effective practice

Where we see our standards delivered well, in practice.

HM Inspectorate of Probation

AN HM INSPECTORATE OF PROBATION **EFFECTIVE PRACTICE GUIDE**

Effective practice guide
Working with women

Based on: The quality of work undertaken with women. A joint inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation and HM Inspectorate of Prisons.

May 2024

Acknowledgements

This effective practice guide is based on information sourced while undertaking the thematic inspection 'The quality of work undertaken with women: A joint inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation and HM Inspectorate of Prisons and work arising from key lines of enquiry'. The inspection was led by HM inspector Noreen Wallace, supported by a team of inspectors and operations, research, communications and corporate staff. User Voice undertook interviews with women who had experience of being supervised by the Probation Service. The manager responsible for this inspection programme is Helen Davies.

In collaboration with Helen Amor, effective practice lead, Noreen Wallace (HM Inspectorate of Probation) and Jonathan Tickner (HM Inspectorate of Prisons) have drawn out examples of effective practice (where we see our standards delivered well) across organisational delivery and case supervision. These are presented in this guide, to support the continuous development of practitioners and managers.

We would like to thank all those who participated in any way in this inspection, and especially those who have contributed to this guide. Without their help and cooperation, the inspection and effective practice guide would not have been possible.

Please note that, throughout the report, the names in the practice examples have been changed, to protect the individual's identity.

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ISBN: 978-1-914478-95-6

This publication is available for download at:

www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation

Published by:

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation
1st Floor Civil Justice Centre
1 Bridge Street West
Manchester
M3 3FX

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Introduction

About this guide

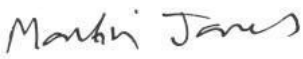
His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation has a duty to identify and disseminate effective practice.[1]

We assure the quality of youth justice and probation provision and test its effectiveness. Critically, we make recommendations designed to highlight and disseminate best practice, challenge poor performance, and encourage providers to improve.

This guide highlights where we have seen our standards delivered well for women being managed by the Probation Service. It is designed to help commissioners and providers improve their work with women being released from custodial sentences or serving community sentences. Whilst front line probation faces many challenges, this guide identifies provide some great examples of what probation practitioners can achieve through a combination of partnership working, imagination and innovation.

I am grateful to all our partners who participated in this review, and for their additional help in producing this guide. We publish these guides to complement our reports and the standards against which we inspect youth offending and probation services.

I hope this guide will be of interest to everyone working in probation and prison services and seeking to improve their practice. We welcome feedback on this and our other guides, to ensure that they are as useful as possible to future readers.



Martin Jones CBE
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Finding your way

Tools for practitioners

HM Inspectorate of Probation recorded interview

Useful links

External video

Contact us

We would love to hear what you think of this guide. Please find current contact details via the HM Inspectorate of Probation Effective Practice page.

[1] **For adult services** – Section 7 of the *Criminal Justice and Court Services Act (2000)*, as amended by the *Offender Management Act (2007)*, section 12(3)(a). **For youth services** – inspection and reporting on youth offending teams is established under section 39 of the *Crime and Disorder Act (1998)*.

Background

3,549 women in prison, four per cent of total prison population December 2023

14.5 months was the average length of custodial sentences for women in 2021

21,402 women supervised by the Probation Service, nine per cent of total probation population June 2023

165 bed spaces available for women in approved premises

Prompted by concerns about the volume of women in the criminal justice system (CJS) and their experiences, the then government commissioned Baroness Corston to undertake a review. This culminated in the Corston Report (Corston, 2007), which made 43 wide-ranging recommendations, recognising the different needs of women, and calling for a radically different approach to addressing the needs of women at risk of, or involved in, offending. The current governmental approach is set out within the Female Offender Strategy (Ministry of Justice (MoJ), 2018) and Delivery Plan (MoJ, 2023). These documents recognised that women in prison or serving community sentences have often experienced abuse, poor mental health, and issues with addiction. The reasons why women offend are often different from those for men, and, therefore, the most effective ways to support them and address their needs to prevent future offending also need to be different. This requires probation and prison services to develop a female gender-informed approach, which differs from that taken with men. The impact of women's offending on society is also essential to consider. Women are often likely to be the primary or sole carer of children; therefore, a custodial sentence can mean the separation of mother and child/children, causing distress and future implications for both. Links between adverse childhood experiences and adult behaviour are now well recognised, including increased risks of offending when people have experienced several adverse childhood experiences.

For Black, Asian, and minority ethnic, and migrant women and girls, their experiences are often compounded by racism and discrimination. Black women are more likely to be overpoliced, criminalised, and receive disproportionately harsh treatment by the CJS (Lammy, 2017).

A report by the Prison Reform Trust (2017) entitled 'Counted Out: Black, Asian and minority ethnic women in the criminal justice system' found a lack of data and research on the topic, which, it concluded, signified a lack of focus on their needs and, in turn, impeded progress. The report found that women from minority ethnic groups face more significant disadvantages than white women. Yet, there were very few specialist local services working with women who offend from minority ethnic groups.

Here you will find a link to the full report:
Counted Out.pdf (prisonreformtrust.org.uk)

Timeline for female offender strategy and policy

2007	Corston Report
September 2015	Better Outcomes for Women Offenders
June 2018	System Approach for Female Offenders - Emerging Evidence
December 2020	The Concordat on Women in or at Risk of Contact with the CJS
June 2021	HMPPS Women's Policy Framework
January 2023	Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan 2022-2025
January 2023	Progress Report on the Concordat

Wales

2019	Female Offending Blueprint

His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) outlines its approach to working with women within the Women's Policy Framework (June 2021), underpinned by the Better Outcomes for Women Offenders guidance (MoJ, 2015). The guidance outlines seven priority targets for support and intervention for women and the effectiveness of approaches.

Addressing substance misuse problems	• **Likely to be effective:** Cognitive behavioural programmes, prison-based programmes with a community throughcare component, and a focus on skills development; therapeutic communities; opioid maintenance in the community. Treatment services with effective links to community-based services post-release. • **Less likely to be effective:** Education on the effects of substance misuse without building life and coping skills; use of 'scare tactics'.
Addressing mental health needs	• **Likely to be effective:** Advocacy; social support; mentoring; trauma-focused cognitive behavioural programmes; short-term trauma-focused counselling. Wide availability of these services and reduced waiting times. Timely and appropriate assessment of need. • **Less likely to be effective:** Only signposting to other services.
Building skills in emotional management	• **Likely to be effective:** Cognitive skills programmes; mindfulness; dialectical behaviour therapy (this is a type of talking therapy. It is based on cognitive behavioural therapy, but is specially adapted for people who feel emotions very intensely). • **Less likely to be effective:** Long-term, non-specific counselling.
Developing a pro-social identity	• **Likely to be effective:** Enabling people to do good for their community or for others; helping people change the way they describe themselves. Asset-based approach to interventions. • **Less likely to be effective:** Increasing awareness of the effects of crime on others without a focus on building a stronger, healthier identity. Services that are experienced as punitive.
Ability to be in control of everyday life and achieving goals	• **Likely to be effective:** Help to believe in ability to be in control and achieve goals, and building confidence in ability to be self-sufficient. Asset-based approach to interventions. • **Less likely to be effective:** Focusing solely on building self-esteem, particularly if contingent on external characteristics, such as attractiveness.
Improving family contact	• **Likely to be effective:** Facilitate and build skills to develop healthier and more supportive relationships. Establishing healthy and positive relationships is wider than just family; there may be circumstances where improving family contact is not appropriate. • **Less likely to be effective:** Solely facilitating contact, without also focusing on improving the quality of relationships.
Resettlement and building social capital	• **Likely to be effective:** Acquiring skills to explore and utilise services; facilitating safe and secure accommodation; meeting educational needs; securing appropriate and meaningful employment; helping women become financially independent. • **Less likely to be effective:** Only signposting to services without developing skills to sustain involvement in resettlement activities.

Figure 1. Better outcomes for women – seven priority targets for support and intervention

Read more about female offender strategy and policy by following the links below:

- Better Outcomes for Women Offenders 2015
- Female Offender Strategy
- Female Offending Blueprint for Wales
- A Whole System Approach for Female Offenders – Emerging Evidence
- Women's Policy Framework
- The Concordat on Women in or at Risk of Contact with the Criminal Justice System. Progress Report
- Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan 2022–25

Trauma-informed practice

In recent years, there has been a recognition of the need to understand the impact of trauma on people's behaviour when working with those involved with the CJS. In a research and analysis bulletin for HM Inspectorate of Probation (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2022), Dr Madeline Petrillo explored working with trauma in adult probation services. She found that there were 'pockets' of practice aligned with trauma-informed practice. Her research showed that those using trauma-informed practice found benefits for themselves and the people they were working with, although staff had concerns about how well the culture of the Probation Service supported them and guarded against vicarious trauma or compassion fatigue through their work.

While there is no agreed definition of trauma, negative experiences such as exposure to actual or threatened death, injury, illness, discrimination, or emotional, sexual, or physical abuse are all recognised as traumatic events. Concerning women, Dr Petrillo reports,

> *"Significant trauma histories are particularly prevalent among women in prison; for example, in a recent study involving women in prison in Scotland, 91 per cent were identified as having experienced both childhood and adult trauma".*

In an HM Inspectorate of Probation Academic Insights Bulletin, Senka et al. (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2023a) considered the issues, challenges, and opportunities for trauma-informed practice within criminal justice work; they said,

> *"Being trauma informed in the criminal justice system is different to being trauma informed in other sectors; instead of being sympathetic or empathic, there is a need to be compassionate. There is a need to recognise the harm that was caused to the person on probation and how that influenced their offending behaviour. However [...], this can be challenging as people do not always recognise their own trauma and different types of adverse experiences can be traumatising in different degrees or ways to people. Just as defining trauma is personalised, working in a trauma-informed way is as well."*

There are obstacles to delivering trauma-informed probation service delivery, not least as those under supervision are required to attend rather than having opted to, and there are likely to be consequences if they fail to comply with the requirements placed upon them. Nonetheless, Dr Petrillo found examples of where practitioners used these opportunities to work creatively and embed trauma-informed principles in their work; these included:

- **rewriting warning letters** from a trauma-informed perspective so that they express empathy and offer an invitation to re-engage

- **creating open and transparent approaches to breach and recall** processes that focus on enforcement as a mutual acknowledgement of immediate challenges and an opportunity to co-produce a more meaningful way forward

- **creating a trauma-informed wording template** for the free-text sections of the offender assessment system (OASys) so that the assessment of the behaviour is contextualised in the person's experiences of trauma and victimisation

- **writing sentence plan objectives that are trauma informed**, with outcomes that focus on promoting wellbeing as well as reducing recidivism.

