blueprint in Wales. Delivery must align with devolved responsibilities, alongside Wales-specific and Mayoral governance and financial frameworks, to embed a clear focus on women's distinct needs within existing local structures.

We must advance criminal justice practitioners' understanding of the drivers of women's offending, particularly VAWG and the impact of trauma, and place tougher expectations on them to work closely with women's specialist services, so that from the earliest stages of a woman's proximity to the CJS, information about her circumstances is gathered to inform decisions, enabling the best opportunities for diversion into support, rather than criminalisation and imprisonment.

Expanding Intensive Supervision Courts (ISCs) will improve women's wellbeing and reduce crime and imprisonment. We must ensure there are options everywhere for women to serve their sentence in the community with specialist support, remaining with their children wherever possible. We must improve the criminal justice response to pregnant women and mothers, always considering the impact of decisions on their children and disrupting cycles of intergenerational harm. We must develop a tailored approach for young women⁷, who are particularly prone to being remanded, and to self-harming in custody. We need to expand women-specific supported housing, capitalising on government investment. We must make more effective use of NHS Liaison and Diversion (L&D) and develop stronger gender-specific pathways into health services. We must improve opportunities for rehabilitation, sentence progression and resettlement for imprisoned women. We must build on the progress seen in devolved areas such as Manchester, Birmingham and Wales.

It has been government policy since 2018 to reduce women's imprisonment and increase the use of community solutions, using a whole system approach centred around the provision of gender-specific, trauma-informed, holistic women's services in the community, using a problem-solving approach. Where this approach has been implemented effectively, it has reduced women's imprisonment. Effective and promising work is being done in some areas,

⁵ HM Government press release, 9 September 2025, '[Millions of people to benefit from healthcare on their doorstep](#)'

⁶ For established examples see National Women's Justice Coalition: [Women's Services Map](#)

⁷ See for example: Agenda/Alliance for Youth Justice (2022) '["We've not given up" – Young women surviving the criminal justice system](#)

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with strong leadership from police, probation, local government and women's specialist services, despite resource constraints. However, implementation has been patchy. There is no statutory underpinning of this approach for women (unlike in the youth justice system) and there has been limited central support, communications and governance to support voluntary implementation. Improving this picture requires strong senior government leadership, to drive work towards shared aims across government departments and in partnership with local agencies, informed by disaggregated data.

Third sector women's specialist services are best placed to build long-term, trusting relationships with women who too often have been let down. They provide exceptional social value by plugging the gap in overstretched statutory services and helping women to engage with treatment, support and the criminal justice process. Ensuring the women's sector receives a fair share of investment in community rehabilitation, accessible to the smallest providers, will increase capacity and resilience in this vital sector.⁸

There is no 'silver bullet' solution to these challenges but we believe implementing our recommendations, based on the above principles, would significantly reduce women's imprisonment.

⁸ See for example: Women's Budget Group & National Women's Justice Coalition (2025) [The Women's Centre Model – The financial case for alternatives to prison](#); Women in Prison (2022) [The value of women's centres](#); Women's Budget Group (2020) [The case for sustainable funding for women's centres](#); NEF (2008), [Unlocking value: how we all benefit from investing in alternatives to prison for women offenders](#)

Women's Justice Reform Programme

We have proposed that a time-limited Women's Justice Reform Programme should be established for this work, led jointly by a dedicated team of Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and Welsh Government officials. We believe this additional resource is needed to drive the reform agenda, given the demands of existing 'business as usual' work and the scale of ambition of the reforms. The programme team should have oversight of delivery of all the actions proposed in this report and lead on completion of the three twelve-month projects set out in Recommendation 1. To ensure consistent delivery, we propose a jointly agreed ministerial governance model enabling structured bilateral engagement between UK Government departments and Welsh Government portfolios.

Implementing the whole system approach

Reducing women's imprisonment through a whole system approach means taking every opportunity to refer women in, or at risk of, contact with the CJS into community-based, women-specific support. This includes suitable temporary accommodation where needed and pathways into permanent housing and healthcare, particularly for harmful substance use and mental health needs. This requires strong 'buy in' from multiple local agencies, ideally under collective governance reporting into the Local Criminal Justice Board. The following table summarises the stages at which there are opportunities to divert women and reduce the risk of harmful imprisonment.

