



Consultation Response Questionnaire



'Empowering Change in Women's Lives' Strategy for supporting and challenging women and girls in contact with the justice system

How do I respond to the Consultation?

The Department of Justice (DoJ), is seeking your views on a proposed framework/new strategy that seeks to support and challenge women and girls who come in contact with the justice system.

To help shape your response we have posed a range of questions throughout the consultation document.

Please note that you are not required to answer every question, and can choose to respond only to those questions which you consider are most relevant to you.

To assist us we would be grateful if you share your views on the proposed framework through either:

'Citizen Space', the NI Direct Consultation Hub
<https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk>

This [questionnaire](#), which can be downloaded from the [DoJ website](#). Please note with regard to this questionnaire [response boxes are not restricted in size](#).

Post:
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Telephone: 028 90520943



The consultation document is also available in [alternative formats](#) or a [language other than English](#) on request.

If you wish to request the document in an alternative format/language or if you have any queries about the consultation please contact us using the details provided.

Privacy, Confidentiality and Consultation Responses

For this consultation, we may publish all responses except for those where the respondent indicates that they are an individual acting in a private capacity (e.g. a member of the public) and that they wish for their response to be kept confidential. All responses from organisations and individuals responding in a professional capacity will be published. We will remove email addresses and telephone numbers from these responses; but apart from this, we will publish them in full. For more information about what we do with personal data please see our consultation privacy notice.

Your response, and all other responses to this consultation, may also be disclosed on request in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Environmental

Information Regulations 2004 (EIR); however all disclosures will be in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) and the applied General Data Protection Regulation.

If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential, so that this may be considered if the Department should receive a request for the information under the FOIA or EIR.

DoJ is the data controller in respect of any personal data that you provide. Further information on Freedom of Information - confidentiality of consultation and the Privacy Notice for this consultation is provided at Annex C and Annex D respectively.

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Department should receive a request for the information under the FOIA or EIR.

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The [closing date](#) for responses is 12 March 2021.

Late responses are unlikely to be accepted.

About you and your consultation response

About you

I am responding (*please select one*):

As a private individual

On behalf of an organisation

Other (*please specify below*)



Your contact details

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Do you want the information you provide in this consultation response to be kept **confidential**?

Yes

No

If 'Yes' please explain your reasons below



Would you like to be **kept informed** on the progress of this work?

Yes

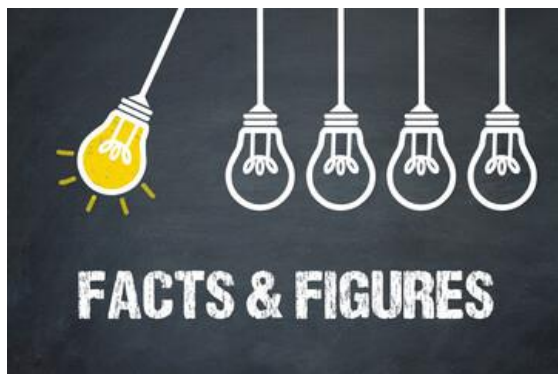
No

If 'Yes' please ensure you have provided a contact e-mail or name and postal address so we can keep you informed.

Background and context

Facts, Figures and trends

A range of facts, figures and trends about women and girls who come in contact with the justice system have been provided.



Q1 Are there any key facts, figures and trends that are missing?

Yes
No

Q2 If yes, please provide a brief description of what is missing (and a source if available)

Very helpfully presented stats that give a good overview of trends.

Just a couple of small points
(i) presumably the 2 graphs at top of Pg 7 are: sentenced & remanded population of males (graph 1); and sentenced & remanded population of women (graph 2) – this is not clear from the labelling.

(ii) The presentation of the average sentence length graphic (pg7) is difficult to read/interpret; is it presented backwards for women?

Strategic Context

We have also provided a summary of the landscape within which the new strategy is set, this includes:

- International obligations and Northern Ireland's programme for government;
- Work that is ongoing or at an early stage e.g. the proposed new women's facility, the review of regional facilities for children and young people; and
- The previous strategies on women who offend as well as some information on our early engagement on the new strategy.

Q3 Do you agree with the information in the Strategic context?

Yes
No

Q4 If applicable, please let us know if there is anything you would want us to change or add.

We welcome the 'tone', particularly the focus on moving away from custodial sentences for women where this is possible, and the recognition of the trauma to which many women in contact with the criminal justice system have been subject which has not been given sufficient attention in the past.

Throughout the Strategic Context, references are made to helpful research and strategies. However, the document is silent on any

specific ways in which thoughts or approaches within the research and initiatives cited between pgs 12-19 are being drawn upon or pulled through practically. For example, a reference is made “promising practice in the Manchester Women’s Support Alliance” but no explanation of what this practice is and how it may be of relevance.

More generally, whilst the tone and aspiration of the document is laudable, we find it lacks specifics; it gives no sense of resourced priorities or, indeed, how ‘success’ would be recognised.