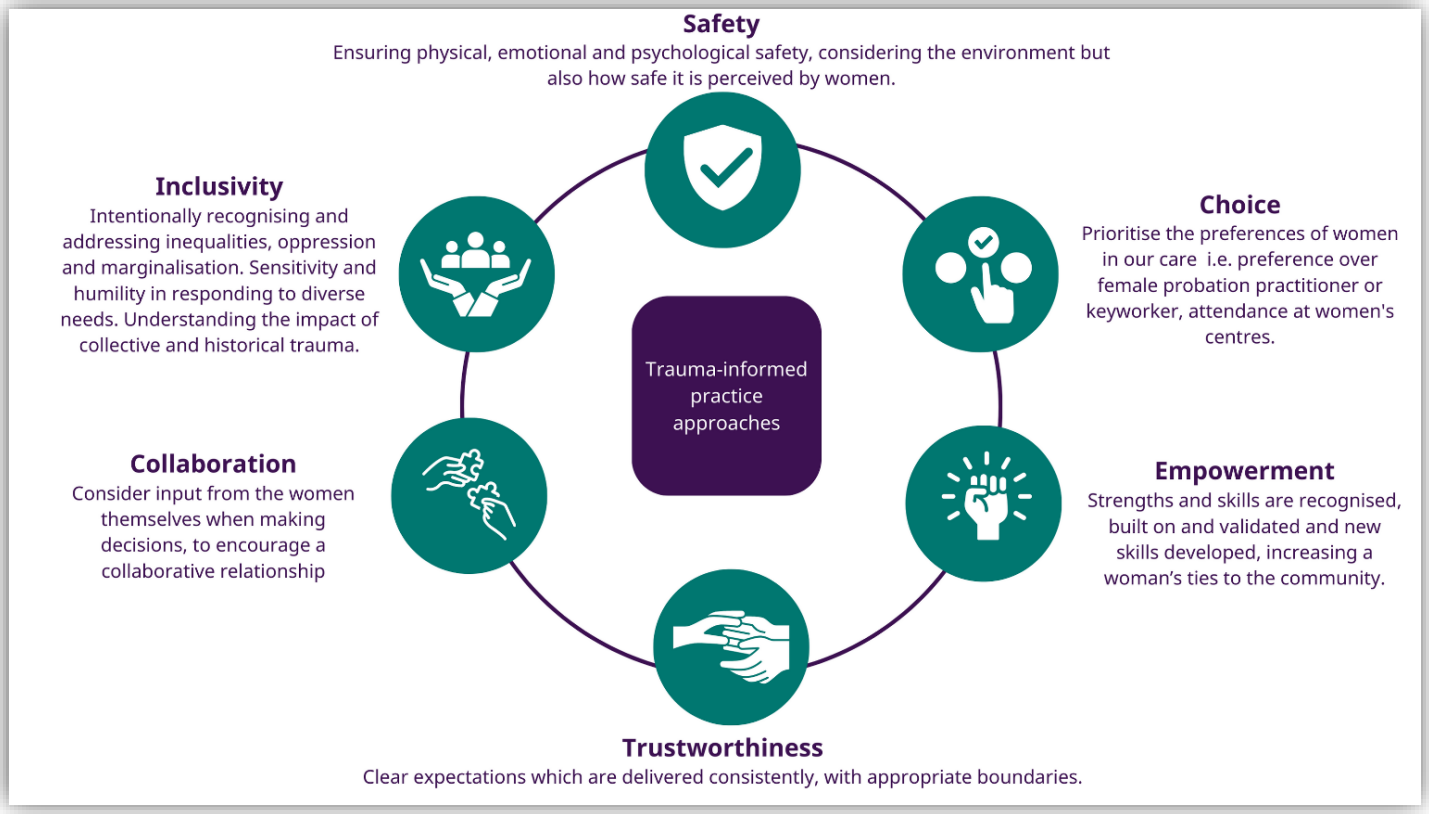


Figure 2. Six key principles of trauma-informed practice

Follow the links below to read more about the application of trauma-informed practice:

- Research & Analysis Bulletins (justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)
- Academic Insights (justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)
- Video (YouTube, 4:55): Reflections from Research – Professor Kieran McCartan (HM Inspectorate of Probation)

Reflection questions

Thinking about your practice as a leader or practitioner, alone or as part of a team discussion…

For managers:

- How mindful are you of the seven priority areas for women when discussing cases or countersigning assessments and plans?
- Are you familiar with local services for women, particularly for Black, Asian, and minority ethnic women?
- Is the analysis you see within assessments sufficient to understand the impact that traumatic events may have had on women?

For practitioners:

- Are you familiar with the seven priority targets for women and what services or interventions are available to address them in your area?
- How well do you understand the key principles of trauma-informed practice and how to apply them in your work?

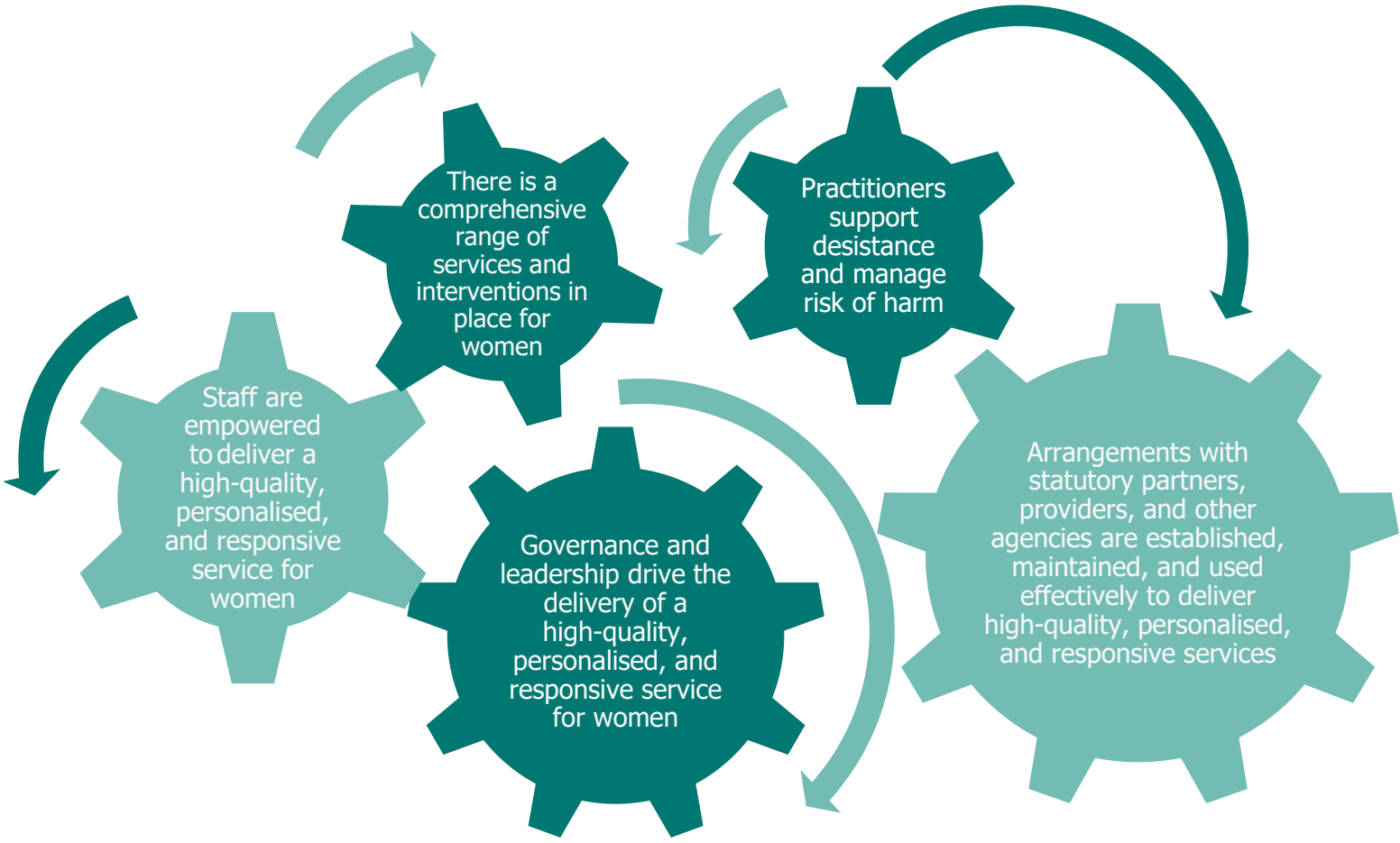
We define effective practice as:

"where we see our standards delivered well in practice, with our standards being based on established models and frameworks, and are grounded in evidence, learning, and experience".

The examples in this guide are drawn from evidence of effective practice identified while undertaking fieldwork for the thematic inspection.

The guide is aimed at a range of audiences; it is intended to support practitioners, middle managers, and strategic leaders to reflect on their own experiences and consider how they may apply the salient learning points in their own contexts. Therefore, please use the contents page to navigate directly to the sections pertinent to you.

Our standards: What we looked for and our expectations



For our thematic inspection, we inspected against the following standards:

Organisational delivery

In relation to governance and leadership, we expect that:

Governance and leadership drive the delivery of a high-quality, personalised, and responsive service for women.

This includes the following expectations:

- Leadership and governance drive delivery of the vision and strategy
- The operating model and delivery plan translates the vision and strategy into effective practice with women
- The vision and strategy is informed by women with lived experience of the CJS.

In relation to staffing, we expect that:

Staff within the Probation Service are empowered to deliver a high-quality, personalised, and responsive service for women.

This includes the following expectations:

- Staffing and workload levels support the delivery of a high-quality service to women
- Learning from audit, inspection, and reviews is used sufficiently to inform work with women
- Staff who work with women are given sufficient training and guidance to understand the specific needs of women who offend, including intersectionality
- Staff working with women receive effective supervision and oversight of their work.

In relation to partnership and services, we expect that:

There is a comprehensive range of services and interventions in place for women.

This includes the following expectations:

- Court work and initial assessments provide sufficient analysis to identify the needs of women and an appropriate range of gender-informed interventions
- The volume, range, and quality of services are sufficient to meet the identified need
- Appropriate interventions, that are sufficiently aligned to the current evidence base, are available to cater for the diverse needs of all women
- There are appropriate quality assurance measures in place for all interventions and sufficient analysis of the delivery of interventions and services takes place, including potential disproportionality of outcomes.

Arrangements with statutory partners, providers, and other agencies are established, maintained, and used effectively to deliver high-quality, personalised, and responsive services.

This includes the following expectations:

- There is sufficient participation in strategic partnership initiatives, agreements, and policies aimed at addressing women's offending
- There is effective communication and information sharing with partner agencies and other services
- Arrangements with partner agencies and other services are reviewed regularly to improve and develop delivery.

Case management

In relation to case management when working with women on probation, we expect that:

Practitioners support desistance and manage risk of harm.

This includes the following expectations:

- Practitioners sufficiently engage the women at each stage of their sentence
- Assessment, planning, and reviews effectively identify, analyse, and address the offending-related needs of women and the risk of serious harm they pose
- Resettlement planning focuses sufficiently on the individual's resettlement needs and on factors linked to offending and desistance while taking sufficient account of factors related to keeping other people safe
- Women participate in and complete appropriate and timely interventions
- Sentence delivery sufficiently addresses factors linked to the risk of reoffending and the risks of harm that the women pose.

Reflection questions

Thinking about your practice as a leader or practitioner, alone or as part of a team discussion…

From a strategic perspective:

- How would you assess your areas of work with women against these standards and what could be improved?
- What is your area's strategy for working with women on probation?
- What gaps have you identified?

From an operational perspective:

- What practice is effective and ineffective in your area when working with women?
- Do training and development programmes equip staff to work with women in a gender- and trauma-informed way?

