Supplementary written submission from Sacro

This paper sets out a proposal for a supported accommodation service for female offenders. The paper seeks to:

- identify the range of problems faced by many female offenders,
- explain the positive contribution that supported accommodation can play in addressing needs, promoting resettlement and in reducing reoffending,
- scope out the level of potential need in both Glasgow and Edinburgh for such a service, and
- describe a model and staffing complement for service delivery.

Sacro believes that this paper would help partners take forward the findings of the Commission on Women Offenders. It must be noted that the example is indicative and intended to inform consideration of future direction and would require detailed review to form a specific funding request.

1. Female Prisoners

In the period 2001/02 to 2011/12, the average daily female prison population in Scotland rose from 257 to 435. The numbers of remand and sentenced female prisoners also increased (respectively) from 62 to 105 and from 195 to 329. Of the 329 sentenced female prisoners in 2010-11, approx. 10% were serving sentences of less than 6 months, 60% were serving sentences of six months and less than 4 years, 26% were serving four years or more and 4% had been recalled to custody. Of the 435 female prisoners in custody in 2011, 379 were being held at HMP&YOI Cornton Vale, 51 at HMP Greenock and 5 between HMP Aberdeen and Inverness.

The snapshot of the female prison population on 30 June 2010 shows that there were 439 prisoners being held. Of these, 97% were from a white ethnic background and 63% were within the 25 – 44 age range.

While the actual numbers provided are historical and does not reflect the recent redistribution of women within the prison estate, the general pattern and geographical significance of women in prison who normally reside in the central belt of Scotland, remains valid for the purpose of this report.

1.1 Female Prisoners – the picture in Glasgow and Edinburgh

Information from the Community Justice Authorities indicates that Glasgow has approximately 80 women in custody at any one time. Of these, approximately one third will be on remand, one third serving short sentences and one third serving sentences of four years or more. On 1st November 2013, 85 women in custody were

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from Glasgow and 51 were from Lothian and Borders. This equates to 34% of women in custody.  

1.2 Female Prisoners – the picture elsewhere in Scotland

Scotland’s other major sources of women prisoners are Lanarkshire (59), Dundee (37,) and South West Scotland (45). Dundee has East Port House - a 16 bed probation/parole service with bail beds, catering for men and women over the age of 16 years.

1.3 Female Prisoners and Supported Accommodation

Research shows that the provision of appropriate accommodation for offenders can be directly linked to a reduction in further offending. There is increasing need for a supported accommodation service specifically targeting women offenders. Sacro is aware that housing is a crucial issue for women facing release from prison and women who are likely to be remanded due to lack of a stable address, due in the main to the differing pathways for women into and out of offending. Many women are reluctant or unable to return to their previous arrangements because these are often chaotic. Of those women who do have settled accommodation to return to, some women cannot return there due to peer and other pressures and personal safety issues. This makes the change in lifestyle sought by many women offenders at point of release (or arrest) very difficult. Sacro believes there is currently a gap in service provision in this area based on our experience delivering services to female offenders.

The service we propose will specifically focus on women offenders as it is widely accepted that the impact of imprisonment may be greater for women than for men in that women are much more likely to lose their homes and responsibility for the care of their children as a result of imprisonment. Evidence also shows that around 20% of women in prison have no permanent accommodation and 30% lose their accommodation while in prison. One major reason for this is that Housing Benefit arrangements often determine whether women prisoners retain or lose their tenancies. Housing Benefit is paid for up to 13 weeks whilst the individual is in prison, after which they are required to pay the full rental cost themselves. This is a major factor in women losing their tenancies.

A recent survey of female prisoners in HMP&YOI Cornton Vale conducted by the Scottish Prison Service found that while 44% of respondents to the survey were council tenants prior to imprisonment, only 23% expected to return to their council tenancy, and of 11% who were with a housing association at point of imprisonment, only 3% expected to return to this type of housing. For those in private rented accommodation pre-imprisonment, the expectation of returning to this type of housing on release dropped from 12% of those responding to the survey to 5%.

