Ending the inertia: a plan to transform outcomes for women offenders
About Crest

We are crime and justice specialists - equal parts research, strategy and communication. From police forces to public inquiries, from tech companies to devolved authorities, we believe all these organisations (and more) have their own part to play in building a safer, more secure society. As the UK’s only consultancy with this focus, we are as much of a blend as the crime and justice sector itself.
Acknowledgements

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1. Executive Summary
A decade of inertia

For more than a decade there has been widespread political consensus about the importance of improving outcomes for vulnerable women within the criminal justice system. A similar level of agreement exists about the required policy changes. But despite the apparent consensus for what is needed and why, women offenders remain trapped by a criminal justice system that fails to identify their needs and circumstances, and which therefore doesn’t punish, rehabilitate or break cycles of offending behaviour effectively.

Jean Corston’s report,1 published in 2007, was intended as a watershed. Baroness Corston’s review outlined the need for “a distinct, radically different, visibly-led, strategic, proportionate, holistic, woman-centred, integrated approach”. The report offered a total of 43 recommendations for women-specific criminal justice reform, including the expansion of women's centres, more liaison and diversion schemes, and replacing women's prisons with suitable, geographically dispersed, small, multi-functional, custodial centres within ten years. But despite cross-party support, including the backing of three successive governments, outcomes for women offenders remain unchanged — a decade later, the number of women in prison has only decreased marginally,2 and progress on the recommendations has been slow at best. A 2017 review by Women in Prison of the progress made on each of the 43 recommendations stated that, ten years on, only two had been fully implemented, whilst twelve had resulted in no progress at all.3

In June 2018 the government published its long-awaited Female Offender Strategy.4 The document is effective in articulating the distinct needs of women offenders and the challenges the justice system faces in meeting them. Significantly, it endorses the weight of evidence suggesting that the number of women in prison for short sentences is too high, and calls for more locally delivered solutions to address the complex needs of women offenders.

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2 Between June 2008 and March 2018, the female prison population decreased by 15.6% — see HMPPS offender equalities annual report: 2017 to 2018.
The Female Offender Strategy (June 2018)

Objective
To improve outcomes for women offenders and make society safer by tackling the underlying causes of offending.

Strategic priorities
Fewer women coming into the criminal justice system; fewer women in custody (especially on short sentences) and more women managed in the community successfully; better conditions for those in custody.

The strategy adopts a gender-responsive, partnership-focused, evidence-based ‘whole system’ approach to women offenders, based around diversion, addressing women’s complex needs, and locally-driven solutions.

Key interventions
- Gender-informed liaison and diversion services at point of first contact with the criminal justice system
- Gender responsive, multi-agency support for women’s complex needs throughout the offender journey
- Work with local and national partners to develop a pilot for ‘residential women’s centres’ in at least five sites across England and Wales
- Deliver a national concordat on women offenders developed in consultation with national and local partners

Framework for implementation
- Locally-led
- Partnership-focused
- Evidence-based

Funding
£5 million of cross-government funding to be invested over two years in community provisions for women. This may be supplemented by reinvesting into the strategy’s implementation savings generated by reducing offending and imprisonment.
1. Executive Summary

However, while the strategy is clear on what needs to change and why change is needed, it offers little detail on how to action these changes. Indeed there is scant evidence that Whitehall has sought to understand why so little progress has been made over the past decade, given the level of political consensus that exists and the work of civic organisations to pioneer and push the need for a new approach to women offenders, such as the Prison Reform Trust.\(^5\)

**Why the system fails**

The starting point for developing a plan to change outcomes is understanding why the current system is failing. In this report, we argue that there are three main factors underlying the inertia surrounding women offenders:

1. **The system remains overly centralised**

2. **Organisations are siloed and work to conflicting, often competing, objectives**

3. **A criminal justice approach towards women offenders fails to address wider social needs that lie outside justice**

As a result, though the government’s strategy provides a coherent framework for reducing the causes and consequences of women’s offending, the execution of its recommendations, notably the development of locally-led whole system approaches,\(^6\) is hindered by the three factors above.

**Our approach**

In previous research,\(^7\) Crest Advisory identified a clear appetite amongst Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) to use the mandate of their office, and the associated levers available to them, to do more to improve outcomes for women offenders. While some PCCs wanted to explore what might be possible with additional devolved powers and budgets, others prioritised using the powers and levers already available to them locally to improve support for women in the criminal justice system.\(^8\) Crest recognises that due to differing circumstances in individual local areas, both approaches may be legitimate. As such, this report sets out a menu of options for PCCs and Mayors seeking to reduce the harms caused by women’s offending.

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\(^5\) See, for example, PRT’s Women’s Programme, accessed online via [http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/WhatWeDo/Projectsresearch/Women](http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/WhatWeDo/Projectsresearch/Women)

\(^6\) See page 7 of the Strategy

\(^7\) See: [http://crestadvisory.com/driving-criminal-justice-devolution/](http://crestadvisory.com/driving-criminal-justice-devolution/)

\(^8\) Available at: [http://crestadvisory.com/the-five-golden-rules-for-justice-devolution/](http://crestadvisory.com/the-five-golden-rules-for-justice-devolution/)
1. Executive Summary

Our methodology has involved the following four-step approach:

- **Evidence review**: we used publicly available national data to evaluate trends in women offending and sentencing outcomes, as well as a range of existing models and practice from around the country.

- **Local analysis**: we completed ‘deep dives’ in Avon and Somerset and the West Midlands, which involved: mapping local provision and flows of offenders through the system; discussions/interviews with stakeholders, including individuals from HMPPS, NPS, NHS England, PCCs, the police, and third sector/charity services; and focus groups with women offenders and service staff.

- **Modelling the costs**: we developed a toolkit for local areas seeking to model the costs of women’s offending in order to make the case for financial devolution.

- **Local blueprints**: based on our research, we developed a blueprint for Avon and Somerset and the West Midlands to support them to advance their own strategies for women offenders.

At each stage the research was framed by the following questions:

1. Why are women offending?
2. What is having an impact on their engagement?
3. Are available services meeting the needs of the cohort?
4. What would make the most difference in terms of improving outcomes for women offenders?

**The opportunity**

With Brexit consuming British politics and the continuing shadow of a tighter fiscal environment, it is easy to see why some are pessimistic about whether change is possible in this area — easy but wrong. For while improving outcomes for women offenders is a complex public policy problem, it is by no means intractable. In particular, there is a growing appetite amongst PCCs and City Mayors to use the levers available to them to find more intelligent ways to manage women offenders.

Indeed some areas are already well down the road to change, notably (but certainly not exclusively) in Greater Manchester (see case study on page 35). These areas are showing the importance of local partnerships and commissioning to deliver more integrated, gender-responsive services.

**Conclusions**

With most of the argument about what is wrong with the current system won, and an increasingly growing consensus about the way forward, this project is not about revisiting old ground. Instead it is about moving beyond the theory and setting out practical steps needed to deliver the agreed changes, and to support local areas in overcoming the barriers preventing change. The blueprints we have developed for Avon and Somerset and the West Midlands (see case study on page 47), and the twelve policy recommendations contained within this report provide evidence that change is possible.
2. Why a distinct approach is needed
2. Why a distinct approach is needed

The factors that lead to individuals committing crime, and to reoffend, can vary significantly between men and women offenders, as can the way men and women respond to interventions. The Ministry of Justice’s own evidence review suggests that ensuring interventions are tailored appropriately to the particular needs of women can be more effective than applying a generic approach for men and women alike.9

The evidence of distinctiveness suggests there is a need to take a different approach to this cohort – one that addresses vulnerability, acknowledges the role of gender, and treats women offenders as individuals with the potential to make a positive contribution to wider society. Such an approach would more likely ultimately break the cycle of reoffending with all the benefits that brings for families and society as a whole.

In this chapter we outline the ways in which women offenders differ from men that should be taken into account when developing gender-specific approaches to criminal justice and rehabilitation.

**Women’s offending patterns**

Women offenders are unlikely to be serious or violent offenders. Just 11 per cent of sentences given to women offenders in 2017 were as a result of more serious offence types (indictable or triable either way).10 All serious offences, when combined (violence against the person, sexual, robbery and possession of weapon offences), accounted for 2 per cent of offences committed by women offenders in 2017, compared to 9 per cent of all offences committed by men. Women also comprise a higher proportion of first time offenders in the criminal justice system than is the case for men (34 per cent of women in 2017 compared to 21 per cent of men).11

At the other end of the criminal justice journey, there are around 3,800 women in prison — around 5 per cent of the total prison population.12 Three quarters (72 per cent) are serving a sentence of less than 6 months for what are overwhelmingly non-violent offences, compared to 56 per cent of men serving custodial sentences of the same length (see figure 2.1). The proportion of women sentenced to custody who have committed theft offences is also larger than for men in particular (see figure 2.2).

Given what we know about the impact of custody on women’s outcomes (rates of self harm are five times higher than in men’s prisons), there are clearly questions about whether custody is a proportionate and suitable sentence for the majority of women offenders.

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9 The Ministry of Justice conducted a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) 2015 to explore the evidence on the effectiveness of interventions for adult women convicted of crime. Relative to the gender-neutral initiatives, more of the gender-informed programmes reviewed led to reductions in recidivism.


Women's reoffending patterns also differ compared to men's, and across different sentence types. Overall, the proportion of women offenders who reoffend is 23.4 per cent, compared with 30.7 per cent of men. However, despite showing lower reoffending rates overall, women who have served custodial sentences show particularly high reoffending rates compared to men — 58.2 per cent vs 47.4 per cent. A similar difference is also seen when looking specifically at short custodial sentences of less than twelve months, with nearly three quarters (72.7 per cent) of women serving these types of sentencing going on to reoffend, compared to 63.4 per cent of men.

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14 Criminal justice statistics quarterly: Court Outcomes by police force area (2017)
15 Criminal justice statistics quarterly: Court Outcomes by police force area (2017)
2. Why a distinct approach is needed

Women’s resettlement

The failures of ‘Through the Gate’ (a policy introduced in 2015 which included the extension of post-custody supervision to those serving short custodial sentences) have been well documented, not least by the Probation Inspectorate, with many Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) having struggled to adequately resource post-release supervision. The impact of this has been particularly pronounced for women offenders, especially those with accommodation needs. Stable accommodation is a critical need for this cohort to reduce their risk of reoffending and support them to gain employment or training, but this is often not available to them. From April to December 2017, 39 per cent of women allocated to CRCs and the NPS were released into unsettled accommodation (compared to 35 per cent of men). Without support, many of those given a community order or under supervision on release will fail to observe the requirements of the remainder of their licence or breach their post-custody supervision and be recalled to custody. A look at the figures since 2014 tells their own story (see figure 2.3).

Women’s needs and vulnerabilities

Vulnerability is both a cause and a consequence of women’s offending. Women in the justice system (either via community supervision or custody) show higher rates of reoffending-related need than men across many main indicators, particularly ‘relationships’ and ‘employability’ (see figure 2.4).

In fact, a review of the evidence conducted for this project reveals women offenders have a number of distinctive characteristics, detailed below, which suggest a more tailored approach would be appropriate. Corston’s description of women offenders — “more ‘troubled’ than ‘troublesome’” — remains apt.

Financial hardship

Women’s offending is more likely to be financially motivated by men. An analysis of OASys (an offender assessment system) found that 28 per cent of women offenders’ crimes were financially motivated, compared to 20 per cent of men, which may correlate with women offenders’ comparatively higher proportions of low-level crimes such as shoplifting.

Interviews conducted with staff working with women offenders also highlighted financial hardship as a key contributor to women’s offending. Issues around the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and delays in accessing benefits were put forward as a driver of some of the repeat offending they witnessed through their work.

21 Supporting data tables: Female offender strategy
2. Why a distinct approach is needed

Figure 2.3. Number of women offenders recalled from licence and breach of post-sentence supervision, all supervising bodies (Year ending June 2015-2018)

Figure 2.4. Proportion of offenders supervised in the community (left) and proportion of prisoners (right) with identified needs thought to increase the risk of future offending, 30 June 2017
2. Why a distinct approach is needed

Victims of domestic abuse

Women offenders are more likely than men to have been the victims of crime — often of serious offences. For example, 63 per cent of women in custody have experienced domestic violence compared to 7 per cent of men.23

Ensuring women have their needs as victims properly understood is key to enabling the criminal justice system and women themselves to address their offending behaviour.

