

SAFE HOMES FOR WOMEN LEAVING PRISON

“The main problem women have coming out of custody is accommodation...when you’ve got accommodation, every other thing will fall into place.”

Sarah, imprisoned mother of two, supported by Re-Unite ¹

“Everyone leaving prison should have somewhere safe and secure to live...”

Lucy Frazer MP QC Minister for Prisons and Probation ²

Executive Summary: Safe Homes for Women Leaving Prison

Nearly six out of ten women leaving prison have nowhere safe to go.

Many women are released with just £46, a plastic bag, nowhere to live and threat of recall if they miss their probation appointment. In so many ways the consequences are catastrophic for the women concerned, their families and for society.

Between 2019 and 2020, 65% of men and women released from prison without settled accommodation had reoffended according to a HMI Probation report.

Lack of secure housing is a significant barrier to successful rehabilitation. This makes securing employment, maintaining positive mental health and preventing a return to harmful behaviour such as substance abuse practically unachievable.

Many women in contact with the criminal justice system have complex needs resulting from past trauma, abuse, poverty and addiction and are unable to return to their former accommodation as this would put them immediately at risk.

The current situation is bleak. However, it does not need to be this way. The Safe Homes for Women Leaving Prison initiative, a unique collaboration of London Prisons Mission, Prison Reform Trust, the Church of St Martin-in-the-Fields and HMP & YOI Bronzefield has set out a number of vital recommendations for reform.

Why are so many women prisoners released into homelessness?

The 2017 Homelessness Reduction Act gives prisons a ‘duty to refer’ anyone at risk of homelessness on release to their local authority. However, the report finds the Act is failing. Reasons include:

- Too many short prison sentences that result in women losing their accommodation
- Many women need to be rehoused with their children as they are often a primary carer
- The need for many women to relocate due to domestic abuse
- A chronic lack of suitable social housing, including for women with complex needs
- Many women are imprisoned far from their previous address so lose their ‘local connection’.

Key recommendations

The recommendations in the report are the result of extensive consultation with policy makers and local authority representatives; service providers; housing experts; charities and voluntary organisations; and women with lived experience of the criminal justice system. They include:

- A national cross-government strategy to address the housing needs of those in the criminal justice system, including specific measures for women
- A review of the ‘duty to refer’ measure
- An agreed target time period for women to be in settled accommodation post release
- Designating responsibility for arranging a woman’s accommodation on release from prison
- Increasing the prison discharge grant to £80, the level provided as part of the End of Custody Temporary Release scheme implemented in response to Covid-19.

Conclusion

The link between access to safe and secure accommodation and reducing the vulnerability of women released from prison as well as their risk of reoffending is undeniable. It is vital to the welfare of thousands of women released from prison each year. The most pressing need is for a national strategy with adequate resources and joined up working between central and local government to ensure the provision of Safe Homes for women leaving prison.

About the Safe Homes for Women initiative

The Safe Homes for Women Leaving Prison initiative was conceived by the London Prisons Mission (LPM) following its work in support of the multi-faith Prison Chaplaincy Team of HMP & YOI Bronzefield. Its purpose is to ensure that no woman is discharged from prison to homelessness or to unsafe accommodation. Much of the research and extensive consultations with public, private and voluntary sector organisations have been focussed on London, but enquiries have extended far beyond and many of the recommendations will be relevant nationally.

The Safe Homes summit on 21 November 2019 was organised by LPM, the Prison Reform Trust (PRT) and the Church of St Martin-in-the-Fields (SMiTF), with support from HMP & YOI Bronzefield and the Mayor's Office For Policing And Crime (MOPAC). Chaired by The Right Reverend Rachel Treweek, Bishop of Gloucester, it took place at SMiTF and brought together women with lived experience of the criminal justice system, local authority representatives, the governor and staff of HMP & YOI Bronzefield and other representatives of prison and probation services, Independent Monitoring Boards (IMBs), housing providers, specialist voluntary sector agencies and charitable trusts, to share knowledge and good practice. Building on those discussions, and grounded in the evidence that informed them, we have developed recommendations to discuss with Ministers, the London Mayor and other key decision makers.

Our proposals are made in the knowledge that many agencies and individuals have been striving for years to find the most effective ways of working, and that good practice exists and provides firm foundations for ensuring safe homes for women leaving prison.

I wholeheartedly commend and support the important work of the Safe Homes for Women Leaving Prison initiative. The link between access to safe, secure accommodation and reducing the vulnerability and risks of all kinds faced by women on release from prison is undeniable. HM Inspectorate often find that effective partnerships between prisons, local authorities, probation services, CRCs and every statutory body and NGO is the key to success. I wish the initiative every success in its vital work.

Peter Clarke, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, August 2020

Overview of the problem

The government's Female Offender Strategy recognises that women in contact with the criminal justice system often have complex needs resulting from past trauma, abusive relationships, poverty, mental health needs, and problematic substance use.³ The challenges faced by women leaving prison are compounded if they are homeless or trapped in unsafe and insecure housing.

Ministry of Justice (MoJ) data for 2016-17 showed that 38% of women were released from prison to short-term and insecure accommodation.⁴ Data gathered by the IMBs of women's prisons and HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMI Prisons) suggest an even larger proportion of women are discharged to homelessness. For example, the 2019 IMB report for HMP & YOI Bronzefield surveyed 116 women prior to their release, and found of those remaining in the UK, 62% would be homeless on release.⁵ The most recent IMB report on women's resettlement found only 41% of women had housing to go to on release, and "*it did appear that prisons discharging people back to London had the most difficult challenge to find them suitable housing.*"⁶ This report also found a quarter of women interviewed had lost their home as a result of imprisonment, often as a consequence of a very short prison sentence.⁷

The benefit derived from having a safe place to call home cannot be overestimated and must not be overlooked. That benefit will be firstly experienced by the individual in question but will ultimately extend into communities and beyond through reductions in the likelihood of reoffending.