Learning from women on probation

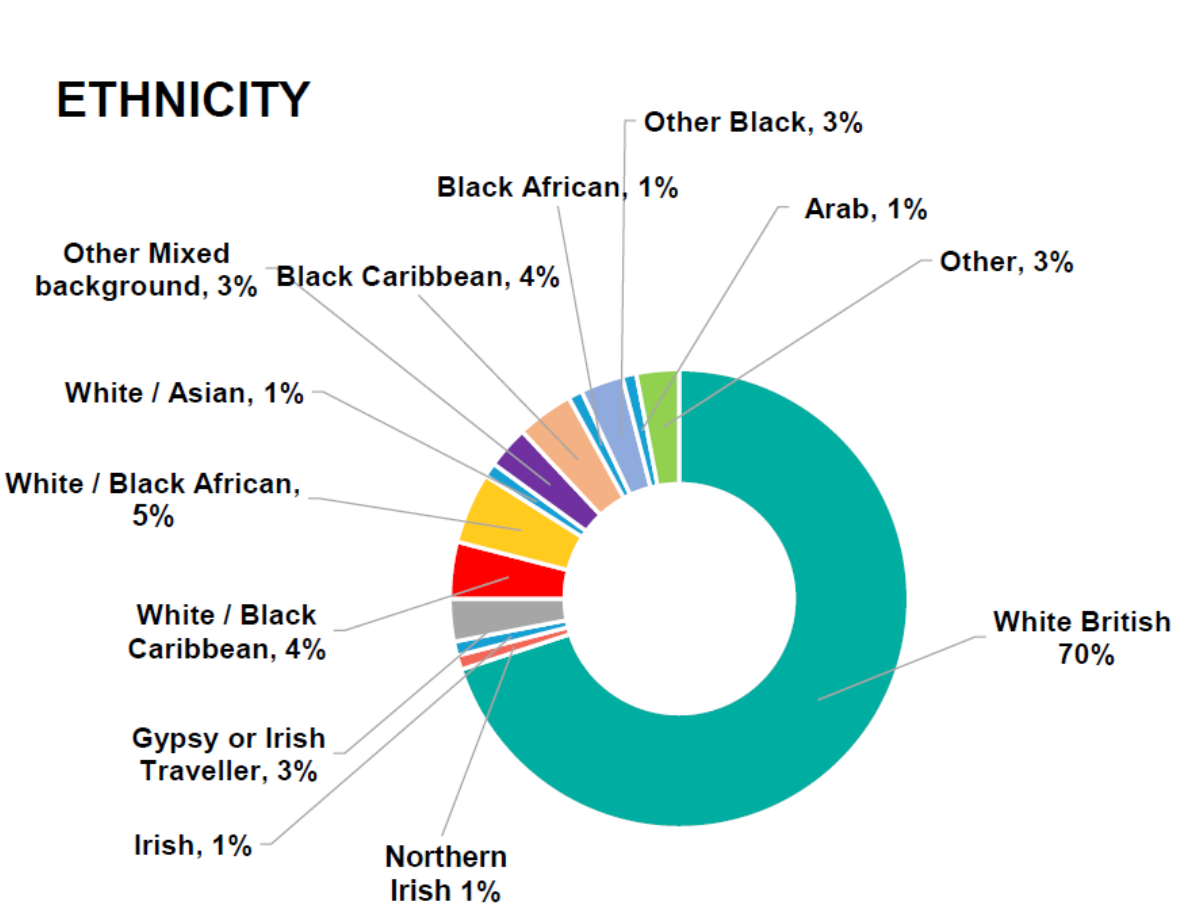
As part of the thematic inspection, we commissioned the services of User Voice to gather the views of women who had experience of being supervised by the Probation Service. They gathered the views of 77 women to understand their experiences. We are grateful for the insights of the women whose feedback we have used to inform our findings for the thematic inspection.

User Voice's overall objective was to understand better how gender affects women's probation services experience. To do this, User Voice sought to:

- understand the experience of women on probation and the support that they have (or have not) had, both in general and in relation to their gender
- understand how women on probation's experience in relation to their gender has changed since the previous inspection, in 2016
- collate women on probation's views on what probation needs to do to support women better
- highlight any good practices that could be built upon by the Probation Service.

77 WOMEN ON PROBATION HAD THEIR SAY:

34 in-depth interviews and 43 survey responses



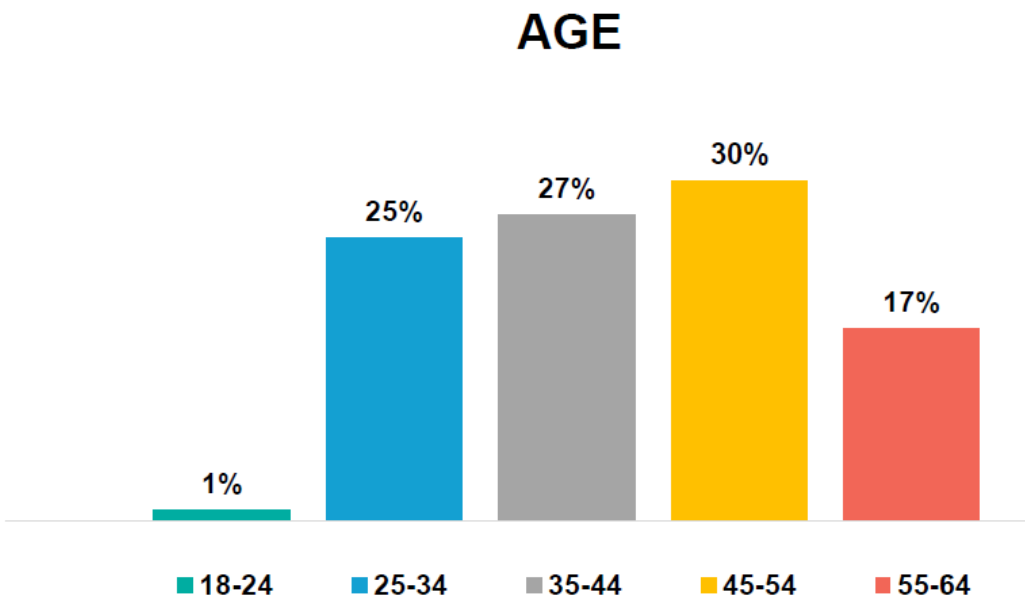


Figure 3. User Voice survey responses

Figure 4. User Voice key findings

Participants who took part in the research suggested the following solutions aimed at improving services:

- asking every person on probation for their preference of practitioner (male or female)
- 'caseload sharing' models for practitioners to avoid people having to relive their trauma
- better and mandatory 'trauma-informed approach' training for practitioners
- multi-agency working and more remote appointments for those who benefit from them.

For this consultation, probation services experience was broken down into six key areas:

Pre-sentence

Over half of the women have been victims of abuse and/or other crimes. It is important that professionals listen to the voices of women and consider their vulnerabilities.

"I was a victim of abuse ... crimes were done on me a lot of the time, but I never pressed charges. It was why I got involved in the criminal justice system."

"Being a victim led to me going to prison, I believed everything my partner told me and that's how I ended up in court."

Induction

Two in three women had a positive induction experience.

"I was pregnant at the time of my induction and my probation officer was very understanding, made sure I was comfortable and could access what I needed."

"I had one-to-one and my mental health, Developing Health and Independence (DHI) and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) workers were there. It was good that we were all in one room, and that they're all women. I'm not very good in meetings and they took that into consideration."

Staff relationships

Two in three women said their overall probation service experience was good. Those women said they felt supported and not judged by probation staff, and that their needs as women are taken care of.

"It [probation] doesn't feel like a punishment, it feels like a support. It is helping me to move on with my life".

"My probation officer is good. ... You need somebody understanding, to make you to feel comfortable, for integration. ... You need somebody who can teach you to love yourself and being in prison is not a bad thing. She kind of made me to accept myself to love myself."

Appointments

Three in four women say their gendered needs are considered during appointments.

"Yes definitely, this worker has set me up with support and made sure they were all included from the get-go. My appointments are mostly by phone now but at first, I had to go every week, just on Ladies Day. I don't think that could be any better for me."

"My needs were considered, and I am very grateful. I was allowed to attend the Women's Centre, as I am a vulnerable adult. This has been extremely helpful in many ways."

Access to services

More than half of the women have access to services they need.

"Yes. Above and beyond. She couldn't have helped me more I don't think.... The Ladies Day shows they take my domestic violence past into account and I never feel judged."

"I speak to Women's Matter and my probation officer all together. ... Everything's done under that one building, which makes it easier and better for me, to do it all in that one day, so I don't have to keep going back and forth."

Being heard

Seven in 10 women feel their 'story' is being heard by probation staff.

"Yes, my trauma was taken seriously ... they showed me empathy and didn't judge me. I wasn't judged for my behaviours.

"Yes, 100 per cent ... I feel like they're not here to judge me, just to help. 100 per cent they show me empathy and listen to my story."

This report from User Voice explains its methodology and findings in full

Reflection questions

Reflecting on this section:

- How do you ensure that you capture the voice of women in your service delivery and interventions?
- Consider the findings above, and think about how you demonstrate them within your practice?
- What could you do differently to strengthen your approach in relation to each of the key areas shown above?

Organisational delivery

Organisational arrangements set the tone and expectations for the delivery of work with women. It is, therefore, important that the expectations set out in the Female Offender Strategy and the HMPPS Women's Policy Framework are seen in action at regional and probation delivery unit (PDU) levels. This requires leaders to ensure that there are appropriate arrangements for reporting to be in place for all women, having a sufficient range and volume of gender-informed services available which address the priority areas for intervention that research has identified as most effective. Training should ensure that all staff have a clear understanding of what is meant by 'gender-informed needs'. In addition, arrangements should be in place to ensure that the quality of work with women is understood and evaluated, and that steps are taken to improve it where necessary.

Strong leadership

During our inspection, we found different approaches to leading the agenda for women's services. For example, in some regions, there are effective networks of practitioners who specialise in working with women and share information and ideas about practice. Some regions have convened complex case panels to provide additional support to practitioners and consider whether additional resources are required to meet women's needs. We also found examples of strong relationships between probation staff and partner organisations to facilitate effective co-working.

Example of effectiveness: Women's strategic leads, Greater Manchester and South Central

The Female Offender Strategy (2018) set out three central priorities: early intervention, community-based solutions, and better custody. Building upon HM Inspectorate of Probation *'A thematic inspection of the provision and quality of services in the community for women who offend'* (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2016), the strategy confirmed the expectation that there would be an appointed, dedicated senior officer as women's lead in each region, initially for a period of one year, from September 2018. The women's lead would have responsibility for supporting implementation of the strategy, monitoring and driving performance, supporting training, and implementing a gender-informed approach.

During the inspection fieldwork, we observed how the regional strategic women lead roles have now been embedded as business-as-usual across areas.

We spoke to Helen Morris, South Central and Fiona Deacon, Greater Manchester about how the role of women's strategic lead operates in their regions and what added value this brings. Video (YouTube: 20:51) Effective Practice, Senior Probation Officer, Women's Strategic Lead (HM Inspectorate of Probation)

Training for practitioners working with women on probation

Research increasingly tells us that women's offending and needs are distinctly different from those of men. Consequently, probation practitioners must receive adequate training tailored to understanding these gender-specific needs. However, learning should not stop at training but seamlessly transition into practical application. This includes robust follow-up and reflection mechanisms to ensure that new-found knowledge is effectively embedded into practice.

Goldstein & Ford (2002) said in their research that learning transfer is about using the knowledge and skills gained through training and learning and development to the workplace in a way that leads to *'sustained and meaningful improvements in practice'*.

In terms of practitioners' ability to transfer learning into their practice, studies identify that the following are important:

- The design and delivery of the training – clear objectives, relevant content to the role. Training for mixed groups of staff to develop cohesion and share knowledge and understanding, using a variety of learning strategies (case studies, role plays, discussions).
- The content of the training – focus on improving knowledge and understanding, skills development, spanning multiple sessions, face to face rather than virtual.
- Ongoing supervision – avoiding knowledge being lost, through quality supervision, applying the skills to the role immediately, feedback, and coaching.

HMPPS learning

The HMPPS intranet learning platform specifies the mandatory, required, and desirable learning for practitioners working with women, which includes national and local training, seven-minute briefings, videos, reports, and guidance for self-directed learning.

There are two identified, women-specific learning packages available for staff working in both custody and the community (including court and approved premises).

Required learning:

- Empowering change: working well with women – which aims to explore how a gender-specific approach can improve outcomes for the women.

While this e-learning is designed to be self-directed, we heard in some areas that women concentrators have completed this together in groups, which allowed for a live case discussion and reflection with colleagues, which maximised the opportunities for learning with peers.

Desirable learning:

- 'Becoming trauma informed' workshop materials are available for strategic women's leads, to support them in the delivery of learning around gendered pathways into the CJS and to gain a deeper understanding of trauma and how this impacts on women they work with.