Stage	Opportunity for diversion
Before contact with the CJS	Ensuring access to women-specific support for women at risk of contact with the CJS – including distinct support for Black, Asian, minoritised and migrant women, and for young women – allows for early intervention and prevention before contact with the CJS.
Point of arrest	Decision to divert from prosecution where possible, with referral into support – through non-arrest/outcome 22/conditional caution/other out of court disposal or deferred prosecution or Decision to prosecute where necessary, with referral into support, providing opportunity to demonstrate capacity for rehabilitation before trial and sentencing.
Court hearing on bail/remand	Decision to bail with referral into support instead of remanding into prison – focus on accommodation needed.
Trial process	Women defendants with specialist support will be better placed to participate in proceedings and provide contextual information to help prosecutors, defence lawyers and the court take proper account of the context for their alleged offence.
Sentencing	Decision to defer sentencing or impose Community Order or Suspended Sentence Order where possible, with attached support. ISCs key here. Where imprisonment cannot be avoided, planning for release can begin at the start of the sentence, with knowledge of the woman's support needs.
Post-release	Effective referral into support as part of pre-release planning, through the gate and post-release, reduces risk of recall and/or reoffending.

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The whole system approach, with women's specialist services at its heart, offers holistic, trauma-informed, gender-specific support through 1:1 keyworker support and a 'one-stop shop' of co-located services, enabling cross-cutting areas of need to be addressed at each stage listed in the table:

- Pregnant women and mothers
- Black, Asian, minoritised and migrant women
- Suitable housing
- Health needs – particularly mental health and harmful substance use
- Victims of domestic abuse, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, trafficking and other forms of VAWG
- Young women, including care leavers
- Poverty and debt
- Education, training and employment

Women's specialist services in the community are fundamental to this approach. Their funding is complex and precarious, while their work is challenging and emotionally demanding. This combination leads to staff turnover, burnout and difficulties with recruitment. Scarce time and resources are spent completing demanding funding applications and reports to funders, reducing the time available for developing service provision. The sector is remarkably creative, effective, dedicated and resilient amid these pressures, but could achieve more with adequate and sustainable funding for its essential work.

Focused work by the Women's Justice Reform Programme to transform the funding of women's specialist services is essential. This must include work to understand the likely impact of the ISR and IRCC recommendations and urgent work to provide short-term, bridging funding supporting referral pathways.

Summary of recommendations

The following recommendations, addressed to MOJ unless otherwise stated, are set out in more detail in the appendix.

Women's Justice Reform Programme

1. The MOJ and Welsh Government should establish a two- to three-year Women's Justice Reform Programme, led jointly by a dedicated team of MOJ and Welsh Government officials, working closely with the MOJ Female Offender policy team, HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) Women's Group and external stakeholders, to provide oversight for delivery of all the actions proposed in this report and to lead three projects over the next year:
 - a. Driving gender-informed implementation of the ISR and IRCC.
 - b. Intensive support for developing local whole system approaches.
 - c. Transforming the funding of women's specialist services and unlocking other sources of support for women.

Anti-racist, intersectional approach to addressing disparities

2. An anti-racist, intersectional approach should be adopted for all this work, to address disparities faced by Black, Asian, minoritised and migrant women, and those with other protected characteristics.

Early intervention, prevention and diversion

3. Introduce incentives, accountability mechanisms and support to ensure all police forces have gender-specific, trauma-informed diversion pathways for women, including a strong focus on reducing arrests and increasing deferred prosecution.
4. Improve scrutiny of, and expand referrals into, the NHS female L&D pathway to ensure consistent, effective practice everywhere.
5. Strengthen decision-making by police and prosecutors about victims of VAWG who are accused of offending and provide effective defences.
6. Address disproportionate criminalisation of women for non-payment of fines resulting from TV licence evasion, Council Tax or truancy.

Community solutions

7. Reduce remand and recall for all women through legislation and focused work under the Women's Justice Reform Programme.
8. Support effective expansion of women's ISCs.
9. Improve resettlement prospects by removing barriers to employment.
10. Conduct a rapid study into the circumstances and needs of longer sentenced women currently in prison, to support individual sentence progression and draw out learning to reduce future imprisonment where appropriate for women accused of more serious offences.

