

Weavers Presentation

30 January 2025

My name is Hannah Fisher and I am Head of the Intensive Supervision Courts for HMPPS. As you've heard from Fiona, my background is the Women's Problem Solving Courts in Manchester and in 2022 I was recruited to lead on the MOJ funded Intensive Supervision Courts which went live in June 2023, one of which is the Birmingham Women's Intensive Supervision Court. The other 3 are Substance Misuse Crown Court ISCs. The ISCs are a new problem-solving approach that diverts offenders with complex needs away from short custodial sentences and into enhanced community-based sentences with the aim to address the root causes of the individual's offending behaviour.

Much of the learning from the Manchester Courts was utilised to support implementation of the ISC in Birmingham, with some tweaks made where we recognised there was an opportunity to improve model delivery. Specifically, working with West Midlands Police to route all women charged within the Birmingham city area through Judge Smith's ISC Court so that early identification of appropriate cases could be achieved as well as commencing work with women from the initial Court appearance stage, as opposed to waiting for her to be sentenced. We also opted for a Judge led approach as opposed to a Magistrates Bench as this provided consistency for reviews and the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships between Judge and the female which you'll hear more about from Judge Smith shortly.

The Interim evaluation report for the ISC pilots, so this covers all of the 4 pilots sites, published on the 17th January, highlighted some key successes:

- Offender engagement with ISC requirements is positive. Stakeholders agreed that offenders on the ISC are complying with their sentence requirements and the rehabilitative support provided.
- Participants with substance misuse issues now test negative for drugs two-thirds of the time.
- Less than a quarter of offenders were sanctioned for poor behaviour. Those who were sanctioned faced strict consequences, including increased drug testing or a custodial sanction of up to 28 days before being released back onto the existing ISC order.
- Drug and alcohol intake by offenders had reduced overall – key to reducing the drug and alcohol fuelled crime that many of the ISC cases have been sentenced for.
- Offenders who needed mental health support received tailored support and access to mental health services, some for the first time in their lives.

Additionally, the pilot highlighted anecdotal evidence from offenders and partner agencies that it was helping to reduce reoffending. However, to caveat, the interim report highlights that it is too early in the evaluation to assess the impact fully and we won't know the confirmed impact on reoffending until late 2027 at the earliest.

Some of my key reflections from delivering Problem Solving approaches for women in the community are;

- The Court element is a small, albeit important, aspect of the delivery model. For anyone considering setting up a PSC in your local area, you must have the appropriate infrastructure and resources to deliver the orders within the community, this expands beyond just Probation capacity.
- We could not do this without the support and partnership of Women's centres which have to be appropriately funded. Problem Solving and ISC women are managed from the women's centres where gender specific and trauma informed services are available. In both locations we have co-located Probation and wider partners to work from the centres This has been of paramount importance to the development of the effective partnership which wraps around the women who remains at the centre of this focus.
- Developing whole system approaches to working with women is important. Having a multi - agency network all pulling in the same direction takes time to build, but is hugely beneficial in ensuring delivery of services which work for women.
- Relationships are at the core of all Problem Solving approaches and the importance of which cannot be underestimated. Having worked in the Problem-solving space for a good number of years, I have seen first-hand the power of the support that women have been provided by committed, competent practitioners and invested Judiciary who have an understanding of who the woman is, what her complex needs are, but probably most importantly, what motivates her. And with that being said I will now pass to Judge Smith who will talk you through her experience of leading the Women's ISC in Birmingham.

Thanks