We heard feedback from areas that briefings had been developed or were in development which were area specific, focusing on working with women while taking trauma-informed practice into account. *Note: These links may require a Ministry of Justice login.*

Learning for Practitioners Working with Women (sharepoint.com)

PS - Empowering Change: Working Well with Women e-learning NDE_1: Part 1 - Empowering Change - Working Well With Women

myLearning: Becoming Trauma Informed – A Gendered Approach Workshop

The Knowledge and Understanding Framework (KUF)

KUF is a national training programme for professionals working across health, social care, criminal justice, and voluntary sectors, and is promoted by HMPPS as additional training via the offender personality disorder teams.

The programme is co-facilitated by trainers with lived experience and clinical expertise, taking a co-produced, multi-agency, trauma-informed approach to working with the complexities associated with the diagnosis of 'personality disorder'.

KUF Two-day Offender Personality Disorder (OPD) Pathway Training is specifically promoted for probation practitioners and is aimed at anyone working on the OPD pathway and anyone working in a prison or the probation service.

The training aims to support staff working with people with complex emotional needs by providing a framework for understanding the development of these needs, introducing case formulation to understand how the past might impact on the present and supporting staff to recognise and respond to the interpersonal dynamics often associated with individuals they work with. The training also aims to develop skills around team working, reflective practice, and staff wellbeing.

We obtained the following feedback from practitioners we spoke to on inspection:

> *"We have been trauma informed through the KUF training; two full days was really good and it was delivered with people with lived experience…"*
>
> *"it [KUF training] provided us with knowledge and understanding as well as networking opportunities"*
>
> *"… interactive training was more impactful than e-learning".*

You can access more information regarding KUF and the variety of training courses they provide here

Example of effectiveness: Supporting staff to understand women's needs, Greater Manchester

Areas we inspected had developed creative ways to ensure that women's leads and practitioners working with women have access to appropriate and required learning. In Greater Manchester, an interactive learning package is available, which follows the journey

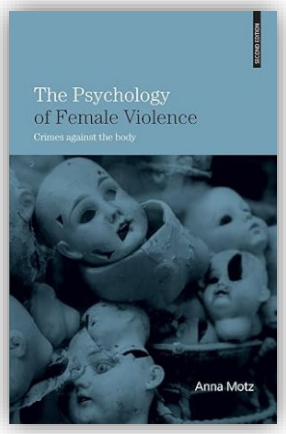
of a female through the justice system and signposts to HMPPS YouTube briefings, research links, toolkits, training, and observational opportunities.

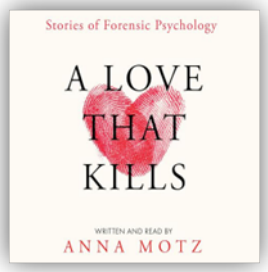
Greater Manchester region has kindly shared its package, which can be accessed here with a Ministry of Justice login: Introduction to Working with Women in the Criminal Justice System

Example of effectiveness: Commissioned training on women and violence, Greater Manchester

In Greater Manchester, Dr Anna Motz, a consultant clinical and forensic psychologist, has been commissioned to deliver training on addressing violent offences committed by women. Dr Motz is a researcher and author with extensive clinical experience with women as perpetrators of violence. She currently works within the custodial setting and has previously delivered events to the national HMPPS women's team.

This was an excellent example of being responsive to the region's needs. Following a Serious Further Offence, practitioners identified a gap in their knowledge about women as domestic abuse perpetrators and violent offenders. It was explicitly noted that the theory, research, and discussion of this type of offence, and how it differs from male to female domestic abuse and violence, was an area that practitioners were not sufficiently experienced in addressing. There is also currently no specific HMPPS training available on this subject. In consultation with the head of operations, it was agreed to fund bespoke training. Dr Anna Motz was commissioned to deliver four sessions (part one and part two, repeated) over 12 months to all probation practitioners. Women's centre staff and partners working with women were also invited. The sessions supported attendees in developing their understanding of the theory underpinning female violence and how to understand and apply it in the context of risk and need when supporting desistance. Dr Motz was also available to answer questions on the topic.





Dr Anna Motz, author of *The Psychology of Female Violence: Crimes Against the Body*

and

A Love That Kills: Stories of Forensic Psychology and Female Violence.

Example of effectiveness: Multi-agency training for practitioners working with women, Cardiff and the Vale

The importance of multi-agency training was highlighted in '*A thematic inspection of work undertaken, and progress made, by the Probation Service to reduce the incidence of domestic abuse and protect victims*' (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2023b) as critical to ensuring that probation practitioners have a sufficient depth of understanding of the topic and understand the work of other expert organisations. The same is true concerning working with women, many of whom will be

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

engaged with other organisations that are specialists in addressing women's needs.

In Wales, we heard how staff identified a skills gap in working with women, in their understanding of motivations for offending and the need for a trauma-informed approach. For the past two years, practitioners in Wales have been accessing the 'Gender-responsive practice and trauma-informed skills ´course, which was commissioned by the MoJ and Welsh Government under the Women's Justice Blueprint for Wales in 2021.

Cymorth i Ferched Cymru
Welsh Women's Aid

The gender-responsive training executive summary states:

> *'The training package and its materials were developed by the HMPPS Forensic Psychological Services (FPS) in Wales to help professionals to support women who are in, or at risk of entering, the Criminal Justice System (CJS) using a gender-responsive and trauma-informed approach. The training is delivered by trainers from Welsh Women's Aid (WWA), a national charity with expertise in trauma-informed and gender-responsive support who also contributed to the development of the training package'.*

The training seeks to create a cultural shift to enable practitioners to think and operate in a more gender-responsive and trauma-informed way, delivering on some of the key objectives of the Women's Justice Blueprint. It is delivered as part of a whole-systems approach, alongside police, courts, prisons, probation services, and third-sector agencies.

Initially designed to be delivered online during the Covid-19 pandemic, the training has now progressed to in-person sessions, also with other organisations, which has been warmly received.

The training was evaluated based on the online format, and the feedback was positive, with participants noting that they felt the training provided an in-depth understanding of a gender-responsive and trauma-informed approach to working with women who are in, or at risk of entering, the CJS. The executive summary of the evaluation said,

> *'Eighty-seven per cent either strongly agreed (67 per cent) or agreed (20 per cent) that their level of knowledge and skill surrounding a gender-responsive and trauma-informed approach had increased as a result of the training'.*

Practitioners commented during the post-training review:

> *"I am far more informed now, than what I was 6 hours ago. I also have reference material to further research to assist my knowledge in this important area."*
>
> *"Training has helped me build on my knowledge and how to try to deliver this."*
>
> *"This is the first training we have really had for working with women. It was sometimes run as just a team and the face-to-face day course was really good. Other people did it with other agencies too…"*

You can read the 'Gender-responsive practice and trauma-informed skills training' executive summary here and the learning outcomes here

There are many research studies looking at the transfer of training into practice. Here are some examples:

How to Prompt Training Effectiveness? An Investigation on Achievement Goal Setting Intervention in Workplace Learning

Transfer of Training: The Known and the Unknown | Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior

Evaluating Training for New Government Officials: A Case Study Using the Success Case Method

Here is a link to a helpful poster for managers to support their staff in transferring their knowledge and skills into practice following any learning and development events: HMPPS Intranet – Probation Learning Helping Training Stick – Evidence Based Tips for Managers poster.pdf (Will need a Ministry of Justice login to access)

Partnerships and services

Having effective partnership arrangements is vital in providing high-quality services for women. Women on probation often have complex needs and may need specialist support to address them. Effective partnership working requires each organisation to understand its role boundaries and those of partner agencies. Each organisation needs to understand clearly what partner agencies are doing to avoid giving mixed messages, duplicating work, or overwhelming women. There also needs to be a clear understanding of what information needs to be shared and how this will be done to inform assessment, planning, sentence delivery, and reviewing.

In this section, we have provided examples of where we saw partnerships working well.

Example of effectiveness: Greater Manchester Integrated Rehabilitative Services

"Each neighbourhood area will be served by an integrated place-based team, with co-located professionals from all relevant public services working together"

The Greater Manchester Model: Further, Faster. Reforming Public Services. Available here: greater-manchester-model.pdf (greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk)

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) has a unique model of public service delivery which is designed to engage and support communities. GMCA describes that its focus is on bringing services together at a neighbourhood level to support people and their needs. The GMCA has devolved responsibility for a range of services which in other local authorities are not within local control. For women's services, this means co-commissioning with the probation service providers for support services. In

GREATER MANCHESTER WOMEN'S SUPPORT ALLIANCE

Greater Manchester, the equivalent of the commissioned rehabilitative service (CRS), Greater Manchester Integrated Rehabilitative Services (GMIRS) aims to deliver a whole-system approach. As the ambition is to address disadvantage, only one of which may be criminal justice involvement, services are available to women, irrespective of whether or not they are subject to probation supervision, and can support women beyond their sentence end date.

The women's service is provided by Greater Manchester Women's Support Alliance (GMWSA), which provides a strategic support system for the nine women's centres across the 10 boroughs of Greater Manchester. The approach allows different organisations to run local women's centres, tailored to the needs of their local area while still coming together to collaborate and engage with the local authority. The GMWSA website states,

> *'United by our common values, we work together to share knowledge and experiences while representing the interests of the women we support – making sure that our collective voice is heard by policy makers and service commissioners. In doing so, we're fostering an approach to helping women that emphasises prevention over intervention.'*

Inspectors found that principles that underpin the approach in Greater Manchester benefited those receiving services, as it offered a multi-agency, whole system approach which avoided multiple referrals, supported consistency of delivery, and aided communication between agencies.

A leaflet on the Greater Manchester Women's Support Alliance is available here: GMWSA leaflet

Example of effectiveness: Women's problem-solving court, Greater Manchester

The problem-solving court (PSC) approach is based on the theory that if an individual's multiple complex needs were addressed and they had access to appropriate services, this would reduce crime and levels of social deprivation.

The courts, Probation Service, and women's centre work together to support a female in adhering to her court order and achieving positive outcomes. This includes a requirement to attend reviews with the dedicated bench of magistrates, setting small achievable goals and discussing progress.

Within Greater Manchester, all females attend their local women's centre throughout their court order as part of a recognised whole-system approach, where they receive support to address their multiple complex needs. Reviews are conducted either in court or via the women's centre.

Suitability criteria include:

- The female must be a resident of Greater Manchester and sentenced at either a magistrates' or Crown Court.
- The female is at risk of custody or a medium- to high-level community order or suspended sentence order.
- The female has multiple complex needs that may include debts, physical and mental ill-health, adverse

Figure 5. Stockport problem-solving court

childhood experiences and trauma, parenting, accommodation, substance misuse, and domestic abuse.

- The female must be motivated to address their problems.

Russell Webster published a guest post article featuring Fiona Deacon, Strategic Lead for Women in Greater Manchester, in September 2023, sharing this approach for women.

The PSC is an impressive approach to managing women, enabled by the overall approach to commissioning services in Greater Manchester, which is unique to the area. The PSC provides positive reinforcement of progress and encouragement to complete goals. It gives women a different experience of supportive authority, which they may not have previously had. While the overall model may not be replicated across England and Wales, many elements of the approach could be used in different ways.

We spoke to Eleanor Murdoch, Justice of the Peace, and Steph Taylor, probation officer, to hear their views on what the Problem Solving Court offers: Video (YouTube: 37:51): Effective Practice: Problem Solving Court, Greater Manchester, (HM Inspectorate of Probation)

Example of effectiveness: Women's Centre, Stockport

During our fieldwork in Stockport and Trafford PDU, we visited Stockport women's centre in Greater Manchester. The centre offers women in the local area an extensive range of services, including access to counselling and psychotherapy services, art therapy, and complementary therapies. The centre facilitates various group work activities, including the 'Freedom Programme' and other opportunities for personal development; the latter include English language courses and multiple creative activities, which allow women to improve social skills, reduce social isolation, and provide ways to express themselves and build their identity. The centre also offers practical support for women, including clothing, food parcels, and hygiene products. The services are available for all women, not just those involved with

the CJS. It can, therefore, support women at risk of criminal justice involvement and those who have completed their sentences.

