



Ministry of  
**JUSTICE**

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A Report on the Government's Strategy for Diverting

# Women

Away from Crime

**December 2009**

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## Ministerial Foreword



This report sets out our progress on implementing the Government's strategy for diverting women away from crime. It describes our plans to consolidate delivery of the investment in more community provision, and to make more widespread changes which will aim to stop women entering into the system in the first place.

We are building on the partnerships already in place. However, our future success to sustain this different approach will depend on greater coordination both in commissioning and delivery in order to improve outcomes for all women offenders. I want to assure you that I have used my roles as Ministerial Champion for Women in the Criminal Justice System and Deputy Minister for Women at the Government Equalities Office to full effect, making it my priority to ensure that issues surrounding women offenders are not marginalised, and that policy and delivery are joined up.

The Government is implementing a strategy that has focused on making a difference for women within the criminal justice system but aims to go further and make more widespread changes which will stop women getting into the system in the first place. We must give the majority of non-violent women offenders the alternatives to prison that give them the opportunity to tackle the causes of their offending.

The strategy is being taken forward by a cross-departmental Women's Unit which provides capacity to cover a broad range of issues and engage more actively with stakeholders. This Unit is led by the Ministry of Justice with representatives from Government Equalities Office, Department of Health and the Attorney General's Office, setting the strategic direction. It also works closely with the National Offender Management Service, Youth Justice Board and partners, to support the delivery of shared plans for diverting women and girls away from crime.

Good progress is being made. Building on this momentum we can close the revolving door of short sentences and persisting offending. We can give these women the opportunity to turn their lives around, and in doing so transform their lives and those of their children.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maria Eagle".

**MARIA EAGLE MP**

**MINISTER OF STATE  
MINISTRY OF JUSTICE**

## 1. Introduction

We have made good progress with the implementation of our strategy and can already see a reduction in the number of women in prison and an encouraging increase in the use of community orders for women. With this promising reduction in the numbers of women in prison and development of a network of community provision we are moving swiftly towards our aim of a sustained different approach to diverting women away from crime.

This Report sets out our progress and details our plans to consolidate delivery of our existing strategy, to invest further in community provision, and to make more widespread changes which will aim to stop women committing crime and entering the criminal justice system.

Having put in place an intensive, multi-agency approach, we are starting to make a difference but are also committing to go further. In particular, we will:

- Reduce the women's prison estate by 300 places by March 2011 and 400 places by March 2012 and divert resources from custody to the community to sustain the multi-agency community projects we have established through grant funding.
- Provide up to £5 million to improve Approved Premises accommodation for women offenders that are being closely supervised on release from custody, and for women offenders with high levels of need to keep them out of custody.
- Make available funding of over £1 million to pilot a new project, from April 2010, to explore the benefits of early intervention for women with multiple needs from their first point of contact with the criminal justice system. Family Intervention Projects will target this group of women and their dependent children in up to 20 areas in England to provide intensive personalised support in a community setting. Dedicated key-workers will provide intensive support to vulnerable women and their families.
- Fund enhanced bail support to provide mentoring and other provision to help over 500 more women settle in accommodation.

## 2. What impact have we seen?

We wanted to see a drop in the number of women in prison and a wider network of women's community projects to which women offenders and those at risk of offending can be referred as an alternative to prison.

Statistics show:

