

The quality of work undertaken with women

**A joint inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation and
HM Inspectorate of Prisons**

May 2024

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Foreword

It is 17 years since the Corston Report¹ called for a radical change to the way we treat women in the criminal justice system. The report showed that a woman-centred approach was needed, which recognised and responded to the range of complex needs that drive women's offending. The current Female Offender Strategy² and subsequent Strategy Delivery Plan³ set out the government's approach to addressing women's offending. It set priorities to reduce the number of women entering the criminal justice system, reduce the number of women serving short custodial sentences through better use of community sentences, and improve outcomes for women who serve time in prison. Although these ambitions mirror the expectations set out by the prison and probation services, our findings in this inspection show that progress is frustratingly, too slow. Too often, services for women fall far short of the gender-informed approaches that were envisioned, meaning safe spaces where women can be offered support and rehabilitation are not available to all who need them.

In prisons, we found that there were too many barriers to good resettlement support and the outcomes were much too hard to determine. The provision of services in prison is disjointed and too complicated, meaning women often fall through the gaps. Support to address practical needs, such as access to bank accounts or national insurance numbers, seems to have deteriorated rather than improved. Suitable accommodation is often not found until very close to women's release dates. This creates uncertainty and means that other services they need, such as mental health treatment or medication, cannot be arranged reliably. There are not enough staff in prison teams, which leads to delays in addressing women's needs. This reduces the chance of any meaningful support being provided during their sentence.

Approved premises for women offer safe and nurturing environments. However, they are underused and opportunities to use them for community orders are often missed. As with prison releases, what was to come next, including where the woman would live, was often uncertain. In some cases, this undid the positive progress women had made there.

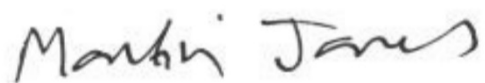
In the community, some delivery models offered hope that positive changes can be made when the Probation Service works closely with local authorities and partner organisations to develop a whole-system approach to overcoming the disadvantage that often leads women to offend. Unfortunately, these models are rare. The quality of supervision and support available varies significantly across England and Wales. There is little evidence that progress is being made in addressing the reasons why women offend, which are widely acknowledged to be linked to their vulnerability. Although evidence-based interventions designed to address women's needs are available, not enough women are being given the opportunity to benefit from them. In addition, services commissioned specifically to meet women's needs are hampered by a complex referral process and there has been insufficient evaluation by HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) to understand whether positive outcomes are being achieved, despite some providers having their own evaluation methods in place.

Prison and probation service regions need to be held to account to ensure they are delivering services that meet women's needs. Almost two decades on from the Corston report, this inspection shows that there is still much work to be done and this report represents a renewed call for action. We have made a set of recommendations that, if followed, should make a material difference to the quality of services provided for women.

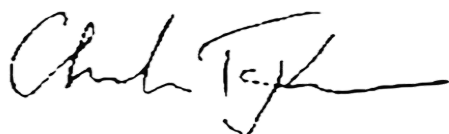
¹ Home Office. (2007). The Corston Report: A report by Baroness Jean Corston of a review of women with particular vulnerabilities in the criminal justice system.

² Ministry of Justice. (2018). Female Offender Strategy. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/female-offender-strategy>

³ Ministry of Justice. (2023). Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan: 2022-25. Available at: [Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan 2022-25 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/118442/female-offender-strategy-delivery-plan-2022-25.pdf)

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martin Jones". The script is cursive and somewhat informal.

Martin Jones CBE
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charlie Taylor". The script is cursive and includes a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Charlie Taylor
HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

Contextual information

Key statistics

20.2%	The proven annual average reoffending rate for adult women ⁴
26.4%	The annual average reoffending rate for adult men ⁴

Prison statistics

3,549	The number of women in prison as at 31 December 2023 ⁵
83,940	The number of men in prison as at 31 December 2023 ⁵
12.9 months	Length of the average custodial sentence for women in 2023 ⁶
21.9 months	Length of the average custodial sentence for men in 2023 ⁶

Probation statistics

21,402	The number of women supervised by the probation service as at 30 June 2023 ⁷
216,862	The number of men supervised by the probation service as at 30 June 2023 ⁷
52%	The percentage of women who were remanded into custody in 2021 by the magistrates' court but do not go on to receive a custodial sentence ⁸
43%	The percentage of women who are remanded into custody in 2021 by the Crown Court who do not go on to receive a custodial sentence ⁸

Approved premises statistics

165	Total number of bedspaces available to women each day as at July 2023 ⁹
4,683	Total number of available bedspace days available to women in July 2023 ⁸
2,550	Total number of occupied bedspace days available for women in July 2023 ⁸

Headline findings from this inspection

Of the cases we inspected, we found:

47%	The percentage of assessments that provided a gender-informed picture of the risks and needs of the woman
35%	The percentage of planning that sufficiently addressed the risks and needs of the woman

⁴ Ministry of Justice. (2024). Proven reoffending statistics: January to March 2022. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/proven-reoffending-statistics-january-to-march-2022> (Accessed 27 March 2024).

⁵ Ministry of Justice. (2024) Offender Management Statistics Bulletin, England and Wales: Quarterly: July to September 2023. Prison Population: 31 December 2023. Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/offender-management-statistics-quarterly> (Accessed 01 February 2024).

⁶ Ministry of Justice (2024). Criminal Justice Statistics Quarterly: June 2023. Outcomes by Offence Data Tool June 2023. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-justice-system-statistics-quarterly-june-2023> (Accessed 18 March 2024)

⁷ Gov.uk Justice Data (no date) Available at: <https://data.justice.gov.uk/probation> (Accessed 01 February 2024).

⁸ Prison Reform Trust (2022) *Why focus on reducing women's imprisonment? England and Wales*. Available at: <https://prisonreformtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Why-women-2022-briefing.pdf>

⁹ Unpublished data supplied by HMPPS; as such, this has not been subject to the assurance that published data goes through.

42%	The percentage of cases where sentence delivery was gender-informed and effectively supported the needs of the woman and addressed their offending behaviour
42%	The percentage of cases where reviewing practices demonstrated a gender-informed approach to considering the needs of the woman and addressed their offending behaviour

Executive summary

Context

This inspection builds on two previous inspections on service delivery for women. In 2011, HM Inspectorate of Probation, together with HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate and HM Inspectorate of Prisons, completed a joint thematic inspection *Equal but different? An inspection of the use of alternatives to custody for women offenders* (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2011). This measured the progress being made by probation trusts in implementing the Corston recommendations. The inspection found that: 'although a great deal had been achieved, provision for women varied considerably and was inconsistent'. Our last inspection of probation services for women, published in 2016, considered the work of the Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) and the National Probation Service (NPS). Since then, probation services have unified, which means that the Probation Service is now responsible for managing people on probation at all risk levels and delivering accredited programmes and interventions. In addition, since our last inspection, a number of significant publications (MOJ, 2018a; MOJ, 2018b; MOJ 2020; MOJ 2021; MOJ, 2023a) have set out expectations for how prison and probation services should deliver services for women.

Methodology

The initial fieldwork for this joint thematic inspection was undertaken in two parts. In November and December 2023, HM Inspectorate of Prisons visited four closed women's prisons: two larger prisons serving the courts, and two training prisons. We interviewed 42 women about their experiences of resettlement provision, most of whom had been sentenced to less than 12 months in custody. We also reviewed the help they had been given by reading their files and talking to the different staff involved. In addition, we interviewed a wide range of managers at each site.

For the probation element, HM Inspectorate of Probation considered the work of six probation delivery units (PDUs) and six approved premises. We inspected two samples during the fieldwork. The first was a sample of 60 women subject to a community order, suspended sentence or licence between 01 July 2023 and 31 July 2023. Our fieldwork took place during October and November 2023. For these cases, we inspected the quality of the case management and interviewed the probation practitioner, where possible. In our second sample, we looked at 30 cases from six approved premises where the women were residents in July 2023. For these cases, we looked at the women's experience in the approved premises but did not examine case management work. During each fieldwork week, we held meetings with a range of staff, managers, senior leaders, and operational and strategic partners. We also spoke to a small number of sentencers and ad hoc groups of women receiving services when we met them during visits to approved premises or women's centres.

Both inspectorates joined together for a final fieldwork week, where we met those responsible for women's policy and strategy at a national level.

We commissioned User Voice to undertake remote semi-structured interviews with people on probation. Consultants with lived experience of the criminal justice system gathered the views of 77 women who had been managed by the Probation Service or lived in approved premises. In this report we have included examples of the opinions gathered, and a copy of the full User Voice report can be found [on our website](#).

A detailed breakdown of our methodology can be found in Annexe 2.

Policy, strategy, and leadership

In contrast to our last inspection, we found a wealth of policies and guidance for directing prison and probation services' work with women. These draw on the available evidence about what works best when working with women within the criminal justice system. The government's overarching

Female Offender Strategy (MOJ, 2018) recognises that, often, women's vulnerabilities are what leads to their crimes; therefore, recognising and responding to this as part of service delivery offers the best chance to support women to move away from offending. The Women's Policy Framework (MOJ, 2021) translates the strategy into a set of expectations, covering outcomes and requirements for prison and probation. The expectations are clear and support gender-informed practice that recognises the needs that often drive women's offending. The Target Operating Model (TOM) (HMPPS, 2021) for the unified Probation Service also acknowledges the need to approach women's offending differently from men's but, disappointingly, dilutes some key expectations. For example, where the policy framework asserts that the probation service 'must' meet three requirements in relation to women, one of which is that women 'should' be offered the opportunity to be seen in a female-only environment, the TOM describes an 'aspiration' that women will be offered the opportunity to report either to a women-only setting or at a time that is for women only. In practice, we found that many of the expectations for women's services are not being met.

The HMPPS Women's Group (formerly the Women's Directorate) has direct oversight of all public sector women's prisons. It provides policy guidance and wider support to the two privately run women's prisons (HMP Bronzefield and HMP Peterborough), which come under the responsibility of the Custodial Contracts Directorate. The team also provides a range of support and guidance for regional probation teams aimed at promoting good practice. This includes helpful forums at operational and strategic levels, to explore effective practice and barriers to progress against its business plan, which is distilled from the Female Offender Strategy. However, competing priorities within probation regions and staffing challenges mean that women are not consistently offered appropriate support in suitable environments.

In theory, a reasonable range of interventions for women are available, including opportunities for group work or one-to-one packages, as suits the needs of the individual. However, in practice, we saw little delivery of these interventions, and no comprehensive analysis to understand how many could be expected to be delivered. Prison and probation services have not fully evaluated the interventions to understand whether they have a positive impact on women's lives or what outcomes they are achieving.

Under the unified Probation Service model, rehabilitative services are commissioned from the private and voluntary sectors. A single provider in each Police and Crime Commissioner area holds the contract to provide support for women across a range of needs-related pathways. This means that women access support in a holistic way from providers who have expertise in working with women. In theory, the model is sound. However, the referral process is too complex and poorly understood by referring practitioners, who must identify women's needs and complexity levels before referring to the provider, who in turn completes their assessment and an action plan. Having awarded contracts to organisations due to their knowledge and experience of working with women, probation services need to take a more collaborative approach in order to maximise their value.

Custody

Overall, while we found hardworking, dedicated staff working in prisons, the arrangements for resettlement were disjointed and too complicated. The dispersed nature of the women's custodial estate means that each prison houses women who will be released to many different home areas. This creates a complex situation for commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS), with some prisons having as many as 15 relevant providers, many of whom are not present on site. In addition, other than in Greater Manchester, senior leaders in prison were not sufficiently aware of outcomes from CRSs to understand the quality of services being provided. In addition, different teams were responsible for parts of the resettlement process and, too often, were not working together effectively. This was causing unacceptable delays in assessing women and supporting them to prepare for release. All of the pre-release teams we visited were understaffed and struggling to keep up with the number of assessments that were needed. Where pre-release plans were completed, they were usually of a reasonable standard. However, too many were based on insufficient assessments. These were often conducted by telephone, which failed to create a safe environment within which women could be honest about sensitive issues.

Unsurprisingly, women on short sentences faced even more significant challenges, and most were unable to get meaningful support to effect longer-term change. In some prisons, recalled women could not access support from CRSs quickly enough because their community referrals had been closed, which meant that the process had to be restarted. We found good communication between community and prison offender managers in most cases, and many prison offender managers were proactive in trying to set up support for women and overcome deficiencies in the system. In a minority of cases, CRS workers delivered high-quality and meaningful support to women. The few providers who came into prisons and delivered face-to-face support stood a better chance of building trust with women.

Reliance on the community offender manager to refer women to a CRS provider for accommodation support caused delays in half of the cases we inspected. In a few cases, we had concerns that the risk of harm posed by women was not always being sufficiently considered. For example, inappropriate release addresses had been approved. We found examples of effective information-sharing between teams within prisons. However, providers and staff were hampered by not having access to all of the prisons and probation case management and assessment systems.

As we have found in other inspections, women were too often not receiving regular high-quality keywork¹⁰ sessions to support their resettlement. Practical barriers to resettlement could not be easily addressed; for example, it was difficult for women to get access to bank accounts and national insurance numbers. Positively, we saw impressive links with various employers, although few women entered employment after release. Accommodation was a priority need for most women, but, too often, an address was not found until women were almost at their release date. This caused high levels of anxiety for women who did not know where they were going to live. It also disrupted other support, such as arranging necessary medical treatment. In addition, prisons could not gather data on accommodation outcomes beyond the first night of release and, therefore, were unable to measure the impact of work completed within the prison.

Three-quarters of the women in our sample had experienced domestic abuse, and many were involved in sex work. But at the time of our inspection, there was no evidence in the four prisons we visited of specific practical support being provided to help women avoid or manage the risk of returning to an abusive relationship or sex work on release. All the prisons we visited had advanced plans to pilot family resettlement workers who would support the woman's return to caring responsibilities on release.

On the day of release from prison, women were often faced with many appointments to attend and insufficient practical support to achieve this. Some prisons had centres outside the gate (sometimes referred to as 'departure lounges') that were available to women immediately after release so they could plan their journeys or make phone calls. We felt that this should be standard across all prisons, along with providing a basic mobile phone for women who do not already have one.

Approved premises

The Female Offender Strategy (MOJ, 2018) included plans to create residential centres for women, which would be used as an alternative to imprisoning women. Progress on these centres has been slow, and, as yet no centres exist. As part of this inspection, we wanted to understand the role that approved premises play for women and how effectively they support rehabilitation and resettlement. There are now nine approved premises for women in England, offering 165 beds, and none in Wales. As with women's prisons, this means that residents are likely to be away from their home area with no links to friends, family, or services in the area where the approved premises are located. Women's approved premises are resourced and governed in the same way as men's. We found that this does not fully take account of and attend to women's different profile and needs. Women's offending is often linked to traumatic experiences, and it takes time for them to build enough trust in those trying to support them to disclose their experiences. Women in approved

¹⁰ Keyworkers are band 3 prison officers who are allocated to promote rehabilitative and constructive relationships between staff and prisoners in order to foster positive behaviour.

premises generally spend more time in the building and want more time engaging with staff, yet the staffing model is the same as in men's facilities. The independently run approved premises can define their own staffing models, and most employ additional roles, such as deputy manager. Almost all the women's approved premises were under-occupied during the period we examined. In exploring the reasons for this, we found that not all probation practitioners were aware that the eligibility criteria for women's approved premises were different from men's, which meant that women assessed as posing a medium risk of serious harm could be referred. We also saw little evidence of residence requirements at approved premises being used on community or suspended sentence orders to form robust sentencing recommendations and avoid women being sent to prison.

In a number of the approved premises run by the Probation Service that we visited, facilities management services were poor and, in some cases, placed residents and staff at risk.