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2 Source SPS weekly prison numbers, Note both Glasgow and Edinburgh Councils provide supported accommodation for offender reintegration.
5 Equal Opportunities Committee Report. Female Offenders in the Criminal Justice System.
6 Scottish Prison Service Survey Results. HMP & YOI Cornton Vale 2009
The evidence given above would suggest accommodation and, in particular, supported accommodation can play a vital part in assisting female prisoners resettle and thereby reduce the risk of recidivism.

2. Proposed Service

The proposed service would provide support in 22 flats to women who are on bail, or need assistance to re-settle into the community following a period of imprisonment. The location of these flats would be directly related to the local authority area that an individual woman is returning, thus preventing any unintended concentration of women in any one local authority area.

The service will aim to help women make the necessary positive changes to their lives in order to reduce reoffending and the likelihood of further periods of imprisonment. It is important to note that this proposal is reliant on the cooperation of housing providers and the availability of suitable properties for women offenders.

While accommodated under this proposal, support would be provided to enable women to develop skills for independent living, domestic skills, budgeting, literacy, numeracy, accessing further education, employment, social skills etc. There would also be opportunities to undertake programmatic ‘behaviour change’ work to address issues such as anger management, substance misuse, self-esteem and relationships, thereby enabling women to begin to focus on meeting their own needs and where appropriate the needs of their children.

The support would be delivered through regular home visits helping women to exercise their rights and to work and live safely within the conditions and terms of any license or order and planning an eventual move-on process for them to live successfully in their own independent housing. Service users will normally be supported in a tenancy for 6-9 months before moving to permanent accommodation.

2.1. Prioritisation

While women ex-prisoners would be given the highest priority for access to the service, there may be opportunities for other women within the criminal justice system to use the service, including:

- Female prisoners subject to a statutory order, with a condition of residence upon release from custody, and supervised by social work services. Women under social work supervision, subject to any other statutory order – e.g. Drug Treatment and Testing Orders, probation orders, etc.

- Women under social work supervision, subject to any statutory order. Women requiring advice, guidance and assistance on a voluntary basis within 12 months of release from custody or following completion of a period of statutory supervision

- Women on bail as an alternative to remand. A recent report states that 46% of women offenders were most likely to report having been on remand between
1 and 5 times and 15% report being on remand over ten times. Around 50% of women on remand do not subsequently receive a custodial sentence.

2.2 Personal/Social Capital and Parenting Support

An important aspect of this proposed service will be the special considerations required to support women with children and, in particular, women with very young children. We are informed by one very recent body of evidence \(^7\) that early life experience shapes the quality of the rest of our lives. The children of prolific and persistent offenders are potentially more likely than any others to repeat the intergenerational cycle of offending unless effective intervention is made at the earliest point in time.

The proposed Supported Accommodation Service for Women Offenders would give the mother the opportunity to deal with any issues she may have that might lead to her further offending and risking the development of her child.

The proposed service would therefore connect with the Scottish Government Early Years Framework and the wider related policy context of Equally Well and Achieving our Potential, all aimed at improving parent and child well being.

3. Staffing

The proposed Supported Accommodation Service for Women Offenders would be delivered over a seven day week in accordance with the individual needs of service users. Staffing levels for this service are based on:

- The expected number of women requiring the service on release from prison
- The expected number of one-to-one support sessions delivered per service user per week
- The likely requirement for a more intensive support package than would normally be delivered to service uses in supported accommodation. It is envisaged that, initially, new service users will be supported on a daily basis

To achieve this level of service delivery, the service would require to be staffed at sites in both Glasgow and Edinburgh working flexibly to support women in their own home, achieved at each site through:

1 x part time Service Manager
1 x Criminal Justice Workers
2 x Housing Support Workers
A number of sessional staff
1 x part time Administrator
A pool of volunteer mentors

\(^7\) The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study
4. Sacro – budget

Edinburgh Women’s Accommodation Service

Total Expenditure £133,353

Glasgow Women’s Accommodation Service

Total Expenditure £154,982

Notes: Difference in cost between centres relates to costs of evaluation, play training for mentors and parents, property rent.

Tom Halpin
Chief Executive
11 November 2013