Pregnant women and mothers

11. Legislate to end imprisonment of pregnant women in all but the most exceptional cases; embed and strengthen improvements in care of pregnant women where imprisonment cannot be avoided; develop and promote residential alternatives to custody for pregnant women for use as bail accommodation or as part of a community sentence.
12. Promote non-custodial sentencing of mothers of children under 18 through directions and awareness raising with sentencers.
13. Improve outcomes for pregnant women and mothers in contact with the CJS.

Young adult women

14. Develop and publish a Young Women's Strategy in the next year aimed at preventing young women's entry into the CJS and imprisonment, particularly for care experienced young women and victims of VAWG (including modern slavery, human trafficking and criminal or sexual exploitation), aligning strategically with youth justice reforms and including a strong focus on reducing remand and increasing access to 1:1 support, mentoring and suitable housing.
15. Provide specific health and wellbeing support for young women in contact with the CJS, including those in prison.

Appendix – Recommendations in full

These recommendations are directed at MOJ unless otherwise indicated. Where other government departments (OGDs) will need to be involved, this is indicated in the righthand column.

Women's Justice Reform Programme

Recommendation	OGDs involved
<p>1. The MOJ and Welsh Government should establish a two- to three-year Women's Justice Reform Programme, led jointly by a dedicated team of MOJ and Welsh Government officials, working closely with the MOJ female offender policy team, HMPPS Women's Group and external stakeholders to provide oversight for delivery of all the recommendations in this report, and to lead three priority projects over the next year – including a focus on Black, Asian, minoritised and migrant women, and on young adult women:</p> <p>a. To drive and track gender-informed implementation of the ISR and IRCC for all women: aiming to maximise reductions in imprisonment and mitigate risks. To include proactive measures to ensure sentencers continue to use 'cusp of custody' provisions and impose a Community Order where appropriate.</p> <p>b. To support intensive development of the whole system approach in local areas and develop a toolkit of options for establishing effective, gender-specific accommodation and healthcare pathways, working with HMPPS Women's Group and external stakeholders: (i) intensive support for key stakeholders in high population probation regions to establish or enhance their provision; and (ii) develop a central forum for wider knowledge exchange and provide toolkits to promote effective pathways into accommodation and healthcare.</p> <p>c. To develop and promote proposals to transform funding of women's specialist services and unlock other sources of support for women, drawing on Reducing Reoffending</p>	<p>HM Treasury (UK-wide), with funding delivered through Welsh Government budgets in Wales</p> <p>Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) (England)/Welsh Government Health and Social Services (Wales)</p> <p>Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) (UK-wide), working alongside Welsh Government employability and skills provision in Wales</p> <p>Department for Education (DfE) (England)/Welsh Government Education and Children's Services (Wales)</p> <p>MHCLG (England)/Welsh Government Housing and Local Government functions (Wales)</p> <p>Home Office (England and Wales), working with Welsh Government on devolved prevention and community safety functions</p>

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Recommendation	OGDs involved
<p>Third Sector Advisory Group and Third Sector Strategic Partnership Board, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Financial analysis of prison funding reallocation to address common funding gaps such as women-specific supported accommodation, explore upscaling of social finance models such as the Hope Street model and other work to unlock potential sources of funding and support; ii) Work with Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and with Welsh Government Housing and Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) leads to explore ringfencing a proportion of new social housing investment, including the Social Housing Grant in Wales, to consider solutions like: increasing affordable housing stock for women's refuges run by housing associations (link with Tackling VAWG Strategy); increase step-down housing stock for women progressing through women's services; increase investment in 'live and work' schemes that provide affordable housing for young women.⁹ 	

Anti-racist, intersectional approach to address disparities

Recommendation	OGDs involved
<p>2. An anti-racist, intersectional approach should be applied for all actions in this report to address disparities faced by Black, Asian, minoritised and migrant women, and those with other protected characteristics. This should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Monitoring to identify disparities and measure progress; b. Action, in partnership with women with lived experience and specialist services, to address 	N/A

