



Justice Select Committee
Chair – Sir Bob Neill
justicecom@parliament.uk

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WOMEN'S PRISON ESTATE EXPANSION PROGRAMME UPDATE PAUSING PLANS TO BUILD

Dear Chair,

I want to provide you with an update on the programme to deliver Gender-Specific and Trauma-Informed (GSTI) accommodation in the women's prison estate.

The Government remains committed to delivering GSTI approaches that will support more effective rehabilitation for women in the criminal justice system. Prison builds are complex capital projects, which are being delivered within challenging market conditions. As with other construction programmes, women's estate expansion plans have been affected by high levels of inflation over the last year, which have had a material impact on estimated costs. Amid these ongoing fiscal challenges, we are taking a responsible approach and pausing our plans to build while we consider the impact of such pressures.

We have already made good progress developing designs for open and closed GSTI accommodation for the women's estate. We have secured planning approval for three of the five sites (in the case of one site this is subject to a Section 106 agreement), with work continuing to secure planning approval for the remaining two. GSTI design work completed to date will stand us in good stead, subject to fiscal considerations, for recommending the building of such accommodation in the future. This will further support achievement of our outcomes in relation to women in custody.

As you know, our Female Offender Strategy and Delivery Plan makes clear that we want fewer women serving short sentences in custody and more being managed in the community. We are introducing a presumption against short-term prison sentences of 12 months or less, subject to the passage of legislation. We are encouraging robust community sentences as an alternative to custody for women, including piloting Intensive Supervision Courts targeting specific cohorts such as female offenders and increasing the availability of residential accommodation options for women at risk of receiving short custodial sentences.

We are committed to exploring solutions for the complex challenges within the Criminal Justice System that deliver better outcomes for the taxpayer. We continue to monitor female population trajectories and work across government to ensure that we take the necessary steps to maintain sufficient capacity within the prison estate to serve the courts.

Our long-term commitment to GSTI approaches will see us continuing to work with the sector in obtaining the right outcome for women in the criminal justice system. We recognise that solutions need to ensure they meet the individual safety, emotional and offending-behaviour needs of the women in our care. We

continue to explore options across this space as we head into the next spending review. We will of course continue to update you on any developments.

Yours faithfully,

Fiona Parker

Deputy Director, Prison Supply Directorate
HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS)