

Nottinghamshire's Blueprint for a Whole System Approach to Women in, or at risk of entering the Criminal Justice System

2022-2025

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Acknowledgements

This blueprint has only been possible thanks to the support of the stakeholders who have helped co-develop it. We would like to thank them for their help.

The blueprint has been informed by the work of Katy Swaine-Williams who co-produced London's blueprint.



1. About the Blueprint

1.1 Nottinghamshire's Blueprint for implementing a whole system approach to women and girls in contact with the criminal justice system and at risk of such contact (hereafter referred to as 'women') was developed through a consultative process and is intended to consolidate the range of strategies and commitments in respect of women in Nottinghamshire and set a foundation for ongoing multi-agency work in this area.

1.2 The Blueprint is intended to:

- **Provide clarity of our vision** in developing a whole systems approach by articulating the signatories' shared aims and objectives
- **Provide clarity of roles and responsibilities** by consolidating the legislative framework applicable to agencies both internal and external to the Criminal Justice System
- **Provide clarity of outcomes and accountability arrangements**, including details of how performance will be measured and progress will be reported and overseen
- **Provide an evidence base** to support the development of a whole system approach, highlighting 'what works' and providing a useful source of reference for all those working with women in Nottinghamshire to work towards a holistic response to women.
- **Achieve stronger connections with national and local strategies** to tackle violence against women and girls including domestic abuse.
- **Create a foundation for the development of an Action Plan** in working towards a sustainable whole system approach. This will include activity to
 - Map existing provision and pathways for women and girls in Nottinghamshire
 - Identify and respond to notable gaps in services identified
 - Strengthen co-ordination and information sharing across agencies to improve outcomes for women and girls in the CJS
 - Promote and embed gender-responsive and trauma—informed services
 - Capture and learn from the voices of those with lived experience of the CJS
- **Provide for the coordination and long-term sustainability of services**, laying a foundation for effective co-commissioning and coordinated allocation of scarce resources across agencies to provide the best possible outcomes.

1.3 The Blueprint consists of a Statement of Shared Commitments and an accompanying Annex. The Statement of Shared Commitments has been formally adopted by all partners listed at the end of the Annex ('the Signatories') and articulates the vision and aims of the Signatories. The Annex provides background context for the Blueprint including a case study illustrating many of the needs the Signatories seek to meet, and information about current provision in Nottinghamshire. The aims outlined in section 4 draw on the evidence base and feedback provided by a range of agencies and will be used to inform the development of a local action plan. This will provide a starting point for discussion and joint work by the Nottinghamshire Women and Girls in the CJS Steering Group in implementing a whole system approach.

2. Statement of Shared Commitments

2.1 Signatories' Opening Statement

2.1.1 It is widely acknowledged that women and girls in, or at risk of entering the Criminal Justice System, present with a variety of complexities which often includes a history of, or ongoing trauma rooted in relationship difficulties and domestic abuse. Tackling and responding to violence against women and girls is at the heart of our approach to addressing the needs of women in the criminal justice system. When these complexities go unaddressed and agencies work in siloes, we fail to see the 'bigger picture' and unnecessarily prolong the contact that women of all ages have with criminal justice and health and social care agencies.

2.1.2 This problem in social justice results in a lack of cohesion and gender-specific, trauma-informed collaborative practice amongst agencies. In turn, this leads to greater numbers of women being imprisoned, a lifelong impact on children and their families and the intergenerational affects which can have routes into crime and future perpetration of crime. This only serves to exacerbate the already acute needs faced by vulnerable women and their families.

2.1.3 There is clear evidence that whole systems approaches, such as those developed in Greater Manchester, achieve results for women in this cohort, particularly when underpinned by principles of joined up working, co-location and problem-solving approaches.

2.2 Commitment to Whole Systems Approach

2.2.1 The Ministry of justice has led on [The Concordat on Women in or at risk of contact with the Criminal Justice System](#) which sets of how partners should work together at a national and local level to identify and respond to the needs of women. It encourages the development of local partnerships to strengthen local delivery and build on existing support for women by creating cross sector, shared values and objectives. Women with lived experience have been clear that the competing demands placed upon them by agencies working in siloes are conflicting, unmanageable and disempowering. A whole system approach would enable the collaboration between agencies and commitment to cross sector working. This will create clear pathways for information sharing, improved communication between agencies and less duplication of work. With the commitment from signatories, a whole systems approach, will reduce reoffending,

reduce the number of women coming into contact with the Criminal Justice System and achieve better social outcomes for women, girls, and their families.