⁹ St Basil's website, accessed 8 December 2025: [Live and Work](#)

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Recommendation	OGDs involved
<p>any disparities already known about or discovered;</p> <p>c. Introduce rewards and accountability mechanisms to encourage action to address disparities; and</p> <p>d. Commissioning a review of racial disproportionality for women in relation to arrest and sentencing, including focus on assault of emergency worker.</p>	

Early intervention, prevention and diversion

Recommendation	OGDs involved
<p>3. Introduce incentives, accountability mechanisms and support to ensure all police forces have gender-specific, trauma-informed diversion pathways in place for women, including a strong focus on reducing arrests and increasing deferred prosecution:</p> <p>a. Designate diversion and referral to support as positive outcomes under police crime resolution recording rules, to incentivise police and other agencies to use diversion schemes more consistently, including reducing unnecessary arrests and increasing deferred prosecution;</p> <p>b. Require all police forces to implement women's diversion. To facilitate this, we recommend:</p> <p>i) MOJ and Home Office collaborate to create expectations on police forces to have a women's diversion scheme, including changes to HM Inspectorate of Constabulary's inspection framework/incentive mechanisms on police out of court resolutions;</p> <p>ii) Require delivery by women's specialist services in the community, with police acting as reliable referral agent at earliest opportunity;</p>	<p>Home Office (England and Wales), working with Welsh Government on devolved prevention and community safety functions</p> <p>DHSC (England)/Welsh Government Health and Social Services (Wales)</p>

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Recommendation	OGDs involved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> iii) Ensure Police and Crime Commissioners/Deputy Mayors are accountable for commissioning women's services for diversion and convening police and other partners (e.g. health services) to ensure integrated services; and iv) Explore allocating proportion of new probation funding or future Community Rehabilitation Service funding, to fund women's services for diversion. c. All forces to have gender-specific, trauma-informed training to strengthen decision-making amongst all officers and staff, including on young women and victims of VAWG, those who are neurodivergent and to address racial disparities. d. Establish senior leaders in police forces, Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) regions, HM Courts and Tribunals Service regions and regional judicial leads and magistrates' benches on improving the response to women suspects and defendants, including gender-specific diversion and safeguards for victims of VAWG who are suspects or defendants. 	
<p>4. Improve scrutiny of, and expand referrals into, the NHS female Liaison and Diversion pathway to ensure consistent, effective practice everywhere:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Establish women-specific L&D pathway in every custody suite and court and explore other potential settings, such as women's centres, and stronger connections with mental health treatment requirements, neurodevelopment assessment, alignment with harmful substance use and mental health treatment and recovery pathways. b. Enhance the female pathway to timely and appropriate support for all women and expand screening, including requirements for local operational partnership plans to involve women's specialist services, other health agencies and early help initiatives. c. Improve scrutiny of the female NHS L&D pathway, including inspection of L&D provision, tracking of 	<p>Home Office (England and Wales), working with Welsh Government on devolved prevention and community safety functions</p> <p>DHSC (England)/Welsh Government Health and Social Services (Wales)</p>

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Recommendation	OGDs involved
<p>funding allocation, data capture, information sharing, analysis and measurement of outcomes for women.</p> <p>d. Explore new models of assessing women's needs and circumstances, including VAWG, to maximise appropriate diversion.¹⁰</p>	
<p>5. Strengthen decision-making by police and prosecutors about victims of VAWG who are accused of offending, and provide effective defences:¹¹</p> <p>a. Implement a joint police and CPS protocol to improve responses where suspects and defendants are also victims of VAWG, using a context-led, trauma-informed approach in partnership with women's specialist services.</p> <p>b. Legislate to introduce effective defences for victims of domestic abuse who are accused of offending, supporting delivery of a context-led approach which takes proper account of the defendant's experience of abuse.</p>	<p>Home Office (England and Wales), working with Welsh Government on devolved prevention and community safety functions</p>
<p>6. Address disproportionate criminalisation of women for non-payment of fines for TV licence evasion, Council Tax or truancy, strengthening local authority engagement and accountability.</p>	<p>MHCLG (England)/Welsh Government Housing and Local Government functions (Wales)</p> <p>DfE (England)/Welsh Government Education and Children's Services (Wales)</p> <p>Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) (England)/Welsh Government Culture, Sport and Third Sector Portfolios (Wales)</p>