We found that staff in approved premises demonstrated a clear commitment to trauma-informed and trauma-responsive practice in their everyday work. Most approved premises were ably meeting the challenge of balancing the risks residents posed to others with the needs and vulnerabilities they had, often with insufficient resources at their disposal.

Community sentence management

Different approaches are taken to managing women within the probation service across England and Wales. Some PDUs have specialist women's teams, sometimes co-located with other organisations as part of a whole-system approach to managing women. These multi-agency women's centres provide safe and appropriate spaces for women to gain support from a range of organisations. In other PDUs, arrangements for women are no different from those for men, which is unacceptable. Many probation practitioners are passionate about working with women and work hard to address their often complex and multiple needs; however, over half told us they needed more training to work effectively with women. eLearning is the primary source of learning on this topic, and many practitioners had either not completed it or had but did not feel it sufficiently equipped them to carry out their roles.

Since our last inspection, the Probation Service has improved its focus on women's needs in some respects. All regions now have a dedicated women's lead at middle manager grade, who reports to a regional senior leader with a responsibility for women. The women's lead role aims to drive high-quality practice and services; their impact is being felt in some areas more than others, depending on the priority given to women by regional senior leaders.

The standard of court reports for women was reasonably good, with sufficient gender-informed analysis to provide a suitable recommendation to the court. However, court staff were not always up to date with the range of interventions and services available for women, and in some cases this led to missed opportunities to address relevant needs.

In most regions, following sentence, women are automatically allocated to female practitioners, although they are not always asked if this is their preference. Too often, women were not offered the opportunity to contribute to their assessment or engaged in creating sentence plans. Many of the women in our sample had experienced significant, traumatic life events. These were usually recorded in assessments but often without the necessary analysis to understand the impact on the woman or her offending.

Women's safety and wellbeing were not sufficiently considered in too many of our sample cases. Known risks that women faced in their lives, such as domestic abuse, were not always addressed. In the worst cases, there was insufficient investigation when vulnerable women stopped reporting to probation.

The quality of court work and assessments was notably poorer for Black and minority ethnic women,¹¹ and although sentence delivery often demonstrated a better understanding of the

¹¹ There were no Asian women in our sample.

women's risks and needs, practitioners were not always aware of specialist support services available to minority groups.

Through probation-delivered interventions or CRSs, there is a range of ways to provide support for women or address their offending-related needs; however, these options are underused. In most cases we found little progress being made against women's priority needs.

Recommendations

For prisons and probation, His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service should:

1. ensure that all staff involved in women's resettlement and sentence delivery have access to all relevant case management and assessment systems, including nDelius, NOMIS and OASys
2. ensure that all practitioners in prison and the community fully understand how traumatic events can affect women's behaviour and are confident that they know how best to respond to women's risks and needs
3. evaluate all interventions being used with women to properly understand their impact
4. include domestic abuse and sex work in the available pathways in the women's CRS provision.

For prisons, His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service should:

5. simplify the CRS provision in prisons to ensure all staff and senior leaders have clarity on roles and responsibilities, enabling all women in prison (including recalled women and those being released at the end of their sentence) to access the good-quality face-to-face help that they need for successful resettlement
6. provide prison leaders with data on the outcomes achieved by CRS providers. Prison leaders should be actively involved in holding CRS providers to account when they do not fulfil their contractual obligations
7. give women in prison access to regular good-quality keywork that supports resettlement
8. ensure data is available to track the accommodation status of all women released from a particular prison at 12 weeks after release, so that outcomes for each establishment can be monitored and improvements made where needed
9. ensure that, on the day of release from prison, the number of appointments women are expected to attend are realistic and they have access to sufficient practical help, including:
 - a basic mobile phone if they do not have one
 - for women who are unlikely to cope on the day of release, someone to collect them at the gate and help them to attend appointments
 - a safe, supportive space on prison premises, run by dedicated staff, where women who have been released can get help, phone taxis, arrange to be collected by family members or check train times.
10. ensure that women's resettlement needs in prison are properly assessed in a timely way, and that any barriers, such as obtaining bank accounts or national insurance numbers, are overcome ahead of release.

For probation, His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service should:

11. ensure that regional probation directors provide services for women in line with all aspects of the Women's Policy Framework, including:
 - making sure appropriate unpaid work placements are available for women in all probation delivery units
 - giving all women the opportunity to report to appropriate locations where they feel safe, for all aspects of sentence delivery

12. ensure that assessments accurately identify appropriate interventions for women, and that the delivery of all interventions is sufficiently monitored and analysed, including attrition rates and shortfalls against identified need
13. review the governance and resourcing model for women's approved premises to ensure that the complexity of working with women and their differing level of need is fully recognised
14. ensure probation court report writers are up to date and aware of all services and interventions for women and therefore equipped to provide comprehensive gender-informed sentencing recommendations.

1. Introduction

1.1. Why this thematic?

Women offenders are a minority in the criminal justice system (CJS), representing four per cent of those held in custody and 12.1 per cent of those supervised in the community (MOJ, 2023b). However, as the ministerial foreword for the Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan states:

'When women with experiences of violence, poor mental health and addiction are left unsupported, society pays the price. Families can be torn apart. Communities can face more crime. And taxpayers end up covering the cost of the services they use – including police, courts and eventually, prisons and probation. When all these things happen, the harmful cycle of female offending continues.'

A number of reports (Home Office, 2007; HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2016) have highlighted the need for holistic, woman-centred approaches, and this was supported by a further publication from the Ministry of Justice in 2018 (MOJ, 2018b), which provides a summary of the emerging evidence that supports the principle that a 'whole system approach' is the most effective way to address women's offending. Such approaches allow statutory agencies and third-sector organisations to come together and respond to women's complex and interconnected needs.

The last probation inspection to focus on women, *A thematic inspection of the provision and quality of services in the community for women who offend*, was published in 2016 (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2016), shortly after the *Transforming Rehabilitation* strategy separated probation services into the National Probation Service and Community Rehabilitation Companies. Since then, services have been unified again, further changing the approach and delivery of services for women. In addition, in 2018, the government published the Female Offender Strategy, followed in 2023 by the Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan.

Our aims in this inspection were to consider progress since our last inspection and the impact of the overarching Female Offender Strategy on the experiences of women being supervised by the probation service and leaving prison. The joint nature of the inspection allowed us to scrutinise the progress of both prisons and probation and the overall strategy that governs services for women. We were able to consider the experiences of women, from custody through to resettlement in the community.

1.2. Background

The publication of the Corston Report in 2007 (Home Office, 2007) prompted a renewed focus on women who enter the criminal justice system. The report, prompted by the death of six women at HMP Styal by suicide, advocated a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to women within the criminal justice system and those at risk of entering it. The recommendations included making community disposals the norm, developing a more comprehensive network of 'one-stop shop' community provision for women, and improving high-level governance and cross-departmental working for women who offend. In 2011, HM Inspectorate of Probation, together with HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate and HM Inspectorate of Prisons, completed a joint thematic inspection *Equal but different? An inspection of the use of alternatives to custody for women offenders*. This measured the progress that probation trusts had made in implementing the Corston recommendations. The inspection found that:

'...although a great deal had been achieved, provision for women varied considerably and was inconsistent'.

In that inspection, we advocated for a locally coordinated multi-agency approach to best support the needs of women. The report's recommendations included maintaining a focus on women through the development of effective outcome measures, supported by monitoring and evaluation. In 2013, the Advisory Board for Female Offenders (now the Women in the Criminal Justice System

Expert Group) was established to bring together key stakeholders to provide expert advice on the development and delivery of policy and services for women who offend.

Our next inspection of services for women (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2016) found a lack of strategic focus on women’s needs and inconsistent provision of services, with a lack of focus on understanding outcomes. The report also raised concerns about the sustainability of funding for women’s centres, which were providing much-needed support. A 2019 overview of women’s centres published by the Tavistock Institute (Tavistock Institute, 2019) provided a package of evidence showing the importance of women’s centres and the positive impact they can have on women’s lives.

1.3. Aims and objectives

In addition to following up on the progress made on recommendations from previous inspections and against the Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan, this inspection sought to answer the following questions:

- Does the vision and strategy drive the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for women?
- Are staff empowered to deliver a high-quality personalised and responsive service for women?
- Is a comprehensive range of services and interventions in place for women?
- How well do practitioners support desistance?
- How well do practitioners manage risk of harm?
- How well do practitioners support the safety and wellbeing of women?
- Are arrangements with statutory partners, providers and other agencies established, maintained and used effectively to deliver high-quality personalised and responsive services?

For the custodial part of this inspection, we decided to focus on the quality of resettlement support available to women, particularly remanded women, those serving short sentences and those due for release, because those are all key elements of the Female Offender Strategy.

1.4. Report outline

Chapter	Content
2. Policy, strategy, and leadership	This chapter considers the national leadership and governance arrangements that oversee services for women. We report on the interventions and services that are available and how staff are equipped to work with women.
3. Custody	This chapter details the findings from our fieldwork in prisons. The custodial part of this joint thematic inspection considered how well women’s resettlement needs were identified and met before release, particularly for women serving short sentences.
4. Approved premises	In this chapter, we report on our findings about women’s experiences of approved premises, including leadership, management and resourcing. We describe how the experience of living in an approved premises affects them, and the challenges of successfully moving on.
5. Community sentence management	Finally, we share our case inspection findings from the probation element of the inspection. We consider how effectively sentences are delivered to women on probation, including the quality of court work, assessment, planning, and sentence delivery. Finally, we examine the services that the probation service uses to support women and address their needs.

2. Policy, strategy, and leadership

In this chapter, we review the national leadership and governance arrangements that oversee work with women, including the interventions and services that are available, and how staff are equipped and enabled to work with women.

2.1. Policy and strategy

When we last inspected services for women in 2016 (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2016), we reported:

'Our inspection found that, in the absence of any nationally specified approach, strategic leadership of the management of women in the community varied considerably.'

Since then, there has been a significant strategic focus on women at a national level. The Female Offender Strategy was published in 2018 (MOJ, 2018a). This was later supplemented by the Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan (MOJ, 2023a), which set out a government-wide approach to managing women in the criminal justice system and a framework for delivering that approach. The strategy recognised the negative impact of criminalising vulnerable people. It sought to reduce the number of women entering the criminal justice system, provide effective community-based sentences, and improve custodial sentences for those who are imprisoned in order to provide better rehabilitation and resettlement. Further publications provided emerging evidence of the value of whole-system approaches to addressing women's offending (MOJ, 2018b), and how government agencies would work together to address women's needs (MOJ, 2020), alongside metrics that would be used to measure the progress of the overarching strategy.

The Ministry of Justice published a Women's Policy Framework in 2018 and updated it in 2021 (MOJ, 2021) to reflect the changes brought about by the creation of a unified probation service. The framework sets out the specific expectations for the delivery of services for women in custody and in the community. It draws on evidence from the overarching government strategy and the Better Outcomes for Women Offenders document (NOMS, 2015). The policy framework is clear about expectations for working with women, and states:

'The Probation Service must meet three specific requirements in relation to the management of female supervised individual. Female supervised individual should be offered the option of a female Responsible Officer/Offender Manager; when attending meetings with their Responsible Officer/Offender Manager they should be offered the option of being interviewed in a female-only environment; and 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.'

The model for the reunified probation service was set out in the Target Operating Model (TOM) (HMPPS, 2021). This envisions staff working with women being appropriately trained and women being given the option of having a female probation practitioner. The model allows regions to choose whether they use some practitioners as semi-specialists or 'concentrators' to manage women. Practitioners are expected to use trauma-responsive practice alongside other skill sets when working with women. Some of the clear expectations set out in the policy framework are somewhat diluted by the TOM; for example, it describes an 'aspiration' that women will be offered an opportunity to report to either a women-only setting or at a time when only women attend. We found that many probation regions are not operating fully in accordance with these expectations, and the delivery of services to women remains varied across England and Wales.

The Welsh Government, UK Government and policing in Wales worked together with justice partners to address female offending, and in 2019 they published the Female Offending Blueprint for Wales. This sets out the need for a joined-up approach that acknowledges the gender-specific needs of women, promotes their wellbeing and supports successful long-term outcomes to reduce

reoffending. It aims to reduce the number of women in the criminal justice system and develop a whole-system approach where integrated services offer targeted support to women.

For the custodial estate, the Women's Policy Framework sets out the expectation that women will be held in safe and appropriate conditions that support them to maintain family ties. It also expects women to be helped to find safe and suitable accommodation on release, and given the opportunity to access appropriate education, learning and skills development to support their resettlement.

2.2. National leadership

His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) Women's Group (formerly Women's Directorate) provides overarching strategic direction and policy guidance for managing women in custody and the community. It has direct responsibility for managing the public sector women's prisons and providing support to the private women's prisons. This model provides leadership for these establishments that is attuned to the specific profile and needs of women as distinct from men. Our findings in this inspection led us to question why women's approved premises do not fall under this structure, so that the same level of attention and understanding exists within their governance and leadership.

Although the Women's Group is responsible for setting and overseeing the strategy for managing women and for delivery against the Female Offender Strategy, regional probation directors remain accountable for the operational delivery of services. Therefore, the Women's Group's role is to advise on policy, and to influence and drive positive progress where possible, but success depends on the profile women are given by regional probation directors, which remains variable. Following approval from the then Chief Probation Officer, each probation region appointed a women's lead at senior probation officer (SPO) grade to support implementation of the Female Offender Strategy and promote women's needs. The SPO women's leads report to a regional women's lead. This is usually a probation delivery unit (PDU) head or other senior leader who holds responsibility for women in addition to their core role. In addition, one regional probation director has a national lead for women in the community as part of their wider portfolio.

The Women's Group provides opportunities for SPO women's leads to come together fortnightly to share best practice and explore how to deliver strategic priorities. SPO women's leads also come together every quarter to discuss and learn about strategic and policy developments. The Women's Group has made good progress in building the profile of the women's agenda and developing methods to track progress against the Female Offender Strategy. For example, it has developed materials for regions to use with the judiciary to highlight the impact of short sentences on women and make them aware of alternative options. To date, the group has lacked the services of an analyst to support it in evaluating the impact of its work effectively. The group has commissioned a dashboard that can be used to regularly monitor performance measures that affect women and compare performance across different regions. Easy access to this data will help build a picture of trends and provide evidence to hold regions to account and drive improvement.

The Women's Group also oversees the Women's Estate Case Advice and Support Panel (WECASP) Policy Framework. This process provides oversight of a small cohort of women in custody who are assessed as having particularly complex needs. The panel also oversees all young adult transitions from the youth estate to the female adult estate. The WECASP provides multi-disciplinary case support and advice to colleagues who manage these individuals. In addition, the Women's Group also works with the women's approved premises estate to develop a Women's Complex Case Approved Premises Panel. This considers complex cases at the point of referral.

For the custodial estate, the Women's Group chairs a Women's Resettlement Operational Working Group to ensure that services are consistent and aligned with the Female Offender Strategy. In addition, the Women's Resettlement Forum brings together senior leaders to agree and establish the overarching strategic position and principles of pre-release activity. This includes Offender Management in Custody, pre-release teams, short sentence function, commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS) provision and community accommodation services.

The Women's Group provides support and clear guidance to those who deliver services for women. It has used research and evidence to develop policies and guidance that support the best interests of women. The Women's Group has direct governance over publicly owned women's prisons, which provides some consistency. The difficulty with probation, however, is that while the group can promote best practice in working with women, and offer support and expert guidance, accountability for delivery sits outside its influence and relies on the profile and scrutiny that regional probation directors give to women's services.