There will be many inherent challenges to providing accommodation for women leaving prison. Therefore, a cohesive approach across the public, private, voluntary and charitable sectors has a better chance of making a realistic and long term difference, for everyone.

Sir Thomas Winsor WS, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of
Constabulary / Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of
Fire & Rescue Services, August 2020

Current landscape

"We know that people reoffend if they do not have accommodation, a job or family ties."

Lucy Frazer QC MP, Minister for Prisons and Probation ⁸

In its 2020 report on accommodation,⁹ HM Inspectorate of Probation (HMI Probation) emphasises the need for safe, stable places to live and notes the absence of a joined up strategy to meet the needs of women for trauma-informed services. The report highlights the links between homelessness and reoffending, including one case of a woman being released on tag back to an abusive partner's home and breaching her order after being prevented by him from leaving the house.

Progress with the Safe Homes initiative was interrupted by the Covid-19 public health emergency but this has added to the urgency of ensuring access to safe housing for women leaving prison. The Prison Group Director for the Women's Estate confirmed in May that:

*"Our biggest problem in women's prisons is finding suitable accommodation for the women. Understandably, many of our women, because of their history of abuse, do not want to return to where they were living prior to coming into custody. It puts them back in their old environment where they are going to be victims of domestic abuse or be tempted back into drug taking..."*¹⁰

Since the implementation of Covid-19 restrictions, 40% of women were released homeless from HMP & YOI Eastwood Park and HMP & YOI Bronzefield.¹¹ Between 23 March and 30 April 2020, 30% of the 592 women released from custody were released in the 'rough sleeping, other homeless or unknown accommodation circumstance' categories.¹²

The government's End of Custody Temporary Release (ECTR) scheme, introduced as a measure to reduce the prison population in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, established a subsistence grant of £80 on release; there are, however, no plans to extend this provision to all prison leavers.¹³ This means unless housing support is arranged in advance, women are released with a plastic bag, £46, nowhere to live and a threat of recall if they miss their probation appointment.

Minister Lucy Frazer MP QC assured the Joint Committee on Human Rights in June she was '*working very closely with MHCLG (the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) to try to ensure that we get people into accommodation on release*',¹⁴ while an update from the IMBs to the Justice Select Committee provided evidence of continuing difficulties in securing post-release housing for women.¹⁵

Finding secure accommodation for those leaving prison is vital, not just for prisoners themselves, but for the protection of the public. Without proper housing, other aspects of successful rehabilitation - employment, mental health and substance use support - become difficult or impossible, and reoffending becomes much more likely.

Women are particularly badly affected. Independent monitoring boards have found nationally that nearly six out of ten women leaving prison have nowhere secure to go to; and that may mean they lose not just a safe home for themselves, but also for their children. Prisons cannot solve this on their own. They need to work closely and constructively with local authorities to provide safe homes for women and their families, and that is why this project, bringing together prisons, the London Mayor's office and community support groups, is so important.

Dame Anne Owers, Chair, Independent Monitoring Boards

In late June, the Minister confirmed that seven Homelessness Prevention Taskforces (HPTs) had been set up by Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) to coordinate the sourcing of accommodation for prisoners released early, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. She added that 'up to £8.5 million' was being made available in a temporary scheme to support individuals at risk of homelessness on release for up to eight weeks and help to move on to permanent accommodation.¹⁶ It is not clear whether or how these measures have benefitted women, nor what support will be provided longer term since both this additional funding and the ECTR scheme, which resulted in the early release of few women, have now ended.

Lack of consistent data

Although ensuring satisfactory accommodation on release is an explicit Ministerial priority, there is no consistent approach across prisons and probation to investigating, recording, reporting or resolving housing need and outcomes, and no settled definition of 'No Fixed Abode'.

The following data was provided by HMP & YOI Bronzefield for the purposes of the Safe Homes for Women Initiative. It confirms that, in the first six months of 2020, an average of 20% of the women released from the prison each month reported that they were of no fixed abode (NFA) on release.

Month	Total number of women released	Number of women who self-declared as NFA on release
January 2020	175	22
February 2020	135	28
March 2020	173	37
April 2020	144	27
May 2020	139	34
June 2020	116	22

Data from a range of published sources appear to vary:

- The national IMB resettlement report 2020 found that only 41% of 78 women interviewed said they had housing to go to on release.¹⁷ The 2019 IMB report for HMP & YOI Bronzefield surveyed 116 women prior to their release, and found that of those remaining in the UK, 62% would be homeless on release.¹⁸ However, the latest IMB report for HMP Send notes that 8% of women were released to homelessness.¹⁹
- HM Inspectorate of Prisons' 2019 report on HMP & YOI Eastwood Park states, *"In the previous six months, 42% of the prisoners, including some high risk of harm prisoners, had been released either homeless or to very temporary/emergency accommodation."*²⁰
- Official data obtained by Revolving Doors in response to a Freedom of Information Act request revealed that, in the first quarter of 2018, 20% of women on sentences of six months or less were released from prison homeless (202 women); 15% with unknown accommodation status; and 65% 'not homeless'.²¹ The 'homeless' figure does not include those in transient accommodation where they have not been identified as homeless.²²
- The HM Inspectorate of Probation report on accommodation and support for adult offenders found that in the period February 2019 - February 2020, 65% of those without settled accommodation had reoffended compared with 44% of those with settled housing (data was not gender disaggregated).²³

It is important to achieve consistency in the recording and publishing of data from individual prisons in order to monitor and compare outcomes across all areas and ensure accountability of all agencies. The proposed

new focus by HM Prisons Inspectorate on pre-discharge accommodation advice services and post-discharge outcomes to be included in all reports will be helpful in achieving and monitoring this.

