

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK AND HEALTH COMMITTEE - 20 AUGUST 2012

REPORT ON: COMMISSION ON WOMEN OFFENDERS

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

REPORT NO: 291 - 2012

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to inform the Social Work and Health Committee of the Government response to the recommendations of the Commission on Women Offenders, current arrangements in Dundee and longer term potential national and local developments. The Commission on Women Offenders was established by the Government to consider the evidence on how to improve outcomes for women in the criminal justice system and make recommendations for practical measures to reduce re-offending and imprisonment.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Social Work and Health Committee:

- 2.1 Note the Government response to the recommendations of the Commission on Women Offenders.
- 2.2 Note current arrangements in Dundee and the longer-term implications of the recommendations, particularly in respect of leadership, structures and the delivery of services.
- 2.3 Instruct the Director of Social Work to provide an update report in 12 months on the implementation of the recommendations and the outcomes of ongoing work streams.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

4.0 MAIN TEXT

4.1 Commission on Women Offenders

The Commission on Women Offenders was established by the Government in August 2011 and consisted of the former Lord Advocate, The Right Honourable Dame Elish Angiolini DBE QC, Dr Linda Caestecker, Director of Public Health in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and Sheriff Daniel Scullion. Its members therefore brought particular expertise in crime, judicial processes and related social and health matters. Over a period of 8 months, it reviewed the evidence on the profiles of women offenders and consulted with relevant stakeholders before producing its final report in April 2012.

In its report, the Commission makes 37 recommendations relating to the criminal justice system as a whole, justice sector agencies within it and other agencies which make contributions to reducing re-offending and custody. It therefore includes recommendations on new or improved services as alternatives to prosecution, remand and custody and the development of services both in the community and prisons. It has a particular focus on the development of multi-agency one-stop-shop Community Justice Centres to deliver and coordinate holistic support, including mentoring.

Related recommendations include the national mental health strategy having a focus on women offenders, a review of services for women with borderline personality disorders, the roll out of diversion and bail supervision schemes and 2 new sentences of a composite prison/community sentence and a suspended sentence. In terms of prisons, it recommends the replacement of HMP Cornton Vale with a smaller, specialist prison reserved only for long-term prisoners and those who present a significant risk to the public, with other female prisoners held in local prisons closer to their home community.

The Commission also makes significant recommendations relating to leadership and structures, proposing a new national Community Justice Service to commission, provide and manage all adult offender services in the community; a new National Community Justice and Prison Delivery Board to promote integration between the new Community Justice Service and the Scottish Prison Service (SPS); and a senior director in each agency to take responsibility for women offenders, to champion and drive through change.

4.2 Government Response

In response, the Government has accepted 33 of the recommendations and noted that it will consider the remaining 4. The recommendation to review services for borderline personality disorder and post traumatic stress disorder will be considered in the context of a national mental health strategy. The recommendation to introduce 2 new sentences will be reviewed within the context of an evaluation of the recently implemented Community Payback Orders and the overall wish to avoid using custodial sentences except where really necessary.

In terms of the recommendations to create a new national service and a leadership board, the Government has noted that the 'status quo in commissioning, providing and managing adult offender services in the community is no longer an option' but that it will consult on what the 'optimal structures should be to manage adult offender services in Scotland' later in the year. This will be progressed by a Reducing Re-offending Programme 2 (RRP2) structures group and will be informed by other RRP2 work streams on funding, performance and services. Some structural change appears inevitable.

The Government has also agreed with the assessment made by the Commission on the potential benefits of mentoring and immediately committed to using the Reducing Re-offending Change Fund (RRCF) to establish mentoring provision across Scotland. Nationally, this funding will constitute £7.5 million over 2012-15 and Public Social Partnerships (PSPs) will co-design services to deliver agreed social outcomes. The PSPs will launch in spring 2013 and in the interim the Government will work with service providers to build capacity in the sector.

4.3 Current and Planned Arrangements in Dundee

As part of its consultation, the Commission visited Criminal Justice Services in Dundee. A dedicated team of Social Workers, Support Workers and a Nurse on secondment from the NHS had been established in response to the distinct needs of women. The team also works alongside other co-located services at Friarfield House, such as Drug Treatment and Testing Order NHS staff, Tayside Police, Apex, Venture Trust and Princes Trust Fairbridge. It routinely works with internal Social Work colleagues in Children's Services and Community Care in respect of child and adult protection.

Using existing resources, the team was already implementing a whole system approach action plan ranging from alternatives to prosecution to resettlement involving partnership work with other agencies, such as the Crown Office Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), the Sheriffs Court, Violence Against Women Services and SPS. Typically, at any time, the team works with around 130 women subject to the various measures of diversion, Community Payback Orders and Resettlement. Of these, around 30 are serving custodial sentences.

The plan has resulted in more women subject to diversionary measures, increases in the engagement of women subject to community sentences and on release from prison and improvements in the female occupancy rate at East Port House. The establishment of the team and the mentoring service in particular were commented on positively by the

Commission in its final report. Currently, the mentoring service has a capacity of working with 16 females at any time and mentoring involvement usually lasts for around 6 months.

Further, planned developments which reflect other recommendations include the implementation of a new Women's Risks and Needs Assessment (WRNA) tool, a discrete bail supervision scheme and a 7 stage resettlement pilot with HMP Edinburgh and HMP Cornton Vale. These developments will continue to take place using existing resources by prioritising in accordance with need and risk. The additional funding for mentoring will clearly increase capacity. In partnership with other agencies, the team is well placed to implement the other recommendations made by the Commission.

4.4 Next Steps

The final recommendation of the Commission is that the Cabinet Secretary for Justice will report to the Scottish Parliament within 6 months of the publication of the report and annually thereafter on the steps taken to implement the recommendations. This has also been accepted by the Government, which will report in the first instance in October 2012. In the interim, recommendations will be progressed by the RRP2 and services in Dundee will continue to be developed within current structural arrangements.

In terms of the proposed structural change, the Department will contribute towards the consultation process. It appears that various options may be possible but that national consistency should not occur at the expense of addressing different local needs and priorities; that criminal justice sector integration should not take place at the expense of integration within and between other agencies; and that the benefits of existing models in terms of both cost and effectiveness should be fully explored. The integration of adult health and social care will also need to be considered.

5.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 This Report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of Sustainability, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Anti-Poverty, Equality Impact Assessment and Risk Management. There are no major issues.

5.2 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and will be made available on the Council website <http://www.dundecity.gov.uk/equanddiv/equimpact/>.

6.0 CONSULTATIONS

The Chief Executive, Director of Corporate Services and Head of Democratic and Legal Services have been consulted in preparation of this report.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 The Scottish Government Response to the Commission on Women Offenders is available at www.scotland.gov.uk/About/commissionwomenoffenders

7.2 Equality Impact Assessment