Parental responsibility

Women offenders are more likely to have parental responsibility. According to the Ministry of Justice, 24-31 per cent of women offenders (those convicted or cautioned) have dependent children.24 Parental responsibilities not only drive economic pressures but also demands on time and priorities as the needs of children come before the needs of women themselves. In one of the focus group discussions, it was suggested that children could potentially act both as a catalyst for women to get help, and a distraction – reason not to address one’s own needs.

A justice system that fails to sufficiently reflect on the complex and conflicting needs of both children and their offending parents will fail to deliver positive outcomes.

Response to intervention

Women offenders’ distinctive needs, such as experience of domestic violence and parental responsibility (see figure 2.5) arguably makes delivering interventions to this cohort more challenging and complex.

Whilst many of the factors that improve service engagement and desistance with crime that work for men also apply to women, research has also emphasised the importance of ‘up front’ work by the women themselves.26 This requires the design of services that are personalised, where staff are able to build deep relationships with the women concerned.

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24 Supporting data tables: Female offender strategy
26 Supporting data tables: Female offender strategy
The current state of provision within the community

As part of the implementation of the original Corston report, £15.6m of Ministry of Justice funding was provided in 2009-11 to expand holistic, women-centred community provisions, with the aim of tackling the complex causes of women’s offending, and to divert them away from the criminal justice system. In 2010, 46 ‘one-stop-shop’, women-only community services were in operation across England and Wales. According to the Ministry of Justice’s map of community services (see figure 2.6) there are now 81 women’s centres in operation, though not all of these are specifically for women who offend. However, the network that exists today is neither centrally funded nor developed by government and is thus not comparable in size to the network of 46 projects that existed in 2010. Those centres that remain now struggle to survive in order to protect the woman-centred model in an increasingly bureaucratic commissioning landscape. One practical issue is that many charitable providers of specialist women’s services with small financial reserves find it impossible to sustain contracts that pay in arrears or rely on Payment by Results (PBR).

“In the nine years since the Corston Report was published, the number of women’s centres has increased modestly. However, the majority have been hampered by instability due to short-term funding, often relying on a patchwork of support from the Ministry of Justice, local probation, charities and health.”

APPG for Women in the Penal System

A thematic inspection of community services for women offenders conducted by HM Inspectorate of Probation found that funding was a “major concern” for women’s centres, with many struggling to cope with the uncertainty of their funding due to temporary, short-term contracts. The inspection also found that provision was patchy, with some areas not having women’s centres at all, and others being inaccessible to some women due to a lack of public transport.

Women’s centres: what are they and how do they work?

Women’s centres are ‘one-stop-shops’ for women involved or at risk of involvement in the criminal justice system. There is a network of women’s centres across the UK but their existence is patchy and the services they are able to offer vary — some only work with women offenders, some will work predominantly with vulnerable women more generally. The central premise of women’s centres is to provide a safe space that is a welcoming, non-judgemental environment where women are treated as individuals and all their needs can be addressed. They have long been identified as a key resource in which to provide alternatives to imprisonment for women offenders.

2. Why a distinct approach is needed

Map of women's community services

The Ministry of Justice’s Justice Data Lab\(^3^4\) analysed 39 women’s centres throughout England and found they had a statistically significant impact on reoffending. The one year proven reoffending rate for offenders who received support provided by women’s centres was 30 per cent, compared with 35 per cent for a matched control group of similar offenders. This is a significant reduction in reoffending: the average effect size of all programmes evaluated by the Justice Data Lab is a 2 percentage point reduction in the one year reoffending rate.

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Though the approaches taken by women's centres vary enormously from centre to centre, holistic support addressing a whole range of needs is generally available, such as housing, substance misuse, domestic abuse, education and employment, mental health as well as group work delivery of specific sentencing requirements.

In 2014 Women's Centred Solutions estimated the annual cost of a holistic community-based intervention at £1,300 per woman. Their analysis claims for every £1 invested in support-focused alternatives to prison, £14's worth of social value is generated over ten years. The Cost Benefit Analysis for the Greater Manchester's model of women's centres (where there are nine centres across ten local authorities) is much more cautious, evaluated at £3.18 worth of social value for every £1 invested and has overseen a drop in the local reoffending rate to 15-17 per cent compared to a national average of 22.9 per cent (or 22-27 per cent in core cities comparators).

Conclusions

The research is unequivocal: women offenders have different offending patterns, needs, vulnerabilities and patterns of engagement to men. As such, there is a strong argument for taking a distinct approach to this cohort of offenders. The research we have undertaken in our two deep dive areas (Avon and Somerset and the West Midlands) provides further weight to this insight, showing the importance of locally developed, personalised and tailored approaches to deliver a better balance between punishment and rehabilitation, responding to both the offence committed and the needs of the offender.

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3. Why the current system fails
Despite a number of well-intentioned efforts by successive governments to improve outcomes for women offenders (see figure 3.1), little has changed in over a decade. We judge this to be a function of three particular problems.

First, despite the advent of PCCs in 2012, the justice system remains highly centralised. When solutions are driven from the top-down, they are less likely to be able to address either local circumstances (such as a lack of women’s centres) or the complex web of vulnerability that characterises the lives of individual women offenders. Turning around the lives of such women requires more personalised interventions, with public service systems that are interconnected, allowing problems to be addressed holistically. But greater personalisation is difficult to achieve when services are commissioned from Whitehall.

Figure 3.1. Timeline of key women-specific policy changes and publications since the Corston report

- **March 2007**: The Corston report is published
- **February 2009**: APPG on Women in the Penal System is established
- **2009**: Inter-ministerial group dismantled post-election
- **September 2012**: Responsibility for women in the CJS separated from men – Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Justice, Women and Equalities appointed
- **October 2013**: NOMS publishes ‘Women’s Custodial Estate Review’
- **March 2011**: Government publishes ‘Strategic objectives for femal offenders’
- **December 2007**: Government response published, accepting 41 of the report’s 43 recommendations. Government appoints ministerial champion for women and criminal justice, an inter-ministerial group and a cross-departmental Women’s Policy Unit to drive the reforms
- **2009-2011**: £15.8m MCJ funding given for community women’s centres
- **March 2013**: Cross-departmental women’s team dismantled and replaced by a criminal justice-specific Women and Equalities Group based in NOMS
- **December 2016**: MCJ publishes ‘Prison Safety & Reform’, which promises to build and open five new community prisons for women by 2020

Female offender strategy published (over a year late). Pilot for five residential women’s announced in the strategy - confirms government’s abandonment of plans for five women’s community prisons.
Second, even when there is appetite locally to improve outcomes for women offenders, criminal justice organisations are often structured in ways that make collaboration difficult in practice. There is very little coterminosity between justice agencies particularly around probation following Transforming Rehabilitation. Locally elected leaders, from PCCs to Metropolitan Mayors, are increasingly keen to trial a different approach, but too often find themselves unable to agree a set of shared objectives and/or unlock sufficient resources to address women’s needs in a sufficiently responsive ‘whole system’ way.

Third, policymakers have too often approached the problem of women’s offending through the lens of criminal justice reform, rather than as part of a broader approach to addressing vulnerability in the round. Clearly reforms to sentencing are an important part of any strategy to improve outcomes for women in the criminal justice system (particularly given the disproportionately large volume of women serving short custodial sentences). However, changes to sentencing alone will do little to address the problems that led to those women ending up in court to begin with, which relate to mental ill health, financial hardship and domestic abuse. Unless there is a strategy to deal with those issues, bringing a range of agencies together in strong local partnerships, governments are ultimately papering over the cracks.

Our approach

To inform our work, Crest undertook two ‘deep-dives’ in two differing police force areas — the West Midlands and Avon and Somerset (see Annex B for further detail) — working with democratically elected leaders, criminal justice agencies, public services and the voluntary sector to understand the flow of offenders through the system, map local provision, and understand the blockages and barriers to delivery. Crest also undertook two structured focus groups with a group of women offenders in both areas.

It is important to be clear that inertia is not inevitable. We have found a number of examples of local areas taking innovative approaches to managing women in the criminal justice system, such as the ‘whole system approach’ introduced within Greater Manchester between 2012 and 2018 — at the heart of which was investment in a network of women’s centres. However, such examples are marginal rather than systemic. And they were achieved in spite of the current system, rather than because of it.

System failures are hampering performance at every point of a woman’s journey through the criminal justice system — from their initial contact with the criminal justice system through to their sentencing and resettlement. Our research suggests that there are four key areas where the system breaks down:

1. Women’s entry into the criminal justice system
2. Assessment of needs and vulnerabilities (pre-sentence)
3. Sentencing
4. Resettlement and broader engagement with services

The next section explores each of these in turn.
1. Women's entry into the criminal justice system

The means by which women come into contact with the criminal justice system are important, as they affect diversionary efforts. Data on the origins of prosecutions shows a particularly stark disparity between male and women offenders, with 77 per cent of men prosecuted by the police, compared to only 44 per cent of women — partly driven by a higher proportion of women offenders being prosecuted for summary (low-level) offences than men, meaning women are more likely to be prosecuted via summons rather than arrest (see Table 3.1).36

Paradoxically, because women are less likely than men to enter the justice system as a result of police prosecution, they are less likely to receive timely preventative support, since they are also less likely to access liaison and diversion pathways.

Table 3.1. Defendants dealt with by the magistrates’ court and Crown Court by prosecutor type and sex (2017)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Type of prosecutor</th>
<th>2017</th>
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<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Police</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TV Licence Enforcement Office (TVLEO)</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA)</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local Authority</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Police</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TV Licence Enforcement Office (TVLEO)</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA)</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local Authority</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9%</td>
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36 Supporting data tables: Female offender strategy
### TV licence prosecutions

Women are disproportionately prosecuted for TV licence evasion compared to men, in part because the TV Licence Enforcement Office prosecutes individuals rather than households, and women are more likely to answer the door to officers than men.\(^{37}\)

Overall, TV licence evasion accounted for 30 per cent of all female prosecutions in 2017, compared to 4 per cent for men.\(^{38}\)

Further analysis suggests that it is women in more deprived areas who are most affected. Figure 3.2 shows a positive correlation between the proportion of all fines that are given for TV licence evasion (dark blue bars), and the IMD score (a measure of deprivation — pale blue trendline) of an area. That is, generally areas with higher deprivation scores give a higher proportion of fines for TV licence evasion as a proportion of all court-issued fines. The suitability of fines in these cases is particularly questionable, given the offence itself may already be indicative of a level of financial hardship.

The enforcement of TV licence evasion is currently outsourced by the BBC to Capita, at a cost of around £58 million per year.\(^{41}\)

As TV licence evasion is not prosecuted by the police, out of court disposals are not an option, meaning those who do not respond to letters can be summoned to court by the TV licence Enforcement Office. Though you cannot be given a custodial sentence for TV licence evasion, you can be given a custodial sentence for non-payment of court fines.

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\(^{39}\) Criminal Justice Statistics Quarterly: Court outcomes by PFA (2017)


\(^{41}\) [https://www.ft.com/content/bdda0014-29a5-11e7-9ec8-168383da43b7](https://www.ft.com/content/bdda0014-29a5-11e7-9ec8-168383da43b7)
3. Why the current system fails

In 2017, 98,999 women were prosecuted for TV licence evasion, with 93.5 per cent of these prosecutions resulting in a fine. The average fine given out to guilty women defendants was £17742 (though magistrates can issue fines of up to £1,000). As of April 2018, the cost of a full colour TV licence is £150.50 (free for over 75s).

TV licence evasion cases make up around 11 per cent of all magistrates’ court cases and are dealt with in designated court rooms, taking up around 0.3 per cent of court time. This equates to approximately £2.4m of HMCTS’s net expenditure.