- There has been a 4.2% reduction in the number of women in prison over the past two years.
- There has been a corresponding 1% increase in community orders for women between 2007 and 2008; an increase of 181 (14,906 to 15,087); this has significantly increased from only 6,490 in 2005.
- Overall, we have seen a reduction in the numbers of women in prison who have died in custody in recent years; from a peak of 14 in 2003. Whilst every death is a tragedy that has profound consequences for families, in 2008 there was one self inflicted death, the lowest number since 1994.
- The numbers of women assessed as high risk of harm to others remains very low, 3% of women compared to 11% of men.
- The re-offending rate for adult women has remained stable; however it remains lower than men's.
- A total of 73 female offenders were sentenced to the Intensive Alternatives to Custody disposal since its start in March 2008. The retention rate was 82% at September 2009; 33% of these were for violence against another person, and 29% for theft and handling.
- The number of female juvenile offenders held in custody fell by 18% from 2006 (88) to 2007 (72). There was also a reduction in the actual reoffending rate for female juveniles, falling 14% from 61.4 to 52.8/100 offenders.
- Reoffending rates are lower for girls than boys for all types of disposal, particularly custody.<sup>1</sup> However, males have seen the largest reduction in the frequency rate of 23.0% from 2000 to 2007 (from 170.0 to 131.0), compared to a reduction for females of 11.7% (from 80.9 to 71.4).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Reoffending of juveniles: results from the 2007 cohort*, MoJ 2009

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

### 3. Significant developments in improving services to women

#### *3.1 Supporting Women's Community Projects across England and Wales*

We wanted to ensure that we had in place strong alternatives to custody, for women who might have been remanded into custody or given short prison sentences.

The Diversion Programme, a key part of the Government's Strategy, was established earlier this year with resources of £15.6 million to divert women from custody and is investing in the provision of additional services in the community for women offenders and women at risk of offending.

We have allocated in excess of £9 million from the £15.6 million Diversion Programme budget as grant funding to support third sector providers across the country to deliver Women's Community Projects (WCPs) (also referred to as one-stop-shops). A WCP is a central hub, which could be a building or a key-worker, where women at any point in the criminal justice system can access support to meet a whole range of needs.

In total 31 grants have been awarded to third sector organisations across the country to work with criminal justice and other agencies to develop and deliver needs led holistic services to women offenders and women at risk of offending. The organisations funded vary considerably. Many have particular specialisms that will inform the work they do, such as the Nelson Trust, a drug and alcohol treatment provider. However, all of the Women's Community Projects are providing support across all the Pathways that support women turning away from crime.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In November 2005 the government published the Reducing Re-offending Delivery Plan. The plan built on the Cabinet Office's Social Exclusion Unit Report published in 2002. The report identified seven pathways which could contribute to future re-offending. They include: accommodation; education, training and employment; health; drugs and alcohol; finance, benefits and debt; children and families; and attitudes, thinking and behaviour.

### Case Study: The Nelson Trust - New Service for Women in Gloucester

The Nelson Trust is one of the longest established drug and alcohol abstinence-based treatment providers in the UK, with a national reputation for excellence and innovation. They work with some of the hardest-to-reach and most complex substance misusers, helping hundreds of people find a life of independence – a life beyond addiction.

In 2005, the Trust began researching gender specific issues that might explain why some women in mixed gender units responded less well than expected. The findings were consistent with those of the Corston report which emphasises three areas of vulnerability: domestic, personal and socio-economic.

On this basis, a Women's Services team was established in a dedicated residential unit the following year. The research underpins the existing women's service, where each woman is involved in constructing her individual care plan to tackle these areas. Developing resilience, learning life skills and enhancing emotional literacy are priorities.

### *3.2 Developments with the Probation Service and Local Partnership working*

*We wanted to ensure that women are diverted from custody where possible and that for those women serving sentences in the community, we have in place services which are responsive to their needs.*

The Probation Service continues to have a crucial role at a local level in ensuring that women are diverted from custody where appropriate. Whilst custody must be reserved for those who pose a risk of harm or re-offending we can propose a different route for women with vulnerabilities. If the Judiciary are presented with real alternatives to remands and short sentences, that also demonstrate effectiveness in reducing offending by addressing women's multiple complex needs, then they are much more likely to use this new provision. Court reports are critical tools to advise the Judiciary of what practical alternatives are available.

We want to ensure that for those women serving sentences in the community, we have in place services which are responsive to their needs and take account of the differing nature and motivations behind women's offending. To ensure this all 42 probation areas now have Single Equality Schemes that, together with recently produced gender specific action plans, should ensure that appropriate services in the community for women are in place.

