

Women in the Criminal Justice System Strategy Group

NORFOLK STRATEGY

Introduction

The proportion of women in the criminal justice system is relatively small; they make up just 5 per cent of the prison population and 15 per cent of offenders serving a sentence in the community.

It has taken time for a system that works predominantly with men to acknowledge the evidence that women have different needs that require a gendered response.

[Baroness Corston's report \(2007\)](#) shone a light on this disparity, highlighting that equal treatment of men and women does not necessarily result in equal outcomes.

On average female offenders commit less serious offences than male offenders and often pose a low or medium risk of serious harm to the public. Over three quarters of women sentenced to custody receive short sentences of less than 12 months with 70.7 per cent of women reoffending following a short custodial sentence.

[The Female Offender Strategy \(2018\)](#) set out the government's commitment to do things differently, acknowledging the significant vulnerabilities and complexities of female offenders that are often the product of a life of abuse and trauma.

The management of women in contact with the criminal justice system (CJS) requires a joined-up approach that acknowledges the gender-specific needs of women, promotes positive wellbeing and supports successful long-term outcomes to reduce reoffending.

To achieve this, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Norfolk (OPCCN) and the Eastern Region, National Probation Service are working together with Norfolk partners to deliver an ambitious strategy with the vision to see fewer women coming into the criminal justice system; fewer women in custody, especially on short term sentences, a greater proportion of women managed in the community successfully and improved provision of through the gate services for those in custody to create better outcomes for women.



Norfolk's Aspirations

- Take a gender and trauma-informed and responsive approach, in supporting women to live crime free and healthy lives making communities safer.
- Promote multi-agency working involving criminal justice agencies, other statutory services (especially those related to health, including mental health and substance misuse; accommodation; domestic abuse; and employment), and voluntary sector women's services to reduce the number of women in the criminal justice system by intervening earlier to keep them safe and address the vulnerabilities that often lead to crime.
- Work with the Norfolk's Youth Offending Board and partners to share learning that can be adopted for girls under the age of 18 and work together to ensure continuity of interventions in respect of young women who transition into adult services.
- Deliver an ambitious service, that is distinct to Norfolk and locally led building on and learning from the successful WONDER Whole System Approach model, recognising the far reaching, long-term impact resulting from the imprisonment of women.

Norfolk's strategy will focus on

Early Intervention and Prevention

- Implement diversion initiatives for women across Norfolk
- Establish initiatives to better support girls, and potentially young women, at greatest risk of offending and therefore entering the CJS

Courts and Sentencing

- Develop a clear understanding of current services available to women involved in the CJS in Norfolk, delivered by both statutory and non-statutory partners in the community to reduce short term sentencing and remand
- Develop pre-sentence pathway that addresses the needs of women who come into contact with the Criminal Justice System.
- Establish range of suitable community alternatives to custody & remand

Custody and resettlement

- Develop/strengthen resettlement provision for women offenders serving custodial sentences (held in local women's resettlement prisons) who are to return to Norfolk on release
- Establish services for Norfolk women in custody to improve and maintain links with children and families

Community Sentences

- Develop a model of Women's Residential services in Norfolk, identifying scope, provision of services and potential capacity
- Improve the availability of gender-specific sentencing options in the community allowing women to receive a community rather than a custodial sentence where appropriate
- Establish a training framework for staff working with women who come into contact with the CJS

What success looks like

If we take the right approach, one that addresses vulnerability, follows the evidence about what works in supporting women to turn their lives around, and treats them as individuals of value, it will have substantial benefits for victims, families, and wider communities, as well as for the women themselves.

Governance

Norfolk's Reducing Offending Board will oversee delivery of the Women in the Criminal Justice System Strategy.

Quotes from WONDER clients...

"LW helps me to explain my situation to services...she jogs my memory at mental health appointments... I 'don't know what I'd do without her".

"LW's support is always in the back of my head. I know if things go wrong, the support is there. LW is an enormous support.... She's always smiling; we talk a lot - she's the only person that I confide in. I'd be lost without her, to be fair.... She is amazing".