

Written evidence submitted by Greater Manchester Combined Authority and Greater Manchester Probation Service Response

In Greater Manchester partners have worked collaboratively over many years to deliver a whole system approach for women in the justice system and those who are at risk of entering it. This approach predates the MoJ Female Offender Strategy. However, it supports the strategies' key ambitions of: -

- diverting women away from the justice system (where appropriate),
- increase the use of community sentences,
- reduce the number of short custodial sentences, and
- deliver a better experience for those in custody.

Overview - Whole System Approach for Women

The 'whole system approach for women' aims to identify women at the points of arrest, sentence and release from custody to offer support to help change behaviour. Where appropriate, women are diverted away from justice interventions into support that meets their wider needs. For example - a referral to women's centre at point of arrest directly by police or partners in the custody suite, including the custody healthcare and liaison and diversion service.

Where it is in the public interest for the women to go through the justice system, there is a problem solving court approach that aims to reduce the number of women sentenced to short custodial sentences. We know short custodial sentences do not allow women to receive the support they need to address their offending behaviour, which can cause major disruption and harm to families and children. This reduction is achieved by proposing intensive community interventions, which take a trauma informed approach and co-ordinating justice, voluntary sector and local authority support through the local women's centre.

History and Development of the Current Delivery Model

Historically approaches to support vulnerable and marginalised women focused on those who found themselves in or at risk of entering the criminal justice system. This approach was not always effective at tackling all specific aspects of need, was inconsistent and lacked a whole system approach. All 10 local areas in GM had some form of existing provision for women; however, there was no core model or framework, resulting in a postcode lottery.

In 2014, the introduction of the Whole System Approach for Female Offenders built on these early foundations to create a consistent basic offer across GM, with the model combining the best that the statutory, private and voluntary and community sector had to offer. The approach has built on the network of local women's centres already in place across Greater Manchester, by consolidating them and expanding their capacity to work with women at all stages in the Criminal Justice System through a process of co-design and co-commissioning. This resulted in improved engagement with offender management and support services and the development of new skills and increased self-reliance of

service users. The providers were a collection of 8 individual charities that became the Greater Manchester Women's Support Alliance (the Alliance). This non-legally binding Alliance works collaboratively to deliver a core set of interventions and standards to women across GM.

A review was undertaken in 2017 which helped to move thinking towards a 'whole system approach for vulnerable and marginalised women' where their needs can be met in a safe environment through a gendered and trauma-informed service delivery model. This removed the label of 'offender' and opened up the opportunity for the women's centres to deliver to women outside of the justice system but facing many similar and complex issues.

The review also recognised the needs of victims can be similar to offenders especially in complex instances where victims and offenders can be the same people. It allowed the approach to engage with other community partners to become part of a wider coordinated service offer that recognises vulnerable and marginalised women do not only appear in the justice system. Usually, they are known to a variety of public services frequently accessing them at a point of crisis and then failing to stay engaged and only to re-present at a future crisis. Evidence tells us, such women once engaged with a women's centre are much more likely to engage and benefit from the services of other public services designed to help. The service has developed a relationship approach which advocates for women and often co-locates services in the women's centre to offer a safe environment for the woman to access those services.

This needs-led focus also highlighted the necessity of the service beyond the involvement of statutory services. The women's centres provide support until the woman herself feels empowered to move on. While for most women this is just a few months in some circumstances the support can be for prolonged periods of time. The continuation and consistency of support not only helps the woman move forward in her life but removed the risks of support ending when a woman is no longer subject to probation and helps prevent her falling back into offending behaviours.

The work delivered across Greater Manchester had a direct effect on the development of the MoJ Women Offenders Strategy. It highlighted how needs of women who find themselves in the criminal justice system need to be addressed and the most effective way to do this is, by linking women to support of a women's centre in their communities. While the Strategy was broadly welcomed by partners in GM, it failed to provide enough resource to see it implemented at any scale or over a long period of time. Greater Manchester remains one of the only areas to have a comprehensive whole system approach. This lack of resource has been highlighted in further discussions with the MoJ who have stated there are no dedicated sustainable funds linked to support the development of a whole system approach.