Many existing Women's Community Projects already have established relationships with their local probation area. Some areas provide dedicated Offender Managers to deliver statutory appointments for women on site. This

partnership between centres and probation is a testament to the commitment of the third and statutory sectors to work together to deliver better outcomes for some of the most socially excluded people in society.

### Examples of Probation working in partnership with the Third Sector

**Merseyside:** Adelaide House, an Approved Premise delivered in conjunction with the third sector provides services for women which cover all nine of the pathways into offending within a supportive, non-judgmental atmosphere. Service users speak highly of the firm but fair treatment they are given.

**West Yorkshire:** Semi-specialist Offender Managers operate in teams to ensure that expertise is developed within the area in working with women. There is a strong partnership with WomenCentre Calderdale, which includes a Community Payback scheme.

**Northamptonshire:** SWAN, a project working with sex workers has well established links with Northamptonshire Probation. The service offers a wide range of service for women currently involved in prostitution and provides support for those trying to leave sex work. An Offender Manager is seconded into the centre and conducts their appointments onsite.

**South Wales:** The Women's Turnaround Project provides services including legal advice, housing, education and improving self-esteem. Women attend appointments with their Offender Manager at the centre and the project is also part of the Intensive Alternatives to Custody pilots currently being delivered.

**West Midlands:** Anawim women's centre has worked successfully with West Midlands Probation Area over a number of years. It has accommodated the Area's group work programme for women, provided crèche facilities, and offered the opportunity to access other services on site. It has also developed close links with Crowley House, the Area's Approved Premises for women, visiting on a weekly basis and offering additional support packages for residents. Anawim has a long standing relationship with West Midlands Probation Community Payback District and provides Unpaid Work and Specified Activity requirements.

Partnership working with the Third Sector is also demonstrated through the Intensive Alternatives to Custody (IAC) projects. These projects aim to maximise use of the community order, particularly for cases on the cusp of custody, and offer the courts an alternative to short term prison sentences.



Several of the IAC projects have developed specific partnerships and interventions to work with women offenders. Additionally, three of the demonstrator projects have dedicated women only strands: South Wales and Dyfed-Powys, through the Women's Turnaround Project and West Yorkshire, through the Together Women Project.

### Examples of working with the Judiciary

**South West:** Using Eden House<sup>4</sup> as a catalyst, the region is running a series of training workshops and presentations to magistrates including: training to new magistrates across Avon & Somerset, on gender specific issues (in partnership with Avon & Somerset Probation Area); presenting to local courts' quarterly magistrates' meetings on the new options presented by Eden House. At an open day at Eden House, chaired by the Bristol Bench Chair, on November 11th which attracted 38 magistrates from the Bristol Bench, he quoted.

*'Bristol has been most fortunate in getting the Eden House Project pilot which gives new sentencing options for those women who meet the criteria. Magistrates and Probation have been given every opportunity to be briefed and see at firsthand what this project offers as an alternative to prison for both sentence and bail. Being both residential with the facility for children, day drop in and outreach it will cater for many varied alternatives. Although still in its infancy the results appear to be very positive and I am sure this will over time become a great asset to all who sentence.'* **Pete Crossman, Bristol Bench Chair.**

**Yorkshire & Humberside:** The Together Women Project provides a key worker to assist and support women during their appearance in court. The aim is to provide women with confidence and allow them to outline their support plan in court which they plan to take forward at the centre. This could include assistance in drug and alcohol detoxification, anger management, mental health support, counselling or educational courses. It also provides an opportunity for women to demonstrate the progress that they have already made in engaging with the service.

Along with making improvements to services in the community, we have agreed with the Senior Judiciary to focus on communicating details of the funded Women's Community Projects with Judges and Magistrates at a local level through existing Probation Service links. This will ensure that local Judiciary are aware of community services within their area and options that would provide an alternative to short sentences in custody.