2.3. Staffing and training

Probation staffing

Staffing shortages in some probation regions have led to continued adaptations to business-as-usual sentence management arrangements under the red-amber-green-rated prioritisation framework. This approach adjusts practice expectations to manage demand. It includes reducing contact levels and face-to-face appointments and reducing the delivery of interventions when there are not enough staff to deliver them according to the usual guidance. Two of the six PDUs we visited were still operating under amber arrangements due to staff shortages. Although more staff have been recruited, vacancies for probation officer and probation services officer posts are still high in some regions, particularly London and the South East. In PDUs with the most challenging staffing levels, leaders reported that they could not form specialist women's teams, as they did not have the resources to dedicate to them. In PDUs where staffing levels were higher, this had only recently improved; therefore, plans for specific arrangements for women were in their infancy. While recruitment drives had been successful and probation staffing numbers were increasing, many staff were relatively new and had yet to gain the necessary knowledge and experience to equip them fully for their role.

Of the 45 probation practitioners we interviewed, 25 told us their workload was 'quite' or 'very' manageable. Practitioners' assessments of their workload were not always aligned with caseload numbers, or with the workload management tool. For example, in one PDU almost all staff had caseloads that were in line with probation service expectations, yet staff expressed the highest levels of dissatisfaction with their workloads. In PDUs where practitioners managing women had the strongest working relationships with partners and other services, staff tended to find their workloads more manageable.

Across the six PDUs we visited, we found varying arrangements for how women's cases were allocated. Four of the six PDUs had women's teams. The remaining two had women's 'concentrators', who took a lead in managing women but did not hold all the women's cases and some also managed men. Those in the concentrator roles were not always clear about what was expected of them; however, some had a wealth of knowledge and experience in working with women and provided excellent support and guidance to their colleagues. Some practitioners felt that having only women on their caseload was too emotionally draining and that a mixed caseload was preferable; others felt that dedicated teams provided specialist knowledge and support within the team.

Training

Probation practitioners' views on training were mixed. Approximately half felt that they had had sufficient training to work effectively with women. This view was held by slightly more practitioners who considered themselves to be specialists in working with women than those who did not. HMPPS's mandatory training includes the 'Empowering Change: Working Well with Women' eLearning course, which is required learning for all practitioners who work with women. This replaced the 'POWER: Positive Outcomes for Women: Empowerment and Rehabilitation' two-day classroom-based training. Empowering Change launched in December 2022, and as of July 2023, 384 people had completed it, although far higher numbers had viewed sections of the training. Completion rates varied by region: the highest was 78 and the lowest was 11. Many probation staff told us that eLearning did not suit their learning style and they found it hard to engage with the

materials in the way they were delivered. One practitioner summed up the views we heard from many by saying:

“Online learning has a place but it’s not the answer to everything – we have gone too far down that road. I learn as much from colleagues on face-to-face training as from the content.”

Most practitioners had received some input about trauma-informed practice, usually through a briefing. However, our case inspection work showed that this had not always given them a sufficiently in-depth understanding of how to work with people who have experienced trauma. We found that most practitioners had interpreted trauma-informed practice as meaning flexibility, but were not sufficiently familiar with the key principles, particularly around building trust and a sense of psychological safety through appropriate boundary-setting. In Cardiff and Vale PDU, staff told us they had attended the Women’s Justice Blueprint gender and trauma-informed training delivered by Women’s Aid and had found this useful. This training has been independently evaluated and accredited to demonstrate continuous professional development. In other areas, some staff had attended Knowledge and Understanding Framework (KUF) training on working with people with complex emotional needs associated with a diagnosis of personality disorder. This training is co-facilitated by trainers with lived experience and those with clinical or practitioner expertise. KUF training takes a co-produced, multi-agency, trauma-informed approach to working with the complexities associated with these difficulties. Those who had attended found it particularly useful for working with women. In Greater Manchester, practitioners spoke highly of the training commissioned by the region to address an identified gap in knowledge about working with women who commit violent offences.

Many practitioners told us about the emotional labour of working with high volumes of women. One said that it is:

“Twice as hard to manage women as you are dealing with a victim as well as an offender.”

Practitioners told us that their support largely came from their team and their line manager, although they knew about external support that was available should they need it. In some regions, there was access to additional clinical supervision, which was encouraged, but not mandatory.

Prison staffing and training

Staffing levels in some prisons have been low in the last few years. The shortage of prison officers has reduced some women’s access to a structured routine, day-to-day support, advice, and key work. However, it is the lack of probation staff across many parts of the country that has had a greater impact on access to good resettlement support in prisons. PDUs are directly responsible for staffing the pre-release teams (PRTs) who identify need in custody; all the PRTs we visited were perennially short staffed. Further, swift access to resettlement support for women relies on actions taken by community probation practitioners, who were often allocated too near to release due to the pressures affecting PDUs, as outlined above.

Most of the CRS providers contracted to deliver resettlement support in custody have struggled to recruit enough staff; poorly paid caseworkers typically moved on in short order, resulting in long gaps in support while the next recruit underwent prolonged vetting procedures. CRS staff are responsible for delivering help with housing, but they are not accommodation specialists and lacked enough training to navigate very complicated provision.

2.4. Interventions

Following the unification of probation services, the range of interventions being delivered was rationalised to create a more consistent offer across England and Wales. A recent analysis of inspection data (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2023b) indicated that when probation professionals make appropriate and timely referrals to planned interventions and services, and when they are

delivered well, people on probation are more likely to complete their time on probation,¹² show more progress in relation to offending-related needs, and are less likely to reoffend. The Probation Service provides three types of intervention: accredited programmes, structured interventions, and practitioner toolkits. Accredited programmes have been reviewed by the Correctional Services Advice and Accreditation Panel. They are higher-intensity group work programmes. Structured interventions are shorter than accredited programmes and are aimed at those with a lower risk classification; they are also usually delivered through group work sessions. Finally, practitioner toolkits are designed for use by probation practitioners on a one-to-one basis. They are, therefore, more flexible and can be adapted to suit the individual needs of the person on probation.

Accredited programmes

The only accredited programme available for women in the community is the Thinking Skills Programme (TSP). Recent research (MOJ, 2023c) on delivering TSP in prison showed that the programme had some positive impact on the rates of reoffending for women who completed it. In prisons, under 100 women had completed TSP in the six months to March 2023. In the community, we found that in the 12 months between June 2022 and July 2023, 166 women were required to complete TSP; by September 2023, only two women had completed the programme, and 42 were recorded as having started. Women were waiting significant periods to start the programme. As we found during our fieldwork, the number of women waiting for TSP in individual PDUs were so small that running women-only groups was rarely feasible. Therefore, if women were not joining mixed groups, they were unlikely to be able to access the programme at all. This caused us to question whether it should still be offered as a requirement as part of a sentencing option, or where other interventions that were more readily available could be used instead. Some regions were running women-only TSP groups, usually under an agreed alternative delivery format that meant they could offer sessions to smaller numbers of women than would usually be considered necessary for a group, or they were providing one-to-one sessions. While this increases the number of women who can complete the programme, the impact of delivering it in this way has not been evaluated to understand the implications. The value that group work brings through hearing other people's experiences and challenges from peers is lost when the programme is delivered in this way.

Nationally, there is insufficient understanding among those responsible for intervention policies of why referrals for TSP are not being made. Those responsible for TSP told us they have tried to address myths around eligibility criteria with court teams, but this has not led to an increase in numbers. Plans to make significant changes to the range of accredited programmes are underway. We were told that this will draw on the most up-to-date evidence for practical work with women and evaluate each programme's impact from the outset of delivery.

Structured interventions

Between June 2022 and July 2023, 1,041 women were referred to structured interventions; of those, 155 had completed them by September 2023. HMPPS has approved a range of structured interventions, including Developing Assertiveness for Women in Relationships (DAWN) and Fostering Identity, Resilience and Strengths for Women (FIRS4W), designed specifically for women. Probation regions choose which structured interventions they offer from the approved list; not all offer DAWN or FIRS4W, but women are offered the other available interventions, in some cases in women-only groups. As with accredited programmes, the number of women accessing and completing structured interventions is low. Those responsible for structured interventions nationally were unsurprised at the low numbers of referrals and completions we found. Some probation regions have been slow to get delivery up and running due to low numbers of staff in intervention teams. Referrals to structured interventions generally require a score of over 25 on the Offender Group Reconviction Scale (OGRS), a predictor of reoffending based on static risks: age, gender and

¹² 'Positive terminations' are where the order or licence runs its full course or where it is ended early by a probation professional to recognise good progress.

criminal history. While many women may present with the needs the interventions aim to address, not all will meet the OGRS criteria.

Toolkits

The main toolkit aimed at women is the First Steps to Change toolkit. This can be used with women of any risk classification or offence category, other than women convicted of sexually motivated offences, which another toolkit, Pathways to Change, is aimed at. It is recommended that practitioners complete foundation modules from the First Steps to Change toolkit but then choose which best applies to the woman they are working with. From previous inspections, we know that recording practices for toolkits are inconsistent and may not accurately reflect the level of use. Between June 2022 and July 2023, 2,227 women were referred to First Steps to Change; of these, 511 were marked as having completed it, although many had no sessions logged in their records. As with the other interventions, nationally there is insufficient understanding of whether the usage meets women's identified needs.

2.5. Services

Commissioned rehabilitative services

HMPPS guidance¹³ states that CRS should be used where:

- the individual's needs cannot be addressed by another indicated intervention (accredited programmes, structured interventions or community sentence treatment requirements)
- addressing the individual's needs can support their pathway out of offending
- CRS interventions will achieve the desired outcomes.

For women, CRS is designed to provide one holistic service, meaning a referral can be made to address a range of needs, but all services will be delivered by a single provider who holds the contract in the local area. Specific guidance relating to women and use of CRS¹⁴ sets out the 'pathways' or needs that can be selected. These are shown below, with indications of which are available in the community or before release:

- accommodation (community and before release)
- education, training, and employment
- personal wellbeing
- lifestyle and associates
- family and significant others
- emotional wellbeing
- finance, benefit, and debt
- dependency and recovery
- social inclusion (only available before and after release from prison).

For each pathway, practitioners are expected to select from a list of outcomes that they want to achieve through the referral. The CRS provider uses this information to create an action plan, which is returned to the practitioner for approval through the Refer and Monitor digital platform. Practitioners are also required to set a complexity level for each pathway. CRS providers do not have access to prison and probation case management systems, which hampers their ability to check the information they are given. In addition, practitioners have little understanding of

¹³ Guidance entitled When should I refer to external specialists? Guidance for referring to commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS), accessed via Equip.

¹⁴ HMPPS guidance entitled Working with women and commissioned rehabilitative services, accessed via Equip.

complexity levels, which can lead to inappropriate levels being set. A more collaborative approach to assessment between probation practitioners and the CRS providers would prevent referrals and action plans being sent back and forth and delaying the women accessing the support they need.

Surprisingly, the pathways do not explicitly include domestic abuse and sex work. These are significant areas of need, which are widely accepted to link to women's offending and are included in the expectations of the Women's Policy Framework as follows:

'Women at risk of, or who are victims of, domestic abuse, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, sex work, human trafficking and other forms of gender-based abuse, are identified and then supported according to their needs.'

As domestic abuse and sex work are not specific pathways, it is hard to assess the actual level of need. The limited criteria of the pre-release service mean many women are ineligible to access early support for issues they will undoubtedly face on release. Monitoring outcomes is extremely difficult due to the complex referral process. Scrutiny of CRSs by the National Audit Office (2023) raised concerns about the effectiveness of CRS contracts in general (not specifically those related to women). In our 2023 follow-up report on race equality (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2023a) we reported on the low number of local minority ethnic community organisations that were delivering services for people on probation under the CRS arrangements. In this inspection, we were similarly concerned to find that few providers had arrangements with specialist providers to support women from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. A notable exception to this was Advance, which holds the CRS contract for parts of the London region. Advance had good links with other organisations and was able to refer women to more specialist provision, such as Hibiscus, where needed.

2.6. Conclusions and implications

Expectations of the way services for women should be provided are now captured in policy and strategy. However, many aspects of delivery need to be strengthened to ensure they are in line with these expectations. For example, providing safe spaces for women to report to should not be considered optional. A range of interventions are available for women to offer a structured approach to addressing their needs. These draw on the evidence of what is known to provide the best chance of having a positive impact. However, few women are given the opportunity to benefit from these interventions, and there is too little understanding nationally of whether the interventions meet their needs. CRS offer an opportunity for women to be supported by organisations that are recognised as having specialist expertise in working with women; however, this process is hampered by a complicated referral process that fails to encourage meaningful collaboration to best meet women's needs. HMPPS has acknowledged the impact of this complexity and is redesigning contracts to simplify arrangements. A stronger focus on measuring outcomes is needed; to date this has not been done effectively. In addition, while contracts include service-level expectations, only some include quality measures. Although providers do provide information in varying ways through contract management review meetings, this needs to be more consistent.

3. Custody

In this chapter we explore our findings from fieldwork in prisons. The custodial part of this joint thematic inspection considered how well women's resettlement needs were identified and met before release, particularly for women serving short sentences.

3.1. Leadership

Resettlement support in women's prisons is adapted from the men's model, which has proven problematic. Women make up less than four per cent of the prison population, so there are far fewer prisons for them and none in Wales. As a result, the population in any women's prison is taken from a very wide spread of geographical areas. Under the current model, women get resettlement help from the commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS) provider in the area where they are released. This means that the population in a prison like Drake Hall, in Staffordshire, depends on as many as 15 different CRS providers, most of which are far away and will not come on site to see prisoners face to face.

We found that population pressures had limited women's access to resettlement support. This was because women serving short sentences were moved to Downview or Drake Hall in order to make space at Styal and Bronzefield for new arrivals from court. For women transferring out of Styal, this meant losing face-to-face access to the main CRS providers. Women sometimes arrived at these training prisons with just weeks to serve, which further hindered release planning.

The model for accessing support from a CRS provider is too complicated, disjointed and poorly staffed. The need for a pre-release team worker, community offender manager and CRS case worker to all play a part and take a series of separate actions builds in delays. These delays particularly affect women serving short sentences and women who have been recalled. We saw duplication of some tasks, partly because staff had improvised over long periods of time to overcome persistent gaps in the model and different processes had slowly been layered on top of one another. Some roles were ill-defined and, overall, there were too many different processes to follow before a woman could be given the help she needed.

Women we interviewed were often confused and struggled to understand who would help them. The lack of a familiar face with whom they could build trust was apparent. This was sometimes compounded by the limited ability of off-site CRS providers to provide updates or offer reassurance.

Responsibility for delivering support was shared across many different teams, which made it hard to hold anybody accountable for the outcome. Overall, we found a lack of joint working, as well as a tendency for one team to blame another for poor outcomes or a lack of input. Strategic meetings were not held regularly enough to hold the various teams and agencies to account. Regular multi-disciplinary meetings had been introduced in prisons to check for gaps in release planning for individual women. This was a sensible measure, but did not address these larger strategic flaws.

Relationships between prison leaders and CRS providers were sometimes distant and occasionally strained. Prison leaders had to rely on the probation service to supply staff for the pre-release team at the prison (who assessed women's needs) and to manage delivery of the CRS contracts. Governors and directors were sometimes unclear about the level and quality of service they could expect from CRS providers and were unable to take direct action to improve outcomes.

It was far too difficult for prison leaders to understand whether the resettlement work delivered by the CRS providers led to good outcomes. Only the Greater Manchester model required providers to deliver a tangible outcome, such as housing women on the night of release. Other contracts only measured processes such as assessing the woman and producing an action plan. Outcomes were typically measured when support ended in the community, so separating out the quality of help given in prison was very challenging. The lack of custodial referral pathways for issues like domestic abuse and sex work made it very hard to determine whether this specific support had been provided.

The introduction of strategic housing specialists and prison employment leads was very positive. Some of these staff were particularly driven and among the most impressive we met, but too often they had to compensate for deficiencies in the resettlement model. For instance, they spent time upskilling CRS workers to understand the intricacies of housing provision, rather than being able to adopt a purely strategic approach to improving outcomes. Some of these staff had introduced very useful resettlement fairs in the visits hall, which gave women approaching release a chance to meet different agencies.

