

October 2017



CLINKS  
RESPONSE

# LVSC and Clinks' response to the London Assembly Police and Crime Committee Investigation: women offenders

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## About Clinks

Clinks is the national infrastructure organisation supporting voluntary sector organisations working in the criminal justice system. Our aim is to ensure the sector and those with whom it works are informed and engaged in order to transform the lives of offenders and their communities. We do this by providing specialist information and support, with a particular focus on smaller voluntary sector organisations, to inform them about changes in policy and commissioning, to help them build effective partnerships and provide innovative services that respond directly to the needs of their users.

Clinks has a key role in supporting and representing organisations that work with women in contact with and at risk of involvement with the criminal justice system (CJS). As well as supporting the sector with information resources and events, we sit on the Advisory Board for Female Offenders<sup>1</sup> to share the sector's expertise with key government departments, including the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). We also convene the Women's Networking Forum<sup>2</sup> as part of the Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory (RR3) Group<sup>3</sup>, in partnership with Agenda and the Women's Resource Centre; these bring together women's organisations to provide an opportunity to feedback on policy developments and foster partnership working within the sector. Clinks [recently merged with Women's Breakout](#) and is committed to continuing their work of supporting women's centres and the wider women's sector.

## About London Voluntary Sector Council

London Voluntary Sector Council (LVSC) is the collaborative leader of London's voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector. Since its founding in 1910, LVSC has championed the VCSE sector and enabled a co-ordinated voice to influence policy makers. We support London's 120,000 voluntary and community organisations which provide a range of services and support to London's diverse communities and empower the lives of Londoners.

The VCSE sector in London ranges from large multinationals like Oxfam to entirely volunteer-run play schemes - in fact it is estimated that 80% of this activity is carried out by volunteers in non-registered organisations, working at the grassroots in the heart of their communities. It employs over 250,000 people and contributes some £19 billion to London's economy. Our vision is of communities being at the centre of a fair and prosperous London.

Our mission is to champion and partner London's communities through building the capability, sustainability and impact of the VCSE sector.



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supporting voluntary organisations that  
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We do this through Building, Connecting and Leading:

- Building the capacity of London's VCSE sector to deliver enhanced social value
- Connecting the VCSE sector by growing the information ecology
- Leading, sharing and influencing through a distinctive and definitive voice.

### Introduction

LVSC and Clinks are pleased to respond to this timely call for evidence and are encouraged by the important commitments the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) have made in their current Police and Crime Plan to work to address and respond to women's offending in London. We particularly welcome the recognition of the specific needs and experiences of women in contact with the criminal justice system and the commitment to investing and securing funds to support and promote gender specific services in the capital.

This response draws together the feedback and key themes from consultation with women's organisations in London and across England and Wales, carried out over the last six months by Clinks and LVSC to support our influencing work on women in the criminal justice system. It also uses data gathered through Clinks' State of the Sector and trackTR surveys, which collect detailed information about changes and challenges for voluntary sector organisations working in the criminal justice system and their service users. In some sections we have included case studies to demonstrate good practice carried out by voluntary organisations across the country, which could be replicated in London.

### **1. How has the context of women's offending, and the way women offenders are dealt with in the criminal justice system, changed over the past decade?**

### **2. What, for you, are the main barriers to tackling women's offending? Are any of these barriers specific to London?**

#### Increased needs

Clinks' most recent *State of the Sector* reports demonstrate an increase in the needs of people in contact with the criminal justice system<sup>4</sup>, with organisations saying that their service users' needs are becoming more complex and more immediate. Organisations identified a range of factors impacting on service user need including changes to the welfare system, a general lack of funding and resources resulting in a reduction of other services and prisons that are in serious need of reform.

Housing was identified by voluntary organisations surveyed by Clinks as one of key areas in which they were seeing increased needs, with lack of stable accommodation specifically highlighted as an issue for women. Housing needs can affect an individual's likelihood of initial involvement with the CJS, as well as their ability to engage in a desistance process after involvement with the CJS including time in prison<sup>5, 6</sup>.

