



Jenny Rathbone MS
Chair, Equality and Social Justice
Committee

19 January 2023

Dear Jenny,

I am writing further to my appearance before the Equality and Social Justice committee on 12 December. I want to thank you again for the diligent and dedicated way you are taking forward this inquiry, which will provide real insight into the experiences of Welsh women.

Following my appearance, you have written to myself, the Deputy Minister for Social Services and the Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing to ask for clarification on a number of subjects. With thanks to my fellow Ministers and Blueprints partners for their contributions, I have provided responses to these queries below.

Outcomes from meeting with Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP

I met with the Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP, Minister of State at the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), on 13 December.

Minister Hinds was complimentary of the collaborative approach we have in Wales in delivering the Women's Justice Blueprints and recognised the complexities of working across devolved and non-devolved landscapes. I made clear also the established partnerships we have developed with third sector organisations such as The Nelson Trust, Llamau and Safer Wales and the vital role they play in delivering frontline support for women including through women's centres.

We spoke about the proposed Residential Women's Centre, and I reinforced the Welsh Government's commitment to its development. Minister Hinds was supportive of the plans to appeal against the planning committee's decision to reject the application.

The important work of women's centres, such as those run by the Nelson Trust and the North Wales Women's Centre in Rhyl, was discussed. Despite being predominantly MOJ funded, I highlighted the Welsh Government support for the centres, including recently providing capital funding for the Nelson Trust centre in Cardiff. Since my meeting with Minister Hinds, myself and the Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing officially

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

opened the Cardiff Nelson Trust Women's Centre and it was good to see you also attending that excellent and very inspiring event.

I raised the challenges around funding for women's centres, notably the centre in Eastwood Park, of which continued funding was highlighted as an area of concern amongst committee members. In the meeting, MOJ officials committed to providing a full briefing on their plans for the centre beyond the current contract. Separately, my officials are also continuing to work with partners to explore future funding options for the North Wales Women's Centre.

We spoke about the experiences faced by women at HMP Eastwood Park and Styal, in particular, for those on short sentences who face severe disruption to their lives and challenges in resettling back into the community. This included discussion on some of the joint work we are doing to improve healthcare and resettlement outcomes, as outlined in my written evidence.

Minister Hinds recognised the issue facing women who were unable to access Buvidal when in custody in England, which is a consequence of differing provision across NHS Trust areas in England. Officials are taking forward work in this area to improve how pathways are operating, and I will continue to pursue this as part of my ongoing engagement with Minister Hinds.

Access to Cordis Bright Evaluation

Members asked whether the Cordis Bright review may be shared. I am pleased to be able to include as part of this letter the Summary Report for the Cordis Bright Evaluation of the Women's Pathfinder WSA and 18-25 Early Intervention Service for your information. I believe that Committee members will also have been sent this report by the Women's Justice Blueprint programme team.



Summary Report-
Women's Pathfinder \

Access to broader data on outcomes for women

On the availability of data concerning women in the justice system which demonstrates the impact the Blueprint is making; I can confirm that discussions are underway on this matter with Blueprints partners. I will follow up once I have further clarification. I am determined to ensure Committee members have access to this information as soon as possible, both because of the importance of access to transparent data, but also because there is an important story to tell about how the Blueprint is beginning to drive systemic change and improve outcomes for Welsh women.

Support for the children of mothers who receive prison sentences

Members recognised the lack of custodial facility for women in Wales and the challenges facing Welsh women imprisoned in England, away from their homes and families. My position remains clear that there is no role for a women's prison in Wales, but I am still determined to improve the experiences of Welsh mothers held in custody in England.

Establishing approaches that seek to improve opportunities for Welsh women in prison to maintain contact with their children is a key priority of the Blueprint. Welsh Government and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) jointly fund the innovative Pact Visiting Mum Service, to specifically support women from Wales who are serving prison sentences in

England to maintain contact with their children (where it is in the child's best interest to do so). The Pact Visiting Mum Service is live in both HMP Eastwood Park and HMP Styal.

Visiting Mum identifies women who are at risk of losing contact with their children and offers specialist support to preserve and strengthen family ties, recognising the importance of maintaining positive relationships between mothers in prison and their children. Mothers are invited to engage in parenting and relationships programmes and to receive support from the team, which may include assistance engaging with social workers and other services.

These relationships help aid women's rehabilitation, reduce anxiety in prison, reduce self-harm and contribute to good order and discipline in prison. These relationships also have a significant impact on the children's emotional wellbeing, their attainment at school and the risk of going on to become offenders themselves.

The service is designed to support Welsh women and their families by arranging visits, offering parenting and relationship programmes to women, offer transport to children, and provide 'wraparound care' for children after their visit. Volunteers, who are instrumental to the running of the service, also encourage families to engage with schools to support the wellbeing of children.