3.2. The impact of short sentences

A principal aim of the Female Offender Strategy is to reduce the number of women being sent to prison, and particularly to reduce very short sentences, which cause immense damage and disruption to many aspects of women's lives, including housing, employment and childcare. We deliberately selected a majority of short-sentenced or recalled women for our case sample, and it was noticeable how much support and input they had missed out on. For instance, they were frequently ineligible to open a bank account; they often did not have enough time to gain a qualification or even improve their reading and writing; there was frequently no time to discuss their risk to the public; and they typically could not address the underlying causes of their offending or access therapeutic support.

An analysis of all the responses to prisoner surveys conducted by HM Inspectorate of Prisons in the nine closed women's establishments we have inspected since May 2021 is available [on our website](#). We disaggregated responses from women serving short sentences of under 12 months and found significantly poorer outcomes for them in some key areas. These women were more likely to have caring responsibilities for children under 18 years of age and more likely to have problems with housing, money and drugs and alcohol. While in custody, they were less likely to have had contact with useful sources of support like keyworkers, and their contact with friends and families was more limited. They were less likely to attend the library, gym, chapel or college, and they spent longer in their cells. Those with a mental health problem or a disability were less able to access help.

3.3. Assessment and planning

We found very high levels of need among the cases we inspected. The most common resettlement need was for housing, followed by help with finance, benefits and debt. The other main areas of need were education, training and employment, rebuilding relationships with children and families, tackling drug misuse, physical health problems, mental health problems and the impact of experiences of trauma and abuse.

The pre-release team in the prison were responsible for identifying women's resettlement needs. In about three-quarters of cases, they had developed a resettlement plan, and most plans were of a reasonably good quality, setting out actions that targeted the woman's needs. However, some assessments to inform the plan were cursory and too many were completed by phone rather than face to face. This was inappropriate, given that women were being asked to disclose sensitive and personal information such as experiences of domestic abuse and self-harm.

All of the pre-release teams we visited were short staffed, so they struggled to complete the sometimes very high number of assessments reliably and promptly. This delayed some women's access to support. The work of these teams was limited as they had to focus on getting assessments and plans done rather than providing any help to the women. Sometimes other resettlement staff and managers from other departments had developed ways to work around the pre-release team's inability to deliver work reliably; other times, because staff in the pre-release team fell under an unnecessary separate management structure to prison offender managers, the latter did not help with assessments even when they perhaps could have done.

We found that some managers had taken sensible approaches to improving the support the pre-release team could offer women. For instance, at Styal, where staffing allowed, team members worked with women from a particular region, which enabled them to develop expertise and build better working relationships with the CRS provider from that area. Co-location of the pre-release

team and the main CRS providers in the prison supported joint working, good communication and a swift response when release plans were uncertain.

Once a woman's needs were identified, support came from a number of different staff. Most notably, help with housing came from the CRS provider based in the woman's home area. CRS providers only engaged with prisoners after receiving a referral directly from a community offender manager. This requirement affected resettlement outcomes for women from areas like London with high numbers of community vacancies. In only half of the cases we checked did the community offender manager make a prompt referral to the CRS provider once alerted to the woman's need. Some pre-release teams could make their own referrals to CRS providers to hasten support, but, unhelpfully, others were still not allowed to do this. Although all our cases had been allocated to a community offender manager and almost all had spoken to them, typically on a video call, these staff usually carried high caseloads and were frequently allocated to work with women too near to the woman's release date to contribute fully to the pre-release phase of the sentence.

CRS providers we spoke to were not always aware of the true level of demand for their services in the prisons where they were not on site; other problems, such as short-staffed pre-release teams, meant that not all women who needed their support were being reliably identified and referred to them. As a result, the number of referrals to CRS providers was sometimes very low compared to the high volume of releases, particularly at Bronzefield. This suggests that many women's needs were going unmet.

All the women in our sample had a prison offender manager who was allocated to their case in a supporting role to their community equivalent. Often, we found that the proactive involvement of a prison offender manager helped to engage others who were responsible for helping the woman. This compensated somewhat for the deficiencies in the resettlement model described earlier.

The quality of public protection work in the cases we reviewed was mixed. There were barriers to fully effective risk management planning in most relevant cases; for example, the women's OASys risk assessments were not up to date. We found some examples of very good practice and we were pleased to see good communication between the prison and community offender managers in most cases. However, only two-thirds of the release plans we inspected took full account of the woman's risk of harm, either to herself or to the public. Some approved release addresses had clear implications for public protection. For example, in one case a woman was allowed to return to live very close to the victim she had previously harassed without safeguards being put in place.

3.4. Interventions and support

Remanded women in Styal and Bronzefield got too little help to address their immediate resettlement needs, either because they had been excluded from the CRS contract, or because the CRS provider and the pre-release teams were too poorly staffed to help them. The entire remanded and unsentenced population (including men and women) were not originally included in CRS provision in prisons. It was a significant omission, which has since been flagged up in numerous HM Inspectorate of Prisons inspections. Contracts are in the process of being amended to extend support to this group.

The lack of support to maintain tenancies, inform employers and manage debts while on remand had a knock-on effect when these women were sentenced, as many had little time left to serve and their problems had inevitably worsened. Since December 2022, HMPPS has provided a CRS contract at Bronzefield to support remanded women, but the CRS provider awarded the contract had been unable to provide adequate staff, so it was hard to see the impact.

CRS providers sometimes rejected referrals for women leaving prison on their sentence end date, as they would not be under supervision following release. This created a gap in support. CRS support is not available to people being supervised under post-sentence supervision arrangements. This meant that some women leaving prison without a requirement for community supervision simply took their problems with them.

Some sentenced women got very high-quality and meaningful support from their CRS case worker; however, overall, support was much too inconsistent and depended on the woman's release area. This meant that prisoners living on the same wing being released in the same week but to different release areas could receive very different levels of support, which was not fair or acceptable. The better CRS providers proactively identified women who were approaching their release date, and chased the necessary referrals from community offender managers so they could start working with them without the delays that others experienced. Prison and community offender managers were not always well briefed on what the CRS providers could offer the women they were supervising, so some providers had sensibly promoted their services in community probation offices and prison offender management units to increase awareness and generate referrals.

Only a minority of CRS providers attended the prisons, and those who did spent a lot of time answering questions from women from other release areas, because those prisoners had nobody to turn to for help and advice. Only about half of our sample had met a CRS worker face to face. Many relied on video calls, a practice that did not help to build trust with the more complex and challenging women. There were not enough video-link suites in Downview or Drake Hall to accommodate the volume of calls needed to speak to women nearing release. When the main CRS providers for the region attended a prison regularly, this generated more awareness of and confidence in their services and, consequently, more referrals. Their presence also promoted better joint working and integration with other resettlement staff. However, recruitment and retention were huge problems for CRS providers, and prolonged vetting processes for new staff resulted in long gaps in on-site attendance.

Information-sharing between the different teams inside the prisons and with community teams was reasonably good in about two-thirds of the cases we inspected. The biggest barrier to good communication was the decision not to allow all parties involved in release planning to access the same information systems. CRS providers could not access OASys, nDelius or even sometimes NOMIS to see important updates and risk information. They relied on referrals that sometimes either failed to provide enough risk information or focused solely on housing and failed to refer the woman for support for her other resettlement needs. Unable to access this information themselves, CRS providers sometimes sent back these referrals, further delaying help for women.

There was too little good-quality keywork to support resettlement planning. Most of the women had a keyworker, but less than half had regular contact with them and even when they had contact it did too little to explore or address resettlement needs.

A small minority of women accessed good opportunities to prepare for employment and rebuild family ties while released on temporary licence (ROTL). At the sites we visited there were very good links with employers such as The Clink, Iceland, Wagamama, Halfords, the London College of Fashion and Max Spielman, but only a small number of women were employed six weeks after release. Between April 2023 and February 2024, 11 per cent of all women released from the four prisons we visited and who were available for work were employed six weeks after release; this amounted to a total of 107 women.

Sometimes this was appropriate because of their caring responsibilities, but other women returned to prison repeatedly on short sentences and had not received the help they needed to address their chaotic lifestyles.

It was much too difficult for women to obtain their national insurance number. Department for Work and Pensions staff were no longer allowed to provide it; instead, an application had to be submitted to HM Revenue and Customs, which took weeks. This was a significant barrier to accessing employment, either on ROTL or on release. Coaching to write CVs and disclosure letters was delivered inconsistently; most women in our sample needed help with education, training and employment, but only half of them had received it.

Overall, there was too little support to help women manage their finances and tackle debt. This work had not been included in the scope of the custodial element of the CRS contracts. All the prisons had a worker who helped women to get identification documents and open bank accounts

where they were eligible. However, there were too many barriers to women successfully applying for a bank account and only a minority of applications were successful. For instance, women with an existing joint account could not open their own, even if they were in an abusive relationship. Only sentenced women could apply, and they needed to have more than six weeks left to serve. Offences as basic as theft disqualified women from applying to some banks. Processes to obtain birth certificates were more successful. It is now possible for women in prison to apply for a driving licence, but the need for a permanent release address disqualified many women.

Staff from the Department for Work and Pensions were available at all four sites to help women claim benefits. Some sites were running an encouraging pilot to activate women's universal credit claims at the gate on release, which gave them quicker access to funds.

Almost all of the women in our inspection sample needed help with housing, and we saw evidence of them getting reasonably good help. Almost all had somewhere to live on their first night of release, but HMPPS did not gather evidence to understand outcomes for women released from a particular prison beyond this point. A place to sleep for the first night is not a measure of success; only a third of the women we spoke to were being released to sustainable housing that was likely to last longer than three months. About half of the women we reviewed were being released to short-term accommodation such as approved premises, CAS2 or CAS3 accommodation. Where longer-term outcomes were recorded by other providers, they were typically less positive than data from the day of release. The current cost and scarcity of housing meant that sustainable accommodation was an increasingly unlikely outcome for many women.

Last-minute plans for accommodation were very common; about a third of the women we interviewed still did not know where they would be living when they were released, and about a quarter felt extremely anxious about their forthcoming release. In the period between October 2022 and September 2023, 1,928 women were recalled to prison, 68 per cent of these for failing to comply with their licence, most often through failing to keep in touch with their supervising officer, and 17 per cent due a new criminal charge.¹⁵ Women we spoke to who had been repeatedly recalled had become resigned to accommodation plans only being agreed at a very late stage. In one worrying case, despite the very best efforts of prison staff, there were plans for a woman with serious mental health problems, who was originally due to be sectioned under the Mental Health Act, to be released to just a night shelter. This was completely unacceptable.

There were no specialist housing workers in the prisons to undertake casework with individual women, which was a significant gap. There was not yet enough CAS3 housing for women in the right locations, particularly in London and the South East. It was not clear who was responsible for referring a woman likely to be homeless to her local authority; CRS providers said they were not contracted to do this, so the task usually fell to either a member of the pre-release team or the prison or community offender managers. Either way, it was confusing and could end up with the women slipping through the net.

In most of the cases we inspected, the women needed help to improve their thinking skills and decision-making, but only about 20 per cent had received any help. When we reviewed the quality of assessments and plans, thinking and behaviour was the most overlooked area of need. There were very few short pre-release courses to help women learn simple life skills like sustaining a tenancy, but a few CRS providers were just starting to provide them. Delivery of the accredited Thinking Skills Programme (TSP) was limited; nationally, fewer than 100 women had completed it in the six months to March 2023, and none of the women we interviewed had done it. Staff shortages had stopped it from running altogether at Downview.

Just over two-thirds of the women we interviewed had a history of trauma or abuse, but only about half of them had been appropriately supported. Nearly a third of our sample group were involved in sex work and about three-quarters were victims of domestic abuse, but there was not enough support for them. None of the prisons we visited had introduced specialist roles like an independent

¹⁵ Ministry of Justice (2024). Offender Management Statistics Quarterly: July to September 2023. Licence Recalls July to September 2023.

domestic violence adviser, independent sexual violence adviser or violence against women and girls worker. The need for this support was stark in some of the cases we inspected.

Children and families work was better staffed at Styal and Drake Hall than other establishments, particularly the former. Overall, there was very little evidence of release planning involving women's family or friends, so the planned introduction of full-time family resettlement workers at all the prisons we visited was a very promising initiative. This pilot scheme aimed to support women who were returning to a caring role with children and had 12 weeks or less until release. It would engage their families in release planning and included some post-release support. Many of the women we talked to had had their children removed, so the introduction of children's social workers at Bronzefield and Downview had been a very positive step.

Most of the women in our case sample had mental health problems and nearly half had a disability or protected characteristic that affected release planning. Overall, healthcare support for release met women's immediate needs; for instance, they were given a supply of medication. The biggest barrier to good health planning was the frequent lack of a confirmed release address until very late in the day, as this prevented community services from accepting referrals. Bridges to Health, a Through the Gate service in the South East, was running especially well at Downview, and provided women with strong support and advocacy before and after release. Reconnect, a scheme intended to help prisoners transition to community-based services, was not yet embedded. Most mental health services provided effective support and had good systems for facilitating community aftercare. However, waiting lists for talking therapies were long, which meant that women were often released without accessing this support, and getting an autism or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder assessment before release was challenging. Perinatal care and support for pregnant women ahead of release was very good overall. Support for women being released with drug and alcohol problems, including harm minimisation advice and the provision of Naloxone, was generally good. Prison staff who were helping women plan for release were not always told which health interventions the woman was engaging with, which was unhelpful. Sometimes some basic information could have been shared to support good release planning while maintaining medical confidentiality.

In Bronzefield and Styal, up to a third of all women released had been recalled. Recalled women often struggled to access help during some very short stays, and those in our sample of cases were not always given enough information about the reasons for recall or prompt enough access to legal advice. The closure of CRS referrals at the point of recall was an unnecessary further barrier to support, as by the time women were re-referred in custody, they were often very close to being released again. Managers at Styal had identified support for recalled women as a priority. There, women were allocated to their previous prison offender manager when they were recalled so that they did not have to keep explaining their circumstances. The planned introduction of a recalls officer to work intensively with the most frequent returnees was a promising initiative.

3.5. Day of release

There was too little Through the Gate support, where staff would accompany the most complex and vulnerable women on the day of release and advocate on their behalf, for example when attending the local authority to try to obtain accommodation. Only a third of the cases we inspected got this support, despite us seeing evidence of complex needs in at least another third. Their likelihood of recall was greater without this help.

Not all of the prisons we visited offered women a basic mobile phone. Given how much of daily life now depends on these devices, leaving prison without one was an impediment to successful resettlement. Not all of the prisons had a centre outside the gate¹⁶ where women could access support immediately after their release to make calls, charge phones, shelter from the weather and prepare for onward journeys after release. It was not always clear who was responsible for

¹⁶ The 'gate' is the boundary which denotes whether people incarcerated or not. In this context, the centre is on prison grounds but only accessible after women have been formally released.

delivering this service and sometimes it fell to the most motivated staff, who fitted it in around other duties.

We saw some good efforts to help women reach railway stations and make onward connections, but often the reporting requirements placed on some women on the day of release were much too intensive given the distances that they needed to travel.

3.6. Conclusions and implications

We met many dedicated staff who all too often were having to circumvent problems with the resettlement model. These included its overcomplicated arrangements, staff shortages, gaps in contract delivery expectations and lack of face-to-face help for women. A decent service often depended on these staff going far above and beyond their role, which was not a sustainable position. The complexities and confusion we have described had a direct impact on the quality of resettlement support that women could access in prison. Too many did not get prompt enough support that addressed all their needs, and those serving very short sentences or who were recalled for a matter of weeks were at significant risk of missing out on help. Where women had accessed good support and planning, it was much too hard to determine if they then achieved good outcomes. For example, HMPPS did not have access to data about the number of women released from a particular prison who were in sustainable accommodation three months after release; consequently, it did not know whether housing work completed at a particular establishment was effective. The help offered by CRS providers was far too variable and the lack of data on outcomes meant that we could not be assured that they offered an effective service. Overall, the current delivery model inserted too many potential barriers to success, and most managers we spoke to during our inspection queried its effectiveness. Meanwhile, the women we interviewed experienced varying levels of anxiety and frustration; they were grateful for the help they had received but too often uncertain about what would happen on release.