The statutory duty to refer prisoners at risk of homelessness on release

Under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 prisons are required to notify local authorities of anyone at risk of homelessness on release, in good time for the local authority to meet its housing duties.²⁴ This is known as the ‘duty to refer’. Local authorities are obliged to ‘take steps to prevent homelessness’ and ‘take steps to relieve homelessness’, regardless of whether an individual is ‘intentionally homeless’ or in ‘priority need’. There has been no systematic monitoring of the impact of this reform, but feedback we have received from prisons, local authorities, women and their support workers indicate inconsistent practice. For example, prisons may refer an individual to more than one local authority or fail to refer an individual in time for housing to be found.

Challenges in implementing these duties include the following:

- A high proportion of women are given very short custodial sentences;
- Women are likely to be imprisoned far from home;
- Women may need to relocate on release due to domestic abuse;
- Many women are primary carers for children or other dependants;
- There is insufficient public/social housing stock to meet community needs.

We support the call for a review of how the duty to refer is working²⁵ especially to prevent or reduce homelessness on release from prison. Effective resettlement provision depends on a detailed knowledge of, and effective links with, local statutory and non-statutory services available where women plan to resettle. Given that women’s prisons hold people from very wide geographic areas, prison and probation resettlement services must be adequately resourced to achieve this.

Reuniting mothers and children

In his review of the importance of family and other relationships for women in the criminal justice system²⁶ Lord Farmer notes that mothers leaving prison can be caught “*in a ‘Catch 22’ situation with respect to securing accommodation for themselves and their children: they are ineligible for housing until their children are living with them, but their children cannot live with them until they have enough room.*”²⁷

Lord Farmer recommends that, in developing the new operational model for Probation, HMPPS should clarify who is locally responsible for securing post-release housing and ensure there is sufficient flexibility in any new resettlement model to enable planning for accommodation post-release to start early enough to secure the best outcome. (Recommendation 15)

He further recommends that guidance for local housing authorities in England should recognise the prospective housing needs of women leaving prison who are otherwise able to be reunited with their children, so local authorities can make these needs the basis for assessment. (Recommendation 16)

The need for effective joint practice

The scarcity of social housing stock and affordable housing present challenges for London boroughs in responding to the housing needs of women leaving prison. Women serving short sentences face a high risk of losing their accommodation, as housing benefit will only be paid for 13 weeks and Universal Credit (for which applications cannot be made in prison) for six months. Women are at risk of being found to have no ‘local connection’ because they are imprisoned far from home and anecdotal reports suggest some are still denied housing for being ‘intentionally homeless’ despite the new statutory provisions. Others may lose housing due to problems with housing benefit or rent arrears.

Feedback from agencies (Appendix 2) emphasises that a more joined-up approach is key to ensuring that women leaving prison have safe and suitable accommodation, even in the context of a housing shortage. There is no excuse for the continued practice of releasing women late on a Friday to no fixed abode, or releasing them at very short notice and without liaising in advance with women’s support services and housing providers. The HMPPS Prison Release Protocol Guidance research report provides a useful resource for developing joint practice and recommends that particular consideration be given to those responsible for children, the majority of whom are women. PRT’s Home Truths report is also very helpful.

Observations from staff at HMP & YOI Bronzefield emphasise that consistent through the gate support, which extends beyond ‘the gate’, is key in terms of compliance with licence conditions. This includes the work of Women in Prison and other voluntary sector agencies that meet women prior to release and then when they leave accompany them to that day’s various appointments, and help ensure ongoing support in the community.

There are many examples of effective housing programmes, projects and collaborations around the country, some profiled in Appendix 2. Such services should be consistently available across London for women in contact with the criminal justice system. While the government's Female Offender Strategy and London's Blueprint for Women together provide the framework for achieving this, there is a need for more concerted action and investment now.

Key recommendations

We recommend that as a matter of urgency the MoJ and HMPPS work closely with the MHCLG to:

- develop a national cross government strategy to address the housing needs of individuals in contact with the criminal justice system, as proposed in the July 2020 report of HMI Probation, with specific measures for women to be included in the national Female Offender Concordat and in the new probation arrangements.
- review the operation and effectiveness of the 'duty to refer' in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, particularly in relation to the housing needs of women in the criminal justice system, in consultation with the London Mayor's office and all women's prisons.
- set a joint prison and probation target for the proportion of women who go immediately to and remain in settled accommodation for a substantial period following their release from prison, against which ministers report progress on a quarterly basis.
- ensure that responsibility for arranging a woman's accommodation on release, allowing her to be reunited with her children if appropriate, is clearly designated within each prison and probation service.
- maintain the increased level of the discharge grant given to prisoners on release as part of the ECTR scheme.

Further, more detailed recommendations for the different agencies with a role to play in ensuring safe homes for women leaving prison are outlined below, while Appendix 2 contains some models of good practice and further insights from leading voluntary sector providers.

Recommendations

These detailed recommendations build upon the HMPPS Prison Release Protocol which is a useful resource for developing good practice. They reflect consultation with many public, private and voluntary organisations with expertise in this field. The most frequently repeated calls were for the provision of more affordable housing and for a more focussed, consistent, joined up approach by all parties.

1. Central government and national public bodies

- a) The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) with Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) should develop a cross-government strategy to address the housing needs of individuals in contact with the criminal justice system as outlined in HM Inspectorate of Probation's 2020 report on accommodation, with specific measures for women to be set out in the forthcoming national Female Offender Concordat. This must include a officer in each women's prison responsible for housing and a target time period within which women should be in settled, rather than emergency or short-term, accommodation after leaving prison. MoJ should report progress to parliament quarterly.
- b) The MHCLG, MoJ and HMPPS must ensure that the new probation arrangements (effective from June 2021) include specific targets and time limits to ensure satisfactory accommodation outcomes for women leaving prison.
- c) The MoJ must work with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and MHCLG to increase time limits for receipt of Housing Benefit for sentenced prisoners from 13 to 26 weeks to prevent those subject to short custodial sentences losing tenancies due to rent arrears, and provide time for claims to be lodged in advance of release.
- d) MoJ and HMPPS must ensure that the new Unified Offender Management model to be established within each Probation Delivery Unit identifies clear pathways and support mechanisms for women under supervision to progress into long term sustainable accommodation. This is an opportunity to embed the recommendation of the Farmer Review for Women for ensuring Offender Managers have responsibility for securing women's housing on release and are resourced to do this.