The Stockport and Trafford PDU has strong links with the women's centre, and the practitioners in the women's team spend part of their week co-located there, where they can share information and discuss the progress of the women they are working with. While there is a close working relationship, probation practitioners and the women's centre staff retain clear boundaries and an awareness of each other's roles and responsibilities. In addition, probation practitioners remain connected to their own service, and up to date with changes within their organisation.

Example of effectiveness: Access to specialist services, Advance Minerva, London

In the London probation region, Advance Minerva is the commissioned CRS provider. In recognition that women are diverse and may have multiple needs, Advance Minerva has a network of specialist services that they can refer women on to. Examples include services for migrant women or those who have experienced child loss.

Hibiscus aims to support migrant women with their basic needs, including safety, obtaining documentation, knowing their rights, finances, food, and housing. They say,

> *"Hibiscus works directly with marginalised migrant women at every point within the criminal justice and immigration system, supporting women at every opportunity on their difficult journey through the system."*

You can read more about Hibiscus on their website.

Birth Companions aims to improve the lives of mothers and babies facing inequalities and disadvantage. It is an organisation led by, and for, women and provides practical and emotional support through services in prisons and the community.

You can learn more about Birth Companions through their website.

Example of effectiveness: Willowdene Rehabilitation, West Midlands

'Willowdene Rehabilitation' is the commissioned provider of CRS services for Warwickshire and West Mercia, but also has a residential rehabilitation programme for women which offers an alternative to custody. Connected to its LINC (Local Initiatives Nurturing Change) programme, Willowdene describes that its service,

> *'offers a holistic, gender-specific model that brings together both public and third-sector organisations, as well as private businesses to equip and empower women to break free from situations and circumstances including domestic abuse, sexual exploitation, offending, substance misuse, poor mental health and homelessness, and to build a purposeful, hope-filled and aspirational lifestyle.'*

Willowdene has provided residential rehabilitation and respite services since 1988. Originally operating as a male-only site, before more recently moving to a mixed facility, it now offers a female-only residential option.

At its women's recovery centre, women reside in a tranquil rural setting, in self-contained multi-occupancy log cabins, with access to a well-equipped communal area. Women are referred via health pathways, usually due to substance misuses issues or through criminal justice routes as an alternative to custody, or following release from prison. Women stay at Willowdene for between seven and 12 weeks.

During their placement, women are offered access to training, counselling, and therapy, and work opportunities, before making a supported exit back into the community once their placement ends, but also focus on building the life skills they need to build a sustainable and purposeful lifestyle.

Willowdene also offers day services where women can attend to complete over 20 qualifications and gain practical work experience.

We spoke to Dr Matt Home to find out more about Willowdene Rehabilitation.
Video (YouTube: 13:08) Effective practice: Dr Matt Home, Willowdene Rehabilitation (HM Inspectorate of Probation)

Reflection questions

Questions for middle managers and practitioners:

- How well is the Female Offender Strategy embedded within your region?
- Have you accessed appropriate training to build your confidence in working with women on probation?
- How familiar are you with the specialist organisations that work with women in your PDU?
- How do you build effective working relationships with women's organisations in your area?

Key take-aways: Organisational delivery

This requires:

effective collaboration and partnership arrangements which provide a whole-system approach to addressing women's offending-related needs

a vision and strategy for improving outcomes for women on probation which are fully known and understood by probation staff and partner agencies

training that equips staff and managers with the skills and confidence to engage with women on probation in a meaningful and impactful way, to understand fully how traumatic events can affect women's behaviour

well-coordinated work with CRSs and community organisations that enhances the quality-of-service delivery and provides services for women in line with all aspects of the Women's Policy Framework

access to sufficient data to understand and improve outcomes for women

ongoing evaluation and review of the effectiveness of interventions to understand fully their impact.

Prison resettlement

While only four per cent of the prison population are female, women often receive short prisons sentences (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2022). The Prison Reform Trust (2023) reported that over 58 per cent of prison sentences given to women in 2022 were for less than six months. The impact can be significant when incarcerated far from home, leading to an increased likelihood of self-harm in custody and trauma related to separation from children and family. This is in addition to managing the practicalities of release and resettlement back into the community, such as securing accommodation.

Effective resettlement has been shown to be important in reducing reoffending, and planning needs to balance all the needs of a female being released, including addressing wellbeing and emotional needs, practical support, motivation, and engagement. Early planning and preparation for release therefore increases the likelihood of interventions being effective.

The HMPPS Pre-release and Resettlement Policy Framework (HMPPS, 2022) sets out the following.

> *'Pre-release activity will ensure the needs of women in prison are at the centre of the work being done around them and provide continuity of support. A golden thread is building a relationship of trust; supporting women to feel safe, engage with services and develop hope in their capacity to make changes.'*

Below, we highlight some examples of notable positive practice seen on inspection by HM Inspectorate of Prisons, of early resettlement planning, with supportive engagement from a range of services, both during the custodial part of a woman's sentence and then through the gate into the community. HM Inspectorate of Prisons' definition of **notable positive practice** is: '

> *…evidence of our expectations being met to deliver particularly good outcomes for prisoners and/or detainees, and/or particularly original or creative approaches to problem-solving'.*

The HM Inspectorate of Prisons' disclaimer is:

> *'… unless otherwise specified, these examples are not formally evaluated, are a snapshot in time and may not be suitable for other establishments'.'*

Example of notable positive practice: Community Rehabilitative Services (CRS), HMP Styal

CRS work with women in prison and on release and aim to provide targeted services to help break the cycle of reoffending. They are delivered by organisations at a local and regional level, both in custody and in the community, and provide support associated with reoffending.

During the thematic inspection, the delivery of CRS services to support women with resettlement needs such as accommodation was most effective at HMP Styal. The three main CRS providers (Lancashire Women, PSS and Ingeus) all attended the prison at least weekly to see women face to face. They were co-located with the pre-release team, to allow for good information sharing and a quick response to any changes in plans.

In one specific case, it was observed by inspectors that the co-location of teams and the CRS services being on-site to meet the women face to face added to the effectiveness of this response to crisis and changing circumstances.

Example of notable positive practice: Bridges to Health, HMP Downview

Bridges to Health is a project in the South East, commissioned by Central and North-West London NHS Foundation Trust and delivered by the charity 'Women in Prison'.

> *The 'Bridges to Health' model is fundamentally a person-focused segmentation approach, with the principal goal of 'pursuing the health of each population segment'.*

The project was observed during the inspection to be running well at HMP Downview, offering good through the gate support for some women with complex needs and health issues. Women could access advocacy in the three-month periods before and after release. The worker at HMP Downview was well integrated into release planning processes; for instance, she had helped women reach approved premises on release and contributed to public protection meetings.

Bridges to Health Segmentation Model – Outcomes Based Healthcare

Women in Prison — National charity providing specialist support services for women by women

Example of notable positive practice: Departure lounge, supporting women on the day of release, HMP Styal

Having practical support on the day of release makes successful resettlement for women more likely. Often referred to as a 'departure lounge', some prisons have buildings or centres located just outside the prison gates where a range of immediate needs can be met. At HMP Styal, women who have just been released can access immediate support in the new visitor centre, located just outside the prison gate, which opens on weekday mornings for up to three hours. This support was organised by the strategic housing specialist, who had identified the high level of need for practical help on the day of release.

Women can access support with immediate needs such as sheltering from the weather, organising transport, charging phones, making calls and planning for their onward journeys. They can obtain toiletries donated by 'Beauty Banks', which is a local charity, and there is a range of second-hand clothes from a variety of sources, including prison staff, the Independent Monitoring Board, and local universities.

Video (YouTube, 00:50): Effective Practice: HMP Styal (HM Inspectorate of Probation)

In addition, a range of services operate out of the departure lounge, providing practical support:

- Department for Work and Pensions – activating claims for Universal Credit and completion of emergency homelessness assessments.
- CRS providers at HMP Styal operate from the space in the mornings if they have cases who need support on the day of release.
- Local substance misuse teams use the space to facilitate gate pick-ups and offer through the gate support, as do other local charity partners, such as 'On the Out', which provides a gate pick-up and ongoing support service for Greater Manchester.
- Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT) – a family support service, helps to run the space and offer signposting and advice for the day of release.

There are longer-term plans to encourage local authority housing teams and probation staff to attend to undertake assessments/inductions.

Lancashire Women (CRS provider at HMP Styal) also provides volunteer support in running the service, along with day-of-release support and gate collection for some cases.

2022/2023 data collated at HMP Styal shows that 56.4 per cent of females released from custody who were informed about the departure lounge attended for support, 157 toiletry packs were provided, and emergency accommodation was sourced in four cases by accessing this immediate support on release.

In the case study below, you can read about Jamie, and how the departure lounge supported her on the day of release.

Case illustration

Jamie was a woman who had returned to custody over five times within the last 12 months and often struggled with attending appointments and navigating complex routes into emergency accommodation on her own.

When she returned to HMP Styal on a very short recall, it was identified that she was at risk of harm from others in the area where she was usually released to. An assessment was arranged in a new local authority area but there was no time to complete this before her release date.

On the day of release, Jamie attended the departure lounge and was able to spend the morning there, accessing support to complete her emergency homelessness assessment and successfully obtaining temporary accommodation out of area.

She was provided with information about support agencies in the new area, had her benefit claim set up, and was given toiletries and clothing to limit her immediate expenses.

As a result, Jamie was successful in her resettlement and has now secured her own tenancy, and has been out of custody for seven months.

Listen here to Tom Warden, Strategic Housing Specialist at HMP Styal to find out more about this service. Video, (YouTube, 18:12): Effective Practice: Departure Lounge, HMP Styal (HM Inspectorate of Probation)

You can learn more about the charities that provide support at HMP Styal by following the links below:

Charity | Beauty Banks

On The Out - A movement, set up by and for people who have experienced life in prison.

Prison Advice and Care Trust

Example of notable positive practice: Provision of mobile phones and preloaded SIM cards on release, HMP Downview

Phoebe Light, the strategic housing specialist (SHS) at HMP Downview, when reflecting on housing data, identified that a large percentage of women who were not attending post-release appointments with their probation practitioners or local authorities, were uncontactable, so there was a need for a form of communication to be established.

HMP Downview has partnered with Bridge the Gap, which has provided SIM cards with 40GB of data, and up to 12 months' free calls and texts. The SIM cards are issued to women who already have devices, or a basic mobile phone is provided by the female CRS providers. This is essential to enable contact with agencies and local authorities, updating community offender managers on arrival times and planning for journeys and appointments, and helping to reduce the likelihood of recall to custody.

You can read more about the Bridge the Gap charity which support this initiative, by following this link: Bridge The Gap (bridgethegaplondon.co.uk)

Delivering effective case supervision

Practitioners support desistance and manage risk of harm.

The Female Offender Strategy (MoJ, 2018) states,

> *'If we are to rehabilitate female offenders successfully and reduce reoffending, our workforce must understand the factors that drive women's offending behaviour, and the greater likelihood that gender-informed interventions will be effective.'*

This approach is also adopted within the HMPPS Women's Policy Framework, which says,

> *'A gender-informed approach is an approach that is built on the theories of women's crime, taking into account the characteristics of women who offend and factors that affect the response of women to interventions.'*

To deliver a gender-informed approach effectively, probation practice must be tailored to what research tells us about women's offending, what the priority targets for intervention

are, and how trauma and vulnerabilities link to women's offending. Practitioners must then apply this knowledge to individuals and understand how their life experiences have affected them, using this to inform planning. In this section, we share examples of practice that we saw during this inspection that demonstrated an understanding of effective approaches with women.