<sup>4</sup> A 3 year demonstration project is underway at Eden House in Bristol. It is piloting an integrated model of Residential, Day and Outreach Services, addressing the needs of women offenders and those at risk of offending within their local community. It is

### *3.3 Working in Partnership across Government to tackle women's offending*

*We wanted to ensure that women have access to mainstream services that support them in turning away from crime/reduce re-offending.*

The Government's Strategy for diverting women away from crime depends on strong partnership work right across the criminal justice system and much more widely. To help support women and reduce re-offending they need help to address their multiple problems that include tackling health inequalities, social exclusion and histories of violence or abuse. That is why our approach covers the nine pathways.

We recognise that individual departments or agencies are not able to tackle this issue alone. The Ministry of Justice is of course involved, but women's offending is an issue that affects several departments in particular the Department of Health in ensuring suitable provision both within custody and in the community; and the Department for Work and Pensions in improving job opportunities for women released from custody and those at risk.

The success of the Government's Strategy relies on getting departments and agencies to work together effectively, improving collaboration and delivering services which both contribute to our targets and commitments. This could not be truer than at a time where departments are being asked to exercise financial restraint; this provides us with an opportunity to be bold and radical in our approach to working with women offenders and women at risk and doing so in partnership with others.

Partnership working is at the heart of the Government's Strategy with the cross-departmental Criminal Justice Women's Strategy Team driving forward delivery. The team has seconded staff from the Department of Health, Government Equalities Office and Attorney General's Office, and works with a wide range of other departments and agencies including the National Offender Management Service, Department for Children, Schools and Families, Home Office, Department for Work and Pensions and the Youth Justice Board. However, our partnership extends beyond the statutory sector; third sector organisations play an integral part in our strategy through the delivery of women's community projects and across the pathways that support women turning away from crime.

The MoJ are undertaking a joint review with the Department of Work and Pensions on employment for offenders. This work is looking at a number of issues including good practice and how best resources could be utilised. A separate but related strand will look at will look at how we can help women offenders find jobs.

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delivered and managed by NOMS South West, in partnership with Avon and Somerset Probation Area. The support of a wide range of voluntary and statutory sector partners in Bristol has informed service design and is now contributing to service delivery.

In November 2009 the MoJ jointly with the Department of Children Schools and Families (DCSF) launched *Reducing Re-offending: Supporting Families, Creating Better Futures - A Framework for Improving the Local Delivery of Support for the Families of Offenders*. The Framework sets out the role of services and agencies, and what needs to be done to support families at each stage of the criminal justice system. This includes a strong focus on what is needed for women offenders and their families.

The recently published *Together we can end Violence Against Women and Girls: A Strategy* by the Home Office stresses that women offenders are often victims of domestic and/or sexual violence and need to be treated as any woman in an abusive relationship, and offered support and advice. It highlights the work of community projects for women offenders that provide specific support for those that have been victims.

### *3.4 Improving and increasing access to mainstream health services in the community and custody*

*We wanted to ensure that women are able to access mainstream health services in the community and improved healthcare provision for those who receive custodial sentences.*

The Department of Health (DH) recently issued a Delivery Plan<sup>5</sup> to support improvements in healthcare for all those in contact at any stage of the CJS, including women. In particular the plan sets out what the NHS and CJS partners will do to improve access to services, in support of diversion and joint commissioning of services to meet the specific health needs of offenders including women.

Our priorities are to increase access to mainstream health services within the community for women offenders and those who are at risk of offending and to improve provision for women who receive custodial sentences. Women offenders should be able to receive the health care they need in the community and should never be sentenced to custody in order to receive health services, such as detoxification for drug or alcohol misuse.

The Department of Health has nine regional offender health teams. Reporting to the Deputy Regional Directors for Social Care, they are responsible for ensuring that women offenders' health needs are included in delivery plans. Currently six of the nine regions have arrangements in place to commission services for women offenders with the other regions following by April 2010.