- e) The MoJ should review the purpose and use of short prison sentences for women offenders. These sentences do not provide opportunities for rehabilitation and often result in loss of tenancies, interruptions to the care of dependent children and a high risk of reoffending.

2. Local government

- a) The Mayor's Office of Police & Crime (MOPAC) should work with HMP & YOI Bronzefield as well as HMP Send and HMP & YOI Downview, and London probation services to ensure that full and comparable data on accommodation outcomes of all women leaving prison are recorded and that this data is shared with the London Blueprint Delivery Group.
- b) London Councils should communicate relevant elements of this report to all London boroughs, initiate consultation about implementation, collect information about effectiveness and outcomes and regularly report to the London Blueprint Delivery Group.
- c) London Councils should communicate and encourage implementation of the recommendations of the national IMB report on the resettlement of women being released from prison.
- d) The Greater London Authority (GLA), and MOPAC, should lead consultations with the MHCLG, London Councils and all London boroughs to ensure they can meet demand for safe and suitable accommodation for vulnerable women with complex needs, including those leaving prison. They should work with specialist service providers to increase the availability of safe and suitable accommodation for women with complex needs, including for those recently released from prison. This must include accommodation for women on the day of release from prison, including those recalled to prison under probation supervision.
- e) The GLA and MOPAC should consider the model developed in Greater Manchester which brings together cross-sectoral organisations to deliver joined up services for vulnerable people including the homeless and those with experience of the criminal justice system.
- f) All London boroughs should designate a named single point of contact for coordinating accommodation for women involved with the criminal justice system and make this known to relevant agencies. A database of this point of contact should be maintained by MOPAC.

- g) London Councils and MOPAC should consult with all London boroughs to identify the impacts on released prisoners of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (especially the ‘Duty to Refer’) and agree a pan-London approach.
- h) In consultation with Safer London, MOPAC should consult London Councils and the GLA Housing Needs and Homeless Group before exploring the feasibility of arrangements with local authorities outside London for the provision of safe and suitable accommodation for women leaving prison who want to relocate outside London in order to distance themselves from abusive, coercive and unhealthy relationships.
- i) The London Blueprint Delivery Group should, in consultation with London Councils, examine the feasibility of a draft protocol to be shared with all London boroughs and other relevant cross-sector organisations outlining the essential features of a strategy for the provision of appropriate services including accommodation for women with complex needs and those leaving prison. The finalised protocol should then be presented for signature, adoption and implementation by all relevant agencies.

3. Specialist public sector agencies

- a) Courts should ensure that they receive a pre-sentence report before sentencing a woman, especially if she is at risk of imprisonment, and this should include information about the woman’s housing situation.
- b) Providers of criminal justice services in London should collaborate with voluntary sector partners to develop and fund an effective supply chain from prison to resettlement / Through the Gate services and eventual accommodation. Resettlement planning should start as soon as a custodial sentence is imposed and in prison resettlement teams should work with probation and relevant voluntary organisations at the earliest feasible stage.
- c) The prison receiving a woman should be provided with a copy of her pre-sentence report and should record information about her pre-custodial accommodation circumstances at the earliest opportunity after reception. Consequences such as possible loss of tenancy should be recorded and appropriate mitigating actions taken.

- d) Prison governors should facilitate video link communications with London boroughs to consider a woman's entitlement to local accommodation and ensure arrangements are in place well in advance of discharge.
- e) All parties, including women's prisons & YOIs, should ensure uniform recording and regular sharing and reporting of data on the accommodation outcomes of all women leaving prisons.

4. Specialist voluntary and private sector agencies and organisations

- a) The London Blueprint Delivery Group, with key stakeholders including specialist women's service and accommodation providers, should develop a longer term strategy to map provisions and assess the needs of women leaving prison including but not limited to those escaping domestic violence, with dependent children, with mental health needs, with problematic drug or alcohol use, foreign nationals and those with no recourse to public funds.
- b) The London Blueprint Delivery Group with support from MOPAC should work with housing associations and private sector landlords and specialist support services to ensure provision of safe and suitable accommodation for women in contact with the criminal justice system.
- c) Organisations providing specialist support services for women with complex needs should be resourced to work with and within women's prisons to improve outcomes for women on release.

I fully support this Safe Homes for Women Leaving Prison initiative.

The initiative is focused on issues which can make a real difference to the lives of women leaving prison.

Support from agencies working together is crucial for women who may have complex needs and who deserve the chance to settle into communities where they can be safe and supported.

Sue McAllister CB, Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

APPENDIX 1

THE SAFE HOMES SUMMIT ORGANISERS

Prison Reform Trust (PRT)

PRT is an independent UK charity working to create a just, humane and effective penal system. PRT's Transforming Lives programme to reduce the unnecessary imprisonment of women has been supported by the National Lottery Community Fund 2015 -2020. A range of resources can be found here: www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/women in particular, see Home Truths: housing for women in the criminal justice system, Leading change: the role of local authorities in supporting women with multiple needs and Broken Trust: the rising number of women recalled to prison

London Prisons Mission (LPM)

London Prisons Mission recruits and supports volunteers to undertake regular work inside several London prisons and an immigration detention centre, in support of the multi-faith Chaplaincy Teams. It promotes Prisons Week each year and curates shows of art by prisoners as a means of communicating accurate information about the penal and criminal justice system to a wider audience. LPM was established under the auspices of Churches Together in Westminster but is now independent. londonprisonsmission.org

The Church of St Martin-in-the-Fields - Trafalgar Square

This is a large and busy church on Trafalgar Square with a long record of social inclusion and work on social justice issues. The Church is also the founder of 'The Connection', which provides services for rough sleepers and homeless people. <https://www.stmartin-in-the-fields.org/> (see also The Connection at SMiTF)

SAFE HOMES SUMMIT CONTRIBUTORS

HMP & YOI Bronzefield

HMP Bronzefield is the largest prison in Western Europe for women (since the closure of HMP Holloway), with capacity for 542 women awaiting trial or sentence, or serving short, medium or life sentences. <http://www.hmpbronzefield.co.uk/home.html>

The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC)

MOPAC holds responsibility for delivering the Mayor's Police and Crime Plan for London, and is led by Sophie Linden, London's Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime. Building on significant investment in services for vulnerable women and a forthcoming police diversion pilot, MOPAC recently launched a Blueprint for a Whole System Approach to Women in Contact with the Criminal Justice System.