¹⁰ See for example: UK Government (2025), [The health of people in prison, on probation and in the secure NHS estate in England](#); Pemberton, S. et al, (2025) [Women's Risk Needs Assessment UK Validation: Preliminary Findings Report](#)

¹¹ See for example: Centre for Women's Justice (2024) [Effective defences for victims of domestic abuse who are accused of offending](#); O'Loughlin et al (2024) [Defendants as Victims: a scoping review of vulnerability, victimhood and safeguards from charge to conviction](#)

Community solutions

Recommendation	OGDs involved
<p>7. Reduce remand and recall for women through legislation and focused work under the Women's Justice Reform Programme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Ensure national learning is drawn from remand review co-commissioned by HMP&YOI Eastwood Park and Welsh Blueprint, including impact of new Head of Remand post. b. Ensure accountability for taking on learning from HMPPS Women's Group's recall workstreams, including evaluating impact, and embed good practice based on evaluation of Lancashire Women's Centre's recall project in HMP Styal. c. Introduce a stronger presumption against remand in custody for all but the most serious offences, particularly for young adult women in light of high remand rates.¹² d. Incentivise local authorities to work with women's services to strengthen housing and social care pathways at the point of remand decisions and on resettlement. e. Consider legislative and non-legislative options to implement the ISR recommendation to tighten recall threshold so that it is only used to address consistent non-compliance with licence conditions or specific and imminent risk, with a focus on women. May include referrals to breach courts or to community services for additional interventions. An intensive management model could be tested where there is a pattern of 'technical' breaches. Consider Greater Manchester's P3 (Problematic, Persistent and Prolific) Framework. f. Consider recommendations of Recall Reform Coalition, including co-production of licence conditions and improving communication; clearer decision frameworks and independent decision-makers for non-emergencies. 	<p>Home Office (England and Wales), working with Welsh Government on devolved prevention and community safety functions</p> <p>MHCLG (England)/Welsh Government Housing and Local Government functions (Wales)</p>

¹² Sharpe, G. (forthcoming) 'An examination of 'good' staff relationships and understandings of 'safety' and 'security' amongst young adult women in prison.' University of Sheffield, Centre for Criminological Research

Recommendation	OGDs involved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g. Amend legislation to end use of prison as a place of safety, whether or not based on mental health need. h. Strengthen accommodation pathways at point of remand and resettlement (to reduce recall), drawing on promising models for women (e.g. Hope Street) and young people (e.g. London Accommodation Pathfinder¹³). The planned residential women's centre (RWC) in Wales could be a test site for accommodation at point of remand. i. Develop project to reduce remand for migrant women, including focus on improving accommodation pathways. j. Maximise impact of new measures to ensure remand decisions take account of domestic abuse and pregnancy. k. Ensure Bail Information Service has specific focus on women and extend coverage especially on weekends. 	
<p>8. Support effective expansion of women's ISCs to reduce custodial sentencing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Collate best practice to inform policy frameworks, including engagement with Centre for Justice Innovation's networks on women's problem-solving courts¹⁴ and Family Drug and Alcohol Courts. b. Engage with judiciary to raise awareness of these reforms, to explore their appetite to lead a more ambitious programme of future judicial training and leadership. c. Identify suitable areas for further pilot sites, prioritising proposals from collaborations with evidence-led assessments of women's needs; ensure women's specialist services are embedded in pilot sites. 	N/A

¹³ Youth Justice Resource Hub: [London Accommodation Pathfinder and Storyboard](#)

¹⁴ Centre for Justice Innovation (2025) [Problem solving courts for women: an evidence and practice briefing](#)