4. Approved premises

In this chapter, we report on our findings about women's experiences of approved premises,¹⁷ including leadership, management, and resourcing. From our inspection of the cases of 30 female residents, we describe how the experience of living in an approved premises affects women and the challenges of successfully moving on.

4.1. Overview of women's approved premises

There are nine women's approved premises in England and none in Wales; six are independently run, and several have opened in the past two years, which has expanded the total number of bed spaces to 165. The purpose of approved premises is to support resettlement and rehabilitation and to offer an enhanced level of public protection in the community. Most commonly, residents are individuals who have been released on licence from custody and who present a high risk of serious harm. Women's approved premises will also accept those posing a medium risk of harm who have complex needs. Individuals can also be required to live in approved premises when subject to a community or suspended sentence order, although this is uncommon. During their stay, residents are expected to spend an agreed number of hours on rehabilitative activity, which may include educational, employment, resettlement, and health-related activities. These may be groups organised by staff on site or external activities that are approved as purposeful. Two of the approved premises run by the Probation Service are designated as Psychologically Informed Planned Environments (PIPEs). These aim to support people on probation who have been identified as potentially having a personality disorder and assessed as posing a high risk of harm. These facilities have additional staffing (a probation officer and a psychologist) to support the additional needs of residents.

4.2. Leadership, staffing and resources

The oversight of three probation-run women's approved premises sits under a regional approved premises management structure within the Community Accommodation Service Directorate alongside male-approved premises. There are 95 approved premises for men, 80 of which are run by the Probation Service. Inevitably, most of the staff and managers in the regions work with male residents. Most approved premises managers we spoke to felt that their line managers and the wider directorate did not understand the specific needs and profile of the women's estate, and were more familiar with and focused on the far larger male estate. As a result, they did not feel well supported in their roles. Some efforts have been made to reduce the sense of isolation felt by women's approved premises managers. For example, women's approved premises network meetings had recently recommenced at the time of our fieldwork. Managers also spoke positively about the Women's Complex Case Approved Premises Panel, which discusses the needs of women who are hard to place, and considers risk management issues and good practice. This increased the level of contact and collaboration between women's approved premises managers and improved their understanding of each other's facilities and provision. Nonetheless, feelings of isolation and frustration at not being fully understood persisted.

We were also concerned about how their facilities were resourced, as the model is the same in the women's estate as the men's. Managers and staff told us that women spend more time in the premises because they are almost always away from their home area and unfamiliar with the local area. Guidance produced by NOMS, entitled *Better Outcomes for Women Offenders* (NOMS, 2015), says that, to engage in rehabilitation, women need first to feel safe from harm, and positive relationships with staff are crucial to achieving this. Building trusting relationships takes time, and staff in women's approved premises feel this acutely. Staff in women's approved premises spend

¹⁷ Approved premises are premises approved under Section 13 of the Offender Management Act 2007 to provide accommodation for persons granted bail in criminal proceedings or in connection with supervision or rehabilitation of persons convicted of offences.

much of their time trying to build a sense of safety with residents, the majority of whom will have experienced significant abuse and trauma in their lives. Women depend on staff more frequently than men for emotional and practical support, and this greater demand is not accounted for in the staffing model. Due to the profile of residents in the PIPE approved premises, the regime designed to support them is reflected in the higher number of staff. However, the profile of women we saw in non-PIPE premises included extremely complex needs that warranted greater resources than were available. At present, in non-PIPE probation-run premises, staffing consists of a manager and probation services officers, who are responsible for offering keywork sessions to residents and residential workers, with some administrative support. The workload for managers is significant in terms of the depth and breadth of the role and unsustainable in the long term due to the high numbers of additional working hours needed to keep on top of all responsibilities. In the PIPE approved premises, we saw the addition of a probation officer, whose role is akin to a deputy manager, as essential. This person provided valuable practice-based experience and risk management knowledge to the facility. The input of psychologists was also highly valuable, both directly with residents to support their needs, and with staff to help manage the emotional labour of working long hours with complex, traumatised women. Some approved premises have also been creative in looking for other support that they can draw upon. Crowley House has built a relationship with a local university and takes occupational therapy students on placement, who deliver sessions with residents as part of the programme of rehabilitative activities. Staff, students and residents all spoke positively about this additional resource.

Facilities management was an area of concern in probation-run approved premises. We saw many examples of issues that posed a risk to the safety and wellbeing of residents and staff, including an external security gate that had not been working for several years, leaving the premises vulnerable. Internal maintenance issues also affected the welfare of residents; for example, one approved premises had doors that were loud and difficult to close, which was triggering episodes of post-traumatic stress disorder for a resident during night checks. Despite the best efforts of staff to mitigate the disturbance, remedial building work was needed to address the issue. Keeping on top of facilities management issues was described as a constant battle for managers and staff. This detracted from other duties, as staff had to repeatedly chase up requests that were not responded to in a prompt or satisfactory manner. Some approved premises continue to have shared rooms. This can lead to inappropriate relationships between roommates and disputes over property, which staff find hard to manage.

Independently run approved premises have more freedom to define their own staffing model and provision, in addition to minimum expectations in their contracts. Most include a deputy manager or a probation officer in their structure as an essential role. Independently run approved premises can also fundraise and commission other services, due to their flexibility over budgets; this allows some to offer clothing allowances and other support that isn't possible in the probation-run estate. Some have also been able to commission additional psychological or counselling services due to the high demand for this input from the residents. The flexibility also allows them to be more responsive to issues that arise, such as facilities management, as often there are in-house arrangements to attend to straightforward repairs and maintenance.

The occupancy rates across the women's approved premises showed significant variation. Target occupancy is set at 90 per cent; however, except for one of the PIPE approved premises, for the majority of the period we examined (June 2022 to July 2023), occupancy in each premises fell below targets, in some cases significantly so for extended periods. Occupancy in approved premises is dynamic and can be subject to sudden change if women are recalled to prison or fail to arrive as expected. Occupancy, recall, bed withdrawal and lengths of stay are all monitored by senior leaders; however, while individual approved premises undertake a range of actions to raise awareness of their facilities to drive up occupancy, more needs to be done to ensure parity across the estate.

4.3. Referral process

To obtain a bed in an approved premises, probation practitioners complete a referral, which is processed by a central unit. Following administrative checks, the referral then goes to the preferred premises to consider. If rejected, it will be forwarded to the next choice until a placement is offered or options exhausted. Staff told us of the delays that occur in this process, firstly as the referral is sometimes wrongly sent to the male central referral unit, and then there are potential delays at each premises that reviews it. Plans are in place to change this process to bring it into line with the male estate. In future, a single approved premises manager will check suitability and identify the most appropriate premises, albeit managers of the individual approved premises will still be able to decline a referral if there is a legitimate reason for doing so.

As part of our fieldwork, we inspected the records of 30 women who had lived in approved premises to understand the impact of this experience. Most of these women had been resident as part of their post-release licence arrangements; only two were on community orders. Most women had been referred due to public protection concerns. Despite what we heard from many approved premises staff about the volume of late referrals, with few exceptions, most cases we inspected had been referred in as timely a way as the circumstances of the case allowed. The quality of referrals was mixed. Approved premises managers reported that they often have to chase up missing information. In some cases, prison-based staff may be more appropriately placed to provide details of suicide or self-harm assessments that have been completed in prison or current medications that the women are prescribed. Staff in some independent approved premises do not have access to the Offender Assessment System (OASys) and therefore rely on the referral to cover all details they need.

Not all probation practitioners knew that women who present a medium risk of serious harm could be referred to approved premises, as this differs from the male provision. We also found that court-based probation staff rarely considered recommending residence at approved premises as part of a community or suspended sentence order. In fact, from information provided by the probation service, we found that only seven such requirements were made between August 2022 and July 2023. Given that the Female Offender Strategy aims to reduce the number of short-term prison sentences, this is a missed opportunity. Of the 60 cases we inspected in our main sample, only two had plans that involved approved premises; however, we found examples where a stay at an approved premises could have offered much-needed support and rehabilitation and enhanced public protection. An example is provided below.

Poor practice example

Beata was sentenced to a 24-month community order for an offence of attempted arson two years after the offence was committed. She was re-sentenced from a previous 18-month order that she did not comply with. The victim of the offence was her partner, whom she described as abusive. Police intelligence confirmed multiple call-outs to the couple as a result of reported domestic incidents, where Beata had been the victim of physical and emotional abuse from her partner. They suspected Beata's partner supplied her with drugs as a means of control. In one incident, he had set light to the tent she was sleeping in while the couple were rough sleeping. Despite this abuse, Beata was described as seeing her partner as her only source of support, as she was isolated from her family and had no income. Beata had had a child with her partner, who was immediately removed from her care and had subsequently been permanently adopted. She was not originally from the UK and, at that time, had no leave to remain or recourse to public funds. Beata had a history of drug use and poor mental health, which had included episodes of repeatedly putting herself at significant risk of harm. She had a history of hoarding rubbish, including rotting food, which she had been physically prevented from eating by mental health staff. She also had to be forcibly removed from the back of a refuse lorry where she was scavenging while the vehicle was operating, risking being crushed by the mechanism.

Beata attended initial appointments on her new community order, but this quickly deteriorated to sporadic telephone contact, as she reported that she had moved out of the area and, using a false name to obtain it, had been provided with housing by a charity. There was no evidence that her probation practitioner contacted the charity before requesting her case be transferred to the new area. No completed risk assessment was recorded on the second community order; therefore, no viable risk management plan that addressed the risks and needs in the case was presented. Beata quickly fell out of contact with probation, and until concerns were raised as part of the inspection, little activity took place to locate Beata or confirm her safety. Subsequent enquiries revealed that she had been granted leave to remain two years previously, which had changed her status and the support available to her.

At neither the court assessment nor during her supervision was residence in an approved premises considered for Beata, which could have offered her much-needed support and stability.

4.4. Being resident

Where circumstances allowed, most women in our sample had been contacted by someone from the approved premises before arrival via a facilitated video-link call from prison or a telephone call to discuss their stay and provide information about the approved premises. Usually, their allocated keyworker made this contact, which provided an opportunity to start building their relationship. At the start of their stay, most women had a residence plan that covered their expectations and considered their specific physical and emotional needs. Plans set out what rehabilitative activities would be delivered to help the women build skills to support their resettlement. All women in our sample received timely, comprehensive inductions at the start of their stays.

Despite continuity of care being a stated priority in the National Partnership Agreement for Prison Healthcare in England,¹⁸ too often women are not released with access to necessary medication. This can be complex and time-consuming to rectify. We were given examples of women with serious health conditions and addiction needs being left unmedicated for a number of weeks. One approved premises manager summarised the views many expressed by saying:

“Medication needs to be investigated as it is a logistical nightmare.”

Issues are often compounded when women arrive late in the day having travelled long distances, particularly on Fridays, as limited medical services are accessible at weekends. Getting appropriate support for mental health issues while women were living in approved premises was also a problem. Managers often felt they were having to manage women with high levels of need without adequate specialist support. To overcome this, Elizabeth Fry approved premises have funded extra time from a clinical psychologist to allow better liaison with local mental health services and try to improve access for residents. One manager summarised the position by saying,

“Services are only available at crisis point and pay little attention to prevention.”

Almost all the women had regular keywork sessions during their stay, and most of these helped to address their resettlement needs. While residence plans were not always formally reviewed in a specific document, the content was usually reviewed through keywork sessions, and positive progress or emerging concerns were recorded and discussed. Rates of self-harm and suicidal ideation are high among women in the criminal justice system, and we found that these issues were identified and recorded in almost all of the examples we inspected. However, reviews of this information were sometimes missed, despite significant changes. Overall, we found that staff supported residents’ safety and wellbeing exceptionally well and showed excellent knowledge and

¹⁸ HM Government and NHS England. (no date). National Partnership Agreement for Health and Social Care for England: Improving the quality of services for people in prison and those subject to statutory supervision by the probation service in the community 2022-2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/healthcare-for-offenders#national-partnership-agreement-for-adults-in-england-2022-to-2025>

awareness of their residents and the risks they faced. The residents we met regularly praised the time staff spent with them and the depth of the relationships they had built.

Women are often placed far from their home area due to the geographical dispersal of women's approved premises. While we found that contact between approved premises staff and the probation practitioners responsible for residents was sufficient in most cases, staff and residents expressed concern about the level of contact the women had with their probation practitioners. Video and telephone calls were used to facilitate contact, but women often didn't feel they had a meaningful relationship with their practitioner. Arrangements are only made for a local practitioner to caretake the case in the highest risk cases, which puts additional pressure on approved premises staff to meet the women's needs. Being away from home also requires women to make temporary links with other support services, which then have to be re-established when they move on from the approved premises.

Most approved premises provide an extensive and varied schedule of activities to help women build practical skills or develop better emotional and social management skills. All the approved premises we visited had a good range of activities that women could choose from. An innovative example of a project at Edith Rigby approved premises is provided below.

Good practice example

Edith Rigby approved premises had created a small cooperative business called Deeds Not Words, inspired by the suffragette movement. The manager had secured grant funding to create and buy merchandise, including sweatshirts, t-shirts, colouring books and pens. These are then sold at a fortnightly market in Preston and online. Residents work in shifts to gain employment and social skills. They have also attended conferences to speak about the project and sell items. The principle behind the business is to create a sustainable community, designed and led by the women, which eventually will lead to a shop that provides employment and a move-on tenancy in the community, with an outreach service. The project aims to instil hope in women that they can achieve social change regardless of their background or socio-economic status. More details about this endeavour can be found on their website: www.deedsnotwords.net.

User Voice heard many positive views from women about their experiences of approved premises. A typical example is provided below:

"I feel safe and supported here because support is available twenty-four hours a day and the other girls are great. There are twenty-one activities a week available and three meals. I know it's a privilege to be here because I was in one in London years ago that was awful so when they first said I was going into an approved premises I was dreading it!"

Where women were less positive about their experience, this often related to being placed too far from home.

4.5. Moving on

The women in our sample generally stayed longer than was anticipated in their referrals. Often, this was because they did not have an appropriate move-on address. Residents in just over half of the cases we considered had clear move-on plans, and the lack of one often caused high levels of anxiety. Women's mental health sometimes deteriorated because they did not know where they would be going when their residence came to an end. While all approved premises managers told us they would never evict a woman who had nowhere to go, the fear of this was a concern for many residents. If women could not return to their home area, due to restrictions on their licence or risks to them that would be present there, plans were challenging to form. Women sometimes wanted to resettle nearby after spending time in approved premises and forming links with local

services. However, local authorities do not accept that as a local connection and will not provide accommodation. Therefore, unless a private rental option is found, women are sometimes forced to move again and build another new support network. Seven of the 30 women in our sample were still residents at the time of the inspection. Of the residents who had moved on, six had gone to settled accommodation independently or with friends or family, nine had gone to transient accommodation of some sort, the status of one was unknown and the remaining seven had been recalled to prison.

Unfortunately, approved premises placements do not always go smoothly. We saw good use of improvement plans in some approved premises to avoid recall or bed space being withdrawn. Some women in our sample absconded and, therefore, had to be recalled to prison as their whereabouts were unknown. Others broke the terms of their licence, or their behaviour deteriorated to the extent that they could not be safely managed in the community and had to be recalled to prison. Each approved premises reported experiencing problems with arranging for women to be promptly arrested when things had gone wrong, and their licence had been revoked. Delays caused significant issues for staff, who had to continue to manage the women within the premises, often with their behaviour deteriorating further and causing unrest for other residents. We heard examples of police taking several days, and in the worst examples up to two weeks, to take women back into custody. These situations are unsafe for the women, staff and other residents.