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<sup>5</sup> *Improving Health, Supporting Justice: the national delivery plan of the Health and Criminal Justice Programme Board.*

We want to build on the learning from the four court pilots funded by the DH, two of which focus specifically on women. The aim was to assess offenders in a different manner by using a broader based team – with mental health workers,

### **Case Study – Bristol Court Assessment and Referral Service**

Bristol Court Assessment and Referral Service (CARS), responsible for mental health assessments, found that a high proportion of women refused to take up psychiatric assessment. It was discovered that this was due to a misperception by women that the assessment could lead to their children being removed from their care. Therefore the mental health worker position was widened to become a more generic women's worker role. So now women are assessed for health and wellbeing, including employment, housing, and benefits advice. This has led to an increase in the uptake of the service.

rather than psychiatrists only, and reducing the number of full psychiatric reports where appropriate. The experience of the Bristol pilot is highlighted below. Over the last two years the Department of Health has worked with the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) to review health provision in prisons and develop best practice guidance for custody staff and this is now being implemented. However, we recognise that for women serving sentences any support that they have whilst in custody needs to be followed up with support within the community and this will form part of the wider offender health plan.

For women held in custody improvements in health care continue to ensure that they are provided with the necessary support. The Primrose Programme, hosted by HMP Low Newton in Durham recently won the World Health Organisation 'Health in Prison Project Award' for its work with female offenders who pose risk of serious harm as a result of severe personality disorder.

### ***3.5 Promoting the Gender Duty - Women in Focus Events***

**We wanted to ensure that services accessed by women meet the requirements under the gender duty.**

The Government Equalities Office has held a series of one day 'Women in Focus' events across the country as part of their contribution to delivering the Government's strategy. The events have brought together a wide range of stakeholders with over 600 delegates in attendance so far; this has included service commissioners, Crown Prosecution Service, police, probation, judiciary, third sector providers and health. The aim has been to provide attendees with

an opportunity to promote awareness of how the Gender Equality Duty supports a different approach to women offenders; share best practice and publicise the work and knowledge of local services within the community. We were pleased to be able to deliver the London event in partnership with the Griffins Society, Women in Prison and CLINKS, this is a testament to the important role of the third sector in meeting the distinct needs of women offenders.

The events have had strong representation by Directors of Offender Management (DOMs) and have provided them with the opportunity to highlight the positive partnership developments within their regions and Wales.

Some of the themes which have emerged from the events thus far:

- The approach to women is changing, that people do understand that a different approach is needed;
- That we all need to promote and use the Gender Equality Duty - it helps us make the case for different services for women offenders;
- If we are to really make a difference then we must ensure that women offenders' health needs are met;
- We must give the Judiciary clear information on community provision in their areas; and
- Successes to date are because we are working in partnership, especially important given the wide range of issues facing many women offenders.

With two more events to follow in the South East and Wales in January we will be reviewing the outcome of these events and a final report will be published in early 2010. This will be promoted at a conference to be held in March 2010. Along with highlighting the findings of the events, the conference is aimed at practitioners and will support delivery through highlighting progress in implementing the Government's Strategy, showcasing good practice and identifying the challenges and solutions in achieving a sustained approach to women for the medium to longer term.

### *3.6 Tackling Offending by Girls and Young Women*

*We wanted to ensure that we have a sufficient body of knowledge to ensure that we deliver interventions which have the best chance of rehabilitating girls and young women.*

We recognise the importance of preventative work and the need to tackle offending at the earliest possible stage. This is at the heart of the Government's strategy for diverting women away from crime. Since women may start their journey on the pathway to offending at a young age, interventions are needed

at the earliest possible stage. The Youth Justice Board (YJB) has a key role to play and there is a great deal of work underway to tackle girls and young women's offending.

There has been a reduction in the number of girls in custody in 2009 though this has fluctuated over the last 5 years. This reflects an overall reduction in the number of young people in custody in the last few months. Nevertheless girls only constitute on average 8% of the total custodial population.