Court work

Providing a clear and accurate assessment to assist sentencing has multiple benefits. For the person being sentenced, it can be their first contact with the Probation Service and, when done well, can start to build positive engagement. Providing recommendations that offer sentencers rehabilitative options that meet the needs of the individual and offer the prospect of reducing further offending and harm can avoid women being sentenced to short custodial sentences, a key aim of the Female Offender Strategy. In this section, we identify some practice examples that demonstrate effective court work activity.

Example of effectiveness: Alana House PSR consultancy, West Berkshire

In West Berkshire PDU, there is a partnership arrangement with Alana House, the local women's centre, to support assessments for court reports for women in the area. Court report authors can refer women for an assessment which can help to build a package of interventions as part of a community sentence, providing robust recommendations to courts, particularly as an alternative to a custodial sentence.

Alana House Court Assessment

Example of effectiveness: Effective analysis in a PSR

Providing sentencers with a clear analysis of women's offending and a robust sentencing recommendation can avoid women being given short custodial sentences, one of the main aims of the Female Offender Strategy. In the cases below, we provide examples that we found during our inspection that demonstrated effective analysis, informed by a knowledge of gender-specific needs.

In this case, the report author ensured that the court was clear on the negative impact that a short custodial sentence would have on Angela.

Case illustration

Angela appeared in court for assaulting a female associate. She had over 100 previous convictions, mainly for theft offences but also violent disorder, threatening behaviour, racially aggravated harassment, and, most recently, possessing a knife in public, and was at risk of receiving a custodial sentence.

The author presented a fast-delivery report to the court, demonstrating a clear understanding of Angela's needs using a gender-informed approach, highlighting how her vulnerabilities were linked to her offending. Angela had been a long-standing victim of

domestic abuse, and the report detailed the impact that sustained coercive control had had on her.

There was a real prospect that the court would be considering a short custodial sentence, and therefore the report also detailed how previous short custodial sentences had destabilised any protective factors which were in place and subsequently led to further offending.

The report acknowledged that Angela had been subject to a suspended sentence order when she committed the index offence. However, it also described that the frequency of her offending had significantly reduced and proposed that with additional support, there would be a greater chance of achieving desistance altogether. A clear rationale for the sentencing proposal was provided and detailed what would be delivered as part of a community order to give the sentencer confidence that a robust community sentence would offer a better chance of reducing offending in the longer term.

Angela was sentenced to an 18-month community order, with requirements to complete the Thinking Skills Programme and 20 rehabilitation activity requirement days.

In our second example, the report author fully addressed and analysed an offence relating to failing to send a child to school.

Case illustration

Miriam was sentenced to a 12-month community order, with a requirement to complete 20 rehabilitation activity requirement days following a conviction for failing to send her teenage daughter to school. She had similar previous convictions. The court indicated that they were not intending to pass a custodial sentence.

As the information had already been gained from police and children's social care services before the sentencing date, sufficient information was available to the author, and a detailed fast-delivery report was provided.

The report author provided a meaningful and compassionate analysis of Miriam's circumstances. She explored Miriam's own childhood experiences and her perceived rejection by her mother, which had led her to adopt a parenting style that promoted a friendship with her daughter that lacked authority. The report author explored Miriam's financial needs and made links to the offence. Miriam was not receiving financial support from the children's fathers and had very limited income.

Police information indicated that her previous relationships had included domestic abuse. Miriam had seven children, who attended three different schools, and had no transport of her own. The child in question had a long walk to school, which Miriam could not oversee, alongside getting younger children to school. The report author explored Miriam's intentions for her children and found that the lack of school attendance was not due to a lack of regard for their education but resulted from her own life experiences and the range of practical problems she faced.

To prepare for the report, the author also spoke to the social worker involved with the family and found that Miriam had started to engage well with them as they had built trust, and the practical barriers to school attendance were being addressed.

The author also included Miriam's strengths in the report; she had recently found employment for the first time in many years and was optimistic about her and her family's future.

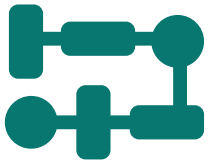
The report author took time to explore Miriam's socio-economic background, her own experiences of care and upbringing, and her relationship with her children. Each aspect was analysed to provide an individualised assessment of her needs and reasons for appearing in court, which provided sentencers with valuable insight into her life and allowed them to pass a sentence which supported her needs.

Reflection questions

Thinking about your practice as a leader or practitioner, alone or as part of a team discussion…

- How do probation services in your area ensure that high-quality reports are prepared for women that enable the courts to make appropriate decisions?
- How do court report writers in your area keep up to date with available interventions and services?

Sentence delivery



In this section, we have shared examples of effective practice from our case inspections which consider assessment, planning, delivery, and reviewing practices.

Example of effectiveness: Incorporating child protection work in planning

Women on probation may have children who are subject to child protection arrangements. Where this is the case, it is essential that a coordinated approach is taken, to ensure that children's social care plans and probation plans work well together, and do not overwhelm or give mixed messages. Probation and children's social care services may have different approaches or differing views on how issues should be addressed, and these need to be explored and addressed to promote joint working for the benefit of the woman and her family.

In the case below, we found that the probation practitioner had taken child protection plans into account in their supervision.

Case illustration

Lydia was sentenced to a 12-month community order, with requirements to complete rehabilitation activity requirement days and unpaid work following offences of driving while under the influence of alcohol and being intoxicated while in charge of her three children, who were in the vehicle at the time. One of Lydia's children was a new-born at the time of the offence, and she had support from the perinatal mental health team due to depression and a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder. As a result of domestic abuse, children's social care services were involved with the family. The probation practitioner referred to the child protection plan in the probation risk management plan, setting out where the children were and the contact arrangements for Lydia to see the children. The plan noted that the probation practitioner would have contact with the allocated social worker, how information would be shared, and the expectations that the child protection plan placed on Lydia.

The risk management contingency plan addressed issues that may foreseeably occur in Lydia's life, the impact they may have on the risk she posed, and what actions should be taken to mitigate the risks. This approach ensured that both agencies understood each other's remit and could work effectively towards ensuring that the children were safe and the woman had support to address her needs without overloading her or making competing demands. There was a clear understanding of how each agency would share information and what information each needed from the other.

Example of effectiveness: Promoting safety and wellbeing

Many women being supervised by the Probation Service have vulnerabilities. In our core inspection programme, between 2022 and 2023, we looked at court reports for 67 women; in 37 of these cases, there was a concern about domestic abuse. In addition, many women under supervision have addiction needs or engage in sex work; these activities expose them to potential harm regularly. Probation practitioners must pay sufficient attention to women's safety and wellbeing at each supervision stage, including assessment, planning, sentence delivery, and reviewing. The approach should be individual to each woman, depending on the known risks they may face. Occasionally, practitioners may need to respond when women fail to attend and consider whether this may indicate that they have come to harm, and action needs to be taken. In situations where the woman's safety cannot be confirmed via any other organisations working with her, that may include contacting the police to request a welfare check or report her missing.

Case illustration

Clare received a custodial sentence for offences of violence towards retail staff when being apprehended for shop theft. She was under the supervision of the Probation Service at the time of the offence and was supervised under the integrated offender management provision, jointly with the police.

Clare's compliance and engagement with services, both pre- and post-release, were poor, with short-lived periods of engagement with drug and alcohol services in the community before returning to a pattern of non-compliance and being out of contact. Attempts were made to conduct home visits, with one joint home visit with women's services being successful, where practical support was offered in terms of foodbank vouchers, clothes, and toiletries. All further attempts were unsuccessful as Clare failed to be present.

When Clare was out of contact, this usually signalled a relapse into substance misuse and reoffending, triggering concerns for her safety and wellbeing. The probation practitioner regularly liaised with police to ascertain her whereabouts and check for any arrest incidents. When she could not be located, the practitioner swiftly reported her missing.

During Clare's period of no contact, it was established that the police had incorrectly removed her as a missing person from their systems. The probation practitioner immediately challenged the police and established that the mistake had arisen because they thought that Clare had been located, when she had not. The robust actions of the probation practitioner ensured that Clare remained noted as a missing vulnerable person and alerts remained live on the relevant police systems, ensuring that she would be flagged as a priority individual should she come to police attention.

Example of effectiveness: Responding to neurodiversity and adapting sessions to individual needs

Neurodivergent individuals often struggle in unfamiliar environments. This is because their brain processes, functions, and interpretation of information are different from a 'neurotypical' brain. Therefore, the criminal justice process can be very stressful for them. It is not always immediately apparent if someone has a neurodivergent condition and that they may require additional support. It is therefore essential that probation practitioners listen and hear what people on probation tell them, and how their neurodivergence impacts on them, positively or negatively, and how they will engage with the requirements of their probation orders or licence.

Inspectors noted effective practice in the case below, where the probation practitioner really understood the triggers for Sian and adjusted her way of working to ensure that she felt comfortable in appointments, while maintaining consistency and boundaries.

Case illustration

Sian was sentenced to a 12-month community order, with a requirement to complete rehabilitation activity requirement days for offences of driving while under the influence of illegal substances.

She had several previous convictions for violent offences and was known to have been domestically abusive towards her ex-partners.

Sian had a diagnosis of borderline personality disorder, exhibited paranoid behaviours, and was a regular cannabis user. She had also previously been addicted to cocaine but had successfully addressed that.

The probation practitioner took time to understand Sian's personality disorder and how her behaviour could impact her engagement. Sian felt very uncomfortable around computers or if she thought anyone was taking notes about her. The practitioner ensured that they never brought a laptop computer, notepad, or pen into sessions.

Despite Sian's challenging behaviour, the practitioner maintained a consistent approach, challenging inappropriate behaviour, and sought support from her manager at various times to discuss Sian's supervision. When Sian missed appointments, the reasons were always addressed, and a consistent approach to enforcement was taken, which helped her understand boundaries.

Sian described that she often ruminated on things, which caused her to feel highly anxious. The practitioner explored ways that she could support her not to over-analyse; for example, when Sian submitted evidence of why she had missed an appointment, the practitioner would write that it had been accepted and no further action would be taken, which allowed Sian to move on.

The practitioner also ended each session by telling Sian what they would cover in the next session, which allowed her to prepare and not feel ambushed when asked to discuss topics.

The consistency of this approach, and working in a trauma-informed way, created trust and psychological safety through which Sian understood expectations and boundaries.

Example of effectiveness: Professional curiosity

> *'Professional curiosity is a combination of looking, listening, asking direct questions, and clarifying and reflecting on information received to analyse what it means in context for that individual. It is vital we do not use a single source of information but instead seek multiple sources. This is so we can triangulate information from a range of sources, analyse behaviour and make informed decisions.'*

(Practitioner: Professional curiosity insights guide based on: *HM Inspectorate of Probation's findings from Serious Further Offence reviews, adult core, and thematic inspections* October 2022)

Professional curiosity has been described as the *'cornerstone of all probation practice'*[2] and we have published effective practice insights guides for practitioners and middle managers on the topic, as well as academic insight publications.

Professional Curiosity Guide for practitioners and managers can be found here: Case supervision (justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)

Academic Insights by Jake Phillips 'Putting professional curiosity into practice' can be found here: Academic Insights (justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)

In the case below, the probation practitioner demonstrated professional curiosity throughout Belle's community order, and where necessary challenged other agencies to obtain information that they needed to work effectively with her.

Case illustration

Belle was convicted of having a dog that was dangerously out of control, and given a 12-month community order. The probation practitioner demonstrated high levels of professional curiosity in seeking to understand Belle's life.

Belle had a child who was being cared for by another family member, and the practitioner made repeated requests to children's social services until she had sufficient information to understand why these arrangements were in place and allowed her to speak to Belle regarding her feelings about this situation.

During her order, Belle's ex-partner was remanded in custody for a sexual offence against her. Part-way through the order, Belle's attitude towards this alleged offence changed and she told her practitioner that she wanted to withdraw her statement. Her attendance at appointments also started to decline. The practitioner contacted the prison, to find out if there had been contact between Belle and her ex-partner. She also contacted the police and an independent domestic violence adviser, to share information and ensure that Belle was supported.