Service Profile

The Alliance is working with a significant number of women and in 2018/19 the Alliance received **1731 referrals**. This is about 400 additional referrals than the previous 3 years due to more non-criminal justice women accessing services.

The service identifies unmet need and works with a woman to help her cope recover and become more resilient. The highest needs are identified as:

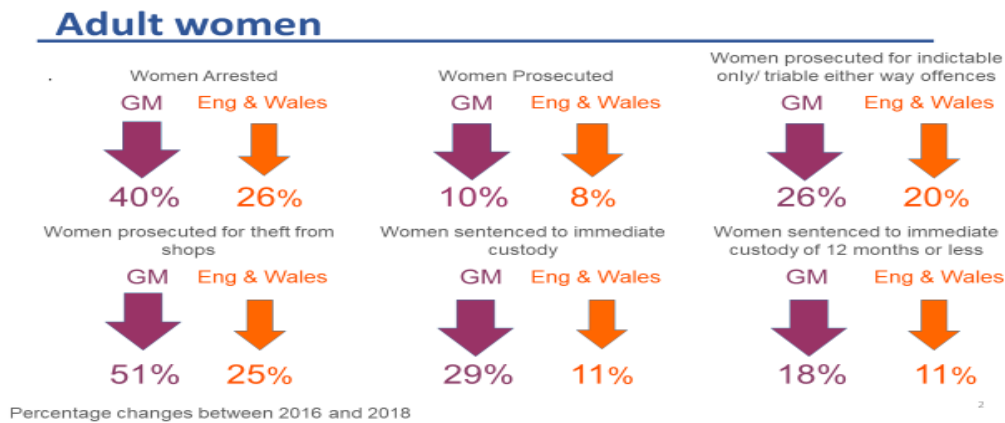
- Mental health and wellbeing 81%
- Domestic abuse 51%,
- Finance and debt 42%,
- Accommodation 34%,
- Children and families 29%.

Women also reported needs in physical health, alcohol or drugs at 20 % in each. 51% of women engaging with the service have needs in 5 areas or more. In every area of need, at least 70% had their need met or some progress made whilst being supported by the Alliance.

The approach has been shown to be successful against a number of outcomes and service user satisfaction is very high at over 95%. Importantly it has helped reduce reoffending rates across Greater Manchester and demand on the justice infrastructure.

Reduction in Demand

Outlined below is the demonstration of how the model reduces demand and offending compare to national averages. (England & Wales)



Reduction in Reoffending

The proven re-offending rate published by Ministry of Justice for Greater Manchester adult women was 13.5% (Jan – Dec 2019). GM compares well with other Metropolitan areas and the England & Wales average.

Area	Proven re-offending rate
GM adult women offenders	13.5%
Merseyside adult women offenders	21.7%
West Midlands adult women offenders	23.6%

South Yorkshire adult women offenders	22.3%
West Yorkshire adult women offenders	25.7%
E&W adult women offenders	20.6%

Governance

Governance for this theme of work is through the Justice and Rehabilitation Executive. A Vulnerable and Marginalised Women’s Board has closer oversight of strategy and delivery which reports to the Adult Offender Reform Board. However, due to the requirements of women which are interdependent on health and local authority partners, it is important to have links to the GM Health and Justice Board and the GM Reform Board to keep them sighted on performance, progress and issues.

The GM Health and Justice Strategy highlighted the value of this work and made recommendations to further develop the approach to meet the needs of women when they appear to services rather than just when they are in contact with criminal justice services.

The approach has been subject to a process scrutiny and evaluation. Manchester Metropolitan University undertook a process evaluation over a 3 year period which highlighted the positive progress made. The GM Corporate Issues Scrutiny Panel reviewed the work favourably offering support to the approach and stating it should continue.