We found positive examples of approved premises using move-on as a good way to review progress and, if appropriate, reflect on what could have gone better. The below illustrates this.

Good practice example

At Edith Rigby, before women move on, staff arrange a 'cake and coffee' ending meeting. This is used to discuss the woman's experience of the approved premises and reaffirm the positive progress made during their stay. As women often form strong relationships with staff, it can be hard for them to leave the support they have found, and this meeting offers an opportunity to express this and identify strengths they can draw on. Even where the move-on has not been positive, every resident receives an ending letter that reflects on their time there, drawing out any positives and reflecting on what went wrong and how things could be improved in the future. Women may return to the approved premises on a future release; therefore, it is important to continue to build the relationship.

4.6. Conclusions and implications

Women's approved premises are not adequately resourced by the generic staffing model set out in the Target Operating Model. Women's gender-specific needs are not sufficiently supported through the current management structure, where women's approved premises are in the minority compared to the vastly larger male estate. Staff work hard to meet the needs of extremely complex women in challenging circumstances, and women were generally positive about the range of activities and support provided. However, women's approved premises are not adequately supported by poor facilities management arrangements, which can leave residents and staff at risk. Overall, approved premises are underused. Opportunities are missed to use approved premises to support women as part of community orders, particularly when a proposal could be made at sentencing to provide an alternative to custody.

5. Community sentence management

In this chapter, we share our case inspection findings and consider how effectively sentences are delivered to women on probation. First, we examine the quality of court work and pre-sentence reports (PSR). We then consider the activities that take place after sentencing, which include assessment and planning, and delivering interventions. Finally, we examine the services that the Probation Service uses to support women and address their needs.

5.1. Regional and PDU leadership

The recruitment of a women's lead at senior probation officer (SPO) grade in each region has been a positive development since our last inspection. In the strongest models, women's leads had formed good links with the teams or individual practitioners who were managing women. They held regular meetings with practitioners to share research and other information with them. In most areas women's leads had also sought to build links with interventions teams and commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS) providers to understand how things were working and drive improvement. Staff often spoke highly of the knowledge and expertise of those in the roles. The women's leads report to a senior regional leader. This is often a probation delivery unit (PDU) head who holds a thematic responsibility for women alongside their core role. SPO women's leads were working hard to raise the profile of women and to make progress against the women's strategy, but they did not always have the level of seniority to effect meaningful change in their region against other competing demands. Regions, and even individual PDUs within regions, were therefore at very different stages of progress with the women's agenda, often as a result of the level of staffing challenges that they have faced since the unification of services.

Some regions had convened complex case panels that aimed to support practitioners in managing women with multiple and challenging needs. In the best examples, these included partner agencies, which enabled the panel to make progress in unblocking access to services in some cases.

Not all PDUs had arrangements in place to support women who did not feel comfortable reporting to mixed-gender spaces. Some PDUs had women-only reporting times. However, we were frequently told that this was not always respected and that, often, men would still be present in waiting rooms during these times. We had concerns about these reporting times being advertised, for example, by posters on the wall in reception areas, as this could draw attention to the times that vulnerable women were likely to attend offices. For women who worked or had childcare commitments, these times were often inconvenient. In Greater Manchester, we were impressed with the model whereby the women's team was co-located at the women's centre for part of the week. This offered greater flexibility to women on when they could report and offered a safe environment where they could access other services. The probation practitioners spend the remaining part of their week in the main probation office. This helps them to retain links to the wider probation service.

5.2. Court work

Overall, we found a reasonably good standard of court reports in our sample; 28 out of the 47 we inspected offered a sufficiently gender-informed assessment and sentencing recommendation to the court. Most were written as short-format written reports, although a small number were oral reports. Inspectors considered the report type appropriate in most cases. However, in four of the seven verbal reports, we assessed that a more comprehensive written report was needed to ensure the women's complex needs were fully explored. The Ministry of Justice has recently published an evaluation of a PSR pilot aimed at improving the quality of and judicial confidence in PSRs (MOJ, 2023d). Under the pilot, women were identified as the priority cohort and, as such, received a written report instead of an oral version. While the evaluation concluded that all stakeholders agreed that women were a priority cohort and that it was therefore essential to maximise their opportunities to have a PSR of some kind, it stopped short of saying that written (rather than oral)

reports should always be used, as this removed the professional judgement of the author. Our sample indicates that this judgement does, however, need to be used cautiously to ensure that women's offending is adequately understood and analysed to make appropriate sentencing proposals.

HMPPS has created an aide memoire for preparing and writing court reports on women. This provides some statistics on women's offending and guidance for staff on how to ensure they consider experiences of trauma as part of their assessment and gender-specific issues that they should consider. Court staff in some areas told us they found this helpful, while others were unaware of it or of any specific strategy for working with women. Few court-based staff had received training on interviewing and writing reports on women. Some had attended training about trauma-informed practice, but this was not consistent across all regions. In Greater Manchester, court staff had participated in training about the impact of trauma, which was delivered by the Greater Manchester Women's Support Alliance (GMSWA). This umbrella organisation incorporates the nine women's centres in the Greater Manchester area. Staff who had attended this training said they benefited from the knowledge and expertise the GMWSA provided. In some regions, court teams had a nominated member of staff who was the lead for working with women. Their role was to keep colleagues updated with relevant information about practice with women, such as changes in available interventions. Where the designated staff member was interested in working with women, this proved helpful; however, in other areas, the role was ill-defined, and the staff member was unclear about what was expected, which made it hard to see the value it created.

Most court offices tried to allocate women's reports to female staff members, availability permitting. In all cases, it was unclear whether the woman had been asked whether she preferred to be interviewed by a male or female. Of the 47 reports we inspected, 32 were authored by women and eight by men. In seven cases, it wasn't possible to tell from the records.

PSR authors in many areas told us it was often difficult to access information from other agencies to inform their assessments. All regions had arrangements in place for court staff to access information from their local police force, such as domestic abuse histories; however, we found that this information was missing from 13 of the reports we inspected. Accessing records from outside the local police force area was more difficult, as this was not covered by local arrangements. Obtaining information from children's social care services was also challenging; information was slow to be provided and often the content was insufficient to meaningfully inform the assessment. When asking whether a woman's children had previously been involved with their services, a typical response probation staff received back was 'not current'. This did not allow practitioners to consider why the children had come to their attention and whether the woman's current offending behaviour indicated the re-emergence of any previous issues. In our court report sample, two-thirds of the women had children. Over half were not in their care permanently or temporarily at the time of sentencing. Nevertheless, in almost all cases, we assessed that the children had been sufficiently considered within the report.

Good practice example

Jane was sentenced to a 12-month community order with 20 rehabilitation activity days for failing to send her teenage daughter to school. This was her second conviction for an offence of this type. The report thoroughly analysed Jane's relationship with her adolescent daughter. It explored her own experience of the care system and rejection by her mother. This had led to her creating a friendship rather than a parental relationship with her daughter, which was directly relevant to her offence. Information about Jane's socio-economic status was included, detailing her multiple children at three schools and no car, meaning the child in question had a long walk to school.

The report analysed Jane's thinking and behaviour, and rather than describing an emerging pattern of behaviour regarding school attendance, the author explored Jane's intentions for her

children. It concluded that absence from school was not intentional but rather a symptom of other problems.

The report's author used information from the police and children's social care services. This provided a current picture of Jane's motivation to work with children's social care services. This had greatly improved, and barriers to school attendance were starting to be addressed. Police information disclosed that Jane had been both a perpetrator and victim of domestic abuse and provided some context, detailing Jane's frustration with her ex-partners' lack of financial contribution to their children. Strengths were also identified, as Jane had recently gained employment for the first time in 10 years and demonstrated her willingness to work with children's social care, which had not previously been the case.

This report demonstrated a gender-informed approach, where the author took time to understand the background of Jane's offending fully and explained this to the court to achieve a community order that would support her and her children.

Obtaining information from mental health or health services was challenging. This meant that court report authors sometimes had to rely on the women's description of any diagnosis of health conditions. Most court staff had better access to information from drug and alcohol services. We concluded that only 55 per cent of the court reports we inspected drew sufficiently on available sources of information; in some cases, critical information included in previous probation assessments was overlooked.

Staff in court teams often told us they felt isolated from the rest of the probation service, and that this meant that they were not always aware of interventions and services that could be included in a community order. Some court staff were unclear about which interventions were available for women, and they did not have sufficient knowledge to explain what these would entail to the woman. In some cases, this lack of knowledge also affected recommendations for unpaid work; for example, court report authors were unclear about whether women with health conditions or childcare commitments could be accommodated, and ruled out unpaid work requirements when these could have been beneficial. In areas with a specialist women's team, court staff sometimes consulted with them to discuss sentencing proposals. Still, this approach was inconsistent, and not all areas had specialists to draw on. Similarly, staff delivering interventions told us that they are rarely contacted to discuss women's needs. In some cases, the lack of consultation led to women being returned to court due to unsuitable requirements being included. In West Berkshire, the probation service had an arrangement with Alana House, the local women's centre in Reading, to provide pre-sentence assessments. The women's centre also recommended services that women could be linked to while on a community order, in order to strengthen recommendations, particularly where women are at risk of custody. Disappointingly, not all report authors knew about and were using this service. Court report authors had mixed views on the Effective Proposal Framework, a digital platform aimed at ensuring consistent and effective intervention when proposals are made at sentencing; some found it a useful check to ensure they had fully considered all options, while others felt it added little to the quality of their recommendations.

In Greater Manchester, we found an excellent example of innovative court work using a whole system approach involving the probation service, HM Courts and Tribunal Service and the Greater Manchester Women's Support Alliance when we visited the women's problem-solving court. The model has a positive impact on the women who engage with it, and many elements could be taken from it in terms of offering praise, pro-social modelling and celebrating success. An overview is provided below.

Good practice example

As part of its wider whole-system approach, Greater Manchester Combined Authority has operated a problem-solving court (PSC) for the past nine years. The scheme is aimed at women who are at risk of being sentenced to a short term in custody, or a medium to high level community order, who have complex needs linked to their offending. Where women show some motivation to address their problems, a requirement for the PSC can be added to their order, through which they will attend for reviews every six to eight weeks. Reviews take place in an adapted court room where magistrates sit around a table with probation staff and the woman whose situation is being reviewed. Women with a PSC requirement are allocated a keyworker at a women's centre, who supports their needs alongside the allocated probation practitioner. For each review the probation practitioner provides a progress report that describes progress made and identifies any areas for improvement. The magistrates conducting the review use the report as a basis to support and encourage the woman to use all available services to continue making progress. Where needed, they talk about the potential consequences of not engaging. Over 400 women have successfully completed their requirements under this scheme since 2017 and in 2021 the reoffending rate for adult women in Greater Manchester was 15 per cent, compared to the England and Wales average of 20 per cent.¹⁹ Cost-benefit analysis completed as part of the PSC evaluation showed that for each £1 invested in running the scheme, £17.60 was saved through less use of other services.

Inspectors observed the PSC in action as part of the fieldwork and its impact on the women who attended was clear. Being praised by someone in authority for being present or for making improvements to their health and lifestyle had a significant impact on the women, some of whom reported they had rarely been praised in their lives, and certainly not from those in authority. The experience also helped them to feel more confident and positive in other settings, such as family courts, where many had had negative experiences.

In most cases we inspected, recommendations set out in the court report were followed. The small number of sentencers we met during fieldwork spoke highly of probation staff, who they reported were often short-staffed but nonetheless always tried to serve the needs of the court.

5.3. Assessment and planning

Allocation

Models for allocating women's cases varied across PDUs. Where there was a specialist women's team, or a 'concentrator' within a generic team, women were usually allocated to them. However, if workloads were high, or no specialisms existed, women could be allocated to any available practitioner. In our case sample, we only found female practitioners managing the cases; however, in focus groups we met male officers who were, or had been, managing women. We hoped to see that women had been asked whether they would prefer to have a female practitioner, but this was only apparent in two of the cases we inspected. Research supports the assumption that most women would prefer to have a female officer; however, this is not always the case, so women should be given the option.

In determining whether a probation officer or a probation services officer was the appropriate grade of staff to manage the cases, some managers were concerned that applying certain registers on a woman's nDelius record, linked to their vulnerabilities, could lead to their tiering increasing unnecessarily, meaning they would have to be allocated to a probation officer. Their concern was

¹⁹ Female Offender Strategy Dashboard. Available at: [Microsoft Power BI](#). Accessed 27 March 2024.

that risk and need then become conflated and women are considered to present a higher risk than is actually the case.

Assessment

Once allocated to a probation practitioner, all people on probation should have an assessment made of their needs and the risks they pose to inform sentence planning. Good practice would engage the person on probation in their assessment to maximise their compliance in their sentence. We found that in just over half of the inspected cases, women were engaged in their assessment and their views were considered; unexpectedly, women managed by practitioners who identified themselves as women's specialists were less often involved in their assessments. Less than half of the assessments sufficiently analysed the women's motivation and readiness to engage in their sentence. This often meant that foreseeable barriers to their success were not considered and mitigated. Women's strengths were mostly identified, and factors linked to their offending were accurately identified in most cases we inspected. *Better Outcomes for Women Offenders* (NOMS, 2015) identified seven priority needs that interventions and support should target in order to move women away from offending. These are: addressing substance misuse, addressing mental health needs, building emotional management skills, helping women develop and maintain a pro-social identity, improving ability to control lives and achieve goals, improving family contact, and helping women resettle and build social capital. We found that most of these factors were considered well. The exception was developing a pro-social identity, which was only sufficiently considered in 35 per cent of relevant cases.

Women's offending involves a risk of harm to others less often than men's offending. Nonetheless, some women do commit serious offences. Twenty-eight of the women in our sample had committed violent crimes, and 14 were assessed as posing a high risk of harm to others. In just over three-quarters of the cases we inspected, the assigned risk of harm level was reasonable; the remainder were split evenly between being deemed too high or too low. Common themes among those we disagreed with were that aspects of the women's current circumstances were not fully taken into account in the assessment. For example, in some cases, factors linked to the woman's offending were all still present, but their risk level had been reduced without adequate explanation. In some cases, important factors in the women's lives that reduced the likelihood of causing further harm were no longer present, but this had not been acknowledged in their assessment. We concluded that in 39 per cent of cases, the assessment had not accurately identified and analysed the risk of serious harm the women posed to others. Specialist women's practitioners more frequently provided better assessments of factors linked to the risk of harm than non-specialist counterparts. In addition, we assessed that just over half of assessments had adequately assessed risks to actual and potential victims.

Where we found deficits in assessments, these often related to a failure to fully analyse information that was known. For example, important events in the women's lives were usually included but there was no analysis to explore their impact. Examples of this included traumatic childhood events, care experience, childbirth and child loss. Assessments failed to consider how the individual had been affected, what support they had had to recover or how these experiences continued to affect them and linked to their offending behaviour. Assessments failed to sufficiently consider trauma that the women had experienced in 47 per cent of inspected cases.

We concluded that less than half of the assessments provided a sufficiently gender-informed, accurate picture of the risks and needs the women presented and this was even lower for Black and minority ethnic women.

Planning

We expect people on probation to have plans in place that address their needs, the risks they pose and their safety and wellbeing. For women, we expect these plans to set out gender-appropriate activities aimed at helping them to move away from offending behaviour and live safely in the community. Too often, women were not involved in planning their sentence and their motivation

and readiness were not sufficiently considered. Plans in just under half of inspected cases failed to build on women's strengths and protective factors, although factors linked to offending were addressed in most cases. Areas of need that were most commonly insufficiently addressed were mental health, developing a pro-social identity and improving family contact. Plans were more likely to address issues linked to general offending than issues linked to risk of harm, and even less likely to sufficiently cover the safety and wellbeing of the women, where over half were insufficient. In some cases, plans did not incorporate activities set out in PSRs to address the women's risks and needs. For women who had been supervised previously by the probation service, plans did not always address how past non-compliance had informed the current plan. In some cases, there was no evidence of planning until months into the sentence. An example of insufficient planning is provided below.