Existing evidence of what interventions work for girls and young women is limited. The majority of interventions have historically been delivered as 'gender neutral', responding to the male majority of offenders. We want to ensure that we have a sufficient knowledge to deliver interventions which have the best chance of rehabilitating girls and young women and preventing them from becoming the next generation of adult offenders. To support this work in March 2009 the Youth Justice Board published *Girls and Offending - Patterns, Perceptions and Interventions*. Building on this full report we are keen to develop a more gender specific approach to youth justice.

### *3.7 Ensuring Custody is fit for purpose for those Women who are given Custodial Sentences*

*We wanted to ensure that the custodial estate and regimes are tailored so as to meet women's particular needs.*

For some women custody remains the only appropriate sentence, either due to the severity of their offence or to ensure public protection. However, provision in female prisons needs to take account of the differences between men and women. Baroness Corston highlighted that although there were existing areas of good practice, more needed to be done to ensure that regimes provide services specifically for women. Since then we have made significant improvements to drive up standards across the whole female estate.

One key improvement has been the introduction of Gender Specific Standards, which require all prisons to treat women prisoners appropriately and provide services designed for women. Establishments have to meet the needs of women throughout their time in custody starting with services available at court prior to reception. The standards were implemented from April 2009 and all women's establishments are now being audited against these requirements. Following their introduction in the female custodial estate we recognise that a similar approach could be adopted for women in the community, and these requirements are now being integrated into new specifications for the management of women by Probation Areas/Trusts.

### Recent improvements to regimes within the female custodial estate

**HMP Holloway:** Women are able to use baths and showers throughout the day and a new prisoner compact has been written permitting them to go to the shower in appropriate nightwear in accordance with HMCIP recommendations.

**HMP Bronzefield:** Introduction of email service for families to contact prisoners and a Virtual Visits system for foreign national prisoners.

**HMP Drake Hall:** A Layered Offender Management pilot was run which includes support for short sentence offenders (under-12 months) in their resettlement and rehabilitation.

**HMP Peterborough:** A lead for women who have been victims of domestic violence, sexual abuse and sex workers have been appointed. A particular focus has also been placed on the foreign national and BME population, which makes up 20% of the estate's population.

NOMS has developed the Women Awareness Staff Programme (WASP), a course for all staff and volunteers working with women. The course covers why women come to prison, how staff can support women in prison, differences in working with women and men in prison, relationships in prison, self-harm, foreign nationals and parenting. During the first year alone 640 staff have been trained and the course has attracted much interest from other foreign correctional services.

The routine 'full searching' of women was for many a distressing experience, particularly for those women with mental health problems and who had suffered from sexual abuse. In practice routine full searching rarely led to the discovery of illicit items. From February 2009, following a successful and fully evaluated pilot, new arrangements for the full searching of women prisoners were introduced in all women's prisons. The new arrangements mean routine full searches have been abolished and full searches are only applied if there is intelligence or reasonable suspicion that illicit items are concealed.

For the past 18 months a training programme for staff Sex Workers in Prison (SWIP) has been piloted, and is being delivered alongside existing specialist workers from local sex work projects. The training enables women to discuss their experiences and receive support whilst in prison to assist them in leaving sex work. The pilot has been delivered at five prisons and we intend to roll out this training across all women's prisons from January 2010.

## 4. Future commitments

### 4.1 Sustaining Women's Community Projects across England and Wales

We want to both maintain momentum and take this work further.

To continue implementation of our strategy we want to both maintain momentum and take this work further by seeking to:

- Reduce the women's prison estate by 300 places by March 2011 and 400 places by March 2012;
- Divert resources from custody to the community to sustain the multi-agency community projects we have established through grant funding and ensure a network of provision across England and Wales; and
- Reduce re-offending.