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Recommendation	OGDs involved
<p>d. Monitor and evaluate impact of women's specialist services that use evidence-led, gendered and trauma-informed needs assessment tools and frameworks in new courts, to identify and promote best practice.</p>	
<p>9. Improve resettlement prospects by removing barriers to employment for women with low-level criminal records: Initiate a rapid cross-departmental review between MOJ, DWP and the Home Office into the impact of low-level criminal records as a barrier to employment for women. Use this to develop and implement a strategy for reducing disclosure of non-material records or changing the law, to support women into work through community sentences where possible, during this Parliament.¹⁵</p>	<p>Home Office (England and Wales), working with Welsh Government on devolved prevention and community safety functions</p> <p>DWP (UK-wide), working alongside Welsh Government employability and skills provision in Wales</p>
<p>10. Conduct a rapid study into the circumstances and needs of longer sentenced women currently in prison, including life-sentenced and Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP)-sentenced women, to support individual sentence progression and draw out learning to reduce future imprisonment where appropriate for women accused of more serious offences. This study should build on earlier research¹⁶ and aim to assist sentence progression for individual women, drawing out learning to improve police and prosecutorial practice, court proceedings and legal defences in these cases, linking with the Law Commission review of homicide. It should include attention to the handling of cases involving defendants who are victims of VAWG and the extent to which this was taken account in proceedings, aiming to reduce unnecessary imprisonment.</p>	<p>N/A</p>

¹⁵ Consider [FairChecks](#) campaign and [Working Chance](#) research as a starting point.

¹⁶ See for example: Hulley, S. (2021) [Defending 'Co-offending' Women: Recognising Domestic Abuse and Coercive Control in 'Joint Enterprise' Cases Involving Women and their Intimate Partners](#); Centre for Women's Justice (2021) [Women who kill: How the state criminalises women we might otherwise be burying](#); Clarke, B. and Chadwick, K. (2020) [Stories of Injustice: The criminalisation of women convicted under joint enterprise laws](#); Prison Reform Trust (2024) [Invisible Women: Understanding women's experiences of long-term imprisonment – Briefing 3: Progression](#)

Pregnant women and mothers

Recommendation	OGDs involved
<p>11. Legislate to remove court powers to imprison women known to be pregnant (on remand, sentence, recall or breach) unless mandated by law or where not doing so would lead to a specific and imminent risk.</p> <p>a. Where imprisonment cannot be avoided, improve safety and wellbeing for pregnant women in prison and their babies by ensuring implementation of the Chief Social Worker's recommendations¹⁷ is embedded and sustained by DfE and MOJ/HMPPS, maximising use of Mother and Baby Units (MBUs), strengthening the perinatal pathway, installing prison-based social workers in every prison and increasing local authority engagement and accountability.</p> <p>b. Facilitate the Prison and Probation Ombudsman's prompt completion of the review of restraint of pregnant women in prison and ensure learning is swiftly implemented and reported on publicly.</p> <p>c. For pregnant women in prison who do not wish to be held in a MBU or are found ineligible following an assessment, consider establishing alternative small units to maximise their safety and wellbeing, and concentrate expertise.</p> <p>d. Intensively support and promote the development and use of residential alternatives to custody for pregnant women at the point of remand, sentencing and post-release, learning from Hope Street, for use as bail accommodation or as part of a Community Order, Suspended Sentence Order or deferred sentencing arrangement. The planned Welsh RWC could be a test site for this provision.</p>	<p>DfE (England)/Welsh Government Education and Children's Services (Wales)</p> <p>DHSC (England)/Welsh Government Health and Social Services (Wales)</p> <p>MHCLG (England)/Welsh Government Housing and Local Government functions (Wales)</p>
<p>12. Promote community sentencing of mothers of children under 18 through directions and awareness raising with sentencers:</p> <p>a. Introduce a specific direction and awareness-raising programme for sentencers not to imprison</p>	<p>DfE (England)/Welsh Government Education and Children's Services (Wales)</p> <p>MHCLG (England)/Welsh Government Housing and</p>

¹⁷ Department for Education (2022) [Applications to mother and baby units in prison: how decisions are made and the role of social work](#)