Poor practice example

Di was sentenced to a 12-month community order after committing criminal damage to her aunt's car while under the influence of alcohol. She had several previous offences that involved violence and aggression after drinking alcohol to excess. Di had struggled to cope since her mother passed away, and her alcohol use had escalated.

While the practitioner discussed plans for Di's order with her, they did not consider her strengths and protective factors; for example, she had already started to engage voluntarily with a substance misuse support organisation. Planning noted the need to address alcohol use but did not determine how this would occur or how progress would be measured. Plans also failed to consider the issues behind Di's alcohol use. Di had been a victim of domestic abuse and rape and had also previously tried to take her own life; none of these areas were considered in the plan, and emotional wellbeing and mental health were not identified as priority areas to address. Although Di's aunt had been the target of her aggression, there was no mention of their current relationship or how she would be kept safe. Planning indicated that Di would be referred to the women's CRS provider but did not detail the specific aims of the referral or how progress would be assessed. Due to a poor-quality referral to CRS, the resulting action plan did not sufficiently address Di's needs. There were several potential barriers to Di engaging with appointments, for example she had financial problems and would have to travel long distances to attend probation or CRS appointments, but these were not addressed. No other interventions or activities were included in the planning. When interviewed, the practitioner said she didn't understand how to deliver one-to-one toolkits and, therefore, had not included this activity.

There was no contingency plan setting out what would happen if Di failed to engage in planned activities or how changes in factors linked to risk would be managed.

Overall, inspectors deemed the planning in Di's case to be insufficient, as it failed to address the underlying causes of her behaviour or to address her specific needs.

Where women had dependent children, we found that less than half of plans adequately addressed safeguarding concerns. Themes here included a lack of detail about how known risks to children were to be managed. When the children were already subject to child in need or child protection plans, there were generic statements, such as that children would be referred to children's social care services if risks increased, with no detail about how the probation service would feed into this work.

Too few women were being given access to the suite of available interventions. Only four plans included an accredited programme, seven included a structured intervention, and 11 referenced plans to use a toolkit, eight of which were First Steps to Change and three were not named. Where interventions were planned, it was rare to see exactly which needs they were aimed at addressing or how impact or progress would be measured. Of the 60 inspected cases, 41 had had no plans for

any probation-delivered intervention; of these, 20 had been assessed as posing a medium risk of serious harm, 13 a high risk, and one a very high risk. While inspectors only identified one further woman in the sample who may have benefited from an accredited programme, they identified seven where a structured intervention could have been offered and 27 where an approved toolkit could have been included in the plan.

Just over half of the women had been referred to CRS, and in approximately two-thirds of these cases the practitioner had identified appropriate pathways that the women needed support with. The quality of referrals to CRS was of some concern. Only 56 per cent were of sufficient quality and included necessary information on risk. Less than half of the resulting CRS action plans adequately addressed the women's needs.

Overall, planning activity left much room for improvement. Too often, important aspects of women's risks and needs were not addressed, and we concluded that approximately two-thirds failed to sufficiently address the risks and needs the women presented.

5.4. Sentence delivery

Reporting arrangements

We found significant differences in reporting arrangements for the women in our sample. Just under a quarter were offered the opportunity to attend women-only spaces for all aspects of their sentence. Most of these women were in Stockport and Trafford or Cardiff PDU, where the women's team were co-located at women's centres for part or all of their working week. A further third had the same opportunity for some, but not all, elements of their order. Just over a third were not offered women-only spaces for any aspect of their sentence delivery. We were not always able to tell if a conversation had taken place to discuss what 'women-only' meant in the context of the specific premises, for example if male staff may be present.

We were pleased to find that the frequency and nature of, for example, face-to-face or telephone appointments offered to women were generally suitable to meet their risks and needs. This was an improved picture from our core inspection findings during 2022 and 2023. Appointments were generally meaningful. They linked to the women's identified needs in more than half of the cases we inspected, and half demonstrated consideration of sequencing activity appropriately. Where other people were involved in delivering aspects of the sentence, practitioners maintained sufficient contact with them in over three-quarters of the inspected cases.

In our last inspection of services for women (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2016), we recommended that probation services²⁰ should refer women to women's centres whenever possible. Only 33 per cent of women in our sample were referred to a women's centre. Use of women's centres varied significantly, as not all PDUs had one in their local area; even where they did, in some cases, they were not being fully used to facilitate probation appointments, despite the centres being open to this in many cases.

Engagement

Probation practitioners routinely made good efforts to enable the women to complete their sentence. We found this to be true in 87 per cent of inspected cases. Strategies used included flexibility about appointment times and locations, to take into account the woman's personal circumstances. In some cases, however, we saw a high number of acceptable absences, with little evidence of efforts to set the order back on track. In the worst cases, women were not seen for long periods of time and appointments were moved from one week to the next repeatedly with no checks made to verify the reason they could not attend. In these cases, practitioners often told us they believed this aligned with trauma-informed practice, which we felt was a misunderstanding and unhelpful in supporting the women to feel safe and understand boundaries. Enforcement was only

²⁰ This inspection only considered the work of the CRCs and therefore the recommendation addressed our findings in relation to them.

used appropriately in just over half of the cases where it was required. Offering some flexibility is entirely appropriate; however, not seeing the woman and allowing sentences to drift does little to address the underlying causes of their offending and therefore is unhelpful. A positive practice example that demonstrated appropriate flexibility is detailed below.

Good practice example

Wendy was made subject to a 12-month community order with rehabilitation activity requirement days. Wendy had a busy life, with dependent children and caring responsibilities for her mother. She had part-time employment and was also required to complete a course and attend appointments directed by children's social care services. Wendy's probation practitioner took time through her assessment to understand her commitments and took her lifestyle into account in planning. On occasions when Wendy contacted them to say she could not attend an appointment, arrangements were made to meet the following day. This was often a home visit, which provided an opportunity for the practitioner to check that Wendy was not being avoidant due to deteriorating home circumstances. During school holidays, arrangements were made to ensure that appointments were offered at times that suited Wendy's childcare needs. Where possible, the practitioner took time to verify any reasons for non-attendance and shared information with children's social care services to ensure that Wendy was presenting a true picture of her circumstances during probation appointments. From the outset, there was a focus on encouraging Wendy to think about how she could attend the appointments she was required to, and her practitioner was clear about what would happen if she failed to do so. Wendy was given clear boundaries about what was negotiable, and where possible given choices that promoted ownership of her sentence. Throughout her sentence, Wendy was praised for progress she made and encouraged to think about how this had been possible, in order to support her in tackling future challenges.

Overall, there was a good focus on building and maintaining effective working relationships with women. This was notably better in PDUs where the women's teams worked from women's centres rather than in PDUs that did not have that arrangement. Important elements to building relationships included allowing sufficient time for discussion, active listening and demonstrating interest in the woman and her hopes for the future. Research for this inspection completed by User Voice found that women on probation felt that practitioners showing an understanding of their life and personal circumstances was key to developing a good relationship. Comments such as the one below were common among those who felt they had a good relationship with their practitioner:

"My relationship with my probation officer was great and she asks me and listens to me about my life worries and about potentially what is going to happen [...]in the future."

Safety and wellbeing

Too often, women's safety and wellbeing were not adequately considered during their sentence. Sufficient attention had been paid to keeping the women safe or addressing risks to their welfare in less than half of the cases we inspected. The picture was slightly better for Black and minority ethnic women, where these concerns were adequately considered in just over half of cases. Many of the women in our sample had experienced domestic abuse, and this was not always fully considered; for example, when women in violent relationships stopped attending probation appointments, this did not always prompt any checks on their welfare. Some of the women in our sample engaged in risk-taking behaviour, often driven by addictions to drugs or alcohol; however, we saw little evidence of efforts to consider ways to reduce potential harm in these cases. Where women had failed to comply with their sentence and practitioners had taken enforcement action and were waiting for a court date, some felt they no longer needed to make efforts to contact or engage with the woman, despite indications that they could be at risk. One practitioner told us:

“Once I have done the breach paperwork, I do not think about them again until the case is heard.”

Reviewing and outcomes

Reviewing practices left much room for improvement. Too few women were involved in reviewing their sentence, and in too many cases, practitioners carrying out reviews failed to consider progress made or to amend plans to reflect changes in the risk of harm or need. Annexed to this report (Annexe B) we have provided a data table showing our judgements about progress made against the areas of priority need set out in the *Better Outcomes for Women Offenders* (MOJ, 2015) document. The cases we reviewed were at various stages of their sentence, and therefore we would not expect to see many where outcomes were fully achieved. Nevertheless, relatively few had made sufficient progress in the areas that were relevant to their individual needs. Emotional management and building a pro-social identity were the needs where the least progress had been made.

5.5. Intervention delivery

Overall, we saw very few examples of probation-delivered interventions, despite many women in our sample having a range of needs that the programme is designed to meet.

Accredited programmes

The only accredited programme currently available for women in the community is the Thinking Skills Programme (TSP). Although four women had TSP in their sentence plan, only two had received any part of it. Of these, one had attended a pre-group session and one group session but had failed to participate due to a deterioration in her mental health and increased substance misuse, and ultimately was recalled to prison. The second woman had also failed to attend and had the requirement removed. Given the long waiting times described in the earlier sections of this report, we were not convinced that continuing to offer TSP as a requirement for women was a viable option, as so few women who have this as part of their sentence get the opportunity to attend, given the long waiting times for appropriate or women-only groups. Many staff told us that, while these women have needs that the programme would address, they often had chaotic lives, making it unlikely that they will attend a lengthy, structured programme. In one region, a TSP group had recently started with eight participants but had quickly dropped to only three. Programme delivery staff told us that women who complete the programme gain much from it; however, often, staff have to provide it through an alternative method, such as one-to-one sessions, to ensure that women complete it. This seems an inefficient way to address the women's needs and undermines some of the purposes of group work, for example peer support and challenge. In some areas we were told that when women did not feel comfortable in a mixed-gender group, they had to ask the court to remove the requirement, as staffing pressures and low referral numbers prevented women-only groups from being run. Some practitioners we met were not familiar with the content of TSP and had never spent time observing group work. Some told us that when women described feelings of anxiety about attending a group, this would sometimes be deemed an acceptable reason for not attending. Little effort was made to try and overcome their concerns and empower them to attend. None of the cases we inspected had completed TSP; therefore, we could not see first-hand how post-programme follow-up work was completed. We heard from programme facilitators that practitioners did not always do this well or continue to work on follow-up objectives, which devalued the programme's overall impact.

Structured interventions

Of the seven women who had structured interventions included in their plans, only one woman had attended any sessions at the time of our inspection. Not all regions offered one of the structured interventions explicitly created for women, but other interventions, such as the Stepwise courses, were available to be delivered in mixed-gender or women-only groups, depending on demand. Most areas have low numbers of women referred; therefore, few structured interventions are offered. As

practitioners then doubt that the interventions will be provided, they are reluctant to refer, which becomes a vicious circle.

In some regions, programme staff were working through lists of all women to try to identify those suitable for structured interventions to generate referrals; practitioners in those areas tended to know little about structured interventions or what the eligibility criteria were, as they expected someone else to tell them if women should be attending. In one region, practitioners told us that they were expected to refer all women to a structured intervention. This did not meet our expectations about personalised sentence planning and delivery that has clear aims. Programme facilitators and managers told us that the generic structured interventions did not seem to have been designed for women; for example, all video clips used were of men. The lack of consideration potentially starts right from the sentencing stage, as the interventions are delivered as part of rehabilitation activity requirement days. The specific structured intervention is not set out in the court report, and many court staff told us they were not familiar with the details of each course. As they are not court-mandated requirements in the same way as accredited programmes, there are fewer formal mechanisms (other than management oversight of individual cases) to ensure they are delivered. In addition, probation practitioners told us they often were not sure how to determine whether women's needs were best met through structured interventions or groups offered through the CRS provision.

Practitioner toolkits

As with the other interventions, we saw little delivery of practitioner toolkits in the cases we inspected. Plans for 11 women said that a toolkit would be delivered, yet only two had any evidence this had been done in the case records. Practitioners had mixed views on the First Steps for Change Toolkit, often expressing a lack of confidence to deliver it. Some regions had delivered briefings or workshops to familiarise practitioners with the content. However, some practitioners still reported that they needed to know more about delivery techniques, as they had not routinely delivered interventions as part of their practice. This was particularly apparent with newer staff. Another reason for low use of the toolkit was the prioritisation framework for sentence management: if a PDU has red or amber status due to low staffing levels, delivery of the toolkit is not expected.

Unpaid work

In our sample there were 11 women with requirements to complete unpaid work. As part of the induction process, an appropriate placement should be identified. This should take account of whether the woman would prefer to be in a women-only space to complete her hours, either in an individual placement or as part of a group project. Some women are happy to work as part of a mixed gender group but it is important that this is carefully considered. Of our inspection cases, we found that gender-appropriate placements had been sufficiently considered in only two. We saw cases where unpaid work requirements had had to be returned to court to be removed, as the only appropriate placements for women were inaccessible because of lack of transport. In some cases, the original sentence had been passed without any probation involvement, meaning the woman may not have been suitable to complete an unpaid work requirement. In two regions we were told about the low proportion of women with unpaid work hours to complete who were actively doing so, although national data shows that women usually have a higher compliance rate than men.

In other cases, there had been a report but no specific communication between the report author and the unpaid work team to determine whether a requirement was appropriate or possible to deliver. In several cases a woman had specifically asked to be given a women-only placement but had been placed in a mixed group. An example is provided below.

Poor practice example

Anya was subject to a 24-month suspended sentence order with requirements to complete 180 hours of unpaid work and 40 rehabilitation activity requirement days for fraud offences. She had previous convictions of a similar nature. Anya reported that she had a diagnosis of post-traumatic

stress disorder and other health-related conditions. She asked to be placed on a female-only placement to complete her unpaid work hours. However, her unpaid work assessment stated:

‘Not suitable for individual placement due to conviction and previous convictions. No female-only work groups due to staff numbers.’

Anya was placed on a mixed-gender working party. At one site, she expressed concern about the toilet facilities, which were subsequently checked by a male staff member and deemed appropriate for her use. He took photos of the facilities to support his judgement. He told Anya’s probation practitioner that he had said if Anya did not want to use the facilities, she could leave the site and find an alternative placement, but that this may result in enforcement action due to her leaving the site. Anya sent an email to her probation practitioner raising concerns about the facilities and asking that she come and inspect them; she said that her medical condition meant she needed regular access to a toilet and stated that she was uncomfortable with them. Anya explained that this was the third time she had complained about the facilities. She said:

“Take into consideration I am the only female working on a Sunday with 10 other men, but nobody understands my situation.”

Despite this request, she continued to be instructed to attend, with no evidence that her probation practitioner discussed her concerns with her. Inspectors reviewing the case judged this situation to have been poorly handled. They noted that, in the photos taken by the unpaid work supervisor to support his assessment that the facilities were suitable, there did not appear to be any sanitary bins to dispose of feminine hygiene products, which Anya may not have felt comfortable discussing with male staff; however, no discussion took place.

In some cases, induction and assessment paperwork contained inconsistent and conflicting information, with some incomplete sections. The lack of attention to detail in some cases led to poor-quality assessments. In some regions, unpaid work inductions were completed in groups, with no provision for women who were not comfortable in mixed-gender groups. While individual staff sometimes ensured that women who asked not to be put in a mixed group were given an individual induction, the approach was inconsistent. It relied on the woman being asked questions in a way that made them comfortable enough to be honest about their feelings.