<https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/mayors-office-policing-and-crime-mopac>

SUMMIT ON SAFE HOMES FOR WOMEN LEAVING PRISON PROGRAMME: 21 NOVEMBER 2019

The Right Reverend Rachel Treweek, Bishop of Gloucester: Chair's welcome
John Plummer, London Prisons Mission: Background to the event
First Panel - Resettlement outcomes for women in London: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sophie Linden, London's Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime: London's housing problem, the impact on women, and The Mayor's work to address this• Woman with lived experience: In my experience...• Vicky Robinson, Acting Director, HMP & YOI Bronzefield: Housing outcomes for women resettling in London, barriers to success and promising developments• Alison Keightley, Chair, Independent Monitoring Board, HMP & YOI Bronzefield: IMB findings on housing outcomes for women leaving Bronzefield
Second Panel - Achieving better outcomes for women leaving prison: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tracy McMahon, Griffins Society fellow: A sense of place - new research on accessing housing for women exiting prison - housing first not housing last• Woman with lived experience: In my experience...• Dr Amanda Brown, General Practitioner, HMP & YOI Bronzefield: Health impacts of discharge to homelessness and practical measures needed• Samantha Cowie, St Mungo's: Barriers to success for women in London and proposed solutions

Breakout sessions - Barriers and solutions for women resettling in London

Closing words - Next steps in London:

- Jill Maddison and Maxine Jordan, Housing for Women: Improving housing pathways in London - reflections on the day's discussion
- Chair's closing words

SAFE HOMES SUMMIT PARTICIPANTS*

Advance	Anawim	Bricky Brick	Crisis
Diocese of Gloucester	East London Services	Hibiscus Initiatives	HMP & YOI Bronzefield
HMP Send	HM Prison & Probation Service	HMP & YOI Downview	Holy Trinity Brompton
Housing for Women	Howard League for Penal Reform	IMB of HMP & YOI Bronzefield	London Borough of Barking & Dagenham
London Borough of Brent	London Borough of Camden	London Borough of Hackney	London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham
London Borough of Islington	London Borough of Lambeth	London Borough of Redbridge	London Boroughs of Southwark & Lewisham
London Community Rehabilitation Company	London Councils	Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government	Ministry of Justice
MOPAC	Nacro	National Probation Service	Network Homes
NHS England	Phoenix Futures	Revolving Doors	St Martin-in-the-Fields
Safer London	Single Homelessness Project	The Griffins Society	Solace Womens Aid
Westminster City Council	Women @ The Well	Westminster Drug Project	With One Voice

**whilst every effort has been made to ensure all organisations have been included, we note this list may be incomplete*

APPENDIX 2

LEARNING FROM GOOD/JOINED UP PRACTICE

There are many models of effective housing programmes, projects and collaborations around the country that support people in contact with the criminal justice system, but there needs to be more consistent provision. Cooperation, oversight and funding by national government and local authorities are vital to achieve better housing outcomes and critical to the success of the government's Female Offender Strategy and London's Blueprint for Women.

Examples of good practice are provided here to inform the roll out and funding of housing services. This is by no means comprehensive but is intended to encourage and inform practical action. For further information, see also PRT's Home Truths: housing for women in the criminal justice system and the IMB's report Resettlement : a survey by Independent Monitoring Boards of women being released from prison. The charity Revolving Doors supports the *Safe Homes for Women Leaving Prison Initiative* and is another excellent source of evidence to inform good practice.

Advance

Advance is a London-based charity led and run by women that enables women and girls to lead safe, violence-free and equal lives, running innovative community, "through-the-gate", and whole-system co-located services. Advance provides intensive, one-to-one wrap around support to women convicted of an offence and women who are vulnerable to becoming involved in the criminal justice system. There are three commissioned programmes - Minerva Community services, Minerva WrapAround services and the Female Diversion pilot. This includes through-the-gate and prison in-reach services at HMP & YOI Bronzefield, HMP Send and HMP Downview and community support in 29 London boroughs. Their report 'A Place to Go Like This' on mothers involved in offending who are survivors of domestic abuse, found that much closer working is needed between social workers, keyworkers, local authority housing departments and women and their children whenever a prison sentence is received. For short-sentenced women, resettlement planning needs to start promptly.

Anawim - Women Working Together

Anawim is a women's centre based in Birmingham offering a holistic service for women, especially those vulnerable to exploitation, and their children. Prison in-reach work is delivered at the two women's prisons in the Birmingham area: HMP Foston Hall and HMP Drake Hall. Funded by charitable trusts, this work is carried out by Anawim's Prison and Outreach team who can assist women pre-discharge with applying for accommodation. The team seeks to ensure that as the women approach release, they have a support network ready for them in the community. On release, Anawim staff work with women to re-engage with relevant services, and help them to secure permanent accommodation if necessary. Where a woman is released from prison on a Friday afternoon to No Fixed Abode (NFA) Anawim staff will work to secure her a safe B&B for the weekend.

Dawn House, a six-bed fully staffed residence was set up by Anawim for women who would otherwise be released to NFA. Women in prison are identified for referral by Anawim staff before their suitability is assessed by a panel. Dawn House gives women the skills and confidence to prepare for employment, training and education so that they can reintegrate into the community. If they were able to scale up the accommodation provision for women post release, it would be for pre-checked stand-alone homes in the community within walking distance of the centre as opposed to dedicated multi-occupancy facilities.