I can confirm that from July 2021 to the end of August 2022, the Pact Visiting Mum Service has supported 68 families and 130 children. I visited Eastwood Park on 19 January with the Counsel General to see first-hand the provision and the difference it is making for Welsh families.

How Welsh social services work with projects such as Visiting Mum to ensure all children have support to visit their mothers

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, Part 6 Code of Practice (Looked After and Accommodated Children) is focussed on promoting family support and providing services that keep families together and preventing parent child separation where possible. The Code of Practice recognises that contact can be very important in helping children and young people develop their sense of identity and understand their lives and their sense of self.

Each Local Authority has a duty to endeavour to promote contact between the child and their parents. This contact can be supported through projects such as Visiting Mum.

Practice guidance available to Local Authorities and social services to ensure that children and women are reunited in a child-focused way

The Welsh Government's aim is to see fewer children and young people entering care, by providing the right support at the right time to families going through difficult times. The focus is on a child's wellbeing and keeping families together. This, coupled with the other commitments for children's services laid out in our current Programme for Government, provides a strong, complementary, and holistic approach to achieving our aim for children and families in Wales.

There is no specific practice guidance related to the reunification of children and women involved with the Criminal Justice System. Guidance is provided to Local Authorities through the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, Part 6 Code of Practice (Looked After and Accommodated Children). This Code of Practice includes principles that Local Authorities should work in partnership with the family and the child or young person to enable them to be reunited with the family where possible, provided that this is consistent with the individual child's well-being. The child's well-being is the paramount consideration

at all times and each child's views, wishes and needs for contact should be individually considered and regularly assessed.

The Welsh Government is also committed to the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and believe that as a part of this all children and young people have the right to be listened to and be treated with respect. A key value underpinning policy in this area is to strengthen the voice and rights of children and their families.

An update on the Small Homes project, and in particular any plans to extend it to North Wales

The Deputy Minister for Social Services and I have agreed with the MOJ to work together to deliver an outcome that will see children in the welfare and justice systems in Wales fully co-located in the same building/site. This is being delivered through the Small Homes Project.

Our vision is to redesign how we look after children and young people so we can do the best for our young people, their families, and communities by providing services that are locally based, locally designed and locally accountable. Our view is that all children should be treated the same regardless of their pathway and that they should be accommodated in the same homes with the full sharing of services and facilities. This approach is in line with the ethos of the Blueprint and the commitment to a child-first, rights-based approach. The vision for the future is to move away from the existing provision towards small, regional homes which better meet the needs of Welsh children.

It was originally agreed that the Small Homes Project would be a joint project between Welsh Government and MOJ. Following discussions Welsh Government will now lead this work to provide more focussed leadership, but officials will still work closely with HMPPS and the Department for Education on this initiative. Over the next few months, officials reporting to the Deputy Minister for Social Services are aiming to establish a programme board with the Ministry of Justice and Department for Education to establish what a secure small home could look like in Wales with a view to building new provision during this Senedd term.

Discussions around the location of any small home have not been discussed at present, but this will need to be a key factor the programme board will need to consider as we progress with the project.

The level of support for women coming into the criminal justice system, whose main presenting factor is their drug addiction, and which organisation provides this service

The main substance misuse services within Wales for women entering the criminal justice system are commissioned by HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). HMPPS is represented on all the Area Planning Boards (APBs) who are responsible for conducting needs assessments and the commissioning and monitoring of substance misuse services. Partnership working between the responsible authorities is key in delivering evidence based and strategic commissioning. Partners such as the Health Boards and HMPPS have an important role in working with APBs to commission and deliver these services and in working in partnership to deliver these services across Wales, which in several areas are jointly commissioned.

The Welsh Government has recently consulted on a Substance Misuse Treatment Framework (SMTF) for Prisons, and this includes actions to ensure continuity of care both at the start of a custodial sentence and on release, the SMTF specifically covers the needs

of women. Given that custodial sentences mean women will serve their sentences outside Wales we are aware of the challenges this presents. Work is currently underway to ensure women from Wales who are sentenced and are receiving injectable buprenorphine in the community in Wales are able to continue to do so during their sentence, as this treatment is not widely offered in the English system. In addition, we are working with HMPPS to put in place steps to ensure those women from Wales who wish to directly access residential treatment on release can do so.

We have also been able to support The Nelson Trust to establish a Womens centre in Cardiff, supporting women who are in contact with the criminal justice system and on release from custodial sentences. The centre offers a range of support including substance misuse services.