We have further concerns about references to initiatives which may seem to be progressive (for example, the health/justice action plan) but which have made little obvious progress over recent years. And one may now question the degree of progress likely to make, now that health priorities are elsewhere.

With reference to the Sentencing Review, NIACRO’s response to that DoJ consultation (Feb 2020) was based on the premise that all sentencing ought to support rehabilitation and that decisions on community sentencing ought to be *“based on evidence of what disposals are most effective.”* We also called for sentencing of women to take account of previous victimhood (often including, but

not necessarily restricted to, domestic abuse). We also drew attention to the need for female defendants to be better informed about the sentencing decision-making process. This came to light in McGuigan & Walker’s 2019 research; it highlighted a lack of understanding of the process by which the women were sentenced. They tended not to know or understand what was in their Pre-Sentence Reports. Neither did they know whether mitigating factors (particularly their experiences of domestic abuse) were taken into account. It recommended that PBNi and NIPS consider a review of the process by which women are taken through their PSR, and how domestic abuse was (or was not) reflected in sentences.

With reference to the Irish National Strategy for Women & Girls 2017-2020 cited, we understand that, when this Strategy was released, it was widely welcomed that the particular needs of women in the justice system were highlighted in this more general women’s strategy. However, feedback from the Irish Penal Reform Trust would suggest that this became a missed opportunity; the reference to their needs in the Strategy were not followed up with any specific resourced priorities or actions.

Proposed framework

Title

The proposed title for the Strategy is: **'Empowering Change in Women's Lives: Strategy for supporting and challenging women and girls in contact with the justice system'**.

We think the title reflects the need to support women and girls and, where appropriate, challenge their behaviour, and empower them to make positive choices and changes in their lives.

It is important to stress that the strategy will recognise the impact of societal issues outside their control, for example poverty.

Q5 Do you agree with the title we have proposed?

Agree

Disagree

Q6 If applicable, how would you change the title?

We find the title cumbersome, using value-based language. The picture on the cover depicts a woman and girl in crisis; certainly needing support, but challenge? The image selected speaks for itself about why 'support' is of greater relevance and importance than 'challenge'. Most women and girls to whom this strategy is relevant

need support; people to walk with them, to guide and certainly at times, to suggest a different path. But we feel that the use of the term 'challenge', in the title sends a wrong message.

The term 'empowering change' infers a power differential between those who are part of 'the system' and the women that have 'things done to or for them'. Being empowered oneself (i.e., seeking out for oneself what this will require) may be a laudable aim. However, staking a claim to 'empower others' opens more questions and can imply someone attempting to 'do something to or for' someone, irrespective of their wishes or priorities. It also assumes crime is always a result of loss of power. Whilst this may be often be the case, it is not necessarily in every instance.

If the concept of 'change' is to remain, enabling change may be a less value-laden term than empowering?

However, our preference would be for a simpler title: 'Strategy for Supporting Women and Girls in Contact with the Justice System.'

Duration

We have also provided a number of options for the duration of the strategy. We consider these provide for an appropriate length of time to make some meaningful change in this important area of work.



Q7 The Strategy should be for:

Five years

Six years

Seven years

Five years with two action plans for years six and seven (that will lead into a new delivery framework)

Other

If 'Other', please provide an alternative

The Vision

The proposed vision of the new strategy is 'Ending harm by empowering women and society.'

We consider this vision reflects the need for a focus on the needs of

victims, women and girls in contact with the justice system and wider society. Providing women and girls with the right support, at the right time, in the right way, to create positive outcomes for everyone.



Q8 Do you agree with the vision proposed for supporting and challenging women in contact with the criminal justice system?

Agree

Disagree

Q9 If applicable, how would you enhance the vision?

It is good to see an acknowledgement of harm: harm women experience which very often leads to them being criminalised. We recognise too the attempt to broaden the remit of who holds responsibility; that all within society have a part to play.

However, several questions we have are:

1. Is it realistic to end harm? Reduce harm possibly, but not put an end to it.

2. Is this reference to harm referring to harm caused to women that leads to them being criminalised, or does it refer to 'harm' caused by women's offending?

3. What is meant by empowering society? There is an undoubted need to educate society about circumstances that lead to the criminalisation of women, but we do not find the term 'empowering' to be relevant in this context.

With respect to educating society, NIACRO delivered an OCN in Offending Behaviour to women's centres as part of the Inspire model up to 2015. This was one of the model's 'pillars of success', paving the way for women with convictions to find a warmer reception in community settings. We therefore advocate for and understand the value of educating society. If this is to be undertaken, who will be responsible and how will it be funded?

Overarching Priorities

To deliver this vision we have suggested three overarching framework priorities focusing on prevention, alternatives in the community, and effective rehabilitation.



We consider working together with a shared understanding and commitment to deliver these priorities has the potential to ultimately realise benefits for everyone.

Q10 Do you agree with these overarching priorities?

Agree
Disagree

Q11 If applicable, suggested additions or changes

We agree with the priorities which speak eloquently about *what* changes or priorities are needed. However, the document does not progress the question of *how* these priorities will be given expression.