Changing Lives

Changing Lives (CL) is a national charity based in the North East that supports people experiencing homelessness, addiction, abuse and exploitation. It provides enhanced through-the-gate services in HMP & YOI Low Newton and offers women the following options on release:

- Dispersed housing of one or two bedroom properties with visiting support and 24-hour phone support. This is helpful for women fleeing domestic abuse who may not be accepted in refuges.
- Housing First models that provide intensive support for women in their own tenancies directly on release from custody.
- Shared supported accommodation service with 24-hour on-site support.
- Supported shared accommodation for mothers and children where there is a child protection concern.

CL has found resettlement needs of women are more likely to be met if housing plans are secured two weeks prior to release - this can involve upfront payment to obtain a rental in advance of occupation. Some years ago, CL received grant funding for the express purpose of securing bed spaces in supported accommodation for women by paying for the 2 week rent void. This small fund of £5,000 made a huge impact.

The Greater Manchester Homes Partnership

The Greater Manchester Homes Partnership (GM Homes) is made up of housing providers, private rented sector partners, social investment partners and delivery partners. Its goal is to prevent and relieve homelessness in Greater Manchester. GM Homes identified 55 people receiving housing services but also habitually in and out of prison. Working closely with the local Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRC) a pilot Diversion from Custody strategy was launched. This aimed to support anyone on the programme who had frequent experiences with the criminal justice system, often for low level acquisitive crimes (e.g. shoplifting) due to low incomes, drug/alcohol dependencies etc. The majority of people on the programme (and majority of rough sleepers in general) have mental health difficulties (often complicated by dual diagnosis) and so need intensive MH support in order to sustain accommodation. This is part of the intensive wrap around support offered to each participant.

The main aim of the strategy is to avoid short term custodial sentences where a community order would be more beneficial to the individual's long-term recovery, rehabilitation and stability, where they can continue to engage with the support provided by the GM Homes programme

This work is the result of collaboration between the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), the individual local authorities, housing providers, private rented sector partners, social investment partners and voluntary sector delivery partners. The GMCA is made up of the ten Greater Manchester councils and Mayor, who work with other local services, businesses, communities and others to improve the city-region. This is a good model for the pan-London approach being fostered from the London Mayor's Office.

The £2.6m funding has thus far supported 324 individuals into settled accommodation at just over £8,000 per person. This figure is dwarfed by the estimated £20,000 - £40,000 per annum cost per person of imprisonment and the multiplier of that by re-offending rates due to homelessness.

Hibiscus Initiatives

Hibiscus is a leading organisation supporting vulnerable Foreign National, and Black, Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BMER) women involved in the criminal justice system who may also have immigration restrictions. Hibiscus work collaboratively with a wide range of agencies.

Hibiscus offer holistic and trauma informed:

- One to one casework - practical and emotional specialist support including on immigration and asylum, identification and support to survivors of trafficking in Prisons, in their Women's Centre, in detention and at Westminster Magistrates Court.
- Outreach information and support around immigration and access to immigration advice through solicitors.
- Language and interpreting support.
- Therapeutic and practical groups delivered by external providers and specialist Hibiscus staff. Include ESOL, gender-based violence workshops, IT classes and legal clinics.
- Volunteer mentors for Prison and community to provide additional practical and emotional support.

Hibiscus will shortly be publishing their research report 'Closed Doors' on accommodation failures for trafficked women in the asylum system.

HMP Liverpool

This men's prison has implemented the following joined up approach, with no extra funding:

- 12 weeks before a resident is discharged he attends the Resettlement Board which meets weekly. Post-discharge needs are discussed, including residence, employment, family, health.
- The managing chaplain can arrange for family members to attend the board to help identify needs that the resident might not disclose.
- On the day of his release, the resident is encouraged to visit a Resettlement Hub at the visitor centre where a range of services are available including DWP, hostel and sheltered accommodation providers and probation services.
- Every month the Governor of HMP Liverpool attends a Regional Reducing Re-offending Summit which includes the Chief Executive of Liverpool City Council, the Police and Crime Commissioner and

representatives from relevant agencies and local authority departments. Together they discuss a joint approach to resettlement and re-offending.

Housing for Women

Housing for Women (H4W) own and manage over 920 homes across 11 London boroughs. The stock is largely comprised of general needs housing, which provides homes at social rents to women and their families across the capital. H4W also operate two specialist supported accommodation projects for women leaving prison who are vulnerable to destitution and have at least one co-occurring support need.

ReUnite provides for women in the catch 22 of being made homeless as a result of incarceration and then struggling for lack of family housing to regain custody of their children upon release. ReUnite provides accommodation and an intensive support package to enable residents to overcome the practical, psycho-social, and legal issues that prevent access to care and custody. This includes advocacy and liaison with social services and family courts, welfare benefits and employment advice, holistic and specialist support to overcome trauma and re-establish healthy familial bonds.

ReConnect provides supported accommodation for women leaving prison dealing with substance misuse and with complex mental health needs, many of whom have experienced trauma and abuse in their early lives.

Both projects require that women are in receipt of, or eligible for, public funds, as placements are funded through Housing Benefit. Local connection not required; referrals are accepted for any borough.

Inspiring Change Manchester: Housing First

Inspiring Change Manchester (ICM) is led by Shelter, as part of the National Lottery Community Fund's Fulfilling Lives programme. The Women's Voices Movement provides a space where women involved with the ICM programme can come together, get mutual support and build the case for system change. It partners with other organisations to make sure women's voices are heard at all levels of society.

Research shows that Housing First schemes help people to maintain a tenancy for a year or more in between 80% to 90% of cases - traditional approaches have the same impact around 40% of the time. In 2019, Greater Manchester launched a full Housing First programme led by Great Places. This included

the establishment of a Housing First pilot with women's prison HMP Styal. Shelter sourced accommodation units for women discharged from the prison who had a history of 'revolving door' reoffending and were perceived as challenging cases for rehousing and reintegration. The project has demonstrated that successful outcomes are achievable.