The role of the police

Our research suggests that the police play an increasingly positive role in diverting women offenders away from the criminal justice system. Many of the vulnerable women we spoke to were positive about their treatment by police officers, describing a distinct approach which they found beneficial to their rehabilitation. Police officers’ approach and attitudes were consistently said to have improved, resulting in very different experiences compared to a decade ago, particularly in areas where the police have dedicated police diversion schemes like in Avon and Somerset (SHE) and West Midlands (New Chance):

“But now the police are in this actually very caring place where they’re sitting and they’re taking the time to talk to you, to see actually why is this woman sat here.”

Women’s centre service user

When women offenders spoke of their journey through the criminal justice system, and their referral to further interventions, generally police officers were said to have treated them fairly, and made an effort to look beyond the offence to the women themselves, and their underlying needs:

“I can see the kind of switch in him from sitting there dealing with an aggressive drunk to someone that was going through something emotionally.”

Women’s centre service user

Police officers’ knowledge of services was also highlighted. This compared to dismissive and sometimes derogatory treatment received during previous contact with police. Such positive feedback of a distinct approach to women offenders from service users should provide motivation to replicate such an approach across England and Wales, as well as in other parts of the criminal justice system.

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43 https://www.tvlicensing.co.uk/faqs/FAQ19
44 Criminal justice statistics quarterly: Court Outcomes by police force area (2017)
Limits of the current system

Despite pockets of innovative practice, tailored diversion schemes are the exception rather than the norm, meaning too many women are being unnecessarily pushed through the formal criminal justice system. There are two fundamental reasons for this.

First, the current system provides no incentives or clarity of mission for intervention at the point where it would have its highest impact on a woman’s future offending. There are a range of circumstances in a woman’s life, which significantly enhances her risk of being involved in offending later on, including experience of domestic abuse, financial hardship (evidenced by benefits sanctions and/or prosecution for TV licence evasion) and mental health issues. Yet such circumstances rarely lead to a systemic response by the local authority or health services that ensures support is provided to the individual woman and/or their family. Instead a woman has to commit several acts of crime before they are referred for help, by which time it is harder to turn their behaviour around. This has been a continual theme in our research.

“The women referred to the project in the past haven’t and still don’t know where to go to get help, or even to identify they need help, and it takes getting into the criminal justice system for them to get the help they needed – that escalation of behaviour.”

Specialist women support worker

This view of offending and rehabilitation, with its narrow focus on the offending behaviour as opposed to the reasons behind it, is a key area that could be improved by drawing on the principles of various innovative, non-traditional projects and interventions carried out across the country – see the following case study below for an example.
3. Why the current system fails

Case study: the Clean Break theatre company

Clean Break, a women’s theatre company, founded by two former women prisoners, aiming to transform the lives of women who have experienced the criminal justice system or who are at risk of entering it. Through theatre workshops, performance opportunities and projects in prisons and the community the programme builds confidence, resilience and wellbeing, underpinned by comprehensive support. Clean Break takes a trauma-informed approach and focuses on the causes of women’s vulnerability rather than the symptoms. They combine empowerment of the women they work with, needs-based services like mental health, and a shared objective of reducing re-offending. According to a 2011 NPC study, for every £1 invested in the Clean Break programme, it is estimated “£4.57 of value is created for society over one year”.

Second, local public services are not configured to provide joined up solutions at women offenders’ point of entry to the criminal justice system. This means a woman’s first contact with the criminal justice system — whether via the police or the court — is rarely used as a trigger for assessment and/ or meaningful intervention. Indeed it is more common to find a siloed scenario in many areas of the country, whereby women are assessed, managed and processed according to parallel systems.

Case study: WONDER+ programme in Norfolk

The Office of the Police in Crime Commissioner in Norfolk have launched WONDER+ (Women Offenders of Norfolk Diversion, Engagement and Rehabilitation Project), a multi-agency diversionary service that covers vulnerable women at all stages of the criminal justice system, including offenders and women at risk of entry, expanding on its previous programme which was limited to police contact for diversion.

Diversionary points now include: community policing, police custody, district council-based multi-agency early help hubs, victim services, health services and other help and support networks for vulnerable women. Under the programme, women given a conditional caution or who voluntarily self-refer to the scheme can receive a gender-based, ‘whole system approach’ intervention to address their needs.

The programme is jointly funded by Ministry of Justice, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Norfolk, Norfolk County Council Public Health and the Norfolk and Suffolk Community Rehabilitation Company (NSCRC), at a cost of £524,000 for three years. Its diversionary points reflect this multi-agency funding base.

48 http://apps.charitycommission.gov.uk/Accounts/Ends60/0001017560_AC_20180331_E_C.PDF
2. Assessment of needs and vulnerabilities (pre-sentence)

In theory, provision is in place to ensure the needs of women offenders are assessed when being processed through different parts of the criminal justice system. At sentencing, under the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 (ORA), women’s vulnerabilities can be taken into account by sentencers. When commissioning services, the government stipulates principles that should be taken into account for meeting the needs of women offenders (see box on NOMS commissioning principles for women offenders below). In practice, however, it is unclear the extent to which these provisions and policies are taken into account.

NOMS Commissioning Principles for Women Offenders, 2015

Seven identified priority needs

In 2015 the Ministry of Justice published guidance to inform the commissioning of services by supporting tailored approaches in seven key areas for intervention:

1. **Substance misuse**: Stabilise and address individual needs, in particular class A drug use, binge and chronic drinking.

2. **Mental health**: Expedite access to services that address mental health needs, in particular anxiety and depression, personality disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and trauma.

3. **Emotion management**: Help women build skills to control impulsive behaviour and destructive emotions.

4. **A pro-social identity**: Be positive towards, about, and around women, and encourage them to help and be positive towards others.

5. **Being in control of daily life and having goals**: Motivate women to believe that they belong to and fit in mainstream society, where they can work to achieve their goals.

6. **Improve family contact**: Help women build healthy and supportive family relationships, especially with their children.

7. **Resettle and build social capital**: Help women find somewhere safe to live, to learn how to manage their money, access education, and improve their employability.

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50 NOMS (2015). Better outcomes for women offenders. Available at:
3. Why the current system fails

The national commission on domestic and sexual violence and multiple disadvantage found that women offenders’ experience of abuse and violence were often not recognised as drivers of their offending, with police viewing women experiencing multiple disadvantages as less credible, and as criminals rather than victims.51

“The criminal justice system was a common point of contact for women who have faced abuse, violence and multiple disadvantage, with evidence indicating that the impact of shrinking resources in housing, mental health, substance use and domestic and sexual violence services has led to more survivors becoming embroiled in the criminal justice system as a result of offending – much of which was far less serious than the crimes they had been the victims of.”

Breaking down the barriers, p.21

This lack of awareness was shown to continue at court, where women offenders who have also been victims often face difficulties as a result of a lack of awareness from magistrates and judges, including an expectation that victims should look and behave a certain way — again affecting their credibility. This sentiment was echoed by a service user spoken to as part of this research:

“Just because you’re suffering doesn’t mean you have to turn up looking dishevelled and homeless. For some people that’s the mask they wear.”

Women’s centre service user

Stakeholders spoken to as part of this research suggested that the offence is often used as an indicator of an offender’s needs by the police. Our research indicates this is a fallacy, as low-level offences such as shoplifting and common assault can often be indicative of numerous and complex needs. For example, 70 per cent of women on project SHE (an arrest diversion scheme in Avon and Somerset for women who commit low-level offending, or for women whose offending is linked to vulnerability) have four or more needs across nine pathways — see following case study:

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3. Why the current system fails

Case study: SHE (Avon & Somerset)

SHE (Support, Help and Engagement) is a point of arrest diversion scheme for women which was launched in Avon and Somerset in September 2017. The scheme applies to any woman who is arrested for a low level offence, and is over the age of 18. This is a voluntary referral scheme, where women are offered support and intervention to prevent reoffending.

Those referred to the scheme are provided with an initial appointment with a SHE worker at a local female support hub, delivered by the Nelson Trust. Following an assessment, an individualised support plan that is tailored to their needs is put together and agreed with the woman, which aims to address relevant issues such as accommodation, mental and physical health, finance and relationships, through referrals to specialist services and one-to-one support.

Nelson Trust opened a new women’s centre in April 2019 in Bridgwater, Somerset, which will support SHE and fill a gap in local women services.

Between September 2017 and June 2018, 128 women were referred to SHE, with 70 per cent of those having four or more needs. The top three identified needs were substance misuse, physical and mental health, and accommodation.52

If a woman is arrested for domestic violence, an alternative arrest diversion scheme called ASCEND can be offered, whereby the woman is offered support and intervention through a conditional caution (the condition being to engage with a SHE worker for a one-to-one appointment).

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3. Why the current system fails

Work in the West Midlands is underway to ensure sufficient information about individual offenders’ needs and the context around their offending is understood and shared at different stages of the criminal justice system (see following case study).

**Case study: Needs assessments pilot in Coventry (West Midlands)**

From February 2019, West Midlands police are piloting a new approach to men and women offenders in Coventry. Anyone interviewed or arrested by the police will be offered a needs assessment by the police officer dealing with their offence.

The aim of the pilot is to enable assessments made by the police to be used at court, hopefully leading to a more informed response to sentencing decisions. Assessments will also be used to inform out of court disposals and referrals to other services.

The pilot will complement the New Chance liaison and diversion programme which also operates across the West Midlands but which doesn’t currently include Coventry (or Wolverhampton).

**Mental health: an example of unmet need**

Numerous studies (including our own research) have highlighted the high level of mental and physical health needs in women offender cohorts. In both areas in which we conducted deep dives, it was argued that a lack of community mental health provision led to early signs of problems not being tackled, and problems escalating, by which point women are more likely to be in contact with the criminal justice system:

> “The theme [in women’s centres] is always the same. There’s usually trauma rooted in childhood that isn’t dealt with properly. The support isn’t there, you’re not listened to, a substance misuse issue usually then develops.”

*Specialist women support worker*
With often inadequate provision in the community, some women go to extreme measures to get support:

“I knew I was in trouble, I signed up to see the doctor and was told there would be a 3 month waiting list. I’ll be dead in three months, so I’d be better to go to Eastwood Park.”

**Offender at HMP Eastwood Park**

In the community, women at risk of entering the criminal justice system often fall between IAPT\(^{53}\) services and psychiatric service needs. Bereavement counselling was highlighted as particularly needed for the women offender population, with demand outstripping resource in prisons and the community — demand stemmed both from loss due to death, and as a result of children being taken into care.

A common theme that emerged from conversations with women offenders was that they had asked for help many times by visiting their GP, prior to their first contact with the criminal justice system to seek help for mental health problems and substance dependency, but that they had simply not been listened to or got the help they needed. For some, repeat visits to the GP about the same issues continued for years.

Unsurprisingly, women we spoke to did not necessarily know what was driving the problems they were experiencing and so were not aware of what they needed. Whereas some women knew they wanted help with their problematic relationship with alcohol and its use as a coping mechanism for example, for others, they only knew that something was wrong but not what:

“If you were to look at my medical history, I'd been going to my doctors for years. I'd been saying I need help. I was sad. I knew I wasn't dealing with emotions properly. But I just didn't know what help it was I needed.”

**Women’s centre service user**

**Limits of the current system**

The failure to ensure women's needs and vulnerabilities are assessed (and acted upon) are the result of long term structural issues in the operation of the criminal justice system, exacerbated by recent reforms to the structure of probation. There are two specific problems.

First, the growing fragmentation between the probation service and the courts, resulting in a long-term decline in the quality/depth of advice provided by probation to guide sentencing decisions, in the form of pre-sentence reports (PSRs). There has been a transition over the past decade from PSRs being detailed, written reports to speedy, short, written and oral reports. Standard delivery written reports made up 7 per cent of all PSRs in 2016, compared to 77 per cent a decade previously, with oral reports outnumbering written reports for the first time.\(^{54}\) This has had a particularly negative impact on women offenders, for whom vulnerabilities and needs may be more likely to be having an impact on their offending behaviour.

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53 Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) is an NHS initiative to increase the provision of evidence based talking therapies at primary care level to support people with common mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression.

