Justice Committee
Scottish Government’s Draft Budget 2013-14

Written submission from the Association of Directors of Social Work

ADSW welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to the Justice Committee concerning the findings of the Commission of Women Offenders. The Association supports the Commissions recognition that women in the criminal justice system require an alternative method of intervention to meet their needs and therefore subsequently reduce the risk of further offending.

The Association believes that there are a number of issues which require to be considered if the findings of the Commission are to be successfully implemented. In our Parliamentary briefing we highlighted the need for adequate resources to deliver the proposed changes and expressed reservation that the Commission was perhaps overly optimistic in its view that reconfiguration of services alone would release sufficient resources to fully implement the recommendations.

At that time ADSW was not aware of the amount of resources the Scottish Government had identified to address the recommendations of the Commission. The provision of this additional resource is welcome and will assist the development and delivery of gender specific services. ADSW agrees that there are opportunities within existing services to identify, release and redirect resources. However, we believe that the specialist and intensive services recommended by the Commission will require additional or a pooling of resources from the agencies with responsibility for delivering the recommendations.

ADSW members are reviewing service provision for women who offend; several have redesigned services and adopted a multi disciplinary approach with other statutory and third sector partners. The inclusion of special posts within such teams has in a number of cases has been resourced from within the criminal justice social work grant, which has the potential of diverting resources and therefore disadvantaging other groups of offenders, particularly 16 and 17 year olds.

The creation of multi disciplinary community justice centres ‘hubs’ is a core feature of the many recommendations. We suggest that successful development of such a resource is dependent upon multi agency support and commitment to provide and finance the range of services needed. The Association is fully committed to improving outcomes for individuals through the provision of integrated services. ‘Hubs’ would provide an opportunity to demonstrate a co-ordinated and integrated approach that maximises resources, Community Planning Partnerships and Community Justice Authorities have a key role in taking this forward. ADSW suggests that the Scottish Government commissions a number of pilot ‘hubs’ to assess the resources required to establish, maintain and facilitate access, their effectiveness in improving lifestyles, reducing reoffending and the use of imprisonment.

The Reducing Reoffending Change Fund will provide resources over 3 years to establish mentoring services for women throughout Scotland. Mentoring will provide
additional and flexible support to women at various points of contact with the criminal justice system. It has the capacity to improve lifestyles and compliance with the decision of the court, thereby potentially reducing the use of imprisonment, particularly that of remands.

ADSW agrees that the provision of safe and secure accommodation is crucial with some women requiring supported accommodation and other support to maintain their accommodation. We consider this area presents one of the major challenges, as demand for accommodation far exceeds the supply, the provision of additional support can be expensive and the impact of DWP welfare reforms will disproportionately impact on the most vulnerable members of society.

The expansion of preventative and earlier interventions is critical and the cost of providing such services can be offset by reducing the need for more intensive and expensive services at a later stage. The Association suggests additional resources are made available to expand the use of such interventions, including structured deferred sentences.

The need for gender specific training is likely to exceed existing training capacity across agencies, however it is essential in order to address the multi complex problems many women offenders present

Association of Directors of Social Work
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