The range of placements available for women varied considerably. Some regions had little to offer for women who were not comfortable in mixed groups due to previous abuse or negative experiences with men but who were not deemed suitable for individual placements. These are usually facilitated in charity shops, but they often will not accept women with theft-related or violent convictions. Some regions had excellent placements for women to complete their hours, which provided meaningful opportunities for women to give back to society and develop new skills. In West Berkshire PDU, a small number of women could complete their hours at the local women’s centre, Alana House. They had completed coffee barista training and were running a small coffee shop within the facility. In other women’s centres, women used unpaid work hours to sort out clothing donations or make ‘dignity packs’, which provide essential supplies to support basic hygiene needs for those in need. In the Effective Practice Guide accompanying this report, we have also featured a cookery project in Barry, South Wales, which used donated food items to provide hot meals for the local community as part of the food bank provision. At the time we visited, they had just provided their 2,000th meal. While the placement was not exclusively for women, it provided a suitably safe and meaningful placement where women learned new skills and could see the positive impact of their work.

5.6. Services

Just over half of the women in our sample who required support from commissioned rehabilitative services (CRS) had been referred, although referral rates varied across the PDUs and not all

referrals had resulted in any sessions being delivered. In just over a quarter of cases, we deemed that sufficient progress had been made in delivering CRSs; however, in approximately a third there had not been, mainly due to the woman not complying with appointments. In a further 39 per cent, progress was insufficient due to the lack of opportunity that been offered, through late referral or lack of appointments.

CRS staff did not have directed access to probation case management and assessment systems, which hampered the referral process. We heard from a variety of providers that referrals often did not contain all the information they required, and they had no access to check or add detail other than by rejecting the referral, although most felt the quality of referrals was improving. For some providers who had previously worked with probation services, the lack of access to systems was a backward step, as many had had access when operating under previous contracts. CRS staff relied on probation practitioners updating them on any changes or emerging concerns in the women's lives that they needed to know about, as they could not see any information that was recorded after the initial referral or even know when the woman's next appointment was with their probation practitioner. Recording of CRS appointments did not always make clear which elements of their action plan were being addressed, or how the contact was adding something additional to the 'check-in' style appointments that the woman was having with her probation practitioner.

In some cases, we saw progress in CRS delivery, and women engaging with the provision who previously had not complied with probation appointments. An example is provided below.

Good practice example

Lara was sentenced to an 18-month suspended sentence order with 35 rehabilitation activity requirement days following a conviction for harassment. She had a number of previous convictions for violent offences linked to alcohol misuse. Lara had long-standing alcohol dependency and had experienced numerous abusive relationships and long periods of homelessness. Lara's attendance at probation had been inconsistent. Lara was referred to Nelson Trust under the CRS provision. Her appointments focused on the most critical areas of need, particularly housing and relationships. Lara had relied on partners for somewhere to live, as she did not believe she could cope alone. This had led to her being trapped in abusive relationships. CRS staff set small goals with Lara to work towards bigger aims, and she responded well to the praise she received when she completed actions. Lara had concerns about managing her own accommodation, but with support and motivation she gained confidence and obtained her own tenancy. Lara's probation practitioner started to sequence appointments alongside Nelson Trust appointments, away from the probation office. Her attendance and engagement in those appointments also improved.

Women were not always sufficiently prepared for CRS appointments; for example, they did not understand the purpose or status of them. In more successful cases, we often saw joint appointments and efforts made to help women understand what CRS was intended to provide.

In addition to CRS, just over a third of women in our sample had also been supported by additional services. These were mainly mental health or drug and alcohol support services, but some areas also had strong links with services providing support to sex workers. Practitioners had varying levels of knowledge about specialist support services available for women in the local area, for example for women from ethnic minorities. Most practitioners were able to name some services. Those in specialist women's teams were generally better informed than those who were not.

5.7. Conclusions and implications

While court reports for women usually provided a sufficiently gender-informed assessment, recommendations to the court were sometimes affected by the author's lack of up-to-date knowledge about sentencing options. Opportunities were missed to involve women in assessments

and planning, which led to significant life events and the women's circumstances not being adequately analysed to understand their impact on their lives and offending behaviour. Practitioners need to be clearer about how to choose the best options to address women's offending, and whether to use CRSs or in-house interventions. More focus is needed on exploring women's individual identities and building pro-social lifestyles, yet interventions and services available to support this are underused. Concerningly, women who have reported concerns about being in mixed-gender spaces due to previous traumatic experiences are not always offered the choice to attend probation appointments or unpaid work in appropriate settings, which is unacceptable. Women's safety and wellbeing are not always sufficiently considered. Better communication with organisations providing rehabilitative services is needed to ensure women receive a joined-up approach.

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Annexe 1: Glossary

Accredited programme	A programme of work delivered to offenders in groups or individually through a requirement in a community order or a suspended sentence order, or part of a custodial sentence or a condition in a prison licence. Accredited programmes are accredited by the Correctional Services Accredited Panel as being effective in reducing the likelihood of reoffending
CRC	Community Rehabilitation Company
EPF	Effective Proposal Framework, a digital platform created by HMPPS to improve consistency and effective intervention proposals in court
ETE	Education, training and employment: work to improve an individual's learning, and to increase their employment prospects
HMPPS	HM Prison and Probation Service: the single agency responsible for both prisons and probation services. See note below on NOMS
IDVA	Independent domestic violence advisors: provide support to survivors of domestic abuse living in the community and assessed as being at high risk of further domestic abuse
Integrated Offender Management (IOM)	Integrated Offender Management brings a cross-agency response to the crime and reoffending threats faced by local communities. The most persistent and problematic offenders are identified and managed jointly by partner agencies working together
Keyword	Keyworkers are band 3 prison officers who are allocated to promote rehabilitative and constructive relationships between staff and prisoners in order to foster positive behaviour
MAPPA	Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements: where probation, police, prison and other agencies work together locally to manage offenders who pose a higher risk of harm to others. Level 1 is ordinary agency management, where the risks posed by the offender can be managed by the agency responsible for the supervision or case management of the offender. This compares with levels 2 and 3, which require active multi-agency management
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
nDelius	National Delius: the approved case management system used by the Probation Service in England and Wales
NOMS	National Offender Management Service: until April 2017, the single agency responsible for both prisons and probation services, now known as HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS)

NPS	National Probation Service: a single national service which came into being in June 2014. Its role is to deliver services to courts and to manage specific groups of offenders, including those presenting a high or very high risk of serious harm and those subject to MAPPA
OASys	Offender assessment system currently used in England and Wales by the Probation Service to measure the risks and needs of offenders under supervision
Offender Group Reconviction Scale (OGRS)	OGRS is a predictor of reoffending based on static risks: age, gender and criminal history
Partners	Partners include statutory and non-statutory organisations, working with the participant/offender through a partnership agreement with the Probation Service
PDU	Probation Delivery Unit
Providers	Providers deliver a service or input commissioned by and provided under contract to the Probation Service. This includes the staff and services provided under the contract, even when they are integrated or located within the Probation Service
PSC	Problem-solving court
PSR	Pre-sentence report. This refers to any report prepared for a court, whether delivered orally or in a written format
PO	Probation officer: this is the term for a 'qualified' responsible officer who has undertaken a higher education-based course for two years. The name of the qualification and content of the training varies depending on when it was undertaken. They manage more complex cases
PSO	Probation services officer: this is the term for a responsible officer who was originally recruited with no qualification. They may access locally determined training to 'qualify' as a probation services officer or to build on this to qualify as a probation officer. They may manage all but the most complex cases depending on their level of training and experience. Some PSOs work within the court setting, where their duties include the writing of pre-sentence reports
Rehabilitation activity requirement (RAR)	From February 2015, when the Offender Rehabilitation Act was implemented, courts can specify a number of RAR days within an order; it is for probation services to decide on the precise work to be done during the RAR days
Thinking Skills Programme (TSP)	An accredited group programme designed to develop an offender's thinking skills to help them stay out of trouble

Annexe 2: Methodology

This inspection sought to answer the following questions:

Does the vision and strategy drive the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for women?

- Does the leadership effectively drive delivery of the vision and strategy?
- Do the governance arrangements, the operating model and delivery plans translate the vision and strategy into effective practice?
- Does strategic decision making enhance and enable effective practice?
- Is the vision and strategy informed by women with lived experience of the criminal justice system?

Are staff empowered to deliver a high-quality personalised and responsive service for women?

- Do staffing and workload levels support the delivery of a high-quality service to women?
- Is learning from audit, inspection and reviews used sufficiently to inform work with women?
- Are all staff who work with women given sufficient training and guidance to understand the specific needs of women who offend, including intersectionality?
- Do staff working with women receive effective supervision and oversight of their work?

Is a comprehensive range of services and interventions in place for women?

- Is sufficient analysis undertaken through court work and initial assessment and to identify the needs of women and provide an appropriate range of gender-informed interventions for women?
- Is the volume, range and quality of services sufficient to meet the identified need?
- Are there appropriate interventions available to cater for the diverse needs of all women?
- Are the interventions available for women sufficiently aligned to the current evidence base?
- Are there appropriate quality assurance measures in place for all interventions?
- Is there sufficient analysis of the delivery of interventions and services, including potential disproportionality of outcomes?

How well do practitioners support desistance?

- Do practitioners sufficiently engage the women at each stage of their sentence?
- Do assessment, planning and reviewing practices effectively identify, analyse and address the offending related needs of women?
- Does resettlement planning focus sufficiently on the individual's resettlement needs and on factors linked to offending and desistance?
- Do women participate in and complete appropriate and timely interventions?
- Does sentence delivery sufficiently address factors linked to risk of reoffending?

How well do practitioners manage risk of harm?

- Do assessment, planning and reviewing practices effectively identify, analyse and address and the risk of serious harm posed by women?
- Does resettlement work take sufficient account of factors related to keeping other people safe?
- Does sentence delivery sufficiently address factors linked to the risks of harm women pose?

How well do practitioners support the safety and wellbeing of women?

- Do assessment, planning and reviewing practices effectively identify, analyse and address effectively risks to the safety and wellbeing of women?
- Do practitioners take sufficient account of the safety and wellbeing of women when delivering interventions and services?
- Do practitioners sufficiently engage with other organisations in relation to the safety and wellbeing of women?

Are arrangements with statutory partners, providers and other agencies established, maintained and used effectively to deliver high-quality personalised and responsive services?

- Is there sufficient participation in strategic partnership initiatives, agreements and policies aimed at addressing women's offending?
- Is communication and information-sharing with partner agencies and other services effective?
- Are arrangements with partner agencies and other services reviewed regularly to improve and develop delivery?

Expert reference group

An expert reference group contributed to this report by advising on strategic and operational issues associated with women in the criminal justice system. The group represented stakeholders' perspectives and commented on emerging findings and final recommendations. Group membership included:

- Professor Loraine Gelsthorpe, Emeritus Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge
- Cat Hemmings, Assistant Chief Officer for Beds, Cambs and Herts Police, NPCC lead for women who offend
- Sam Julius, Clinks, Head of Influence and Communications
- Jude Kelman, HMPPS Women's Estate Lead Psychologist
- Professor Simon Pemberton, Professor in Social Policy and Criminology, Birmingham University
- Sonya Ruparel, Women in Prison, Chief Executive
- Dr Gilly Sharpe, Lecturer in Criminology, Sheffield University
- Pia Sinha, Prison Reform Trust, Director
- Cordelia Tucker O'Sullivan, Revolving Doors, Director of Policy, Research and Communications
- Professor Tammi Walker, Principal of St Cuthbert's Society and Professor of Forensic Psychology, Durham University
- Emma Wools, Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales and Senior Responsible Officer for the Women's blueprint.

Fieldwork

Our fieldwork inspected the work of six probation delivery units (PDUs): Worcestershire, West Berkshire, Stockport and Trafford, Camden and Islington, Cardiff and Vale and Bath and North Somerset. Our fieldwork sites included metropolitan and more rural areas, to ensure that we gained a rounded picture. Fieldwork was completed between October and November 2023. We inspected two samples during the fieldwork; the first was a sample of 60 women subject to a community order, suspended sentence or licence between 01 July 2023 and 31 July 2023. For these cases, we inspected the quality of the case management work and interviewed the probation practitioner, where possible. We drew our samples from lists provided by the probation service of the women in

each PDU being supervised during our chosen time period. The reporting system used by the Probation Service only allows this list to be created using 'sex' rather than 'gender'; therefore, our sample only included women whose sex was recorded as female.

In our second sample, we looked at 30 cases where the women were residents in approved premises during July 2023. The approved premises were: Bedford, Elizabeth Fry, Edith Rigby, Hestia Highbury, Crowley House and Eden House. Three of the approved premises we considered were independently run and two were Psychologically Informed Planned Environments. We looked at the women's experiences in the approved premises for these cases but did not examine case management work.

During each fieldwork week, we held meetings with a range of staff, managers, senior leaders, and operational and strategic partners. We also spoke to a small number of sentencers and ad hoc groups of women receiving services when we met them during visits to approved premises or women's centres.

The custodial component of this joint thematic inspection was completed in November and December 2023. Inspectors from HMI Prisons visited four closed women's prisons: two larger prisons serving the courts (Bronzefield and Styal) and two training prisons (Downview and Drake Hall). We interviewed 42 women, mostly sentenced to 12 months or less, about their experiences of resettlement provision. We also reviewed the help they had been given by reading their files and talking to the different staff involved. We also interviewed a wide range of managers at each site.

Both inspectorates joined together for a final fieldwork week, where we met those responsible for women's policy and strategy at a national level.

We commissioned User Voice to undertake remote semi-structured interviews with people on probation. Consultants with lived experience of the criminal justice system gathered the views of 77 women who had been managed by the Probation Service or lived in approved premises. We have included examples of the opinions gathered in the relevant sections of this report, and a copy of the full User Voice report can be found [on our website](#).

Characteristics of the main probation sample

Age	No.	%
18–25	4	7%
26–35	28	47%
36–55	23	39%
56+	4	7%
Race and ethnic category	No.	%
White	43	72%
Black and minority ethnic	17	28%
Other groups	0	0%
Does the person on probation have a disability?	No.	%
Yes	25	43%
No	33	57%
Type of case being inspected?	No.	%
Licence	11	18%
Post-sentence supervision	5	8%
Community order	30	50%
Suspended sentence order	14	23%

Annexe 3: Data tables

Table 1

Please state the impact of the work undertaken in relation to the following outcomes (where relevant):		
a) Substance misuse:	No.	%
Outcome achieved	2	4%
Sufficient progress	6	13%
Insufficient progress	29	62%
Deterioration	10	21%
Not applicable	13	-
b) Mental health – enabling access to mental health treatment:	No.	%
Outcome achieved	0	0%
Sufficient progress	16	28%
Insufficient progress	37	64%
Deterioration	5	9%
Not applicable	2	-
c) Emotional management:	No.	%
Outcome achieved	0	0%
Sufficient progress	11	19%
Insufficient progress	42	74%
Deterioration	4	7%
Not applicable	3	-
d) Pro-social identity:	No.	%
Outcome achieved	0	0%
Sufficient progress	11	24%
Insufficient progress	33	72%
Deterioration	2	4%
Not applicable	14	-
e) Being in control of daily life and having goals:	No.	%
Outcome achieved	1	2%
Sufficient progress	16	29%
Insufficient progress	34	61%
Deterioration	5	9%
Not applicable	3	-
f) Improve family contact:	No.	%
Outcome achieved	1	2%
Sufficient progress	12	27%
Insufficient progress	29	66%
Deterioration	2	5%
Not applicable	16	-
g) Resettle and build social capital:	No.	%
Outcome achieved	0	0%
Sufficient progress	12	24%
Insufficient progress	34	67%
Deterioration	5	10%
Not applicable	9	-