A second problem relates to a tendency for women offenders to be assessed through an excessively criminal justice prism. Our research suggests that needs assessments typically highlight particular areas of needs that are related to offending but overlook associated needs that affect how women respond to help or intervention. For example, an accommodation need rarely exists in isolation from other problems relating to substance misuse, mental health and/or domestic abuse:

“I think they’re missing a trick that actually, there’s a reason that they’re homeless that is not just through circumstance [...] I think actually, for the whole of the UK, not just here, the reason that people become street homeless a lot of the time is because they can’t maintain a tenancy, they just don’t know how to do it, and there’s no support there to help them to maintain that.”

Women’s diversionary worker

This is a symptom of a broader problem: public services are not able to join up around the individual to addressing their (often interconnected) needs in a holistic way.

3. Sentencing

Within government, there is recognition that women offenders are often more likely to have complex needs and that these should be taken into account when sentencing. However, it is clear from previous studies (and our own research) that there is a lack of knowledge among sentencers about the sentencing options that are available in their local area, particularly specialist women-specific options, as well as the knowledge and circumstances around a woman’s offending, leading women offenders to be treated in a generic rather than gender-informed way.

Quality of advice to the court

Clearly the severity of sentencing decisions should not be impacted by the consideration of the gender of the offender, but there is widespread consensus that it should take into account their particular circumstances. Yet HMI Probation’s 2016 thematic review of community provision for women who offend found that pre-sentence reports did not differentiate the needs of women from those of men.

Given the increasing propensity for PSRs to be produced rapidly (in 2017 96 per cent of reports prepared were same-day ‘Fast Delivery PSRs’ compared to 68 per cent in 2012), and the issues identified with women disclosing needs (many women will deliberately fail to declare child-caring responsibilities for fear of losing their children to social services), often sentencers’ hands can be tied by a PSR that may not tell the full story. Even within that, Crown Court statistics show that women are half as likely to receive a standard, more detailed PSR, than men — meaning vital opportunities to identify needs and vulnerabilities may be missed (see figure 3.3).

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55 A lack of granular data means that outcomes of the sentencing framework cannot be examined for differential impact by gender.
The type of report that magistrates receive should be looked at too — when there are complex issues in somebody’s background, it may be that we need a full PSR rather than an oral report on the day.

**Magistrates’ Association**

PSRs also provide a vital tool for increasing magistrates’ awareness and confidence in available community alternatives to custodial sentences. Court closures have resulted in magistrates having to cover much larger areas, meaning it is more difficult to keep abreast of local service provision, and their suitability for different women that come before the courts. A significant part of having confidence in community sentences is about understanding what it would mean in each individual case, and magistrates may not have all of this local intelligence. Information given on the day, via PSRs for example, is therefore very important:

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**Figure 3.3. Differences in type of PSR prepared by Probation Service (NPS) by court type and gender, 2017**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
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<tr>
<td>Crown Court</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standard PSR</td>
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<td>Fast Delivery PSR</td>
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<td>Fast Delivery PSR written</td>
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<tr>
<td>Magistrates Court</td>
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<td>Standard PSR</td>
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<td>Fast Delivery PSR</td>
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3. Why the current system fails

“I think it’s really important when we ask NPS for a PSR, they need to keep on saying to us, ‘Our recommendation would be this that and the other, and this would be carried out at Eden House which means that…’ and I think that would make an enormous difference frankly, because we don’t know what’s practical for women, such as whether they can get to [name of residential care] from their home, because we’re no longer that local now that courts cover a wider area, so it’s not realistic for us to have a wider knowledge.”

**Magistrates’ Association**

**Use of fines**

Discussions around sentencing often centred around fines, given these are the most commonly used sentence for women offenders, and also make up a higher proportion of all sentences for female compared to male offenders. Generally it was agreed by individuals working with women offenders (e.g. magistrates, probation officers) that fines are an unsuitable outcome for many vulnerable women offenders for two reasons.

Firstly, crimes committed by women offenders are often motivated by financial hardship. Fines therefore compound financial difficulties, which in turn can drive further offending and an escalation in sentence severity. This may be further exacerbated by the use of civil prosecution routes (particularly by shops) to speed up the justice process and gain access to civil recovery funds to pay for in store security.

Secondly, fines offer no associated interventions nor rehabilitative elements as a court outcome, and for some vulnerable offenders, are a ‘missed opportunity’. So though they keep women offenders from prison, women in receipt of a court-issued fine are then not connected with services that can support them in addressing their offending. This is particularly the case for the large numbers of women who arrive at court via a summons, rather than arrest, and so bypass potential liaison and diversion opportunities.

A magistrate speaking on behalf of the Magistrates’ Association discussed some of the difficulties of deciding on sentences to give to vulnerable women who continue to commit low-level offences given current guidelines, acknowledging the balance that needs to be struck between ensuring a proportionate sentence and meeting all of the (somewhat conflicting) purposes of sentencing, which include punishment and rehabilitation:

> “Fines can be a missed opportunity… Many women have no money but [their offending has] often gone too far for a conditional discharge, so you just keep piling up fines on them.”

**Magistrates’ Association**

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60 Criminal justice statistics quarterly: Court Outcomes by police force area (2017)


62 The Criminal Justice Act 2003 sets out five purposes of sentencing. These are the: punishment of offenders; reduction of crime (including its reduction by deterrence); reform and rehabilitation of offenders; protection of the public; making of reparation by offenders to people affected by their offences.
3. Why the current system fails

**Use of short custodial sentences**

Short prison sentences are increasingly acknowledged to be detrimental to rehabilitation and the risk of reoffending, as they do not provide an opportunity to address the issues that brought women to prison in the first place, yet are still frequently used (custodial sentences of 12 months or less made up 79 per cent of all custodial sentences given to women offenders in 2017).63

> “We’re [women’s centre] helping the criminal justice system because most of the women that go through the criminal justice system get ridiculously short sentences and then there are these complex issues that aren’t dealt with, so who are you helping? You’re not helping anybody. Actually what you’re doing is keeping her trapped.”
>
> **Women’s centre involvement worker**

Perhaps counter-intuitively, a number of women’s centre staff expressed similar frustration with short three month community-based conditions, which was not deemed long enough to engage the woman in a meaningful programme of rehabilitation. Staff frequently expressed frustrations that resources are not available to fund ongoing support to address the women’s needs, and that they often worked with women past the length of their sentence conditions at their own discretion — doing so in spite of, rather than because of, the current system:

> “Once the level of support is done, you’re meant to close them. But in cases like [name], we just continue for as long as they need support from us because she needs it, so I never shut the door on her regardless of how long it was. Because it’s a person, an individual.”
>
> **Women’s diversionary worker**

This additional continued support was appreciated by service users, and was considered to be an important factor in their improved outcomes:

> “Really I was signed off six months ago wasn’t I? But they’ve just kept going and going and going […] And they’re still here with me, and they’re going to get me a job next week. They’ve done everything.”
>
> **Service user**

**Use of community sentences**

Community sentences are associated with better outcomes for offenders, and can be a cheaper and more effective alternative to custody.64 However, in order to command the confidence of magistrates, it is critical that the conditions attached to such sentences are perceived to be appropriately tailored to a woman’s particular needs and likely responsiveness to intervention. Our research has found little evidence that this is the case in practice. In 2017, for example, only 119 mental health treatment

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63 Criminal justice statistics quarterly: Court outcomes by PFA (2017)
64 Justice Select Committee (2018). Transforming Rehabilitation: Support for offenders on probation. Available at: https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmjust/482/48208.htm
requirements were commenced by women under community orders and suspended sentence orders. Drug and alcohol treatment requirements were used more frequently (1,935 for drugs and 1,007 for alcohol), but collectively with mental health requirements only made up 11 per cent of requirements attached to sentences.\(^{65}\)

The introduction of 12 month post-release supervision for women following short custodial sentences was viewed as excessive by more than one stakeholder we spoke to. The well-documented absence of support for offenders following release alongside the additional supervision had undermined women’s ability to move on. For example, having to visit a probation office every week as a result of an offence could exacerbate certain barriers to rehabilitation:

“We had a client who was working, full time employed and her colleagues found out that she was on a probation order and that caused a lot of problems in the workplace, and that was only a minor offence. I don’t think there’s much thought going into it.”

*Women’s diversionary worker*

“It’s their whole life that’s affected, it’s their job, their family and everything that’s involved in this and they cannot move forward with all these orders going in. I just don’t think, sometimes, they’re relevant.”

*Women’s diversionary worker*

**Limits of the current system**

Community sentences have the potential to offer a more effective and efficient alternative to fines and short custodial sentences as a response to women’s offending, but their use has been falling since 2010, while the use of custody and fines has remained relatively flat (see figure 3.4).\(^ {66}\) This is the function of two systemic problems within the criminal justice system.

First, there remains a low level of awareness amongst magistrates about the sentencing options that are available in their local area, particularly specialist women-specific options. The magistrates we spoke to expressed frustration with the lack of information from CRCs about the provision available in the area.\(^ {67}\) Moreover, many felt that the training they receive no longer prepares them for dealing with community sentences and their requirements. Expenditure on training for magistrates has declined significantly, from £110 in 2009 to £36 in 2015.\(^ {68}\)

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66 Criminal justice statistics quarterly: Court outcomes by PFA (2017)

67 Also see previous work by Crest in this area, which found similar sentiment in 2017, Crest, Community sentences: where did it all go wrong?, http://crestadvisory.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/community-sentences-report-where-did-it-all-go-wrong.pdf

Second, magistrates receive little to no feedback on the outcome of sentences — meaning that many feel in the dark about what is and isn’t working. The probation staff we spoke to pointed out that judges tend to view success/failure as binary (i.e. whether the woman reconvicted or not) whereas the reality is often more nuanced and needs to be measured in terms of ‘distance travelled’. Women’s problem solving courts are in use to allow offenders to be regularly reviewed by a panel of magistrates who set long-term goals for rehabilitation, offering gender-specific interventions to support offenders.69

4. Resettlement and broader engagement with services

The current inflexibility of the system means women can end up penalised or losing support for not adhering to conditions set by the court. One example of this is the prevalence of group interventions within substance misuse services for women who were not ready or able to participate in group help.

69 See, as examples, Aberdeen’s problem solving approach and Stockport Problem-Solving Court and Manchester Women’s Court
3. Why the current system fails

“That’s the thing, there’s no individual flexibility. Some people don’t like groups, they really can’t cope with groups, they’d rather have a one-to-one.”

**Women’s diversionary worker**

“The first [local drug and alcohol service] meeting I got there was lovely, it was one-to-one, he was really nice, and that’s what I thought the service was going to offer. The next time I got there, it’s a group of four people, they’re all discussing each other’s stuff, never met them before. […] I know there’s a space to have a confidentiality thing, but I don’t trust somebody I’ve never met before. So I said I can’t do that. The next time I went it was even worse, there was another bloke there who knew all about me before I’d even got there. So then I said I’m sorry but I can’t engage with this.”

**Service user**

As well as having an effect on service user engagement, the inflexibility of services also has a knock-on effect on the support that the key workers can offer the women offenders on their caseload:

“The drug and alcohol support service is tough, really tough. Because if they’re living chaotic lifestyles and they can’t be going to their one-to-one appointments or attending group, if they don’t go then [the local drug and alcohol service] will close them as a referral, so then we’re back to square one because then they’re not getting support with their drug or alcohol habit. […] But we don’t get the support from drug and alcohol services, an understanding of the women that we’re working with.”

**Women’s diversionary worker**

In an evaluation of Greater Manchester’s whole system approach, it was emphasised that addressing the complex and multiple needs of women required long-term and intensive work, particularly to build up trust and overcome women’s distrust of services.70

**The importance of trust and relationships**

Focus groups with women offenders conducted as part of this report demonstrated that trust between service users and staff is the most important factor for engagement with services:

“The biggest thing is trust.”

**Women’s centre service user**

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A number of factors appear to be important as drivers of trust. Consistency of staff is critical, with high staff turnover negatively impacting on trust, and therefore engagement. Conversely, having staff with lived experience was also highlighted as having a positive effect on engagement:

“I say to her, ‘I’m an ex-service user’, and then she goes ‘are you?’, straight away. And it makes the difference because you’re talking to someone that understands what you’ve been through, and I’m showing you that there is a light at the end of the tunnel which is the most important thing, because then you’re giving back hope which is what a lot of people that use our services have lost a little bit.”

