

The Highland Council
ADULT & CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE
22 MAY 2013

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| Agenda Item | 18. |
| Report No | ACS/57/13 |

Criminal Justice Services for Women Offenders

Report by Director of Health & Social Care

Summary

This report provides an overview of the development of services for women offenders provided by Criminal Justice Services, including the re-design of services in line with the recommendations of the Commission on Women Offenders (2012) and following the establishment of the Community Integration Unit in HMP Inverness established in mid-2010. It provides information on the function of an additional social work post recently agreed by the council, as well as other recent initiatives.

1. Background

- 1.1 The proposal to establish Community Integration Units (CIU) in HMP Aberdeen and HMP Inverness was a key part of the Scottish Government's Reducing Reoffending 1 programme. CIUs are located within the perimeter fence of both prisons, with a capacity for 8 and 6 low supervision/risk female prisoners respectively, including provision for mother and baby should there be a requirement. This was a pilot initiative, and the focus was on those women coming towards the end of their sentence, and assessed as suitable to give them the benefit of being nearer home and allowing access to and engagement with services in the community. The CIUs have informed the development of the new community-facing prison regimes - e.g. HMP Grampian, which is due to open in Spring 2014 and where some women from Highland may serve their sentence.
- 1.2 Research has shown that for a number of reasons women, in HMP Cornton Vale often were not taking advantage of the resources available to them to deal with their problems. Figures from the National Equal Opportunities Committee Report 2011 for women in custody reveal:
- 80% have employment issues
 - 95% left school at 16 years
 - large numbers have debt and money management issues
 - large numbers have accommodation issues
 - 75% report historical abuse/neglect
 - 80% have mental health issues
 - a significant proportion have drug and/or alcohol issues
- 1.3 The CIU was an opportunity to develop work with women prisoners in an innovative way and begin to address these issues with a view to developing

better reintegration for women in the community, reducing the risk of further offending and a return to prison. Criminal Justice Services (CJS) were initially allocated £30,000 per annum for the CIU.

- 1.4 In total, there have been 17 women who have entered the unit in Inverness since its inception in 2010. Two of these women were returned to HMP Cornton Vale for SPS breaches (bringing in illicit substances and violent behaviour in the CIU). Of the 14 women released from the unit, 12 opted to have on-going contact with CJS support; and of these, 5 still remain in contact with the service. Of the 12 that opted for on-going contact there is no evidence of any further custodial sentences being imposed.
- 1.5 An external evaluation was commissioned by SPS and a draft report prepared by Figure 8 Consultancy Services Ltd. 43 women were admitted to the two units between June 2010 and March 2012. The average age was 33 years, ranging between 18 - 55yrs. 28 of the women have children. 20 women have been released from the two CIUs, of which one has returned to custody from the community.
- 1.6 This 5% “reconviction rate” compares very favourably with that of the control group from HMP Cornton Vale where reconviction rate is 62 – 72%. However, it must be borne in mind that small numbers are involved. None of the women have been out for a full two-years and ‘return to custody’ is not a sensitive measure of re-offending; rather it is a measure of the number of people caught, convicted and given custodial disposals.
- 1.7 At admission, 70% of the women presented with problems relating to accommodation. By their time of release 80% had secured accommodation. On admission to the units, 55% presented with problems relating to employment.
- 1.8 Additionally, 40% of the women were reported to have ‘education’ as an area that needs to be addressed. Post-release, only 40% remained unemployed. An additional 40% were reported to be in employment with 20% either looking for work or in training/education.
- 1.9 On admission to prison 90% of the women presented with substance misuse problems. Post-release 45% of these women continued to have substance misuse problems, a reduction of 50% (Note: this information is not disaggregated in the evaluation between HMP Inverness & Aberdeen).
- 1.10 Due to a lack of women meeting the strict criteria for the CIU, the unit in HMP Inverness has been temporarily closed to ensure the best use of resources. However, the new Governor in Charge is committed to improving services for women prisoners and if women are assessed as suitable in the future, consideration will be given to re-opening it

2. Key Drivers for Change

- 2.1 On 17 April 2012 the Commission on Women Offenders published its report on

the treatment of women in the Scottish criminal justice system (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0039/00391828.pdf>). The key proposals within the report included:

- Creating Community Justice Centres (one-stop shops) to enable them to access a consistent range of services to reduce reoffending and bring about behavioural change
- Multi-disciplinary teams (comprising, as a minimum, a criminal justice social worker, a health professional and an addictions worker) are established in the Community Justice Centres to co-ordinate offending interventions and needs
- Intensive mentoring should be available to women offenders at risk of reoffending or custody to support compliance with court orders
- Developing mental health services, including training for police, prison officers, criminal justice social workers and the third sector
- Improving alternatives to prosecution, e.g. Fiscal Work Orders
- Improving alternatives to remand, e.g. bail supervision
- A new national prison for women replacing HMP Cornton Vale
- Improving community integration upon release from prison by, for example, improving access to benefits and providing support to all women

2.2 In the Scottish Government's response to the report on 20 December, Redesigning the Community Justice System – A Consultation on Proposals, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice adopted 35 of the 37 recommendations of the Commission. The two recommendations regarding the Commission's views on establishing a single community justice agency to commission, provide and manage adult offender services were not agreed. (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2012/12/7292>).