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Recommendation	OGDs involved
<p>individuals who are the primary carer for a child up to the age of two other than in exceptional circumstances, to reduce maternal separations in the critical first 1001 days of the child's life.</p> <p>b. Promote community sentencing of mothers of children under 18, through engagement with key stakeholders and enhancing pre-sentence reports (and other forms of information provided to the courts) to inform decisions.</p>	<p>Local Government functions (Wales)</p> <p>DHSC (England)/Welsh Government Health and Social Services (Wales)</p>
<p>13. Improve outcomes for pregnant women and mothers throughout the criminal justice process:</p> <p>a. Develop a directory of accommodation and promote with practitioners to inform development of a multi-agency protocol to support pregnant women and mothers in contact with the CJS into suitable accommodation.</p> <p>b. Improve data collection on children of parents in the CJS.</p> <p>c. Introduce a probation policy framework to mirror that used in prisons for women and babies in the first 1001 days, guiding supervision, licence conditions and community order requirements, bail and recall decisions.¹⁸</p>	<p>DfE (England)/Welsh Government Education and Children's Services (Wales)</p> <p>MHCLG (England)/Welsh Government Housing and Local Government functions (Wales)</p>

Young adult women

Recommendation	OGDs involved
<p>14. Develop and publish a Young Women's Strategy in the next year aimed at preventing young women's entry into the CJS and imprisonment, particularly for care experienced young women and victims of VAWG (including modern slavery, human trafficking and criminal or sexual exploitation), using a co-production approach with young adult women, supported by frontline services:</p> <p>a. Work jointly with the new Girls' Justice Strategic Board and DfE review of the National Protocol for</p>	<p>DfE (England)/Welsh Government Education and Children's Services (Wales)</p> <p>DHSC (England)/Welsh Government Health and Social Services (Wales)</p> <p>MHCLG (England)/Welsh Government Housing and</p>

¹⁸ [Birth Companions](#) are developing a First 1001 Days Impact Tool for publication in 2026 which will assist.

Recommendation	OGDs involved
<p>reducing criminalisation of looked after children and care leavers. In Wales, take forward activity through devolved Children's Services and Youth Justice arrangements, aligned with All-Wales governance and safeguarding frameworks.</p> <p>b. Investigate promising approaches to early intervention and prevention and how these can be replicated.</p> <p>c. Improve implementation of whole system approach for young women – increase access to 1:1 support, mentoring, suitable housing and mental health services. Engagement should not be a condition of bail, community order or deferred sentence, as non-compliance is highly likely amongst this group, making imprisonment likely.¹⁹</p> <p>d. Ensure delivery of local partnership plans to connect early intervention agendas with young women's services, maximising impact from other government investments in early intervention²⁰ and community health.²¹</p> <p>e. Foster existing, successful social care innovations that can prevent longer term poor life outcomes and crime, including Family Drug and Alcohol Courts, potentially through ringfencing pooled funding.²²</p>	<p>Local Government functions (Wales)</p> <p>DWP (UK-wide), working alongside Welsh Government employability and skills provision in Wales</p> <p>Home Office (England and Wales), working with Welsh Government on devolved prevention and community safety functions</p>
<p>15. Provide specific health and wellbeing support for young women in contact with the CJS, including in prison:</p> <p>a. Develop time-bound programme of work to learn lessons from the inquest into Alex Davies' death at HMP Styal and report publicly on progress within one year.</p> <p>b. Work with young women and women's services to:</p>	<p>DfE (England)/Welsh Government Education and Children's Services (Wales)</p> <p>DHSC (England)/Welsh Government Health and Social Services (Wales)</p> <p>Home Office (England and Wales), working with Welsh Government on devolved</p>

¹⁹ Sharpe, G. (forthcoming) (see fn 12)

²⁰ HM Government press release, 10 January 2025, '[Families to receive £126 million in early years support](#)'

²¹ Department of Health and Social Care (2025) [Road to recovery: the government's 2025 mandate to NHS England](#)

²² National Centre for Social Research (2023) [Evaluation of Family Drug and Alcohol Courts](#)

Women's Justice Board recommendations for reducing women's imprisonment

Recommendation	OGDs involved
<p>i) Develop practice to improve young women's wellbeing in prison, including access to mental health and neurodevelopment assessments and treatment; access to purposeful and social activity and peer support; and contact with family; and</p> <p>ii) Foster specialist, gender-specific community support for young adult women in contact with the CJS.</p>	<p>prevention and community safety functions</p> <p>DWP (UK-wide), working alongside Welsh Government employability and skills provision in Wales</p> <p>MHCLG (England)/Welsh Government Housing and Local Government functions (Wales)</p>