A joint briefing by Women in Prison and the Prison Reform Trust found that 60% of women leaving prison do not have a home to go to on release. Some of the key issues the briefing identifies are:



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- The distance from home women are held at often removes their 'local connection' to their home community, a precondition for accessing local authority accommodation.
- Hostel accommodation can expose women to risky situations.
- A lack of suitable accommodation options for women, especially those with children or those affected by substance misuse, mental health problems, or domestic abuse.
- A lack of clarity and consistency about responsibility for the housing of women offenders.
- Insufficient communication, cooperation and joined up working between prison authorities, probation services, housing providers, and local authorities.<sup>7</sup>

In February 2017 Clinks and Homeless Link published the results from a short scoping exercise we commissioned that explored the impact Transforming Rehabilitation has had on the accommodation outcomes for people in contact with the criminal justice system. We found that worsening accommodation outcomes are mainly occurring due to increasing pressures on housing supply, and reductions in Local Authority budgets, which is leading to fewer housing options. In addition to this, due to the implementation of TR, some stakeholders also reported that disruption and confusion about the new probation landscape and the roles and responsibilities of each organisation was having an impact on accommodation outcomes. To ensure appropriate accommodation outcomes are achieved for people in contact with the CJS, it is important that this issue is resolved. This could be done through the creation of an accommodation strategy, developed in partnership with the Ministry of Justice, Department of Communities and Local Government and the Department of Work and Pensions.

### Funding for women-centred services

Small and medium-sized women-centred voluntary sector organisations provide the majority of holistic services in London for vulnerable women and women involved in the CJS. These organisations face specific challenges in securing adequate and sustainable funding in order to deliver high quality services.

The biggest issues currently facing women's centres are access to sustainable funding and commissioning processes that hinder multi-agency partnership work. Women's centres receive funding from a range of different sources to support their approach. Volatility in funding from voluntary sources coupled with reductions in funding from local authorities, often creates difficulties in creating sustainable services.

Clinks' State of the Sector reports have demonstrated a shift from grant funding to contractual funding that is frequently problematic for small and medium voluntary organisations due to the resource-intensive nature of the bidding process, evidencing contractual outcomes and the difficulties in securing full cost recovery<sup>8</sup>. Contractual funding can be particularly challenging for women's centres due to the holistic nature of their work. Stringent outcome requirements can restrict the ability of women's centres to respond to the individual needs of their service users and to work with a wide range of women. Long-term grant funding may be a more appropriate way to maintain the ability of women's centres to provide prevention, diversion and resettlement work through a one-stop-shop model.

Clinks has also heard evidence from voluntary organisations working with women that some commissioners are reluctant to commission gender-specific services due to the relatively small numbers of women in contact with the criminal justice system, preferring to commission larger mainstream services to work with both men and women.



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### The needs of women with additional protected characteristics

Clinks and LVSC strongly welcome MOPAC's recognition that people in the CJS have often also been victims of crime. Voluntary organisations in London have raised concerns about the under-reporting of crimes against Eastern European and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) women due to a lack of trust in the police and other CJS agencies, making them increasingly vulnerable to domestic violence and exploitation.

Organisations are particularly concerned about punitive immigration regulation and enforcement being used disproportionately against women from refugee and migrant communities, with CJS agencies viewing them as offenders rather than victims. This has been confirmed by recent reports of the Metropolitan Police reporting victims of crime to the Home Office for potential immigration breaches<sup>9</sup>. This punitive approach to women from refugee and migrant communities hinders strategies to address domestic abuse, sexual violence and trafficking by preventing women from accessing the CJS as victims and making them more likely to be caught up in the criminal justice system unnecessarily.

Evidence from the Lammy Review, demonstrates that BAME women are more likely than white women with similar offending histories to experience poorer outcomes at arrest stage, in sentencing and in prison<sup>10</sup>. For example, black and mixed women are twice as likely as white women to be arrested, BAME women are more likely than white women to be convicted at Magistrates' Court and BAME women report higher levels of victimisation by staff in prison.

A recent report by Women in Prison and Agenda highlighted the discrimination and additional barriers experienced by BAME women in the CJS. It found that at all levels of the CJS many BAME women experienced overt racism from CJS staff, felt as though they were treated differently to their white counterparts and found that their specific needs were not met.