Our plans to build on the work undertaken to date are set out below:

**Community provision:** for those community approaches which prove successful we want to sustain this different approach through both criminal justice and other mainstream funding. In the longer term our ambition is that this approach to tackling women's needs continues to develop and grow, enabling women in all areas of the country to have access to similar services. The Directors of Offender Management (DOMs) will have a lead role in ensuring appropriate commissioning and joint commissioning of services for women offenders within their region/Wales. Grant Agreements with Women's Community Projects (WCPs) are now monitored by the DOMs and they will work with Probation Trusts/Boards, WCP providers and local partners to identify how to sustain women-focussed services.

**Conditional cautioning:** our aim is to promote and embed the Women's Conditional Cautioning scheme within the national conditional cautioning framework, linking with the issue of revised Guidance on Conditional Cautioning. The Women's Conditional Cautioning Scheme seeks to reduce the number of women sentenced to imprisonment and has been piloted with a condition attached for the woman to attend a women's centre. This allows for a full needs assessment, providing women with an opportunity to address the causes of their offending and presents a chance for diversion from the criminal justice system at an early stage. A full evaluation is expected in the New Year.



**Early Intervention:** funding of over £1 million has been agreed to deliver a new project from April 2010 that will test out early interventions for women with multiple needs at their first point of contact with the criminal justice system. The approach will be integrated into the work of the Family Intervention Projects and we will target this group of women and their dependent children in up to 20 areas in England to provide intensive personalised support in a community setting. Dedicated key-workers will provide intensive support to vulnerable women and their families, building on the success which Family Intervention Projects are already demonstrating in turning around the lives of the most challenging families whom other services have failed to engage. The projects follow the publication of the Cabinet Office's Social Exclusion Task Force Short Study on Women Offenders which highlighted the potential for intervention at this early stage.

**Bail Accommodation:** we will provide an 'enhanced' bail specification under the new bail accommodation support service contract that will, for example include mentoring for women offenders.

#### *4.2 Delivery: NOMS, Probation Service and Local Partnership working – what next?*

DOMs' leadership and support for this agenda working with partners is critical. Their regional reducing re-offending partnership plans all include a focus on this agenda and their forthcoming commissioning plans will also include a specific reference to commissioning and joint commissioning for women offenders.

Probation Trusts/Boards have an increasingly important role to play in commissioning services for women both directly and in cooperation with a range of local partners. Their role as members of Local Strategic Partnerships and as a Responsible Authority on Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships will enable them to champion commissioning for women's specific services and ensure a focus on women in Local Area Agreements. The Local Criminal Justice Boards also will have a role to play in supporting this agenda. These partnership approaches will support the development and sustainment of specific services.

Probation managers will be encouraged to ensure commissioning meets women's needs through their new Local Delivery Units. Trusts will be encouraged to ensure that their governance arrangements include adherence to the Gender Equality Duty. Accountabilities, the expectations for DOMs in supporting this agenda, have been developed and we will see the impact of these over the next twelve months.

New initiatives detailed below will need a period of consolidation for the benefits to be shown but aim to improve the delivery of services for women:

- **Performance:** through the Integrated Probation Performance Framework (IPPF) we will continue to monitor compliance, liaison with the judiciary and seeking to reduce incidences of breach and Recall. Moreover, a performance target for DOMs will be set from April 2010.
- **Approved Premises:** NOMS capital funding of around £5 million in 2010 to improve Approved Premises for women requiring increased supervision in the community or with high level of needs to keep them out of custody. Subject to planning permission, where appropriate, the new facilities will allow more women to use premises in the community and will include safe rooms for women in crisis and facilities for women who are older or have disabilities. For example, at Bedford AP we are looking to improve the accommodation for women getting ready to move on to other accommodation so that they can become used to living more independently while still under supervision. In Wales, we are looking at a range of options for providing supported housing for female offenders in small units to enable women to stay closer to home.

Within the next 15 months, when the Diversion Programme funding comes to an end, a transformation in approach to women's issues will be required, moving from development to ensuring sustainability; where the different motivation for offending between men and women is well understood and that the features of social exclusion are actively tackled.