Jigsaw Support: Housing First

This Housing First project in Greater Manchester ran between April 2015 and March 2020, originally by Threshold Housing, later taken over by Jigsaw Support. It was awarded 'Homelessness Project of the Year' at the UK Housing Awards in 2019 and the evaluation by University of York recognised the project's achievements. The service was established to find new ways of working with women offenders who have multiple and complex needs - and whom other services have failed. It has been commended for its unique gender and trauma informed approach, which involves staff working intensively with six to seven women at a time, enabling engagement with other services to meet complex needs (mental health services, drug and alcohol treatment and training and employment advice) as well as helping clients to secure permanent tenancies. The project delivered successful outcomes: all of the 77 women rehoused through the programme have been successful in managing their tenancies with no reoffending and no rent arrears, saving money on public services including the NHS.

Roc Solid: Supported Housing and Work in Prisons

Marsh House in Stockton on Tees provides accommodation and 24/7 support in a positive, safe environment for women over the age of 18 at risk of sexual exploitation. Many clients have been in the prison system and have vulnerabilities such as drug/alcohol dependency and mental health issues. Marsh House takes referrals from prisons directly (the local prison being HMP & YOI Low Newton), as well as probation and drug/alcohol services. Seven women are accommodated in studio rooms with communal living and dining areas. Women contribute their housing benefit and other benefits pay towards bills. All women have individual support plans and staff help women engage with legal, medical, social and housing professionals as well as linking them up with local agencies and charities, such as specialist recovery programmes and literacy and computer skills classes.

ROC Solid does pre-discharge work with women, to ensure that support is put in place prior to their release. However, the primary obstacle to helping more women exiting prison is around the discharge process, as well as a lack of funding, especially for women on short sentences.

Single Homeless Project: Probation and Housing First for Women

Single Homeless Project (SHP) is a London-wide charity working to prevent homelessness and help vulnerable and socially excluded people to transform their lives across all 32 London boroughs, accommodating up to 600 people in hostels and supported housing at any one time. Each hostel specialises in meeting one of four priority needs: mental health, substance misuse, offending or the needs of vulnerable young people, including those leaving care. SHP's accommodation services focus on empowering people to move on with their lives and achieve sustainable, long term recovery.

In 2018, SHP partnered with MTCnovo and the National Probation Service (NPS) to deliver a London-wide housing support service. With a team of 25 SHP staff co-located in local probation offices, they work in close partnership with probation to support medium to high risk offenders to access secure and sustainable accommodation at this critical time. Housing Advice and floating support workers have so far successfully supported 468 people into independent accommodation.

In November 2019, after attending the Safe Homes for Women Leaving Prison Summit, SHP launched a Housing First for Women initiative funded by private donors with the potential to be scaled up over time. 12 units of supported accommodation were secured and made available. SHP has however struggled to work with women pre-release because they are mostly on short sentences with little resettlement support provided by the prison or probation service. To identify women for the scheme prior to release SHP relies on organisations such as Advance/Minerva. In SHP's experience, Housing First can be effectively deployed with a low case load (1:5 / case worker: client ratio) and is scalable to deliver where most London boroughs do not have provision.

Solace Women's Aid

Solace provides services to survivors of violence, particularly women and girls, including advice, advocacy, counselling and accommodation. It manages 18 refuges across seven London Boroughs (Barnet, Bexley,

Camden, Enfield, Haringey, Islington and Lambeth) for women and children who need a safe place to stay when fleeing abuse. Specialist staff help residents to find safe move-on accommodation.

In 2018, Solace was commissioned by Southwark Council to run a service for women leaving prison, funded by the Government's Rough Sleepers Initiative for a period of two years. Staff provide intensive, wrap-around support to women released from prison who are victims of sexual exploitation, domestic violence, those who are involved in prostitution, are long-term rough sleepers or who have multiple support needs for drugs, alcohol or mental health issues. The service reduces reoffending by tackling a woman's needs holistically. Women are escorted as they leave prison to prevent their immediate re-exploitation. Women must have a connection with the LB Southwark to access this initiative, described by Gill Herd, Senior Partnerships Manager, as "an excellent example of how Rough Sleeping Initiative funds can be used to meet the very specific, and often more hidden, needs of women."

This initiative is complemented by an accommodation based service, Southwark Women's Hub, funded by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government in partnership with LB Southwark for women affected by VAWG, the Criminal Justice System, rough sleeping, drug and alcohol support needs, and mental health complexities. The accommodation is staffed 24/7 and residents receive therapeutic and practical support during their 8 - 12 week stay. Support continues for up to twelve months to help maintain their accommodation and independence.

St Giles Trust - lessons learned from their housing support practice

St Giles Trust (SGT) is a charity working with vulnerable young people involved in or at risk of criminal exploitation, adults and young people facing unemployment and poverty, and vulnerable women and families. Over the last ten years SGT has delivered gender-specific through the gate support for women who are often caught in the revolving door of offending. Their learning includes:

- Women's resettlement services frequently experience late referrals by prisons, sometimes less than 48hrs before release, which allows insufficient time to plan for accommodation on release.
- The prison's duty to refer under the Homelessness Reduction Act is poorly understood by prison staff, and there is a lack of follow-up communication between the referrer and the council's housing team.

Custody staff need training as very few prison resettlement staff have knowledge of housing/homelessness law, or what rights a prisoner may have if they had been in care as a child (as is the case for almost a third of women in prison).