The report also discusses the need for women's provision to meet the specific needs of some BAME women, such as overcoming cultural stigma around CJS-involvement and language barriers. It suggests that additional training for staff may be necessary and that women should have access to culturally and religiously sensitive support in prison and in the community.<sup>11</sup>

Research by Imkaan shows that women who have experience domestic and sexual violence are more likely to access specialist BAME organisations and report feeling safer to speak about their experiences of violence in an environment where staff have the knowledge and expertise in providing specialist support to vulnerable BAME women.<sup>12</sup> Their report notes that a large number of specialist organisations for BAME women with experience of domestic or sexual violence have closed or been absorbed by larger providers in recent years. As Imkaan states,

***"Where this has taken place, these 'culturally specific services' lose their autonomy, become part of a suite of services offered by a large, single provider and become delinked from the specialist BME women's sector (and movement)."***

In order to meet the needs of BAME women in or at risk of involvement with the criminal justice system, it is vital that specialist services with expertise in the specific needs and experiences of BAME communities exist and are sufficiently resourced to provide support to all women who may wish to access a specialist service. This is increasingly important given that Clinks' most recent State of the sector survey highlights that 30% of specialist black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) organisations report they are at risk of closure, compared to 5% of other organisations.<sup>13</sup> 24% of BAME and women's organisations report that they never receive full cost recovery on contracts.



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In addition to the issues raised around disproportionality for BAME women, voluntary organisations consulted with by LVSC felt that there was a lack of robust data on women in the criminal justice system with disabilities. This lack of data means that these women's specific needs are not being identified or addressed by criminal justice agencies or other services.

### The quality of probation services

As MOPAC has highlighted in its Police and Crime Plan, 2017 – 21, a recent inspection found that through the gate services provided by London Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) in North London were of poor quality and not achieving positive outcomes.<sup>14</sup> This report also found that probation practitioners had a lack of awareness of domestic abuse and child safeguarding issues and that London CRC had no budget for developing services for women. It stated that, "Most service users had not received a service that met their needs or was likely to help them to stop reoffending."<sup>15</sup>

This has been supported by a number of voluntary organisations who have raised concerns about the quality of through the gate provision and community supervision following the introduction of Transforming Rehabilitation (TR), with CRCs often simply signposting women to other services that are not funded by the CRC or only offering short-term group work. In some areas, TR has also led to a fragmentation of services, preventing some women's services from being able to access vulnerable women at different points in the CJS. A 2016 thematic inspection report by HM Inspectorate of Probation echoed these concerns, stating that there was a lack of strategic focus on women in probation services.<sup>16</sup>

This restructure of the probation system has also seen a sharp increase in recall rates for women. Recall rates are a key driver of the women's prison population and should be urgently addressed. A recent Prison Reform Trust report found that the number of women recalled to custody after their release has risen by 68% in England and Wales since 2014, partially as a result of the introduction of post-custody supervision for people serving sentences shorter than 12 months.<sup>17</sup>

### Sentencer awareness

Many voluntary organisations we spoke to raised concerns about sentencer awareness of the specific needs of women and confidence in community alternatives to custody for women. We have also heard that sentencers, due in part to changes brought about by the Transforming Rehabilitation reforms, lack awareness of what provision is being offered for women by Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) and the National Probation Service (NPS).

While pre-sentencing reports are an important method of ensuring that sentencers are aware of the needs of women about whom they are making sentencing decisions, women's organisations tell us that the quality of these reports has been significantly impacted by recent probation reforms. This issue was also raised by HM Inspectorate of Probation in their thematic inspection of community services for women.<sup>18</sup> In some areas, the introduction of the Transforming Rehabilitation Programme has led to decreased levels of voluntary sector involvement in court processes, meaning that pre-sentencing reports are completed by NPS staff without specific expertise in supporting women. An emphasis on 'swift and speedy justice' has also meant that voluntary organisations supporting women in the CJS are often unable to contribute to pre-sentencing reports due to insufficient time. Further to this, Women in Prison's investigation of progress against the Corston recommendations highlights extensive barriers to obtaining timely psychiatric reports, including a lack of resources in community mental health teams and a lengthy Legal Aid process.



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Without a thorough assessment of the needs of women in court, sentencers are unable to make informed decisions about the most effective course of action and may impose a prison sentence in cases where this is inappropriate and ineffective for the individual concerned.

### The impact of imprisonment on desistance

Imprisonment can be a significant barrier to addressing women's offending, often having a severe and far-reaching impact on women's lives through separating them from children and family members, causing the loss of accommodation and aggravating already existing trauma and mental health issues. The Corston Report<sup>19</sup> emphasised that women should not be imprisoned unless they are a risk to the public,

***"[I]n the year to March 2017, 62% of sentenced women entering prison were serving six months or less, and 84% of them had committed a non-violent offence."***<sup>20</sup>

With closure of HMP Holloway, women from London are now imprisoned significant distances away from their families and from services that could support them to resettle and desist from crime once released. This means that the impact of imprisonment is likely to be more severe and disruptive for women from London, providing fewer positive opportunities for rehabilitation or desistance.