Women’s centre service user

Awareness of available services also affected engagement, with women commonly having no knowledge of the services that exist:

“I used to drive past it every day for four years… That is the irony of ironies. I think the issue is not where it’s located, people just don’t know about it.”

Women’s centre service user

Other factors that affected engagement with services included children and childcare. As mentioned in chapter 2, some service users said that their children acted as a catalyst for seeking help, whereas for others children could act as a distraction from addressing one’s own needs. Once in touch with services, childcare could also affect service users’ engagement. Anawim women’s centre in Birmingham is attempting to address this barrier by having an onsite creche. However, as the creche was provided by an outside agency, its function is dependent on a sufficient number of women with children using it, which did not always happen:

“We do have childcare issues, we do try and provide a creche but we need a certain amount of people to be able to attend.”

Women’s centre involvement worker
The role of women’s centres

Women’s centres were considered a positive example of joined up services, providing a ‘one stop shop’, allowing service users to look at the links between lived experience/trauma and behaviour, and giving women a space to unpick this relationship. This was the characteristic of women’s centres that was deemed to be what made them unique and successful in terms of addressing women’s needs:

“[a course offered at a women’s centre] broke that whole relationship [between trauma and alcohol] wide open and actually it was the best thing that ever happened to me.”

*Women’s centre service user*

“The women’s centre is the whole picture.”

*Women’s centre service user*
Case study: Greater Manchester Women’s Centres

The Greater Manchester Model is much touted as the best example of a women’s centre approach. The city has a network of nine women’s centres (covering ten local authorities) operating under the umbrella of the Greater Manchester Women’s Support Alliance. A whole system approach for Greater Manchester was a result of a strategic decision to focus on a different approach for women, which was then developed from a combination of existing provision and the repurposing of some Ministry of Justice funding for justice projects. Interventions for women take place at the point of arrest, sentence and following release from prison. Centres offer a range of support and advice for women on accommodation, education, training and employment, health, drugs and alcohol, finance, benefits and debt, children and families, attitudes, thinking and behaviour, domestic abuse and sex work. Although not all services are offered everywhere, centres take a holistic approach to assessing needs and offering support. The whole system approach in Greater Manchester has been fully operational since January 2015.

All women’s centre providers carry out a needs assessment for women upon referral. They offer a safe women-only space, co-located teams (to maximise sharing of skills and expertise), key working & mentoring, and a one stop shop for delivery of services by other key agencies, which support a reduction in reoffending and increased resilience in vulnerable women.

The work was initially developed between the OPCC and the probation trust. As the work developed it became part of the Female Offender Board, which provided oversight and a link into the Justice and Rehabilitation governance structure. Work was initially funded by the Justice and Rehabilitation Executive, NHS England and the National Offender Management Service, over two years, to increase capacity. This was distributed through a competitive grant funding process to six areas. Funding then moved to the local Justice and Rehabilitation, CRC and the Greater Manchester Women’s Support Alliance, who were awarded £1.125m from the Big Lottery and Tampon Tax over 3 years, to sustain and build the approach. Although the primary referral pathway to a women’s centre in Greater Manchester is via probation services, women can be referred via police and non-police routes and can self-refer. More recently the sustainability of the model is also being extended to enable vulnerable and marginalised women to access women’s centre support, and governance is now through a Vulnerable and Marginalised Women’s Board, which links closely with both health and justice partners. Indeed one of the lessons learned by Greater Manchester is that it is only by extending accessibility to the hardest to reach women, regardless of whether or not they have offended, that siloed working is being properly broken down and the strength of the partnership (of justice and non-justice agencies) realised.

71 See: https://gmwsa.org.uk/
72 MOJ - diverting women from crime projects 2011 / MOJ - Guide to a Whole System Approach 2018
Case study: Greater Manchester Women’s Centres (cont)

Cost benefit analysis

- Estimated annual costs: £855,000 (plus in kind services from co-located services etc)
- Funding: 30 per cent combined authority, 30 per cent CRC, 40 per cent fundraising (e.g. tampon tax)
- Cost savings evaluated at £3.18 for every £1 invested (although these vary for different contributors)

Impact

- The volume of referrals to the women’s centres is now 1,600 per year
- The number of women in custody is reducing (bucking the national trend)
- The number of women sentenced to prison fell 14 per cent between March 2016 to March 2017 — 20 per cent are serving <12 months, 3.7 per cent are serving a sentence of ≤3 months
- Local reoffending rate of 15-17 per cent compared to national average of 22.9 per cent (or 22-27 per cent in core cities comparators)
- On average, a positive change of 1.5 was seen against every assessed need (on a scale of 1-10)

Notwithstanding the success of the Greater Manchester model to date, ongoing challenges remain in the delivery of a sustainable partnership involving local government, health and social care services and justice agencies each with competing priorities.

![Fig 3.4. Estimated fiscal benefits for Greater Manchester](image)
Thresholds to access women’s centres were considered high by stakeholders, meaning women had often reached crisis point by the time they were given the support they required to address their offending and its drivers. Service users stated that there should be a lower threshold for accessing services, but were aware that there would need to be a significant increase in resource to meet the added demand:

“I’d have a women’s centre for every three areas [in Birmingham] because actually the need is huge.”

*Women’s centre service user*

**Limits of the current system**

Despite some inspiring examples of women’s centres bucking the trend, too many vulnerable women are continuing to be failed by the system. We think three specific issues lie behind this.

First, services remain highly disjointed. For example, in some areas, community mental health services will not work with women if they have not addressed their substance misuse issues, which results in vulnerable women not being able to access the support they need. In other areas substance misuse services are affected by wrangling over commissioning between CRCs and the NHS about who should pay for substance misuse testing if it is part of a sentencing requirement.

A lack of a joined up approach between prison and community services was also highlighted as a barrier to engagement and rehabilitation for women offenders:

“That can be a real barrier when you can’t communicate with someone who’s inside and you’re trying to set things up so that when they come out they’ve got housing set up and things like that.”

*Women’s diversionary worker*

“That because women are going in and then they’re not getting support in prison so then they’re just coming straight back out and if you’ve got no home, you don’t know what you’re doing or where you’re going, you’re just going to fall straight back into that line, whereas we need people who can capture them in prison.”

*Women’s diversionary worker*
Second, many services remain inaccessible, particularly to the most vulnerable women. In a centralised system, decisions about where services are located are often made nationally, meaning many women are forced to travel a long way from home to access services. Faced with the choice between a long (and costly) trip to a women’s centre and staying away, many women will choose the latter. Indeed for some women, simply leaving the house to attend an appointment could be very difficult due to anxiety or other mental health issues:

“A lot of the women we deal with have anxiety issues, massive anxiety issues and are scared to leave their houses, can’t travel on their own, can’t afford to travel because of universal credit and things like that.”

Women’s centre involvement worker

Accessibility is a particular issue for women prisoners — for example, at HMP Eastwood Park in Avon and Somerset, only 12 per cent of prisoners are from the area, as women prisoners can be sent there from a large geographical area, meaning many women serving sentences there are a long distance from home. This affects women offenders’ ability to maintain family ties, particularly for the two thirds of women at Eastwood Park who are mothers, of which only 24 per cent received visits from their children. Maintaining contact and family ties during a prison sentence can affect the likelihood of reoffending.

In some parts of the country, women’s access to services is restricted by a lack of available local provision. For example, in the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), despite some highly-regarded women’s centre provision, two of the seven local authority areas have no gender-specific interventions available to support women offenders or divert low-level women offenders away from the justice system:

“It feels like a postcode lottery to a certain extent. Birmingham is a big area, granted, but if you live outside, you get nothing.”

Inspector, West Midlands police

Third, our deep dives have revealed that even where provision does exist, there continues to be a worrying lack of awareness amongst professionals, with the exception of police officers. This meant that despite presenting themselves as needing support (to GPs in particular), support was not offered, allowing issues and behaviours to worsen and reach crisis points:

“If someone had sat me down then and had a conversation with me then, it could’ve saved me twenty years of turmoil.”

Women’s centre service user
4. Removing the barriers to change
Systemic barriers

Our research in this area suggests that political will and consensus around the problems/solutions will not be enough to drive change. We have outlined the major systemic barriers that need to be removed in order to unlock change on the ground.

Centralisation: While the criminal justice system remains highly centralised, there will be huge challenges in designing flexible placed-based services to address the offending drivers of a small minority of the overall offending population who themselves have very specific and complex needs. This is most clear in the current configuration of the women’s prison estate which involves placing women a long way from home and disrupting continuity of services on release — for example there is no women’s prison in the West Midlands, with the nearest location over an hour north of central Birmingham.

Fragmentation: Organisations are siloed and working to conflicting, often competing, objectives. For example, the drive to increase on-the-day pre-sentence reports, which advise magistrates on the appropriate sentence, has improved court efficiency but results in a less sophisticated assessment for each woman offender with complex needs, parental responsibilities and a back-history of involvement with other services — factors which, if highlighted to and considered by the judiciary, might lead to a different sentencing package.

Criminal justice-centric: Policymakers (both national and local) need to recognise that the criminal justice system cannot tackle the wider social needs which drive offending and reoffending on its own. If a woman is homeless, her primary need lies outside the justice system; as it is where drug abuse, mental health problems and substance misuse are present. Mainstream services in local government, the NHS and wider voluntary sector partners are as vital to improving outcomes for women offenders as the police and justice agencies. The aim should be to knit these services together locally, around the needs of individuals, using contact with the justice system as an ‘intervention point’ where co-ordinated action is taken to triage women into mainstream or specialist services to meet their underlying needs.

Resources: Finally, the fiscal context is clearly a significant barrier to transforming policy intentions into practice on the ground that underpins all of the above. The funding released by Central Government as part of the Female Offender Strategy (£4.5 million over 5 years to pay for community provision for women offenders)73 is woefully short of what is required to meet current demand.

In 2017, 12,989 women were given a community sentence,74 and 5,665 women were supervised under post-release supervision.76 Assuming the number of women given community sentences remained stable over the five years, the £4.5 million funding pot would equate to £48.25 per woman offender per year — for context, the annual cost of a women’s centre per individual is roughly £1,000.

Throughout our fieldwork, ambition was thwarted by shortage of resources. For example, in the South West, a door-to-door service bringing children from South Wales to visit their mothers in Eastwood Park Prison (in South Gloucestershire) had to be terminated after its three-year Lottery funding came to an end and local funding could not be found to cover the c. £100,000 p/a cost. The programme, Visiting Mum, had been evaluated by Cardiff University and shown to improve outcomes for both children and mothers.77

74 Ministry of Justice, Criminal justice statistics quarterly: Court outcomes by PFA (2017)
75 Offender Management Statistics quarterly: October to December 2017 — Probation 2017, Table A4.14
In a period of fiscal tightening, creating incentives for organisations to work together is clearly critical, but doing so within a highly centralised and siloed system remains difficult. In particular, unsustainable and overly complex funding streams, often in the form of national grants or schemes, present barriers to local areas attempting to develop their own whole system approach. Services end up fighting over small and short-term pockets of money in a competitive way which means they are not always able to think about what different organisations could do together, especially in the long-term.

**Removing the barriers**

Despite the challenges outlined above, inertia is not inevitable. Crest’s work with PCCs and combined authorities on women’s offending suggests there are a number of concrete, practical steps that can and should be taken by local areas to develop a more joined up, preventative approach to the management of women offenders.

**Knowing your local system**

Having a clear picture of local drivers of offending and services available to provide support and challenge to women offenders is necessary for developing a specific, local approach to women offenders and identifying areas where additional commissioning will be required. This may include how the criminal justice system is responding to the particular mix of offending behaviour; what existing services are currently providing; what gaps there are; and how pressures from outside the criminal justice system are having an effect locally. Mapping women’s pathways through the justice system — as well as the current state of local provision — is a first step to understanding who is in the system and identifying pressure points and anomalies within it.

**The value of a local strategy**

Rather than attempting to establish a single standardised approach that can apply across the whole country, a strategy for women offenders needs to be rooted in the specific circumstances of each local area. For example, in some areas, a focus for reform might be on the need for clearer pre-sentence reporting and better local information for magistrates about the options and services available locally that could form part of a new, robust community sentence. In others, it might be aimed at addressing the problem of women being incarcerated far from home.