- There are still no housing specialists located in women's prisons despite prison staff repeatedly pointing out that this is needed.
- Women with no accommodation on release feel let down, which often results in disengagement, substance misuse relapse, and/or relapse of mental health.
- Women often lack essential documents on release - and if they have no ID a local authority, supported housing provider, or even a private-landlord will generally turn them away.
- Late releases, and releases on a Friday, are known to jeopardise a woman's chances of securing accommodation, especially if they have to travel from outside of London.
- The chances of a woman being housed immediately on release, and of managing other essential appointments (probation, benefits, healthcare, childcare, substance misuse) increase greatly with professional support on hand throughout the release process.
- Ongoing support to maintain tenancies must be provided.
- The location of accommodation for women on release can have a huge impact on outcomes. If a local authority places a woman in accommodation far from her support networks, it can result in her abandoning the accommodation. Similarly, women might be placed in areas that may be dangerous for them, because councils may not accept there is evidence of the threat.
- Women rejected by local authorities will often have no other options available to them. Supported housing options, night-shelters and hostels are scarce and women can rarely afford even low-cost hotels or B&Bs.
- Access to private-rented accommodation is very difficult: pre-release it is practically impossible to access including for want of rental deposits, references, credit checks, advance payment.
- Criminal justice services need to be better staffed and workers (including probation) need to have smaller caseloads in recognition of the multiple and complex needs that clients have. Services for women should as a rule be provided by women.

The following are critical in achieving sustainable outcomes for women:

- Pan-London services to avoid a postcode lottery, with frontline staff developing relationships with local services but the service need to be flexible to enable follow up work with women across the city, as the client group can be so transient in nature.
- Through-the-gate support needs to begin at least a month before release, in order to ensure that everything is in place for each woman. This enhances engagement post-release.
- The housing process for some women can be slow and drawn-out so support should be available on a longer-term basis post-release (e.g. at least 6mths post-release if required).
- Meet at the gate on the day of release and provide strong advocacy on the women's behalf.
- Women on release, especially those with complex needs, require holistic, wrap-around support. This needs to be provided by staff who are experienced and well-trained in housing rights, as well as a range of other areas.
- Adopting a 'lived experience' model of staffing and design of the service.

St Mungo's

St Mungo's have been delivering services in prisons since 1999 and have contracts to support ex-offenders, including the London Councils funded HARP connect service - a through the gate, community integration programme. St Mungo's is the London provider of the accommodation pilot funded by the MHCLG and MoJ, as well as being the lead provider for Hertfordshire under Bench and London CRC. They deliver housing advice services in HMP & YOI Bronzefield, HMP Send and HMP & YOI Downview, and interventions to prevent homelessness on release, including tenancy rescue, facilitated return to the family home, and support to prevent homelessness on the day of release.

St Mungo's considers the following action essential to support women leaving prison:

- The government should ensure there is enough safe and secure housing for women and survivors of abuse. Women sleeping rough are at high risk of physical and sexual violence, so they need safe, secure housing with the right support to escape abuse for good.

- The government should commit to building 90,000 new social homes per year for at least 15 years, with some of these homes being made available to people with a history of rough sleeping. Common restrictions in social housing allocation policies based on local connection, rent arrears or anti-social behaviour should be reviewed.
- The government should suspend the Benefit Cap and ensure that LHA rates remain at a level which can cover the true cost of renting, as well as bring forward legislation to end Section 21 evictions and provide further security in the private rented sector.
- Last year councils in England spent nearly £1 billion less on services supporting single homeless people compared to a decade ago. Funding must be restored and ring-fenced to enable councils to fund vital support services that help people to rebuild their lives away from the street for good. The government should invest an extra £1 billion a year in services that prevent homelessness and end rough sleeping.

This year St Mungo's has made the following recommendations to Ministers and the rough sleeping taskforce on accommodation for women and survivors:

- Involve the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and specialist VAWG agencies in planning move-on accommodation and support for women and survivors, and issuing specific guidance to local authorities.
- Keep emergency hotels and other accommodation open for as long as it takes to safely house everyone. No survivor should be forced out of emergency accommodation without an offer of suitable alternative housing and appropriate support.
- Provide more accommodation for women facing multiple disadvantage. This will mean urgently increasing funding for specialist refuges that can house survivors with mental health and substance use issues, Housing First for women, floating support and supported housing services. Women-only services and spaces should be available in every local area.
- Fund specialist VAWG agencies to provide community support to help survivors facing multiple disadvantage stay safe, including survivors living with mental health and substance use problems, and those who are street homeless.

- Develop safe accommodation and support options for homeless couples currently isolating together in emergency accommodation, at increased risk from domestic abuse. The taskforce may wish to draw on the recently published Homeless Couples and Relationships Toolkit published by St Mungo's in March 2020, as well as ground-breaking research by Homeless Link and Brighton Women's Centre.
- Where survivors in couples choose to leave a relationship, local authorities should work with specialist domestic abuse agencies to accommodate perpetrators as well as survivors, to prevent the perpetrator returning to rough sleeping or to the survivor's accommodation. Funds should be made available to support this.
- Provide sufficient funding and flexibility from central government to ensure that people who are subject to No Recourse to Public Funds conditions - or are otherwise not entitled to welfare benefits and homelessness assistance in the UK - do not return to the streets or to their abusers, to the detriment of the government's commitments to end rough sleeping and tackle violence against women and girls.

Stockport Women's Centre

Stockport Women's Centre (member of Greater Manchester Women's Support Alliance) provides services to any women who is in need of support. This includes women who have experienced or are experiencing domestic violence. Due to the nature of the work membership is restricted to women only.

The Women's Centre provides the following services:

- Counselling & Psychotherapy
- Complementary Therapies
- Self Help Groups
- Domestic Abuse Drop in
- Legal Advice Surgery
- Education Courses (Numeracy & Literacy)
- Freedom Programme

The Women's Centre will support, empower and educate to improve the wellbeing and physical and mental health of women, enabling them to have improved life chances for themselves and their families.

During the Covid-19 pandemic Stockport Women's Centre in partnership with Great Places Housing Group and Salix Homes have worked with Greater Manchester Combined Authority to ensure women prison leavers and women fleeing violence and abuse have access to suitable temporary accommodation.

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