Justice Committee
Scottish Government’s Draft Budget 2014-15

Written submission from the Scottish Working Group on Women’s Offending

The Scottish Working Group on Women’s Offending (SWGWO) welcomes the opportunity to submit written evidence to the Justice Committee.

The Scottish Working Group on Women Offenders has a broad membership, details of which are included as a footnote. Many of the organisations involved have also submitted evidence to the Justice Committee and we endorse their comments.

SWGWO welcome the Scottish Governments position on prioritising preventative spend throughout the budget statement in particular its focus on

- Women offenders
- Children and young people
- Victims of domestic abuse and violence against women

Justice Budget

The Scottish Governments commitment to continue to invest in the Reducing Reoffending Change fund over the next two years is very welcome. We would recommend that this continued investment be utilised, at least in part, to fund the existing Public Social Partnerships (PSPs) that have only recently commenced. This includes a national PSP to provide mentoring support to women offenders. These services will be at a premature stage to provide the necessary robust evidence of effectiveness when the existing Change Fund financing ends in March 2015.

In response to the recommendations of the Women’s Commission the Scottish Government have invested funding into the establishment of 3 Women’s Centres in Edinburgh, Fife and Dundee. Additional funding has also been awarded to Community Justice Authorities in the past month to develop additional support services for women offenders including ‘one stop shops’ and the creation of multi-agency dedicated women offender teams. A pilot Diversion project in Glasgow has galvanised support for women while in Police custody and diverted them from the Courts and possible prison sentences.

In common all of these projects have short term funding. The challenge to securing the sustainability for these projects is to develop robust evidence of the effectiveness and subsequent savings within the system and then to redirect this funding. This takes time. We would request the continued support of the Scottish Government during this period of shift towards preventative spend.

The criminal justice social work budget has no increase and is expected to remain at the same level for the next 2 years. This will undoubtedly make it very difficult for this budget to be used to continue the funding of the various projects whose funding will end within the next year or so.
Many organisations involved with SWGWO are from the third sector. Many of these same organisations receive funding from the criminal justice social work budget. The standstill budget allocation for criminal justice social work is obviously a concern for these third sector organisations. That and Short term funding is a significant issue for these organisations.

SWGWO welcome the Scottish Governments commitment to investing in new fit for purpose prison facilities for women offenders. The numbers of women in prison is of real concern to SWGWO especially when crime rates are at an all-time low. Our wish is for a reduction in the numbers of prisoners and a corresponding reduction in the number of prisons. Our hope would be that these same resources could instead be invested in community alternatives. There are many more women offenders resident in our communities than in prison.

Information about the Scottish Working Group on Women's Offending

Information is at:

SWGWO was established at the start of 2011 and comprises a group of organisations and individuals concerned with all issues surrounding women’s offending in Scotland. The group wishes to see true equality for all women across the criminal justice system, and to sharpen the focus of policy makers on those women with mental health and learning disabilities and those women from a background of sexual abuse, addiction and substance misuse, as well as support for their families. The group would ultimately like to see that these women and their families are supported to move away from the criminal justice system towards a healthier future.

In particular the group’s aims are:

- to address the issues of why women offend;
- to ensure that the appropriate support is given to women offenders and their families;
- to work to reduce the numbers of women imprisoned;
- to reduce the numbers of women throughout the criminal justice system.

SWGWO has co-authored some publications with the Scottish Consortium on Crime and Criminal Justice, which can be viewed at http://www.scccj.org.uk/index.php/scccj-publications/#Women%20Offenders

SWGWO has received support from SCCCJ in the past and currently receives funding from “Positive Prison? Positive Futures”.

People and organisations associated with SWGWO:

- Monica Barry Senior Research Fellow Strathclyde University
- Donna Bell Head of Early Years Scottish Government
- Liz Dahl CEO Circle Scotland
- Ann Henderson Assistant Secretary STUC
- Audrey Howard Renfrewshire Council
- Jim Hunter Chief Officer North Strathclyde Community Justice Authority
- Tom Jackson Chief Officer Glasgow CJA
- Nico Juetten Parliamentary Officer & Policy lead on Youth Justice SCCYP
- Irene Kitson Justice of the Peace, Parole Board Member and Howard League Scotland
- Ron Lancashire SWGWO Representative
- Howard Llewellyn Chief Officer Tayside CJA
- Nancy Loucks Chief Executive Families Outside & Visiting Professor, University of Strathclyde
- Susan Matheson Honorary Secretary Howard League for Penal Reform in Scotland & Non Executive Board Member SPS
- Paolo Mazzoncini, Sacro
- Elaine McKenna, individual member
- Tony McNulty Chief Officer Lanarkshire Community Justice Authority
- Teresa Medhurst Governor HMP Cornton Vale
- Heather Meldrum, STUC
- Helen Miller Equalities Human Rights Commission
- Rhona Morison, individual member
- Justina Murray Chief Officer South West Scotland CJA
- Kirsty Pate Service manager Willow Project
- Anne Pinkman Chief Officer Fife and Forth Valley Community Justice Authority
- Tony McNulty Chief Officer South Lanarkshire CJA
- Marina Shaw Project Manager, Families Affected by Imprisonment Circle Scotland
- Alan Staff Chief Executive Apex Scotland
- Rob Strachan Chief Officer Lothian and Borders CJA
- Sara Watkin, individual member
- Pete White Project Coordinator Positive Prison? Positive Futures
- Peter Willox Chief Officer Northern Community Justice Authority

Anne Pinkman
Convener
31 October 2013