Building a strategy around the specifics and circumstances of a place binds stakeholders towards a common set of goals and priorities, in a way that is difficult to achieve when seeking to drive collaboration from Whitehall, where the distance between services and their users is much greater.

**Whole system approach**

The notion of a ‘whole system approach’ has almost become synonymous with women’s centres. In fact, while women’s centres can offer an effective alternative to a formal criminal justice pathway, they should be viewed as a means to an end, rather than the end itself. Geographical and financial realities will mean that in some areas, it will make more sense to establish a series of co-located services (e.g. with children’s services and probation), than financing a series of new buildings. Similarly, local commissioners may choose to design an outreach/mobile service — with women visited at home by key workers — rather than the traditional ‘one stop shop’ model.

The most critical success factor for building a whole system approach is not the existence of a building or set of buildings, but whether local services are able to tackle the range of interlinked problems experienced by vulnerable women offenders, as
4. Removing the barriers to change

opposed to focusing solely on their offending behaviour; and whether services provide a platform for deeper relationships to be built, with a single individual able to take a bird's eye view of the woman's history of service involvement, rather than her being passed around the system.

Services for women offenders — whether part of a woman's centre, or some other model — need to be embedded within a wider system of local public services, effectively spanning community and criminal justice services. Otherwise they run the risk of becoming a silo themselves.

Making the financial case for change

Understanding the financial impact of women's offending on public services locally (not just criminal justice ones), and the potential benefits of a more joined up, preventative approach, can be used to make a powerful case for change. Indeed the government has invited local areas to come forward with analysis detailing the case for change. However, in the absence of an agreed methodology, local areas have sometimes struggled to do so.

To mitigate this, Crest have built a rigorous methodology (using publicly available data) to enable local areas to estimate the costs of women's offending to their local public services so that areas can start to quantify what could be possible when “design[ing] approaches tailored for the specific needs of their populations and local circumstances.”78 See the box below and annex A for more detail.

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A methodology for understanding the local cost of women offending and potential benefits for delivering alternative approaches

Baselining the demands on services and accompanying costs of women's offending on a more granular level is vital for local partners to be able to accurately design — and make the case — for commissioning interventions that may need pooled resources and budget commitments from agencies who currently have no centrally driven incentive (financial or legislatively) to do so. With very little published information, we have had to make a series of assumptions as to the costs that might be accrued to different agencies. We would suggest that this information be used to understand what more accurate local-level data could be obtained, with access to internal organisational data and/or the support of partner agencies.

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78 Ministry of Justice's stated vision for female offenders, ibid.
79 3,803 women in prison in 2018. Approximately 830 of those were serving sentences of less than 12 months, however 1,370 were serving sentences of 1-4 years and 1,600 were serving sentences of over 4 years — this group needs to have a prison estate to meet its needs.
80 Only one in 20 children are able to stay in their own home while their mother is in prison, but over 17,000 are thought to be affected by maternal imprisonment. Children of female offenders may also have different levels of need to those of the average looked after child. According to Pause, cost of taking a child into care is £57,102
81 The Intensive Alternative to Community (IAC) trials cost £4,200 per sentence, including twice-weekly contact with a probation officer, 80 hours of unpaid work and mandatory completion of accredited programmes.
4. Removing the barriers to change

### Table 5.1. Estimated costs to services of female offending (principally criminal justice system costs)

#### Pre-sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>National Avg. Unit cost</th>
<th>Organisation bearing cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arrest with detention</td>
<td>£718.5 per arrest</td>
<td>Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of Court Disposal (Arrest with simple caution / no further action)</td>
<td>£345 per arrest</td>
<td>Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police custody (remand)</td>
<td>£134 per night</td>
<td>Police (based on prison costs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case costs to CPS</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>CPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Aid Support (avg cost per case of LA accounting)</td>
<td>£840 per case</td>
<td>LAA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court case costs: Magistrates</td>
<td>£1,150 per day</td>
<td>HMCTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court case costs: Crown</td>
<td>£1,900 per day</td>
<td>HMCTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-sentence report</td>
<td>£210 per report</td>
<td>HMPPS (NPS/CRC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaison and Diversion</td>
<td>£393 per case</td>
<td>NHS England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health referrals from Police</td>
<td>£105 per appointment</td>
<td>PHE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversionary schemes</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Local initiatives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Prison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>National Avg. Unit cost</th>
<th>Organisation bearing cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local female prison sentence (including contracted skills training)</td>
<td>£4,135 per month (average custodial sentence length in 2017 was 10 months for women)</td>
<td>HMPPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probation pre-release support</td>
<td>£227 per month (* 5 due to average custodial sentence length = £1,135)</td>
<td>HMPPS (NPS/CRC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison health care</td>
<td>£30 per month</td>
<td>NHSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children in care</td>
<td>£646 per week</td>
<td>LA (Approximately 2,200 children of imprisoned mothers are taken into care every year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Aid</td>
<td>£840 per case</td>
<td>LAA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing support from any locally commissioned initiatives</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Local initiatives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Post-custody and community sentences (CO/SSOs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>National Avg. Unit cost</th>
<th>Organisation bearing cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community order / suspended sentence order</td>
<td>£4,476 per average sentence</td>
<td>NPS/CRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensive community order at most expensive</td>
<td>£12,500 per year</td>
<td>Ministry of Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-custody supervision</td>
<td>£2,274 per year</td>
<td>NPS/CRC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Costs related to vulnerability (not necessarily criminal justice system related)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>National Avg. Unit cost</th>
<th>Organisation bearing cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holistic social care support</td>
<td>£1,300 for community based support</td>
<td>Joint commissioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing support</td>
<td>£513 per month</td>
<td>HCLG (Not a specific criminal justice system cost though)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits and employment support</td>
<td>£2,274 per year</td>
<td>DWP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Case study: MOPAC blueprint for women in contact with the criminal justice system

The capital has a complex criminal justice landscape with around 16,800 arrests of women offenders by the Metropolitan Police Service in 2017/18, 32 local authority districts and a wide range of stakeholders across the capital from the statutory and voluntary sector. The closure of HMP Holloway means any women sentenced to custody are now necessarily placed a significant distance from home, with the associated challenges this brings.

There are currently three women’s centres focused specifically on women in contact with the justice system: a major centre in Lambeth working across six boroughs, one Hammersmith and one (recently opened) in north east London. Access to support and services for women offenders in north and east London is currently limited to more general women’s provision. The Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) has invested £4.6 million over three years from a co-commissioning fund into female offender projects.

MOPAC is also planning a diversion pilot to selected areas; this will integrate a holistic package of support with an out of court disposal to improve outcomes for women. It will offer police officers and the CPS a robust alternative pathway, as opposed to prosecution through the courts. Trauma-informed, gender-specific intervention support will be provided in a friendly space by specialist key workers.

After extensive consultation with partners, MOPAC will shortly publish its blueprint for women offenders, intended to implement a whole system approach to improve the treatment and outcomes of women in contact with the criminal justice system in London, and to provide co-ordinated and sustainable services for women. The blueprint is to be formally adopted by all key partners, and will include agreed markers for measuring progress on the shared aims.

Notably London’s blueprint includes a commitment to:

- Work collaboratively to align priorities and budgets
- Invest in prevention and community based alternatives to custody for low-risk women offenders
- Map existing provision for women
- Enable the co-designing of services to address the causes of offending by women
- Investigate what would be needed to develop a network of women’s centres across London as hubs to deliver much of the above

MOPAC and the Ministry of Justice continue to work together under a ‘memorandum of understanding’ to ensure there is sufficient funding and investment for female offender services in the community.
Pooled budgets to maximise resources

With little prospect of further substantial funding from central government on the horizon, the ability to co-commission services and pool budgets is key to success. As the case studies above illustrate, there is much that local leaders can already do, within the constraints of the current system, provided they have the vision and leadership to drive change. Yet a common feature in our conversations with local leaders was the frustration that even where local participants shared a vision for reform, many of those sitting around the table did not have the flexibility to pool budgets and/or that central government had not loosened their grip on the way funding was allocated. Whilst PCCs have some flexibility in how policing resources are spent, collaboration often breaks down because court managers, probation providers, directors of public health and prison governors are unable to ‘unlock’ portions of their budgets to fund joint working and/or innovative reform.

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[82] The London strategy group for female offenders have developed a blueprint for London, coordinated by the Prison Reform Trust.
5. Policy recommendations
5. Policy recommendations

This paper has argued that local public services need to get better at treating the women offenders’ underlying needs and vulnerabilities, rather than their presenting symptoms, but are currently prevented from doing so, by a system that is heavily centralised, fragmented and criminal-justice-centric, which means:

- we are missing opportunities to stem the flow of women into the criminal justice system;
- women’s vulnerabilities and needs are not being appropriately assessed and acted upon;
- sentencing is ineffective and inefficient; and
- women are not being adequately rehabilitated and are thus being recycled through the system.
## 1. Women’s entry into the criminal justice system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What needs to happen?</th>
<th>How can this happen?</th>
<th>Who could make it happen?</th>
<th>Further devolution needed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.1</strong> Diversion pathways should be piloted in courts for women who enter the CJS via non-policing prosecution bodies — so that there is a further opportunity beyond police interaction for identification of need and a supportive intervention</td>
<td>We recommend PCCs and mayors work with courts to develop specific diversion pathways to offer additional opportunities to provide interventions to women who enter the CJS via non-policing prosecution bodies such as TVLEO or DVLA and do not come into contact with justice agencies until summons and/or court. This would also include ensuring that, at a minimum, liaison and diversion is rolled out across courts in all areas as well as police custody.</td>
<td>PCCs, mayors, courts, judiciary</td>
<td>Pilots can be developed by PCCs, Mayors and courts without the need for devolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.2</strong> Explore the feasibility of a new requirement for courts to assess whether financial planning support is required as a condition of sentence, including fines</td>
<td>Government should explore the potential to pilot financial planning support as a condition attached to fines. This would include exploring provision within existing legislation (such as s.151 and s.300 of CJA 2003), for example, which makes to replace fines with unpaid work as a condition of discharge and community based penalties for repeat offenders in receipt of multiple fines at the discretion of the court.</td>
<td>MoJ, HMCTS, courts, judiciary</td>
<td>Requires national policy change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.3</strong> Given the prevalence of shoplifting offences amongst women, retail-based diversion schemes should be offered to women committing shoplifting offences</td>
<td>PCCs should work with the retail industry to develop schemes which divert women caught shoplifting to their local women’s centre or women’s service rather than to the formal criminal justice system</td>
<td>PCCs, mayors, local retailers</td>
<td>Can be implemented immediately by PCCs and mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.4</strong> Further research is required to understand the characteristics of women offenders who come into the criminal justice system via non-police prosecuting bodies, such as TVLEO and DVLA</td>
<td>Government should, building on the findings of the 2015 Perry Review and BBC review in 2017, work with non-police prosecuting bodies (i.e. TVLEO, DVLA, Local Authorities) to analyse the characteristics of women who are the subject of prosecution to build an evidence base to inform an action plan to address gender disparities in prosecution</td>
<td>Government, Prosecuting agencies</td>
<td>Support required by central Government</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Policy recommendations

