

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb a Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol](#) ar [Profiadau menywod yn y system cyfiawnder troseddol](#)

This response was submitted to the [Equality and Social Justice Committee](#) consultation on [Women's experiences in the criminal justice system](#)

WECJS 09

Ymateb gan: Cymdeithas Llywodraeth Leol Cymru | Response from: Welsh Local Government Association



WLGA Evidence: Equalities and Social Justice Committee Women in the Criminal Justice System

Rachel Morgan Community Safety Policy Officer

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Introduction

Welsh Local Government Association - The Voice of Welsh Councils

- 1 We are the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA); a politically led cross-party organisation that seeks to give local government a strong voice at a national level. We represent the interests of local government and promote local democracy in Wales.
- 2 The 22 councils in Wales are our members and the three fire and rescue authorities and three national park authorities are associate members.

We believe that the ideas that change people's lives, happen locally.

- 3 Communities are at their best when they feel connected to their council through local democracy. By championing, facilitating, and achieving these connections, we can build a vibrant local democracy that allows communities to thrive.
- 4 Our ultimate goal is to promote, protect, support and develop democratic local government and the interests of councils in Wales.

We'll achieve our vision by

- Promoting the role and prominence of councillors and council leaders
 - Ensuring maximum local discretion in legislation or statutory guidance
 - Championing and securing long-term and sustainable funding for councils
 - Promoting sector-led improvement
 - Encouraging a vibrant local democracy, promoting greater diversity
 - Supporting councils to effectively manage their workforce
- 5 The WLGA welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to the Equality and Social Justice Committee as part of its consultation into the experiences of

"Mae'r ddogfen yma ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is available in Welsh."



women in the criminal justice system. The views in this response are supported by the Wales Safer Communities Network.

Women in the Criminal Justice System

- 6 The WLGA welcomes the Committee's consultation seeking views on the experiences of women in the Criminal Justice System (CJS). Experiences with the CJS can undoubtedly be affected by a range of factors – many inter-linking – including gender. Evidence reflects that women face a range of issues which impact on and are impacted by their experience in the CJS and it is important that these are highlighted and explored with a view to addressing any problems and improving the outcomes for women who become involved with the CJS.
- 7 It is known that many women who enter the CJS are often victims of abuse; suffer with mental health issues; and/or substance misuse issues. It is important that these issues are addressed – ideally before engagement with the CJS but certainly while in contact with the system – so that female offenders are supported to address such issues and assisted to break the cycle of offending.
- 8 Women account for just 5% of the prison population and where they receive custodial sentences these are more likely to be short-term sentences for non-violent offences. In the past the nature of these sentences, together with a lack of support services, has led to high rates of re-offending which has had an impact not only on the lives of these women and their families, but also the wider community.
- 9 There is no Women's Prison in Wales and as a result female prisoners are likely to have to serve their sentences in England either in HMP Styal near Manchester or HMP Eastwood Park in Gloucestershire. This often means that female prisoners from Wales are serving sentences some distance away from family and wider community support. As women are also more likely to be primary carers, custodial sentences for women have a greater impact on children and families, in the short and longer-term. Evidence has shown that children whose mother has been imprisoned are at greater risk later in life of drug use; alcohol misuse and of coming into contact with the CJS themselves.
- 10 The Association supports the view that justice should focus on positive intervention and preventative activities in order to offer early support to women and girls at risk of offending and re-offending so that they can avoid engagement or further involvement with the CJS. Furthermore, we support the call for more community-based sentences where appropriate, keeping women



out of prison, and supporting their rehabilitation so that they can lead positive lives within local communities.

- 11 The joint Ministry of Justice and Welsh Government Women's Justice Blueprint for Wales sets out to improve the experiences of and outcomes for women who are in or at risk of entering the criminal justice system in Wales and the WLGA supports the direction of travel as set out in the Blueprint.
- 12 There are a number of interesting and positive areas of work underway as part of the Blueprint e.g. the North Wales Justice Strategy, led by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner North Wales, seeks to work in partnership to support women in North Wales who are at risk of offending to have opportunities and support through diversion and rehabilitation.
- 13 The Women's Pathfinder Whole System Approach introduced in Gwent and South Wales aimed to reach women in contact or at risk of being in contact with CJS. Evaluation of the Pathfinder found that the approach resulted in positive outcomes for the women involved.
- 14 Other positive projects which impact on women in the CJS include the Family Drug and Alcohol Court pilot in Cardiff is an alternative family court for children's care proceedings. It is specifically designed to work with parents with drug or alcohol misuse problems. The Court takes a problem solving approach to proceedings, where referrals have been made from Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan local authorities. It will be interesting to see how the pilot develops and whether the evaluation looks at any gender specific impacts of its operation.
- 15 Under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014, local councils have a range of duties to fulfil in respect of assessing and meeting the care and support needs of those individuals in the secure estate, both male and female. As a result of these new duties, local authorities have engaged in a number of different approaches to meet the care needs of people in the secure estate.
- 16 In order to meet the duties and responsibilities required by the Act, some local authorities, such as Bridgend and Wrexham have established small dedicated teams that sit within the prison, comprised of a range of staff, including: senior social work practitioner; social worker; and occupational therapists who carry out assessments and develop managed care and support plans for people in the secure estate, as well as supporting the work of the existing health board's mental health in-reach team. This includes the provision of information and advice services, and peer-mentoring and support.
- 17 For others responsibility for these new duties sits within existing teams. For example, in Monmouthshire responsibility sits with the Monmouth Integrated



Services Team who are forging new partnerships with National OMS and the Prison Health Service (ABUHB) and developing nurturing/initiating creative, preventative approaches (the 'Buddy Scheme', Yoga, Mindfulness, Day activities, Peer support sessions), which involve the prison population with care and support needs.

- 18 Local authorities recognise however that despite the progress made, they continue to highlight areas for action such as improving access to, and continuity of preventative services; strengthen multi-agency preventative services, including providing family stability and support, for example through Families First and addressing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs); and continuing to improve partnership working, e.g. networking, communication, joint working where appropriate.
- 19 There are a range of wider societal issues that can affect women and girls lead to their engagement in the CJS. These include substance abuse; mental health; poverty; and a lack of education and employment opportunities. Housing is a key issue which is integral to the reduction of re-offending and local authorities remain committed to working to meeting the housing needs of its communities. Addressing these societal issues requires public services working together, across devolved and non-devolved services, and the Blueprints help in this regard.
- 20 In terms of the Women's Rehabilitation Centre, the Association supports this development as a means of enabling female offenders to serve custodial sentences closer to home and to support networks and in order to receive appropriate support and intervention. This approach, we believe, will aid rehabilitation and reduce re-offending both helping to deliver safer communities as well as providing positive outcomes for female offenders.
- 21 The location of the WRC has yet to be finalised. It's location, however, will be part of the key to its success. The location of such accommodation can often cause some concern and anxiety for local communities and it is vital that local authorities are fully involved and consulted and engaged in its development and operation. It will also be important that any concerns that local communities have to the choice of location are properly considered and addressed.
- 22 In addition to the issues highlighted above, it is important to also consider the CJS and how it relates to women as victims. Violence Against Women and Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence is regrettably prevalent throughout Wales and local authorities, working with partners, are committed to tackling this. The CJS can play an important role in supporting women who are victims of VAWDASV. The establishment of a Specialist Domestic Abuse Court at

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Cardiff Magistrates Court is an example of how the CJS can help ensure the needs of women are addressed.

Conclusion

- 23 The WLGA welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to the Committee and hopes that the above is helpful.

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