Residential rehabilitation and inpatient detoxification play an important role in helping service users secure their long-term recovery. The Welsh Government remains committed to ensuring that such services are available. As part of the budget for 2022-23 the Welsh Government increased its investment by £1m to £2m for ring-fenced funding for residential rehabilitation and inpatient detoxification from the Substance Misuse Action Fund to Area Planning Boards (APBs). Access to both residential and detoxification treatments, as well as community-based rehabilitation are available through our residential treatment framework 'Rehab Cymru' which provides over 30 approved settings in Wales and England, some of which offer medically managed detoxification services.

Residential rehabilitation and inpatient detoxification continue to play an important role in helping service users secure their long-term recovery and the Welsh Government remains committed to ensuring that such services are available on a long-term sustainable basis in Wales.

The Welsh Government is engaging stakeholders to update the Substance Misuse Delivery Plan and will be considering all options for better alignment with non-devolved criminal justice services.

Support available for the reintegration of women into the community once they have been released, and what follow-up takes place to ensure that their incarceration is not a repeat occurrence

Building on the existing written evidence I have provided to the Committee and the Cordis Bright evaluation included above, I have highlighted some of the key support available below.

HMPPS lead on resettlement planning and as part of this in 2021 it launched a new Commissioned Rehabilitation service for women, recognising the need for a distinct approach to supporting women supervised by Probation services and women in prison who are due to be released into the community on licence. This is a holistic service for women which addresses the following frequently occurring rehabilitative needs: accommodation, dependency and recovery, finance, benefits and debt and personal well-being. The interventions are tailored to reflect each woman's individual needs and circumstances.

These services are available for women on a Community/ Suspended Sentence Order with a Rehabilitation Activity Requirement or on Licence/Post-Sentence Supervision. The accommodation and social inclusion 'mentoring' service is also delivered pre-release for women who are due to be released on Licence.

The innovative Women's Pathfinder Whole System Approach (and 18-25 Early Intervention Service) currently delivered by Future 4, provides a service to knit around and complement

statutory provision (such as that provided under the above Commissioned Rehabilitation Service contract) for women. It is one example of how the Blueprint vision for delivering a whole system approach is being operationalised into practice in South Wales and Gwent.

The Service seeks to work seamlessly to support women at all stages of the criminal justice system (including key transition points such as release into the community following a period of incarceration) to support women to avoid further involvement in crime through providing consistency in support.

HMPPS has established six Women's Pathfinder Partnership Integration Coordinator Roles, aligned to the Probation Delivery Units in Wales to complement delivery of the Whole System Approach to supporting women across Wales. These roles support inter-agency connectivity and collaboration in relation to delivering support for women across Wales (including coordination of the Women's Pathfinder Multi-Agency Case Conferences) and in helping to unblock barriers to women accessing support.

Seven multi-Agency Women's Pathfinder Case Conferences have also been established across Wales. These Conferences provide a mechanism for partners to provide a solution focused, holistic approach to identifying, sequencing, coordinating and responding to the needs of women with complex needs and vulnerabilities. Women may be referred into case conferences at any stage in the system (including women being released from prison).

The Offender Personality Disorder Pathway (OPDP) is working with and supporting the transition of High Risk of Harm & Complex Needs Women that meet the OPDP criteria from HMP Eastwood Park into the community, specifically their access into health services.

Welsh Government continue to work closely with HMPPS in Wales on implementation of the Accommodation Pathway for Ex-Offenders, as well as supporting implementation of the Women's Blueprint. This includes the joint funding of a number of posts with HMPPS in Wales to support implementation of the Pathway and improve partnership working between homelessness and Probation services.

As part of the Ending Homelessness Action Plan and the Rapid Rehousing transformation, there are a range of activities being taken forward to support and improve the accommodation journey of women leaving custody. This includes revision of the current Pathway in light of recent service changes within the Probation service, as well as prioritising improved prevention services for people leaving custody to reduce the likelihood of homelessness on release in the first place.

No one should be forced to sleep rough in Wales and we have introduced secondary legislation to ensure the continuation of our 'no-one left out' approach ahead of wider legislative reform. This means anyone who presents as homeless who is street homeless is now identified in law as priority need for accommodation and should be entitled to access temporary accommodation.

Aimed at providing additional accommodation options for women leaving custody likely to be homeless on release, the rollout of CAS3 accommodation continues with 8 Local Authorities having now engaged with HMPPS. Welsh Government officials will be urging all Local Authorities to either continue or re-open their dialogue with HMPPS in order to access this additional funding from the UK Government.

There will always be more to do to improve outcomes for women and young people in contact with the justice system and we will continue to work in collaboration with our justice partners to progress this important agenda.

I will keep you informed of progress.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Hutt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke above the first letter of "Jane".

Jane Hutt MS

Y Gweinidog Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Minister for Social Justice