### 2. Assessing (and acting upon) women’s vulnerability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What needs to happen?</th>
<th>How can this happen?</th>
<th>Who could make it happen?</th>
<th>Further devolution needed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.1</strong> Local areas should consider recasting women’s offending strategies as ‘vulnerable women’s’ strategies, to establish a defined gender responsive approach for CJS and non-CJS agencies, address the drivers of vulnerability and to identify opportunities to co-commission specialist services to meet local needs.</td>
<td>PCCs and Mayors should work with CJS and other public service partners to develop shared objectives around women’s vulnerability. This will enable them to align policy, resources and strategy between criminal justice and other public services e.g. bringing together mental health, drug and alcohol interventions, early help and family support.</td>
<td>PCCs, mayors, public services</td>
<td>Can be implemented immediately by PCCs and mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.2</strong> New out of court disposal options should be piloted locally, tailored to address underlying causes of offending, rather than acting solely as a simple warning not to reoffend.</td>
<td>PCCs should pilot a new point-of-arrest gender-informed diversion scheme to replace formal cautions, whereby the conditions attached are designed to address the underlying drivers of offending and not led by the offence itself. The specification and eligibility criteria should be co-designed between probation services and the police.</td>
<td>PCCs, NPS/CRCs, police</td>
<td>Can be implemented immediately by PCCs and mayors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 3. Smart sentencing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What needs to happen?</th>
<th>How can this happen?</th>
<th>Who could make it happen?</th>
<th>Further devolution needed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.1 PCCs and other local CJS agencies need to know where women offenders from their area are incarcerated</strong></td>
<td>PCCs should commission analysis on where women offenders in the local area are incarcerated, to understand how far they have to travel, how many are in large establishments, and to build a richer picture of local women offender pathways</td>
<td>PCCs, mayors</td>
<td>Can be implemented immediately by PCCs and mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.2 Sentencers need to be given more information about women’s needs and offending circumstances at the point of sentencing</strong></td>
<td>Pre-sentence reports (PSRs) should be used to help courts understand the underlying needs of women offenders who have committed ‘lower level’ offences. We recommend Magistrates operate under a presumption that they will request PSRs for any woman offender at the point of sentencing</td>
<td>HMCTS, MoJ (NPS)</td>
<td>Requires national policy change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.3 Custody budget for women offenders to be devolved to PCCs and Mayors as a mechanism to increase investment in community provision</strong></td>
<td>Ministry of Justice have asked local areas to build a business case for devolved justice budgets, including the budget for custody. PCCs and Mayors should convene partners to build a local case for change, using local data around demand for services and cost benefit analyses of community and custodial provision to demonstrate the evidence-base for devolving custody budgets to local areas</td>
<td>Ministry of Justice, PCCs</td>
<td>Requires national policy change including financial devolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.4 Greater use, and development, of alternatives to short custodial sentences</strong></td>
<td>PCCs and Mayors should commit to the co-development of innovative alternatives to short custodial sentences such as gender-informed versions of the Intensive Community Order, as well as greater use of electronic tagging</td>
<td>PCCs, mayors, NPS, CRCs, Courts</td>
<td>Can be implemented immediately by PCCs and mayors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## 4. Resettlement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What needs to happen?</th>
<th>How can this happen?</th>
<th>Who could make it happen?</th>
<th>Further devolution needed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.1</strong> PCCs and Mayors need to have a comprehensive picture of local coverage of gender specific provision for women offenders at every point of the offender journey, so that they can understand where gaps exist and fill them.</td>
<td>PCCs should review current local provision for women offenders, and ensure women’s only provision, is accessible across all postcodes in a PCC area with a commitment to provide full geographical coverage. This must be locally driven, and could take the form of designated mobile support and/or physical space. For example where it is impractical to invest in a bespoke physical women’s centre, the development of women’s only provision within existing community space via a key worker model could be investigated.</td>
<td>PCCs</td>
<td>Can be implemented immediately by PCCs and mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.2</strong> The development of a gender-informed probation service</td>
<td>Forthcoming changes to probation services should ensure that services for women include closer links to women’s centres as part of a more gender-informed probation services. A central part of this will also be improvements to the Through the Gate model</td>
<td>Central government, NPS, women’s centres</td>
<td>Requires national policy change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Call for action:  
Blueprint for women offenders in Avon and Somerset and the West Midlands

Based on the ‘deep dives’ conducted for Avon and Somerset and the West Midlands, Crest developed a blueprint for each area to support them to advance their own strategies for women offenders. The purpose of the blueprints was to set out the challenges, opportunities and way forward in implementing a whole system approach to women’s offending in each area.

Using the local data analysis and stakeholder engagement, the nature, scale and costs of offending in each area could be mapped and compared against existing provisions. Based on this, tangible and achievable policy recommendations were put forward, advocating a locally-led approach in line with what is being done across the country to tackle women’s offending.

The case for change for a gender responsive approach to women’s offending in Avon and Somerset and the West Midlands focused on:

- **Moving support upstream:** Women at risk of offending need support earlier in the process, integrated with wider support for vulnerable women
- **Use of fines:** A gender responsive approach means assessment and where necessary intervention at the point of a fine
- **Shoplifting:** A gender responsive service should address theft and shoplifting, given women’s over-representation in these offences (particularly in the West Midlands)
- **Engagement with services:** Women offenders service user engagement is often poor, and needs to be better understood (particularly in Avon and Somerset)
- **Community sentences:** A gender responsive approach must to more to keep women out of custody, but sentencers need to have confidence in more constructive options

A cost analysis was also completed for each area, demonstrating the local costs of women’s offending to police, and the cost of sentencing and managing women offenders, to help make the case for a whole system approach and the attendant cost benefit this could bring to each area.

Options for reform centred around four key themes: strategy, knowledge, partnership and governance. Each option detailed its potential outcomes and its impact on demand, as well as whether national constraints would mean further devolution would be required to implement the proposed reform.
Annex A: A methodology for understanding the cost of women offending locally
Annex A: A methodology for understanding the cost of women offending locally

Baselining the demands on services and accompanying costs of women offending on a more granular level is vital for local partners to be able to accurately design — and make the case — for commissioning different interventions that may need pooled resources and budget commitments from agencies who currently have no centrally driven incentive (financial or legislatively) to do so. With very little published information, we have had to make a series of assumptions as to the costs that might be accrued to different agencies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What</th>
<th>Cost/benefit to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policing costs, including:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrests Out Of Court Disposals (OOCD</td>
<td>Police (Home Office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remand</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaison and diversion</td>
<td>NHS — Department of Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court and other criminal justice system 'processing' costs</td>
<td>Ministry of Justice (some to LA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosecution</td>
<td>HMCTS, TVLEO, DVLA, (LA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Aid Agency</td>
<td>CPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courts</td>
<td>LAA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probation advice</td>
<td>HMCTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPS — HMPPS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cost of community based sentences/ interventions</td>
<td>Ministry of Justice (HMPPS) Local Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Charities/ Grants (e.g. Big Lottery Fund)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cost of provison of prison sentences</td>
<td>Ministry of Justice (HMPPS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cost of resettlement/ post-licence supervision</td>
<td>HMPPS (NPS/CRC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of employment income, taxes paid (job seekers,</td>
<td>DWP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>employment support allowance etc)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of home and/or housing support or benefit</td>
<td>HCLG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health costs (GP, ambulance, substance misuse services e.g. methadone prescription)</td>
<td>DoH/ PHE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs of children to care (temporary foster placement vs full care proceedings)</td>
<td>Local Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs to offenders' families (loss of income, visiting costs, taking over childcare)</td>
<td>Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial cost of crime to victims</td>
<td>Society</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As some costs often attributed to women offending, such as housing support, lack of employment, health needs, could be both a cause and effect of a woman’s offending, these are not taken here to be a direct cost of women offending. It is also important to say that although there may be savings to be made in some areas (for example in reducing expensive prison sentences), more money may need to be spent upfront in other areas in order to reap dividends in the longer term. Likewise, by stopping or preventing women’s offending, direct costs to organisations outside of the criminal justice system, such as employment or housing benefits, may not necessarily be cut. Many women will have been receiving housing support/benefits before criminal justice system contact so custody would act as a break in these benefits being given out. Nevertheless, looking at the longer-term, including intergenerational benefits, is important when making the case for commissioning different interventions.
# Table A.1. Estimated costs of female offending to criminal justice system services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-sentence</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Unit cost</th>
<th>Organisation bearing cost</th>
<th>Source for women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arrest with detention</td>
<td>£718.5 per arrest with detention</td>
<td>Police</td>
<td>Number of women arrested and detained</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of Court Disposal (Arrest with simple caution / no further action)</td>
<td>£345 per arrest</td>
<td>Police</td>
<td>Number of women given an OOCD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police custody (remand)</td>
<td>£134 per night</td>
<td>Police</td>
<td>Number of women held in police remand</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case costs to CPS</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>CPS</td>
<td>Number of female cases prepared by the regional CPS (costs will be localise)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Aid Support (avg cost per case of LA accounting)</td>
<td>£840 per case</td>
<td>LAA</td>
<td>Number of women support with legal aid (held centrally)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court case costs: Magistrates</td>
<td>£1,150 per day</td>
<td>HMCTS</td>
<td>Number of women court cases</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court case costs: Crown</td>
<td>£1,900 per day</td>
<td>HMCTS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-sentence report</td>
<td>£210 per report</td>
<td>HMPPS (NPS)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaison and Diversion</td>
<td>£393 per case</td>
<td>NHS England</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health referrals from Police</td>
<td>£105 per appointment</td>
<td>PHE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prison</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Unit cost</th>
<th>Organisation bearing cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local female prison sentence (including contracted skills training)</td>
<td>£4,135 per month (ACSL in 2017 was 10 months for women)</td>
<td>HMPPS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probation pre-release support</td>
<td>£227 per month (* 5 due to ACSL = £1,135)</td>
<td>HMPPS (NPS/CRC)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison health care</td>
<td>£30 per month</td>
<td>NHSE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children in care</td>
<td>£646 per week</td>
<td>LA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Aid</td>
<td>£840 per case</td>
<td>LAA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post-custody and community sentences (CO/SSOs)</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Unit cost</th>
<th>Organisation bearing cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community order / suspended sentence order</td>
<td>£4,476 per average sentence</td>
<td>NPS/CRC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensive community order at most expensive</td>
<td>£12,500 per year</td>
<td>Ministry of Justice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-custody supervision</td>
<td>£2,274 per year</td>
<td>NPS/CRC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and social care support</td>
<td>£1,300 for community based support</td>
<td>Joint commissioning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing support</td>
<td>£513 per month</td>
<td>HCLG (Not a specific criminal justice system cost though)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits and employment support</td>
<td>£2,274 per year</td>
<td>DWP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

83 3,803 women in prison in 2018. Approximately 830 of these were serving sentences of less than 12 months, however 1,370 were serving sentences of 1-4 years and 1,600 were serving sentences of over 4 years — this group needs to have a prison estate to meet its needs.

84 Only one in 20 children are able to stay in their own home while their mother is in prison, but over 17,000 are thought to be affected by maternal imprisonment. Children of women offenders may also have different levels of need to those of the average looked after child. According to Pause, cost of taking a child into care is £37,102.

85 The Intensive Alternative to Community (IAC) trials cost £4,200 per sentence, including twice-weekly contact with a probation officer, 80 hours of unpaid work and mandatory completion of accredited programmes.
Annex A: A methodology for understanding the cost of women offending locally

The potential costs and savings of providing support

Sentencing that leads to better outcomes and savings

On average, it costs ten times more to send a woman to prison than to put her on a standard probation or community service order.86 Outcomes are starkly different for the two sentences: community sentences have a proven reoffending rate of 30.5 per cent compared to 71.5 per cent for short custodial sentences (less than 12 months).87 As we outline in chapter 1, short custodial sentences are typically used for women who commit non-violent offences, and are more likely to have committed repeat low-level offences like shoplifting.

Table A.2. Estimated costs (and potential savings) based on information from the latest Eastwood Park inspection report88 and an estimated imprisonment cost of £1,000 per week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence length (and average used)</th>
<th>Number of women affected at Eastwood Park</th>
<th>Estimated saving based on average weekly cost of imprisonment of £1,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Serving sentences of under 1 month (estimate based on average 2 week sentence)</td>
<td>76 women</td>
<td>£152,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving sentence of 3-6 months (estimate based on average of 18 weeks)</td>
<td>117 women</td>
<td>£2,106,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving sentence of 6-12 months (estimate based on average of 36 weeks)</td>
<td>47 women</td>
<td>£1,692,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>240 women</td>
<td>£3,950,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing support</td>
<td>£513 per month</td>
<td>HCLG (Not a specific criminal justice system cost though)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits and employment support</td>
<td>£2,274 per year</td>
<td>DWP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

86 The average prison sentence for a woman in 2017 was 10 months, at an approximate cost of £4,135 per month. This equates to £41,350 per average custodial sentence compared to £4,476 for the average community order.
Pooling budgets to avoid duplication and provide holistic support

Women’s centres are seen as an effective model to act as ‘one stop shops’ to provide support to vulnerable women which provide better outcomes for women offenders at a much lower cost than typical sentences. The Ministry of Justice’s own analysis praises the efficacy of these services at reducing women’s offending:

“We can be confident that there is a real difference in the reoffending rate for those persons that received support provided by women’s centres throughout England and the matched control group by between 1 and 9 percentage points.” 89

The average cost of a holistic community-based service is estimated at £1,300 per woman,90 meaning they can unsurprisingly lead to cost savings. Indicative, early estimates by Greater Manchester estimate that over £6 is saved for every £1 spent on the Together Women Project women’s centre, with around £16 of wider economic value created for every £1 spent.91

The cost of running a women’s centre will vary according to its location and its operating model, for example, such as whether it is a physical building or a mobile hub, and the geographical spread of women it needs to reach.