- 2.2.2 The experience and background of women in, or at risk of entering the Criminal Justice System, is complex and often marked by experiences of additionally being a victim. As evidenced in various academic texts, publications from Corston's seminal report (2007), the MoJ Female Offender Strategy (2018) and the National Concordat for women in or at risk of entering the CJS (2020), a gender-specific and trauma-informed approach is paramount to achieving better outcomes and responding to the distinctly different needs of a woman in the CJS. This approach is likely to look different for each agency, however shared principles of practice and commitment to this joint up way of working will serve to reduce the re-triggering of trauma for women and respond to their wider issues and complexities that are part and parcel of her whole self.
- 2.2.3 Gender responsive practice is one which acknowledges the differing routes into crime that occur for men and women. Trauma Informed practice encourages staff and organisations to deliver a service which seeks to understand what happened to an individual rather than asking 'what's wrong'. Trauma Informed practice is a more recognised phrase locally in recent years, however this blueprint seeks to go further and develop trauma informed organisations, with this ethos embedded into practice, as opposed to staff simply completing some training.
- 2.2.4 To support this way of working and to integrate the shared objectives and values into all signatories' organisations, where possible, co-location will be explored to support the development of multi-disciplinary teams. This will create a culture of gender specific and trauma informed working and practice in which the woman is placed at the heart of joint agency decision making. In turn this will provide the foundation to allow appropriate sequencing of interventions and understanding of competing demands placed upon a woman. Multi-Disciplinary Teams cultivate agency collaboration and cross-pollination of agencies skills and training.

3. Interdependent Strategies and Legal Obligations

3.1 *Female Offender Strategy, Ministry of Justice (2018)*

Sets out three main priorities to better meet the needs of women and girls in, or at risk of entering the CJS. These are:

1. Fewer women and girls coming into the Criminal Justice System

Diversion of women at first contact with the Police via gender specific Out of Court Disposal schemes. Supporting more agencies to identify vulnerable women at an earlier stage so that referrals can be made for appropriate, women's only support.

2. Fewer women and girls in custody (especially for short term sentences) and a greater proportion of women managed successfully in the community.

Ensuring that the public and Judiciary have confidence in the community provision available for women and that clear information pathways into Court are available to allow specific and appropriate recommendations to be made. Community options to be sustainable and equipped to meet the needs of the complexities and volume of women that would be diverted their way.

3. Better conditions for those in custody

Custody which protects the public, but which improves the chances of rehabilitation. This includes strengthening family ties and for the resettlement of women to include pathways into employment, training or education where appropriate and to safe housing with effective wrap around support.

3.2 *National Concordat for women in, or at risk of entering the Criminal justice System (2020)*

Sets out how Government and other partners should work together at a national and local level to identify and respond to the needs of women. A cross government commitment to support women has agreed on a set of actions and desired outcomes designed to ensure established partnerships deliver on this commitment. The commitment involves the partners working together to improve outcomes for women who have already encountered the Criminal Justice System or at risk of doing so. Evidence shows that it is local agencies and organisations, with local expertise, that can truly drive change. The concordat is designed to support the development of partnerships to achieve this.

3.3 Domestic Abuse Act (2021)

Aims to raise awareness and understanding about the devastating impact of domestic abuse on victims and their families. It looks to strengthen the support for victims of abuse by statutory agencies and to improve the justice system in providing protection for victims of domestic abuse and bringing perpetrators to justice.

3.4 From Harm to Hope Strategy (2021)

Government's 10 year plan to cut crime and save lives by reducing the supply and demand for drugs and delivering a high-quality treatment and recovery system. The strategy lays the foundations for creating a world-class drug and alcohol treatment and recovery system across England which meets the needs of all communities, particularly those who have often not received an effective service in the past, including women and people from ethnic minority backgrounds. This blueprint will support and work towards delivering the objectives of the From Harm to Hope Strategy.

3.5 Homelessness Reduction

We will work towards establishing a shared approach across Nottinghamshire, working closely with local authority housing departments and the local authorities, to address the housing needs of women in contact with the Criminal Justice System, including preventing homelessness and supporting resettlement on release. This will include:

- a. Working together to intervene earlier and more effectively to prevent women being made homeless, in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and Code of Guidance;
- b. Aiming to ensure that all women are resettled into safe and suitable accommodation, either long term or including a realistic plan for achieving long term accommodation; and
- c. Aiming to ensure that all women have access to tailored wrap around support to meet their emotional, health and practical needs upon resettlement.

3.6 Equality Objectives

Pursuant to our obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and the findings of the Lammy review, the Signatories are committed to achieving equal treatment of all women, including:

- a. Black, Asian and minority ethnic women;
- b. Foreign national women;
- c. Women with disabilities;

- d. Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller women;
- e. Women of different faiths; and
- f. LGBT women.

We will scrutinise outcomes for women in these minority groups and, where disparities appear with no justifiable explanation, we will implement reforms in consultation with women and specialist service providers.

3.7 Best Interests of Children

The Signatories are committed to fulfilling their legal obligations to protect the best interests of children whose mothers are in contact with the Criminal Justice System. We will work towards achieving the following:

- a. Separation by imprisonment is avoided wherever possible;
- b. Imprisonment of pregnant women is avoided wherever possible;
- c. Where imprisonment cannot be avoided, best practice is followed in the treatment of pregnant women and new mothers and support is provided to both children and mothers¹ to limit the negative effects of separation;
- d. Proper account is taken of women's parenting responsibilities and measures implemented to help ensure these do not operate as a barrier to their compliance with criminal justice proceedings, including meeting the requirements of out of court disposals, community sentences and licence and supervision requirements²; and
- e. Parenting support is provided where it is needed, including offering support dedicated to the mother in addition to the child's social worker.