As well as the overuse of custodial sentences for non-violent offences, the use of remand for women before they are sentenced is also a significant driver of the women's prison population:

***"The number of women in prison could be reduced safely and easily—nearly half (45%) of women entering prison do so on remand, but few of them go on to receive a custodial sentence."***<sup>21</sup>

Although remand prisoners will not necessarily end up with a conviction or a custodial sentence, the effects of imprisonment remain. Access to services can also be more difficult for women on remand due to the lack of a sentencing or resettlement plan.

### **3. What impact could MOPAC's new Female Offender Service have on women's offending and reoffending?**

### **4. What opportunities do you believe there are to further reduce women's offending in London?**

Clinks and LVSC strongly welcome MOPAC's investment in a gender-specific service for women involved in the CJS in London. This is a key opportunity to develop a more joined-up approach to women's offending, utilising the expertise of women's organisations and evidence from good practice developed across England and Wales.

We believe that this opportunity can be translated into the successful prevention of offending and re-offending if the service utilises the principles outlined below.

### Principle 1: Support the desistance process

Desistance theory provides us with an underlying model for the process of supporting people away from involvement in the CJS through addressing the root causes of offending:



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***"[D]esistance theory emphasises the need for a holistic, flexible and person-centred approach to supporting people who have offended and who wish to stop."*<sup>22</sup>**

Research into women's offending identifies experiences of domestic abuse and sexual violence as key drivers of offending for the majority of women involved in the CJS<sup>23</sup>; Women in Prison report that 80% of the women they work with have experienced domestic violence<sup>24</sup>. Desistance-based approaches are sensitive to the adverse experiences of women, such as rape, domestic violence and childhood abuse, highlighting the need to address the impact of these experiences in order to prevent offending. It also emphasises the need for trauma-informed services and underlines the risks of delivering generic services that do not effectively engage or meet the needs of women.

As evidenced above, safe and stable accommodation is an essential element of the desistance process and is crucial to preventing both offending and re-offending. Clinks and LVSC welcome the measures outlined in the Mayor's draft housing strategy to prevent homelessness caused by violence against women and girls. Recognising the important relationship between housing and involvement with the CJS, the Mayor's housing strategy should include a broader prioritisation of the needs of all vulnerable women, in order to avoid homelessness-related involvement in the CJS. The strategy should be informed by the approach of the Female Offender Service and should also address the housing needs of women resettling in London after a prison sentence.

### **Clinks and LVSC recommend:**

- 1. The work of the Female Offender Service should be thoroughly informed by desistance theory and research, emphasising the need for vulnerable women to have access to services and practitioners that provide a holistic, flexible and person-centred approach to responding to individual needs.**
- 2. The Female Offender Service should ensure that women who have experienced domestic abuse and sexual violence and women who have been involved in sex work are able to access specialist support, provided by practitioners with expertise in these areas.**
- 3. The Mayor's housing strategy should ensure that women's specific needs are taken into account.**
- 4. The Mayor's housing strategy should ensure that women leaving prison are able to access secure and gender-appropriate accommodation.**

## Principle 2: Ensuring effective resettlement

A fundamental aspect of supporting the desistance process is ensuring that all women resettling in London after a prison sentence have access to good quality through the gate provision. Through the gate provision ensures that women leaving prison are able to continue to engage in a process of desistance and overcome the issues at the root of their involvement in the CJS, in order to avoid returning to prison either through breach of license or re-offending.

It should consist of high quality one to one mentoring, providing practical and emotional support to address a range of needs related to desistance such as securing accommodation, accessing services such as healthcare and substance misuse and resolving family issues

such as contacting children in care or rebuilding relationships with other family members.

As discussed above, voluntary organisations and HM Inspectorate of Probation have expressed significant concerns about the quality of London Community Rehabilitation Company's Through the Gate provision. While MOPAC has taken steps to proactively address this issue through making additional funding available through London CRC, voluntary organisations have raised additional concerns about the efficacy of providing all through the gate services through London CRC. To address this organisations suggested that MOPAC should consider directly funding voluntary organisations outside of probation delivery chains in order to ensure that women resettling in London have access to the necessary range of resettlement services.