Sustainability Approach – Outcomes-focused & delivering at scale

The GM ambition is to have a gender specific approach for women facing complex and multiple issues to help them cope and move forward in their lives. We know that for such women in the justice system or at risk of entering it, we are making that difference now. We also know that benefits of the existing delivery model fall to justice, health and local authority partners. However, we also realise that the full potential of this approach has not yet been reached. Work with health and local authority partners has demonstrated there are further opportunities to engage women at various other points in the broader health, justice and statutory services systems. This could include offering support and accepting referrals from early help, social services, accommodation / homelessness, GP’s and A&E. In addition to these pathways, there is an opportunity to embed the whole system approach to women more firmly in our integrated approach to the delivery of public services.

Service delivery for women subject to probation

Greater Manchester Probation Service is a key partner in co-design and are integral in assisting with service delivery. They have co-located their probation staff in women’s centres so the vast majority of women report to their local women’s centre. They have identified and deliver against 4 priorities to ensure the whole system approach is maintained.

1) Retain focus on sentencing outcomes and reducing number of under 12-month custodial sentences imposed

This is achieved via the female problem solving court for women at risk of short custodial sentences, established in 2014. This offer for GM Women has significantly reduced the number of short custodial

sentences in GM. Quarterly reports are shared with key partners and stakeholders and quarterly board meetings convene alongside GMCA, magistrates and GMPS to address any performance needs.

2) Ensure that a robust package of intervention and support is in place for female offenders across GM

We have strengthened our relationship with interventions and UPW and programmes are actively delivering interventions via women's centres, with UPW having a female focus on groundwork, gardening and other suitable projects. We have a GM presence in all female specific meetings and forums and co-promote interventions for females in stakeholder engagement events with sentencers.

3) Improve the accommodation offer for women in contact with the Criminal Justice System across GM

We are linked in with local HPT provision to ensure joined-up approach, identification of key barriers, co-ordinated feedback to centre/policy and the further development the offer for vulnerable females who require this service. We have established strong links with the housing specialist at HMP Styal to ensure early identification of possible NFA/transient cases. We contribute to GMCA accommodation forums to look strengthen the offer for women, acknowledging their vulnerabilities, housing needs and caring roles.

4) Maintain close links and joined-up working with Women's Centres across GM

The strategic lead for GM women works alongside GMWSA and through local lead managers, we ensure up to date knowledge of service delivery can be shared with female concentrator practitioners. These practitioners are across each of the 9 PDUs and are co-located within their local women's centres, to co-work alongside support staff. The centres are the first point of contact for court inductions and where possible for prison releases.

Commissioning of support services for women on probation

The recent Dynamic Framework to commission support for women on probation (in GM the Integrated Rehabilitation Services (IRS) commission) failed to adopt principles set out in our whole system approach and the MoJ's Female Offender strategy. To address this, Greater Manchester Probation Service undertook commissioning in partnership with GMCA and by using the GMCA commissioning process. This novel approach allowed GMCA/GMPS to develop some innovative commissioning opportunities. Different to the Dynamic Framework, the IRS commissioned a women's service to build a trauma informed relationship with women and to address their support needs The GM provider is also able to refer into other specific IRS commissioned services to assist achieve specific outcomes such as around securing accommodation, gaining access to specialist dependency and recovery services or education, training and employment outcomes.

We also extend the cohort of women in touch with the justice system to include those women who were on stand-alone unpaid work, on remand in custody and going through a police custody suite (integrating with Liaison and Diversion).

To maintain the needs led whole system approach GMCA co-invested in the service to ensure it could still deliver to those women who were at risk of entering the justice system and without support would have been likely to offend. This allows key partners such as social services, domestic abuse services and self-referrals to access support at an earlier stage than if they had to be a person on probation.

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