Table A.3. Estimated costs associated with women centres, 201793

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Annual cost</th>
<th>Cost per woman per year (supporting number of women)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>London borough</td>
<td>Up to £400,000</td>
<td>£1,000 per woman per year (supporting 300-400 women)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Manchester</td>
<td>£170,000</td>
<td>£500 per woman per year (supporting 350 women a year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East England</td>
<td>£300,000</td>
<td>£1,000 per woman per year (supporting 300 women a year)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Annex A: A methodology for understanding the cost of women offending locally
Annex B: Case studies
Annex B: Case studies

So that local areas can most effectively do things differently for women offenders, the particular drivers behind women offending in particular areas need to be understood, by analysing local data and comparing against both the national picture and comparable police force areas.

We mapped provision in two areas — the West Midlands and Avon and Somerset — and discussed these with local stakeholders and service users to explore how they correlated with specific demand profiles, looking for barriers and blockers in local offender journeys that might affect identification, engagement and rehabilitation.

**Case study: West Midlands**

As a large metropolitan area, made up of seven local authorities and the second largest number of women offenders in the country (after London), the West Midlands has access to both a breadth of service provision and many of the economies of scale that should make a different approach to women offenders particularly viable. Nevertheless, it covers a large area, and infrastructure, notably public transport links, might present problems in setting up an entirely new ‘whole system approach’.

**Criminal justice journeys**

Understanding the journey of women offenders through the local criminal justice system is key to understanding how to impact on outcomes. Arrests of women in the West Midlands increased 2.8 per cent from 2016/17 to 2017/18, whilst nationally, they decreased by 11.3 per cent.

In the courts, a significant number of women in the West Midlands are sentenced outside of the area. This is because from 2014, TV licence evasion prosecutions (which form a substantial proportion of all fines given to women offenders) were all based from Warwickshire courts and not the West Midlands.

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**Figure B.1. Flow of female offenders through the criminal justice system in the West Midlands, with comparisons to national data and other similar areas (2017 data)**

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As a result, proportionally fewer women were sentenced with a fine in 2017 (64 per cent) than nationally (85 per cent), with comparatively more being given suspended, community and custodial sentences (see figure B.1).

Trends in sentencing show that the West Midlands has seen a drop in the use of non-custodial sentences (e.g. community sentences, fines), falling at a faster rate than the national average. In 2017, 477 women were sentenced to immediate custody in the West Midlands, with shoplifting accounting for an overwhelming majority of custodial sentences (see figure B.2).

Reoffending rates were similar to the national average, with roughly a quarter of women reoffending overall. The number of reoffences per offender is also increasing.94

The Staffordshire and West Midlands CRC received a ‘requires improvement’ rating from the inspectorate in December 2018,95 however there are specific arrangements and interventions for women which the inspection considered positively. Women’s centre engagement with the CRC varies; one centre specifically bemoans the one-size fits all approach the CRC took to a contract to support women offenders. The large geographical area covered by the CRC (and lack of coterminosity with police force areas) is almost certainly a challenge to engagement and ensuring all women can access support and courses on offer. Getting reoffending rates down will therefore require a more joined up and localised approach to ensure all women can access the right support and services.

Figure B.2. Women sentenced to custody in the West Midlands by detailed offence (top 10 most common offences), 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offence Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theft from shops</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common assault and battery</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breach of restraining order</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary in a Dwelling - Notifiable either way</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft from the Person or Another</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possession of article with blade or point</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraud by false representation of Cheques, plastic card and online bank accounts</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production, supply and possession with intent to supply a controlled drug - Class A</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assaulting, resisting or obstruction of a constable or designated officer in execution of duty</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

93 Criminal justice statistics quarterly: Court Outcomes by police force area (2017)
94 Reoffending geographical data tool (2018)
Case study: West Midlands (cont)

Needs

Complex needs typify women offenders in the West Midlands as elsewhere. However, because of the relatively high numbers of women offenders and the urban nature of the area, a wide range of support services are provided across the area. A liaison and diversion pilot is underway, led by the New Chance Project, operating across all areas of the West Midlands with the exception of Wolverhampton and Coventry. Discussions are also underway locally to extend MASH teams to adults, and lowering the threshold at which a multi-agency response could be introduced, particularly to increase the effectiveness of liaison and diversion.

Women’s centres (facilitated by Anawim and Black Country Women’s Aid) provide support to women across the West Midlands, with the exception of Coventry and Wolverhampton where there is no specific support available for women offenders.

Sentencing pathways

Over half (52 per cent) of women offenders given custodial sentences in the West Midlands in 2017 were sentenced for theft offences, which is a higher proportion than in comparison areas such as London (28 per cent) or Greater Manchester (24 per cent). This challenge is exacerbated by there being no local prison for women in the West Midlands, most women sentenced to custody being in HMP Foston Hall or HMP Drake Hall one-hour north of Birmingham.

A better understanding of the drivers of offending in this area is key to developing a more effective, localised response. The women’s centre Anawim suggested that financial hardship and substance misuse may be driving theft offending — further investigation and evaluation of the services and support available to women vulnerable to these factors would be a key way to potentially divert and impact on this differential locally.

Challenges in developing a gender-responsive approach

The West Midlands is a complex landscape with a mayor, PCC and a lack of coterminosity posing challenges for commissioners, and of course for women trying to access support. However, there is considerable appetite for a gender-responsive approach in the West Midlands, across a number of partners and stakeholder groups. A number of initiatives and discussions are well underway in the area, including a joint task and finish group focused on women offenders, facilitated by the combined authority and chaired by the PCC’s office. The West Midlands has also a women’s champion in post at the NPS since 2017. In addition, the PCC is focusing on shifting away from punitive approaches (for both male and women offenders), and shifting towards treatment e.g. for substance misuse and mental health issues.
West Midlands Governance

PCC: David Jamieson  
Police Force: West Midlands Police
CRC: Reducing Reoffending Partnership (Staffordshire and West Midlands)
Victim service: Victim Support
Mayor: Andy Street
Local Government: Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall, Wolverhampton
NHS: Four clinical commissioning groups, Public Health England (West Midlands)
Voluntary sector support for women offenders: Notably Anawim and Black Country Womens’ Aid (New Chance Project operates through these)

Resourcing for services

Anawim women’s centre in Birmingham is a recipient of some government investment via the Female Offender Strategy.\(^96\) Other attempts by the PCC to secure seed funding to develop alternative, localised approaches to improve outcomes for women offenders have been unsuccessful so far.

Going forwards, the extent to which local agencies can agree a strategy and common objectives around pooled resources will be key to improving outcomes across the area.

\(^{96}\) £3.3 million was awarded to 12 organisations in November 2018 (an average of £275,000 each).
Case study: Avon and Somerset

The Avon and Somerset area incorporates a diverse range of physical, economic and social environments. It includes the cities of Bristol and Bath through to some of the most rural areas in England. This presents some obvious accessibility issues for women offenders who reside in the area. Though there is a local prison, HMP Eastwood Park, only 12 per cent of the prisoners are from Avon and Somerset.97

There is considerable appetite for a gender-responsive approach in Avon and Somerset, across a number of partners and stakeholder groups, and a number of initiatives and discussions are well underway in the area. Therefore there is potential to overcome the barriers posed by the area’s geography to provide a whole system approach for its women offenders, through joint working and shared outcomes.

Journeys

The overview flow (see figure B.3) demonstrates that the overall picture in Avon and Somerset does not deviate in any significant ways from the national average. That is, similarly to national figures, women were overwhelmingly sentenced with fines (87 per cent) with only 2 per cent of those convicted at court (158 women) receiving an immediate custodial sentence. The reoffending rate in Avon and Somerset is similar to the national average, with roughly a quarter of women reoffending overall.98

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97 HMP Eastwood Park needs analysis, carried out in March 2018.
98 Reoffending geographical data tool (2018).
There is one female prison located in the South West, Eastwood Park, and over a quarter of the women there (26 per cent) are serving sentences for theft offences, and two thirds of the population are in custody for non-serious offences.\(^9\) The rate of assault incidents has risen steadily since 2013,\(^1\) and self-harm rates are also increasing, outpacing national figures.\(^2\)

**Needs**

The needs of women offenders in Avon and Somerset differ from those of male offenders in a number of ways (similarly to national findings). Though they have fewer problems with thinking behaviour and pro-criminal attitudes, a higher proportion of women offenders have issues relating to employment and training and relationships compared to male offenders. They are also twice as likely to have received medication for mental health problems.\(^3\) A liaison and diversion scheme based in Bridgwater is in operation (SHE — see case study on page 24) which aims to divert vulnerable women offenders away from the criminal justice system, and address the needs that underlie women’s offending behaviours.

In addition to project SHE, a number of other services operate in Avon and Somerset to support the needs of women offenders e.g. Golden Key and One25, which are both specialist women’s centres in Bristol, and a new women’s centre in Bridgwater, opened in April 2019, run by the Nelson Trust.

**Sentencing pathways**

In terms of sentencing trends, the use of community sentences has decreased in Avon and Somerset, but at a much slower rate than the national average. The use of immediate custody has remained largely stable (5 per cent decrease between 2007-2017, compared to a 2 per cent decrease nationally), whereas the use of suspended sentences nearly doubled between 2007-2017, compared to a 41 per cent increase nationally.

The use of fines increased by 35 per cent in Avon and Somerset between 2007-2017 (compared to a 13 per cent increase nationally), making up 87 per cent of court outcomes for women offenders in 2017 compared to 80 per cent for male offenders. Given fines offer no associated interventions nor rehabilitative elements as as a court outcome, and women’s offending is more likely than men’s to be financially motivated, one of the key questions in developing a more effective, localised response in Avon and Somerset will be whether fines are an appropriate sentence to use with women offenders, and if not, what are the alternatives.

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\(^9\) Prison population data tool (2018)

\(^1\) Assaults data tool (2018)

\(^2\) Self-harm data tool (2018)

\(^3\) Justice Committee: Written evidence from Avon and Somerset probation trust (2012). Available at: https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmjust/92/92we28.htm
Case study: Avon and Somerset (cont)

Challenges in developing a gender-responsive approach

The regional landscape in Avon and Somerset adds to the complexity of developing a whole system, gender-responsive approach to women offenders. Governance is complex, with two mayors, a PCC, a devolution deal and a lack of coterminosity, which taken together pose challenges both for commissioners and, of course for women trying to access support.

However a number of initiatives and discussions are well underway in the area, including a South West reducing reoffending board (with a driving focus on women), a gender responsive pathway that sits under the Avon and Somerset reducing reoffending board, project SHE and appetite from the PCC to collaborate and co-commission.

Avon and Somerset Governance

PCC: Sue Mountstevens
CRC: Bristol, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire
Victim service: Victim Support South West
Bristol Mayor: Marvin Rees WECA Mayor: Tim Bowles
West of England combined authority: Bath & North East Somerset, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire
Local Government: South Gloucestershire, Bristol, North Somerset, Somerset, Bath and NE Somerset
Bristol voluntary sector support for women: Bristol Drugs Project: Missing Link (women’s mental health & Housing); One25 (sex work & addiction); Support Eden House Project (one day stop service)
NHS: SW Clinical Commissioning Group - made boundaries coterminous with police; Public Health England - South West (has health and justice lead)
Other areas voluntary sector support for women: Nelson Trust (addiction); Spring of Hope (mental health & shelter); Project SHE (mental health and retreats); Womankind (mental health)