**Clinks and LVSC recommend:**

- 1. MOPAC should work closely with probation services and women's organisations in London to ensure that the Female Offender Service provides high quality through the gate services to all women resettling in London after a prison sentence. MOPAC should explore possibilities for increased investment in voluntary organisations delivering through the gate services to women outside of probation delivery chains.**
- 2. Given the recent sharp rise in recall rates for women discussed above, MOPAC should work in partnership with London CRC and the NPS, to develop a problem-solving approach to breaches of licence, which makes the best use of community services to ensure that women are not recalled to prison unless they present a high risk to the public.**

### Principle 3: Focus on diversion and early intervention

Diversion from custody allows women to address the causes of their offending in the community and avoids increasing their likelihood of reoffending through the destabilisation and potential harm caused by imprisonment.

For the majority of women coming into contact with the CJS, diversion from custody and towards community services has been seen to offer significant benefits, and savings. As demonstrated by five case studies provided by Prison Reform Trust<sup>25</sup>, effective diversion from the CJS must involve collaboration between a range of CJS and non-CJS agencies and organisations. Diversion is most effective when shared outcomes are developed, and particularly when resources are shared, for example through pooling budgets<sup>26</sup>. A key element of this approach is ensuring that services are accessible for women already under CJS supervision and for those at risk of involvement in the CJS. This is cost effective, avoiding duplication of services, and allows for an individualised, need-based approach rather than a singular focus on offending. This more flexible approach will help keep women out of prison, and risk further damage from custody.

While there have been significant developments in Liaison and Diversion across England and Wales over the past two years, it is important that these services are able to respond to the specific needs of women in the CJS. As evidenced by a range of research<sup>27</sup>, women's needs and past experiences, as well as the drivers behind their involvement in the CJS, tend to look very different to men's, with 57% of women in prison reporting a history of domestic abuse and 53% reporting emotional, physical or



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sexual abuse as a child. There is also evidence that women are more hesitant to discuss their experiences and needs with professionals<sup>28</sup>, which suggests that a more proactive approach may be necessary to provide effective Liaison and Diversion for women.

Due to the differences listed above, generic Liaison and Diversion schemes can have low engagement rates for women. In some areas this has led police, health services and voluntary organisations to develop gender-specific pathways within Liaison and Diversion services that proactively address the specific and multiple needs of women. These services tend to focus on vulnerabilities rather than offending histories, meaning that Liaison and Diversion practitioners will assess each woman coming into contact with the CJS rather than requiring a referral from a custody sergeant.

### Case study: Together (Working for Wellbeing): Women's Court Liaison and Outreach Project

Together (Working for Wellbeing), a national mental health charity deliver a women's project based at Thames Magistrates court, staffed by a female practitioner. It offers a five day a week court liaison service to vulnerable women appearing at the court; screening, identifying and offering assessment to every woman who comes through the court on remand. The practitioner liaises with agencies, provides reports and recommendations to the court and makes referrals to appropriate services. Establishing a close working relationship with sentencers and inviting them to refer to the Together service, including women on bail, the practitioner 'triages' requests by the court for psychiatric assessment. The initial mental health assessment identifies whether further psychiatric assessment is required, with the aim to avoid unnecessary requests for such reports and use of remand. The project also supports probation at the pre-sentence report stage to ensure that any community sentence addresses both offending behaviour and the woman's health needs through the creation of a joined-up sentence plan.

During the first year of operation (June 2009 to May 2010) 112 women were assessed, with 57 women either bailed, released, given a community disposal or hospital order following the recommendation of the Together practitioner. The reducing reoffending team in Tower Hamlets estimated that there had been a 40% reduction in the number of women from Tower Hamlets being received into HMP Holloway during the same time period. Whilst it is not possible to attribute this solely to Together, it would suggest that the services offered by the women's project had a significant impact.<sup>29</sup>

#### **Clinks and LVSC recommend:**

1. MOPAC should use a desistance- and diversion-based approach as the basis for the design and development of the Female Offender Service, focusing on diverting vulnerable women from the criminal justice system and responding to women's needs rather than solely their offending.





## Principle 4: Raise awareness of effective, gender-specific community sentences

While Clinks and LVSC believe that diversion from the CJS into support services should be the primary focus of the Female Offender Service, particularly for women with mental health issues, providing appropriate community sentences ensures that sentencers are able to respond to women's offending in flexible and appropriate ways.