3. The Development of Services

3.1 Taking account of the low number of women in the CIU and the additional funding for women offenders in 2013/14, Criminal Justice Social Work is part-way through implementing a revised model of delivering services to women offenders. The key features of this are:

- Establishing a Social Worker to work exclusively with women offenders subject to statutory supervision. This will cover the areas covered by the Inverness and Dingwall CJS teams, primarily the Inner Moray Firth area.
- This will allow for consistent service delivery built upon best practice and will include Criminal Justice Social Work Reports and a throughcare service to women during their prison sentence.
- Incorporating work with women in the CIU within this post.
- Locating this post in a newly established substance misuse team, created by bringing together a range of hitherto separately funded CJS substance misuse services. Importantly, this team includes NHS Highland Community Psychiatric Addictions Nurses thereby bringing together key component parts of the multi-disciplinary teams in the Community Justice Centres as outlined in the Commission's report.

- Case management and programmes of intervention for women can be developed and implemented consistently, e.g. Aberdeen City have recently published a programme for women, Connections, and have agreed to Highland accessing this, including advice on delivery.

3.2 In addition, Inverness was one for the pilot areas for Fiscal Work Orders (FWO). The scheme was established in 2009. The Scottish Government is planning to roll-out FWO to all areas during the course of 2013/14 and the Principal Officer is due to meet with the Government shortly to discuss what is required in Highland. CJS has also established a bail supervision service operational in the Inner Moray Firth area. The number of bailees has been disappointing and there are on-going attempts to promote this service to courts, i.e. sheriffs, procurator fiscals and defence agents.

3.3 In 2012, the Scottish Government launched a Change Fund to provide offenders with substantial one-to-one support through evidence-based mentoring schemes and to promote strong, equal partnership working between third and public sector organisations through a Public Social Partnership (PSP). Sacro successfully developed a bid for a national mentoring scheme for women, which will become operational during 2013/14. This will:

- Bridge an identified gap in the support provided to women offenders serving short-term prison sentences, on remand or subject to Community Payback Orders, who present a high risk of custody
- Contribute to desistance, reintegrate women offenders back into the community and reduce their reoffending behaviour in the longer-term.
- Improve the quality and coordination of mentoring services and establish a national standard for delivery
- Complement existing services for women offenders
- Improve motivation for women offenders to positively engage with existing services
- Assist women in addressing social and health inequalities
- Promote financial independence and improved budgeting skills in the light of the introduction of welfare reforms

3.4 The resource allocated for the Northern Community Justice Authority area is for 3 mentors, which has been determined by a formula applied across Scotland, and funding is fixed-term to March 2015 (see 4.2 below). The deployment of this resource which is managed by SACRO is not yet known.

3.5 Collectively, this will enable CJS to begin to meet the key recommendations of the Commission on Women Offenders report, and will significantly develop services for women and build on work already achieved with the CIU and the links established with the Scottish Prison Service. It is anticipated that the new service will be fully operational from June.

4. Implications

4.1 Resources – CJS receives a ring-fenced grant allocation from the Northern Community Justice Authority (NCJA) to provide a range of services for offenders, including community-based sentences such as Community Payback

Orders and throughcare to prisoners. The grant for 2013/14 contained a ring-fenced allocation of £30,000 for women offenders, which, together with an additional £15,000 from Highland Council preventative Family Support funding, will enable CJS to develop the services for women as outlined above. There is, therefore, no negative impact on resources for other services as there is a net increase.

- 4.2 The PSP referred to at 3.3 (above) is funded by the Scottish Government and is predicated on a commitment that providing outcomes are delivered, public sector partners fund the on-going delivery of the service beyond March 2015 from within existing resources. However, the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the NCJA on behalf of the constituent local authorities is clear that no financial commitment can be guaranteed and no legally binding contract has been entered into.
- 4.3 Equalities – most offenders are English speaking and with no disability. Given the ethnic make-up of the population in Highland, particularly Gaelic and eastern European speakers, CJS is able through The Highland Council’s interpreter service to work with offenders if necessary. For offenders with a learning disability, for example, CJS would also work with relevant agencies to ensure equality of access and service, including the delivery of programmes. Hitherto CJS has provided very little specific services or interventions for women only.
- 4.4 Research indicates that women offenders have specific needs and as the Commission on Women Offenders report states “There is a strong evidence base which supports the view that a distinct approach should be taken with women offenders, which is compliant with domestic and international law and obligations” (page 21). There are three broad areas which support the case for a separate approach – the profile of women (e.g. more likely to have dependent children and drug/mental health problems than men); predictors of re-offending (e.g. dysfunctional family needs); and what works to reduce reoffending (e.g. empathic practitioners and holistic interventions).
- 4.5 There are no Legal, Climate Change or Risk implications.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note and comment on the development of services for women offenders.

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