The vigilance of the practitioner to changes in Belle's presentation prompted her to gather information from a range of sources, to try to understand what may have been contributing to these changes. The professional curiosity demonstrated in this case initiated a multi-agency response to the concerns raised and provided support to Belle.

[2] Sonia Flynn, then Chief Probation Officer, in a recorded interview as part of: Practitioner: professional curiosity insights guide, Based on: HM Inspectorate of Probation's findings from Serious Further Offence reviews, adult core, and thematic inspections October 2022.

Example of effectiveness: Case formulation with offender personality disorder (OPD) team

Insight into why someone may behave destructively can be key to supporting them in moving away from harmful behaviours. In the case below, a case formulation, supported by the OPD pathway, helped to identify more effective ways to work with a woman who had complex needs.

Case illustration

Gail was sentenced to eight months in prison following her conviction for offences against a child. The context of the offence was that Gail's children were in the local authority's care, her mental health was poor, and she had substance misuse problems. Gail had one unrelated previous conviction.

Gail's assessment identified that she had also been the victim of domestic abuse. She was initially released to an approved premises but was recalled twice following non-compliance with the curfew placed upon her. Her most recent release was on post-sentence supervision only.

Prior to re-release, a consultation through the OPD pathway took place. The discussion identified concerns about the impact of Gail's low self-esteem, the risks of exploitation that she faced, and her previous experiences of sexual abuse. It identified Gail's use of substances as a means of coping with trauma and a way through which she met her need for connection and a sense of belonging. The formulation indicated the need to build her support network and identity and suggested a referral to the women's CRS specific programme, which the probation practitioner completed.

A multi-agency meeting took place between Gail, her probation practitioner, and a worker from the CRS, and a separate meeting with her substance misuse support worker and a psychologist. This approach allowed for consistency from all agencies, informed by the case formulation, which set out methods that were likely to offer the best chance of having a positive impact on Gail.

Following her release, more effective risk management was achieved, and a better focus on Gail's safety and wellbeing, which had required frequent crisis management.

Throughout the post-sentence supervision period, as the probation practitioner understood that Gail was at risk of being exploited by others, they demonstrated effective professional curiosity by ascertaining the names and addresses of men who attended the probation office with Gail and made enquiries to the police about them.

Example of effectiveness: Using creative opportunities, Worcestershire

In Worcestershire, the Probation Service has partnered with Crave Arts to offer the 'Creative Space' project. Developers of the project told us,

> *"Statistically, women are more likely to have experienced trauma throughout their lives, whether this be in childhood or later life, and these experiences impact on how they respond and work with professionals. I have observed and participated in all the projects and have seen the increase in the women's confidence over the weeks…the projects have*

enabled the women to express themselves in a mutually supportive, safe way and grow the skills and tools they need to improve their self-esteem and wellbeing. The feedback from both the participants and staff has been entirely positive, with one woman choosing to finish the project beyond the end of her supervision!"

The project offered a range of creative opportunities for women, including arts and writing elements. Women who took part in a writing project were asked to evaluate the impact that the project had had on them, using a 1–5 scaling chart.

The evaluation showed that all women felt the writing workshops had contributed positively to their lives:

- **Mental health and wellbeing:** an average increase of 1.3 on a 5-point scale
- **Confidence:** an average increase of 1.7 on a 5-point scale
- **Managing emotions:** an average increase of 1 on a 5-point scale
- **New skills:** an average increase of 1.3 on a 5-point scale
- **Crime-free life:** an average increase of 1 on the 5-point scale.

You can access an eBook of the poetry and prose anthology created by women at Crave Arts as part of their Creative Space project in Worcestershire and the impact report by following this link: Latest News | Crave Arts

We spoke to Debbie Birch, Crave Arts, and Helen Madeley, senior probation officer, Worcestershire delivery unit to find out more. You can listen to this discussion here: Video (YouTube: 22:55): Effective Practice: Creative Space, a joint project between Crave Arts and Worcestershire Probation Delivery Unit (HM Inspectorate of Probation)

In the following case, a practitioner found creative opportunities to support a woman who felt she had lost her identity.

Case illustration

June was sentenced to a nine-month community order, with requirements to complete rehabilitation activity requirement days and unpaid work for a violent offence against her partner. This was her first conviction.

Safeguarding enquiries found that there was a long history of domestic abuse within the relationship. June had young children, and following the assessment an early help intervention was implemented.

Unfortunately, June had several changes of probation practitioner; however, when her most recent probation practitioner reviewed the case, she asked important questions about what June wanted out of life, and her goals. This sparked an honest and enlightening discussion about identity, and June described that she felt she had no identity of her own, outside of being a mother.

June also shared that when she was younger, she had had an interest in amateur dramatics and had thoughts about taking on further studies in this subject. The probation practitioner referred her to 'Clean Break', a women's theatre company focused on the themes of women

and criminalisation. The practitioner also spoke to June about the 'Maya Centre', a community-based charity which provides mental health and wellbeing services.

The probation practitioner in this case sought out organisations that could support June, even after her probation services involvement had ended, and give her a creative outlet, which helped her build her own identity, gain new skills and confidence, and gain the support of peers.

Details about the organisations mentioned in the case above can be found here:

https://www.cleanbreak.org.uk/about/

https://www.mayacentre.org.uk/

Example of effectiveness: Multi-agency coordination

Many women will have contact with other services while they are under probation supervision, and therefore effective communication and joint working are essential to ensure that information is shared appropriately. Working with other organisations can help build a picture of women's lives, to verify information or raise concerns about emerging risks. In the following case, the practitioner demonstrated effective communication and multi-agency coordination in their practice.

Case illustration

Shona was sentenced to a community order, with an alcohol abstinence monitoring requirement, rehabilitation activity requirement days, and a mental health treatment requirement.

The pre-sentence report and initial assessment both demonstrated a gender-informed approach and analysed the trauma that Shona had experienced, drawing links to her offending behaviour.

From the outset, there was effective communication with police and adult safeguarding services.

The probation practitioner took the lead in co-coordinating multi-agency activity around this complex female. She used various sources to gather information and worked with a range of police teams, including the integrated offender management scheme, the gangs team, and the domestic abuse unit, to get the information she needed.

Shona had a diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome and reported that people often found her behaviour strange. The probation practitioner explored with Shona how best to communicate with her and agreed that using slow speech and providing a written summary following the appointment helped her.

During her order, Shona was assaulted by a drug dealer. The practitioner completed safety planning activity and shared information with all professionals working with Shona. They convened regular multi-agency discussions.

The mental health treatment requirement was initially delivered via video calls but changed to face-to-face delivery when the probation practitioner requested this as an approach that might work better for Shona. Shona was also open to substance misuse

services; while her engagement with them was poor, her allocated keyworker within the service continued to maintain contact.

Shona's life was quite chaotic, and as there was a range of agencies involved, the probation practitioner set up an email group to ensure that the correct information was always shared swiftly and with the right people. This ensured that when things changed in Shona's life, a focus on managing risk and promoting her safety and wellbeing was maintained.

Example of effectiveness: Responding to escalating risk

In the following case, the probation practitioner responded to escalating concerns in the case and pursued multi-agency support.

Case illustration

Eloise was sentenced to a 12-month community order, with rehabilitation activity days and a six-month drug rehabilitation requirement for theft offences. She quickly reoffended by assaulting an emergency worker.

Eloise had a significant history of acquisitive and violent offending and was assessed as posing a high risk of reoffending and a high risk of causing serious harm to others.

Regular intelligence suggested that Eloise was involved in county lines drug dealing, exploitation, robberies, and other incidents of violence. The probation practitioner consulted with a psychologist through the OPD pathway, to explore strategies to encourage compliance and engagement.

The probation practitioner referred Eloise to the integrated offender management scheme and multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA), but neither accepted the referral. Due to continued concerns and the assessment that risk was escalating, the practitioner increased her contact with Eloise to twice weekly and pursued other options for joint agency work.

Eventually, Eloise was accepted for monitoring via a joint intelligence forum, where her case is formally discussed every month, and information is shared daily.

Key take-aways: delivering effective case supervision

Effective case supervision of women on probation requires:

- **gender-informed analysis of needs and risks** at court stage, using all available information to inform an appropriate recommendation for sentencing
- assessments **analysing the context of women's offending**, considering their lived experience, trauma, and disadvantage, to ensure a gender-informed approach
- the **meaningful involvement of women on probation** through all aspects of assessment, planning, sentence delivery, and reviewing
- **promoting the safety and wellbeing** of women at all stages of the CJS, providing an individualised approach
- a **holistic response, tailored to the specific needs of the woman on probation**
- a **coordinated and collaborative approach to safeguarding** which promotes effective joint working
- **use of professional curiosity** to explore and understand women's lives
- **use of specialist services to address gender-specific needs.**

Reflection questions

From an operational perspective:

- How do you ensure that women are fully engaged in their assessments and plans?
- How do you feel when you read the case illustrations?
- What challenges have you faced in your work with women on probation?
- How would you tackle these challenges with the knowledge you have gained from your experience and reflections?

Approved premises

There are nine approved premises for women in England (none in Wales), which provide a total of 165 bed spaces. Surprisingly, the places for women are underused and approved premises are often under-occupied. Female approved premises accept women assessed as posing a high risk and very high risk of serious harm. They also take residents assessed as posing a medium risk of serious harm with complex needs. Women can be referred to approved premises ahead of release on licence or can be required to reside as a requirement on a community or suspended sentence order. Throughout our inspection, we saw that timely preparation for residence, feeling safe at the approved premises, and building skills to support onward resettlement were essential aspects of practice. In this section, we have shared examples of the effective practice we found.

Example of effectiveness: Balancing risks and needs

Where women are assessed as posing a high or very high risk of harm to others, they may have several licence conditions which significantly restrict what they can do during their licence period. To support women in moving on from their offending behaviour, it is important that rehabilitative opportunities are not overlooked, with the focus being placed solely on public protection or restrictive measures. In the following case, we found an example where public protection and rehabilitation were balanced through the work of the approved premises.

Case illustration

Anya received a 60-month custodial sentence for drug-related offending. It was suspected that she had continued to be involved in drug supply throughout her prison sentence. She was therefore closely managed as she was known to be involved in serious organised crime and, as a result, had many restrictions on her release licence.

Before her release, her probation practitioner had liaised with the approved premises manager, to ensure that appropriate arrangements were in place for Anya's supervision. There were concerns that she would try to manipulate staff and residents, so staff were briefed to guard against this.

Notes from keywork sessions were detailed, to ensure that information was available to Anya's probation practitioner. Keywork sessions focused on identifying purposeful activity and encouraging Anya to engage with other agencies to address her substance misuse, mental health, physical health, and access to education.

As she had multiple restrictions concerning who she could associate with on her licence conditions, the approved premises staff tried to provide a sense of her community and purpose within the approved premises by using her skills to offer beauty services to other residents.

Communication between approved premises staff and Anya's probation practitioner was regular and thorough. Information about Anya's behaviour and activities, which supported public protection work and effective monitoring, was provided.

In a case like this, it can be easy to focus solely on managing risks and overlook opportunities for rehabilitation or supporting needs, which are vital to addressing the longer-term likelihood of reoffending and causing further harm. Staff at the approved premises looked for opportunities for Anya, rather than focusing on what she was restricted from doing under her licence, which led to positive outcomes and hope in this case.

Example of effectiveness: Supportive keywork

The case below provides an example where a woman had struggled to cope in prison and yet responded well to the regime within the approved premises. Keywork was used to reinforce positive behaviours and build coping skills.

Case illustration

Moira was sentenced to 10 months in prison for assaulting emergency workers while intoxicated.

She was released to an approved premises out of area as she had restrictive licence conditions not to return to her hometown.