Evidence suggests that women are more likely than men to comply with a community order or a period of licence supervision<sup>30</sup> and that community sentences are significantly more robust and effective than custodial sentences in supporting women's desistance. A report from the Prison Reform Trust found that community sentences are often the best option for women:

***"Imprisonment usually compounds a woman's problems, and short custodial sentences have the worst reoffending outcomes. Overall, 48% of women leaving prison are reconvicted within one year but for those serving sentences of less than 12 months, the reconviction rate rises to 61%. Women released from custody are also more likely to reoffend (and reoffend sooner) than those serving community sentences."*<sup>31</sup>**

It is vital to ensure that gender-specific and flexible community sentencing options are provided so that women are able to engage successfully and are supported in their desistance process. Alternative sentences are most effective when they provide an environment that feels safe for women who have experienced domestic and sexual violence and when they support women to feel comfortable in sharing their experiences and vocalising their needs. For these reasons, women-only spaces are considered by organisations with expertise in supporting women to be the most appropriate environments for supporting community sentences<sup>35</sup>.

Flexibility in community sentences is necessary, not only to ensure that women are able to engage around their domestic and childcare responsibilities but also to safeguard women at risk of domestic abuse. This is particularly important given that some requirements of community sentences such as curfews can close off escape routes for a woman experiencing domestic abuse, meaning she is unable to remove herself from harm without breaching the terms of her sentence.

Some organisations suggested that problem-solving approaches may deliver more effective sentencing for women. These bring a range of agencies together to identify the root causes of an individual's offending behaviour and develop strategies that enforce the law while ensuring they are given the necessary support to prevent reoffending. As discussed above, the timely completion of high quality pre-sentencing reports by probation services is essential to enabling sentencers to provide an appropriate and effective response to the individual's specific circumstances.

## Case study: Manchester and Salford problem-solving court

Manchester and Salford problem-solving court is a collaboration between the National Probation Service, Cheshire & Greater Manchester Community Rehabilitation Company and WomenMATTa, a women's centre run by Women in Prison. Probation staff at the court identify women who are at risk of receiving a custodial sentence but are appropriate candidates for a community order.



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When a woman is referred to the problem-solving court, the case is adjourned and the woman is bailed to appear at WomenMATTAs services in order to assess their needs and provide a process for them to be involved in their sentence planning. Agencies involved in the project have stated that this approach is highly motivating for the women engaged in it and allows them to receive gender-appropriate support while working towards their rehabilitation goals, such as securing accommodation and employment, or tackling substance misuse issues.

### **Clinks and LVSC recommend:**

1. MOPAC should work with the MoJ to develop a programme to raise awareness among sentencers in London of the impact of prison for women, emphasising the Corston report's recommendations that women must not be sent to prison for their own good and that women with mental health issues who do not have a psychiatric report must not be remanded in custody or given a custodial sentence, due to the risk that the impact of custody presents to their safety and wellbeing.
2. The timely completion of high quality pre-sentencing reports should be a priority concern for the Female Offender Service. MOPAC should work in partnership with the NPS, and women's organisations to ensure that pre-sentencing reports are always completed by staff members with specific expertise in supporting women.
3. MOPAC should work closely with London CRC and the NPS to ensure that the safety of women at risk of domestic violence is placed at the centre of sentence planning and enforcement decisions.
4. MOPAC should work to encourage partnership between London CRC, the NPS and women's organisations in London to develop problem-solving approaches to women's offending that can support sentencers in choosing the most appropriate and effective sentences.

## Principle 5: Address disproportionality for BAME women

As discussed above, there is strong evidence of disproportionately poor outcomes for BAME women at every level of the CJS. While this should be a key consideration for any organisation or agency working in the CJS, the higher proportion of BAME people living in London make this an urgent priority for MOPAC. The Female Offender Service must consider and address the needs of BAME women, tackling discrimination and unfair outcomes within the CJS as well as ensuring that specialist support is available for BAME women across the city.

### **Clinks and LVSC recommend:**

1. MOPAC and the Female Offender Service should develop an action plan to respond to the Lammy Review's findings and recommendations, aiming to address disproportionate outcomes for BAME women across the CJS. This action plan should adhere to the Lammy Review's key principle of 'explain or reform', requiring CJS agencies to address BAME disproportionality where it cannot be explained by disparities outside of the CJS.
2. MOPAC should ensure that all staff working within the Female Offender Service receive ongoing training on the specific needs

and experiences of BAME women in contact with the CJS.