¹ This could include services being commissioned to facilitate regular telephone and face to face contact with children where appropriate

² This will take into account safeguarding law and best practice and that the best interests of the child may not always align with the mother's wishes

4. Aims to be achieved by 2025

Over the next three years the Signatories will work together to achieve the following objectives, which are aligned to the priorities of the Female Offender Strategy's priorities:

4.1 Improving understanding and awareness of the needs and experiences of women and girls at every stage of the criminal justice process:

- Developing a data dashboard to track needs and outcomes of women and girls in o at risk of entering the CJS. This will include data relating to vulnerability and criminogenic needs; case progression; outcomes from interventions delivered by the police, courts and specialist support services; and rates of offending and reoffending. The dashboard will be accessible to all Signatories.
- Capturing the views and experiences of women and girls with lived experience and ensuring that this information is used to help shape and inform the development of local services. Signatories agree on the importance of integrating 'experts by experience' into all aspects of the action plan. The golden thread that runs throughout this Blueprint is that women and girls' voices are heard. It is a fundamental principle of the Nottinghamshire blueprint that will be embedded across all the workstreams³.
- Identify and develop effective and more closely aligned pathways for transferring girls into adult services with the support of the Youth Offender Team and Priority Families and Troubled Families departments.

4.2 Strengthening integrated gender-specific service provision for women, taking a whole-systems approach:

- Developing and improving the availability of community solutions for women in the CJS. Signatories will develop more joined up ways of working and explore opportunities for co-location of services and multi-disciplinary teams where this would be in the best interests of their service users.

³ The focus of this work is that voices are heard throughout the criminal justice journey and that they are acknowledged and used to inform the development of the work across the partnership. It is well documented how lived experience adds knowledge through first-hand, direct involvement; the benefits are two-fold not only to the organisation/partnership but also to the women who chose to share their experiences to progress the system

- Signatories to the blueprint will work to align their strategic priorities and objectives to ensure a whole system approach is delivered, one which creates cohesion between agencies in strengthening the multi-agency, cross sector response to women and girls in the CJS
- Develop and deliver gender-specific and trauma informed workforce training and gender-specific risk assessments and screening tools where appropriate.

4.3 Improving the use of out of court disposals and community sentences

- Exploring health care provision (physical and mental health) for women in or at risk of entering the CJS and improving the way Liaison and Diversion services can work with gender specific pathways. This will include consideration of the business case developed in the West Midlands between NHS, Women’s Centre’s and Probation Service
- Developing and embedding the Nottinghamshire Women-Specific Conditional Cautions pilot across Nottingham and Nottinghamshire as part of the wider reform to the out of court disposals framework

4.4 Better conditions and outcomes for women in or leaving prison

- Work with prisons to create clear pathways into the community where there will be wrap around support for women and strengthen the women’s resettlement model to provide safer releases for women which promote and enable better engagement with key services
- Work with the Troubled Families and Priority Families Departments in the city and the county to provide support to families impacted by maternal imprisonment and consider the use of the Prison Reform Trust Child Impact Assessment⁴.

4.5 Recognition of and improved response to inter-sectionality in the provision of local services

- Ensure there is culturally appropriate and LGBTQIA+ specific services across the county.
- Improve understanding and response to the needs of Black, Asian and other minority ethnic women and girls within the CJS

⁴ This leads to the building and protecting of family ties for women who are in prison and the workforce acknowledging the significant impact that maternal separation has upon families.

5. Sufficient and sustainable investment

- 5.1 In acknowledgement of the long-term history of women's services not being afforded sustainable investment, we will strive to achieve sufficient and sustainable funding to further the work of the group. We will do this by:
- a) Establishing what resources are required to achieve our aims and what funding sources may be accessed, whether 'in kind' or through the use of pooled / aligned budgets, to develop a business case for additional financial investment;
 - b) Services across local authorities, health bodies and criminal justice agencies coordinating effectively with each other and with the voluntary and community sector on a local and regional level to make best use of existing resources in the community and building in a tailored approach to current provision;
 - c) Working collaboratively to align our priorities and budgets and pool resources wherever possible;
 - d) Identifying and responding to emerging funding opportunities available to support the development whole-systems approaches for women in or at risk of entering the CJS

6. Governance and Action Plan

- 6.1 The Women and Girls in the Criminal Justice Steering Group will continue to meet on a quarterly basis to review progress against the blueprint. An action plan will be developed to identify how the blueprint will translate into specific organisational and practice changes. We expect that this will result in the formation of specific task and finish groups to directly address elements of the action plan.
- 6.2 The Nottinghamshire Reducing Reoffending Board provides a direct line of governance to the work of the Women and Girls in the CJS Steering group, which in turn reports into the Nottinghamshire Local Criminal Justice Partnership Board. The Reducing Reoffending Board has endorsed Nottinghamshire's movement towards a whole systems approach. A further line of governance and accountability is provided by the East Midlands Reducing Reoffending Board which shares the priority of developing a gender-specific and trauma-informed response to women and girls in the CJS.