#### *4.3 Improving and increasing access to mainstream health services in the community and custody*

To support the Government's Health & Criminal Justice Delivery Plan, a specific strand of work will aim to meet women's specific needs . In particular:

- The Department of Health will develop specific commissioning guidance for provision for women offenders, which will be included in the wider Primary Care Trust commissioning guidance for offenders.
- There will be close working between the Women's Community Projects and regional offender health teams, to support commissioning .
- A training pack will be developed working with the South West Offender Health regional team, focusing on the complexity of women's needs, the alternatives to custody and overcoming the challenges that women have in accessing mainstream health care in the community. The pack will be piloted and then provided to staff

including probation, police, and women's community project staff.

- A review has been conducted on existing health care provision within police custody suites. The aim was to ensuring that the specific needs of women have been successfully identified and commissioned. The key recommendations will be taken forward to improve services for women in police custody.

#### *4.4 Action to Further Tackle Offending by Girls and Young Women*

The Youth Justice Board's programme of work underway includes:

- **Mapping the 'gender-specific' provision:** enabling the YJB to identify emerging and innovative practice as well as highlighting gaps in service provision. It includes a focus on serious youth violence and a final report will be produced the end of March 2010.
- **Practice framework:** for Youth Offending Teams to provide guidance for Youth Offending Teams in delivering programmes to young females who offend. This is being developed alongside the mapping exercise and will be completed by April 2010.
- **Best practice:** continuation of a national forum for practitioners working with young females who offend, enabling showcasing of emerging practice, discussion of trends in female offending and development of partnership working. In addition to the national forum, some regions have developed their own practitioner forum for girl offending.

Building on the triple track approach of prevention, support and enforcement activity through implementation of the Youth Crime Action Plan (YCAP) , a range of additional activities are being taken forward to address girl offending, including:

- **Gangs:** responding to the HMIP thematic review looking at gangs within the young women's secure estate and building on the triple track approach of prevention, support and enforcement activity through implementation of the Youth Crime Action Plan (YCAP).
- **Alcohol:** a social marketing campaign currently out for consultation (launched in November 2009 for 3 months). This will build on the Chief Medical Officer's Guidance about alcohol for parents and young people. The campaign will aim to delay the age at which young people start to drink and make sure that when they do drink it is in a safer, more sensible way.

#### *4.5 Ensuring Custody continues to be fit for purpose for those Women who are given Custodial Sentences*

Further developments include:

**Women's Custodial Estate:** strategic oversight of the women's estate that will focus on the anticipated changes to the numbers and type of women in custody. As more women are diverted into Women's Community Projects at an early stage in their offending history there is an expectation that the custodial estate will focus on women who pose a high risk of harm, those who are prolific and who have more challenging and complex needs.

**Sex offenders:** developing a female sex offender management strategy, which includes a case management approach based on a standardised assessment framework for use with all female sex offenders, with individualised risk management and intervention plans. This will be fully integrated into the offender management process with the offender manager being responsible for managing the resulting sentence plan. This will be available to offender managers working with female sex offenders in custody and under supervision in the community. It is intended to introduce this strategy from April 2010.

**Third sector:** a reduced female custodial estate will enable resources to be utilised for the care and progression of those with the greatest need. Connections established with third sector organisations within the community and as a result of the diversion programme will continue to enable women to be engaged with whilst in custody with continuity of delivery post-release with resourced specialist providers.

## 5. In conclusion

We are beginning to make an impact on what are complex and deeply entrenched problems. We are implementing a strategy that is focused on making a difference for women within the criminal justice system. But we aspire to go further and make more widespread changes which will stop women getting into the system in the first place. It is important to continue to challenge how we deliver services and interventions for women and to identify new and more creative approaches if we are successfully to address women's complex and multiple needs.

The package of measures being implemented, with good progress already being made, the commitments for further action described above will help transform for the better the way women offenders are managed, ensure this different approach is sustained for the future and contributes to our wider ambition to prevent women who are at risk of offending from entering the justice system.