3. The Female Offender Service should be designed and delivered in ongoing consultation with voluntary organisations with expertise in supporting women and working with people from BAME communities. This will ensure that the specific needs of BAME women are identified and addressed by the service.
4. MOPAC should work with voluntary organisations with expertise in supporting women and working with people from BAME communities to identify funding and sustainability issues and develop a strategy to address these.
5. Alongside the development of the Female Offender Service, MOPAC should work with the Metropolitan Police Service to develop a protocol for responding to victims of crime from refugee and migrant communities, ensuring a non-punitive approach which focuses on reducing the vulnerability of the victim and preventing criminalisation.
6. The Female Offender Service should ensure that robust data is collected on the protected characteristics and specific needs of women in contact with the CJS. This data should be used to develop specialist support for women whose needs are not being met by mainstream services.

## Principle 6: Promote sustainable funding for women's centres and women-centred services

We strongly welcome MOPAC's commitment to invest in gender-appropriate services and to expand access to women's centres. As outlined above, a successful desistance- and diversion-based approach relies on effective partnership with women's centres and other women-centred services. Women's centres provide gender-specific, holistic support to vulnerable women both under CJS supervision and at risk of CJS involvement through providing a multi-agency one-stop-shop of services. They are essential to providing a desistance- and diversion-based approach.

Developing and implementing a sustainable funding strategy is not just important in expanding the women's centre model, but is vital in order to ensure the protection of existing services. The challenges for voluntary organisations discussed above mean that there is a real risk of the loss of effective services and existing expertise. This would not only be highly detrimental to the lives of many vulnerable women but would also approaches to support women have to be re-developed from scratch, incurring short-term and long-term costs for the criminal justice system and other statutory agencies. Due to the challenges presented by the shift from grants to contracts, MOPAC should consider possibilities for using long-term grant funding to maintain the ability of women's centres to provide prevention, diversion and resettlement work through a one-stop-shop model.

At a local level, pooling budgets can be a useful way for statutory agencies and women's organisations to work together to achieve a broad range of outcomes through addressing the needs of vulnerable women. This is a pro-active way of avoiding the challenges created by silo-ed funding and of developing a shared set of methods and outcomes to reduce the financial burden on local services of receiving service users at crisis point.



## Case study – Greater Manchester Women's Alliance

The Greater Manchester Women's Alliance is formed of eight voluntary sector women's organisations, working in partnership to deliver a Whole Systems Approach<sup>34</sup> across the ten boroughs of Greater Manchester. This approach and the alliance model was formed over five years through working with the National Offender Management Service, Greater Manchester Public Service Reform and a range of commissioners including the Community Rehabilitation Company and the Justice and Rehabilitation Executive. Having secured the funding to build the infrastructure for the alliance, bringing together women's organisations that had previously been in competition with each other due to commissioning processes, the alliance worked with commissioners to develop a Whole Systems Approach to ensure that women across Greater Manchester could access community services at every level of the CJS. Rather than seeking additional funds, the alliance focused on encouraging commissioners to use the funds already allocated in a different way and to develop a set of shared outcomes to enable contracted organisations to work together.

Implementing this Whole Systems Approach across Greater Manchester has provided access to the holistic support of women's centres for women being diverted from every level of the CJS. While the organisations involved have been able to maintain their individual, localised approach, the Alliance model has also provided consistency in provision and quality, as well as allowing organisations to share their expertise.

The collective approach has opened up more funding opportunities to the organisations involved, enabling them to bid for larger pots of funding. Despite cuts to commissioners' budgets, the Alliance has been able to secure funding for the next three years to continue their work.

It is important to recognise however that this developing this approach and model requires financial and structural support from commissioners. Small organisations often do not have the resources or time to support consortia-building work and will benefit from financial support to do this, particularly in the form of grants. Awareness among commissioners of the importance of a Whole Systems Approach and a willingness to contribute towards a shared approach rather than focus on silo-ed outcomes is also vital to the success of this work; this can be supported by clear leadership on the Whole Systems Approach from the MoJ.

### **Clinks and LVSC recommend:**

- 1. MOPAC should work in partnership with the Ministry of Justice, London CRC, the NPS, local authorities and the voluntary sector working with vulnerable women, to develop and implement a sustainable funding strategy for women's centres and other women-centred services across London. This strategy should allow women's organisations to work with women inside and outside of the criminal justice system and should allow smaller organisations to develop their capacity and sustainability.**



## Principle 7: Work in partnership with the voluntary sector and service users

Clinks and LVSC welcome MOPAC's commitment, as outlined in the Police and Crime Plan, to working with partners including the voluntary sector and are encouraged that the Female Offender Service is being developed in partnership with a voluntary sector organisation. This will allow MOPAC and other agencies in London to benefit from the experience and expertise of the voluntary sector and provide a joined up, cost-effective service.