Moira had not coped well in custody and had been prone to aggressive outbursts and self-harm.

At the start of her stay at the approved premises, a thorough support and safety planning assessment was completed, which set out details of Moira's risks and needs, and guided staff on how to respond to her.

Moira had regular keywork sessions throughout her stay, focusing on emotional regulation, her attitudes toward others, and improving her coping skills. Moira was reminded of skills that she had learned, and encouraged to use them. Notes from sessions showed that she often left these in a calmer state than when she had entered, and the approved premises saw little of the problematic behaviour that she had displayed in prison.

Purposeful activity was also discussed in keywork, and Moira was encouraged to engage in a range of activities that supported her needs, including an alcohol support group and employment support sessions. Keywork sessions also included praise and positive reinforcement when she had managed situations well.

Example of effectiveness: Building skills through 'Deeds Not Words', Edith Rigby

Deeds Not Words is a cooperative enterprise dedicated to empowering women through employment opportunities. Their mission is to foster social change by advocating for gender equality irrespective of socioeconomic backgrounds.

You can find out more about the work they do on their website: Home - Deeds Not Words

We spoke to Victoria Eccleston and Ashley Mayoh about the Deeds not Words social enterprise, and you can listen to the interview here: Video (YouTube: 16:39) Effective practice: Deeds not words, Edith Rigby Approved Premises (HM Inspectorate of Probation)

Example of effectiveness: Responding to individual needs

In the case below, the approved premises took time to build the confidence of a resident who was extremely fearful. Staff gradually supported her in engaging in more activities within the approved premises, and she made significant progress during her stay.

Case illustration

Faith was convicted of child cruelty and received a long prison sentence. She was released to an approved premises as she could not return to her home area due to restrictions on her licence.

Faith was highly fearful about being around other people, and concerned that they would harm her due to the nature of her offence. Staff at the approved premises had a video call with her before she was released, to start building a relationship and listening to her concerns about being kept safe.

On her release, staff allocated her a room close to the approved premises' staff area to reassure her, and arrangements were made initially to minimise her contact with other residents.

Assessments indicated that Faith would resort to self-harm when she felt unsafe. As staff worked with her to build her confidence, she was encouraged to engage in more communal activities, but this was taken at a pace that suited her needs.

With support, Faith was able to join the regular regime and moved to a different room, away from the staff area. She was encouraged to participate in purposeful activities within the approved premises, which built her confidence and introduced her to relaxing activities to help manage her anxiety.

During her stay, Faith began to volunteer with an organisation away from the approved premises, which was a significant achievement, given her initial levels of fear.

Example of effectiveness: Occupational therapists, Crowley House Probation Hostel, Birmingham

Crowley House is an 18-bed approved premises on the outskirts of Birmingham. It is classified as a 'psychologically informed planned environment' (PIPE); however, many of those who reside there have not been through the prison PIPE regime. This can prove problematic, in terms of an individual's readiness to engage in the provision. The focus of the approved premises' interventions are trauma- and gender-informed from the outset, and an extensive and structured programme of interventions, groups, and support is available for residents.

Crowley House offers placements for occupational therapist (OT) students from Birmingham University. The idea was born out of the success and benefits which were seen when using OTs within custodial PIPEs. Crowley House staff and managers were trained by the university on how to mentor students and how best to make use of their time.

There is a structured approach with students being based at Crowley House for 10 to 12 weeks, with weekly long-arm supervision from an OT outside of the approved premises and weekly in person supervision by either the approved premises manager or PIPE probation officer. The approved premises also feeds into the mid-placement and end-placement student reviews.

The students are described as an invaluable resource, bringing new perspectives and instilling an awareness, through practice, of the importance of activity and both structured and opportunistic interventions with residents. OT assessments of residents' needs are completed using various theoretical frameworks and outcome measures to track bespoke

interventions encompassing the physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, and cognitive aspects of the individual.

Case illustration

One of the OT students provided capacity to engage in one-to-one interventions focused on the specific needs of residents. She worked individually with Amy, who was a resident who had learning difficulties and a low IQ, in addition to a personality disorder. Amy was struggling to manage arrangements in terms of travelling to appointments. The OT student worked with Amy to create a step-by-step plan to access and use a travel app. This increased her confidence and, in turn, reduced the chance of her accessing her 'dark side' by engaging in unhealthy communication or relationships to meet her needs for support.

Another OT student focused on group work with residents, alongside travel training and one-to-one sessions with other residents. This was found to be invaluable, as the student worked alongside the approved premises' assistant psychologist and provided the useful insight that another discipline can afford in creating holistic care.

Karen, the clinical lead at Crowley House, made the following comments:

> *"Having an OT student here was an asset to the team. Here at Crowley, we are a PIPE and part of our added service is running groups – structured and informal – to assist our residents in a holistic manner. Our OT students planned and ran groups on various topics – e.g. mindfulness, healthy eating etc., and supported our staff in engaging more with purposeful activity.*
>
> *Some of our ladies faced significant barriers to engaging with the world due to cognitive or psychological impairment, physical and mental health difficulties, and substance misuse. The OT students were able to use their models to assist these women in planning ways of developing coping strategies to achieve their goals.*
>
> *They provided another discipline's view on our case discussions and were available to staff and residents alike."*

Here are some reflections from Farah, who has recently had a placement at Crowley House:

> *"I thoroughly enjoyed my placement and applying my occupational therapy skills to the role of a student OT. Working with the women at Crowley House helped me learn how to apply my skills to support women who may have lost their identity along their journey through the justice system. For me, it was important to help them relearn who they are and create an identity and a sense of belonging.*
>
> *I had some great feedback from many of the women, which made me happy to know that I could make a difference to them. Whether they would continue using the techniques and support I gave them, they could take away a positive experience from occupational therapy."*

Example of effectiveness: Supporting safety and wellbeing

Effective safety planning requires a thorough assessment of the individual and actions that should be followed when concerns arise, even in a crisis. The case below demonstrates the value of having a detailed plan which is used as a live, working document instead of a process that is completed and only reviewed according to a prescribed timescale, rather than in response to significant events.

Case illustration

Rona was sentenced to 48 months in custody following her conviction for robbery. She was released on licence and subsequently recalled for non-compliance. She was re-released and had been in the community for several months before an approved premises placement was sought as an alternative to recall. She had many previous convictions, predominantly for violent offences, and there had been a significant gap before she was convicted of the index offence. She had problems with substance misuse and a history of co-dependent, domestically abusive relationships.

After she arrived at the approved premises, staff completed a support and safety assessment plan, which detailed Rona's history of self-harm and risk-taking behaviours and provided actions that should be used as part of a contingency plan if behaviours re-emerged. These included additional welfare checks and paying for taxis when her safety was potentially at risk and she needed to return to the approved premises.

Important early indicators were detailed in the plan, so that staff could be vigilant to any changes in Rona's presentation and instigate extra checks as needed.

Information contained in the plan was used during crises when the NHS 111 service had to be used. The plan provided a succinct summary to support the healthcare staff treating Rona.

Staff used the plan as a live working document in their daily contact with her and reviewed the content regularly, with relevant changes to ensure that it was always up to date.

In the following case, approved premises staff successfully supported the welfare of a resident who had an eating disorder.

Case illustration

Vanessa received a long prison sentence following her conviction for a violent offence committed against her then-partner. She also had previous convictions, predominantly for violent offences; however, the index offence was the most serious.

Vanessa had a history of abusive relationships and traumatic events in her childhood.

Approved premises staff had a good understanding of the factors relevant to her resettlement. They regularly liaised with the probation practitioner managing her licence and completed many keywork sessions, including three-way meetings with the probation practitioner.

There was a clear focus on supporting Vanessa's safety and wellbeing – in particular, her long-standing eating disorder. Before she was released, her eating disorder was discussed, to consider how she could be supported in the approved premises, where

residents ate together. On release, Vanessa was introduced to the chef at the approved premises, and a valuable conversation took place about how to support her, drawing on what had helped in the past. As a result, the approved premises implemented suggested strategies, such as providing her with a smaller plate and involving her in cookery sessions, which broadened her food choices. Staff monitored her eating habits, and when it was observed that she was missing meals, they provided encouragement and additional support. Vanessa successfully completed her stay at the approved premises and moved on to new accommodation.

Reflection questions

From an operational perspective:

- How do you feel when you read the case illustrations? Enthusiastic to apply to your own cases? Curious? And why do you feel this way?
- How do you consider and implement the themes in the case illustrations in your own practice?
- How do you ensure effective communication between approved premises and probation practitioners? Are you clear about what should be shared and how often?

Unpaid work

The primary purpose of unpaid work is to provide punishment and reparation, with service users working on projects that benefit the community. There is also the potential for rehabilitative benefits, as unpaid work can offer the opportunity to develop life and vocational skills that support desistance and can be particularly effective for women in building confidence and reducing social isolation. For women, the HMPPS Working with Women Offenders Guidance 2017 states,

> *'Women can find it extremely daunting reporting for UPW [unpaid work] in a male dominated group session and this may have a negative impact upon successful completions. Following the implementation of the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 (under which probation services must make provision for the gender specific needs of women) one of the minimum requirements is for women to be provided with the option of a (risk-assessed) women only work placement.'*

The HMPPS Women's Policy Framework also sets out that one of the three requirements that the Probation Service must meet in relation to women is that,

> *'...they should be offered the option of not being placed in an all-male work environment as part of an unpaid work or attendance centre requirement.'*

During our inspection, we found examples of effective unpaid work placements for women, which we have outlined below.

Example of effectiveness: Barry Cookery Project, Vale of Glamorgan

Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan PDU partner with the 'Coastland Family Church' to support the Vale Foodbank project. A weekly group uses donated food to make hot meals, which users of the foodbank can collect. At the time we visited, they had just served their 2,000th meal. The placement is not exclusively for women; however, it has proven to be a meaningful placement where women learn new skills and positively impact the community. A male unpaid work supervisor oversees the placement; when we visited, a male who was a qualified chef was completing his unpaid work hours within the project and sharing his skills with the women who were undertaking their hours.

We spoke to Robert Robbins, Community Payback Operations Manager, and Becky Morgan from the Coastlands Church about how the project came about and its impact on those completing their hours, and the local community. Video (YouTube: 21:14): Effective Practice Barry Cookery Project (HM Inspectorate of Probation

Example of effectiveness: Unpaid work, West Berkshire

During our inspection week in West Berkshire PDU, we visited Alana House, the local women's centre run by PACT. Through a partnership arrangement, a small number of women had completed their unpaid work hours at the centre within the community café. The women were able to achieve qualifications, gain new skills, and contribute to the overall services offered in the centre. They told us that it felt meaningful to support the women's centre, and the opportunity to complete their hours there also opened their eyes to other support they could get through the centre. Probation staff involved in the project commented:

> *"Alana House went brilliantly. They all passed their level one food hygiene and got great reports. The manager was really pleased how supportive they were of each other and how engaged they were. It was an UPW dream story."*

We also heard about another project in West Berkshire where women had gained real value from their placement, at St Michael's Hospice. One probation practitioner wrote,

> '*One of my people on probation has just completed her hours in St Michael's Hospice Tadley… she has said that she truly feels like the unpaid work/placement changed her life. She runs her own company and says that she felt like she had been wrapped up in this and the people already in her life. However, attending the placement has opened her life up to different people from different backgrounds and has allowed her to work alongside people with completely different perspectives. She has got so much satisfaction from attending the placement and all that it offered to her that whilst she has now completed [her hours], she is now an official volunteer…and is going to continue attending each week. She said the person who was also in there prior to her regularly popped into the placement to see them all and that this demonstrates what a fantastic placement this is.*'

We encourage readers to use this guide as a toolkit and reference point to consider the guiding principles identified, and to reflect on and consider how they may improve their practice.

We would welcome feedback on this guide, including its impact and any suggested improvements.

Please send your comments and ideas to Helen.amor@hmiprobation.gov.uk.

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