As well as partnership in delivery, ongoing strategic engagement with a range of voluntary sector organisations is important to identifying the needs of vulnerable women in London, designing an effective service, monitoring the quality of delivery and identifying opportunities for improvement. Voluntary sector organisations require consistent support to enable their engagement at a strategic level. This is particularly the case for small organisations embedded in their communities, as the majority of women's organisations are. Such support is therefore crucial to ensure that MOPAC can benefit from these organisations knowledge and understanding of the local context of women's needs and offending patterns in different areas of London.

Clinks and LVSC welcome the proactive steps that MOPAC has taken to consult the voluntary sector on its strategies so far. MOPAC's Female Offender Strategy Group includes voluntary sector representation and MOPAC has held consultation events with voluntary sector organisations including LVSC and Clinks. However, this engagement can be disrupted by unstable funding arrangements such as gaps between contracts and a lack of investment alongside engagement opportunities. While voluntary organisations and particularly infrastructure organisations are keen to share their expertise in order to support MOPAC's aims, it is important that consideration is given to the most effective ways of supporting this engagement.

Voluntary organisations have emphasised the value of service user involvement in developing effective, evidence-based policy at all levels of the CJS. Good service user involvement can ensure that services reflect the needs and wishes of those who use them and set outcomes and objectives that are led by service user need.

The voluntary sector has a strong track recording in involving service users in both strategy development and service delivery; Clinks' State of the Sector report found that 80% of organisations have consulted service users about the design and delivery of their services and 41% have a service user forum or council<sup>35</sup>.

### **Clinks and LVSC recommend:**

- 1. The development and delivery of the Female Offender Service should be informed by ongoing consultation with a range of voluntary organisations with expertise in supporting vulnerable women, as well as women with lived experience of the criminal justice system.**
- 2. MOPAC should developing a sustainable, long-term funding strategy to ensure that voluntary organisations are supported to engage in effective strategic consultation and partnership.**





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### Principle 8: Encourage collaboration

Increased collaboration between national and local government, as well as the development of local and regional multi-agency partnership is essential to addressing women's multiple needs.

Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) is a coalition formed between Clinks, Homeless Link and Mind to improve policy and services for people facing multiple needs, which includes contact with the criminal justice system, homelessness, poor mental health and substance misuse<sup>36</sup>. There are 13 areas across the country, including Hackney that have adopted the MEAM Approach. This is a practical non-prescriptive framework for developing a coordinated approach to supporting people experiencing multiple and complex needs<sup>37</sup>. This work is delivered by both statutory and voluntary sector partners.<sup>38</sup>

MOPAC's police and crime plan outlines plans to use a portion of the London Crime Prevention Fund to develop the co-commissioning of services across London Boroughs. Clinks and LVSC welcome this approach and suggest that MOPAC considers how this could be used to support a desistance- and diversion-based approach for vulnerable women in London through encouraging local authorities to support the work of women's centres and women-centred services.

#### **Clinks and LVSC recommend:**

- 1. MOPAC should utilise the learning from the MEAM approach to provide effective multi-agency support for those with multiple and complex needs and works with the voluntary sector to consider how this learning can be applied in a gender-specific context.**
- 2. MOPAC should consider how the London Crime Prevention Fund and the cross borough co-commissioning of services can involve the voluntary sector to support a desistance- and diversion-based approach for vulnerable women in London.**
- 3. MOPAC should review their engagement with voluntary sector organisations, statutory agencies such as the NHS, and other government departments, with a view to strengthening this in order to promote early intervention that can avoid contact with the CJS altogether, preventing the significant public and human costs associated with involvement in the CJS.**

### Conclusion

MOPAC's Police and Crime Plan 2017-21 provides strong ground for the development of a desistance and diversion-based approach, focused on diverting vulnerable women from the criminal justice system by providing support that addresses their broader needs. Clinks and LVSC welcome MOPAC's constructive engagement with the voluntary sector so far and encourage MOPAC to develop and continue this throughout the design and delivery of the Female Offender Service. There should be a particular focus on effective partnership with organisations providing services for vulnerable women, including those that specialise in working with women and people from BAME communities.

Clinks will continue to engage with MOPAC on its approach to women in contact with the CJS through the Female Offender Strategy Group, focusing on the principles outlined in this response.

## End notes

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# CLINKS

**Clinks supports, represents and campaigns for the voluntary sector working with offenders. Clinks aims to ensure the sector and all those with whom they work, are informed and engaged in order to transform the lives of offenders.**

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