For example, 'getting access to the right services at the right time, and in the right place' will require resourcing of cross-departmental initiatives, particularly health, education, communities and justice. We need this strategy to give direction on how cross-departmental working can progress.

We agree with the principle of supporting women as early as possible including supporting women who are on the 'cusp' of offending. However, a criminal justice response in these situations often increases the likelihood of criminalisation. De-escalation is more likely when other agencies take the lead. For those on the 'cusp of offending' (likely to be younger women and girls) criminal justice is reliant on other agencies with 'reach into' and influence over this population. But justice must take initiative; directing and guiding other agencies (youth services, education, and health etc).

Under the heading 'Victims & Survivors of women's offending' we do not follow the phrase "*Creating a more prosperous community by using a range of approaches to prevent and reduce women's offending whilst addressing the harm it causes.*"

What is meant by the term 'prosperous'? If monetary, does it take into account the comparatively small monetary value of women's offending? The rolling together of prevention and reduction of offending with '*whilst addressing the harm*' may suggest to a reader that one initiative / action will result in both of these distinct outcomes. This is presumably not what is meant?

Two further comments about the statements in this section in general:

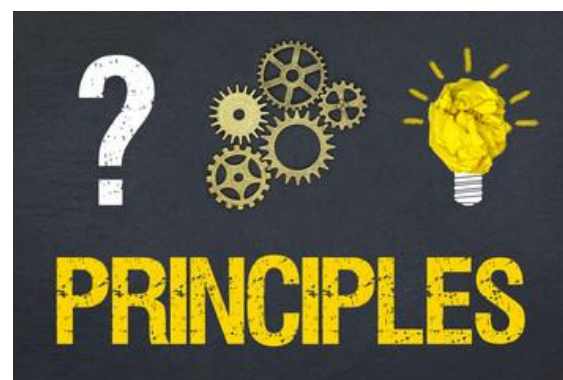
1. Terms appear to be used interchangeably; 'opportunity to change', 'improved life chances for these women and their families' and 'realise positive life outcomes'. Is there a cohesive understanding of how and when particular language is used?

2. Throughout this section, there remains a sense in which women who offend are somehow 'separate to' or 'other than' society in general. We would welcome a more inclusive approach that any woman who has a conviction is not separate from the rest of society.

Principles

The strategy (and its out workings) should be supported by a strong foundation of principles. Six/three pairs of complementary and balanced principles have been suggested as a sound basis for this work;

- Gender informed and Person centred
- Trauma informed and Holistic
- Pro-active and Responsive



These principles recognise the need to focus on the individual needs of women and girls who come in contact with the justice system while planning for changes at a strategic level.

Q12 Do you agree with the principles?

Agree

Disagree

Q13 If applicable, suggested additions or changes

Strategic themes

We would suggest that the new strategy is constructed around three key themes that cover the full spectrum of potential contact women and girls might have with the justice system.



1. **Prevention and Diversion**

A focus on early intervention including support up to, and including, sentencing.

2. **In the Community**

Maximising community solutions.

3. **In Custody and Reintegration**

Rehabilitation to support positive outcomes.

Q14 Do you agree with the proposed strategic themes?

Agree

Disagree

Q15 If applicable, suggested additions or changes

We are in agreement with the themes – although, as highlighted, insight into the ways in which these themes may be carried forward in practice are missing.

Under the 'In Custody & Reintegration' heading, we highlight the sentence: *'Seeking to empower women with the confidence and resilience needed to pursue a pathway away from offending.'*

Please refer to earlier comments about the term 'empower'. The use of the term 'resilience' is also increasingly coming under question from people who face multiple disadvantage; its connotation being that life will continue to present knocks and if those in positions of authority require you to become 'resilient' this indicates that you must accept the reality that life will continue to deliver 'knock down' upon 'knock down'. Whilst we understand the sentiment behind the sentence, we feel a trauma-informed approach would be seeking to restore a sense of self-worth, from which transformation of outlook and priorities will come (with appropriate guidance).

Theme 1 - Prevention and Diversion

This first theme outlines the need for and opportunities to intervene earlier with women and girls who come in contact with the justice system



Q16 Do you broadly agree with the introduction and basis to this theme?

- Yes
- No

Q17 If applicable, proposed additions or changes?

Because of the high representation of young women who have been through care in the justice system, it is critical that health plays a strong lead role in prevention. We are aware of many girls who, once they move into independent living, are involved in incidents which provoke a justice rather than care response. Yet, in theory, they should remain the responsibility of health up to age 21. We would therefore call for more robust strategies to help prevent early criminalisation of young people in care, for example, where police are called to incidents and for greater support to those aged 16 to 21.

It would appear that early interventions have had some success; the young male estate (Hydebank SC) has been decreasing

in size since 2013, daily population dropping from 170 in 2016 to 92 in 2020 (DOJNI 2016 & 2020) yet numbers of women have been rising (DOJNI 2020). What has worked to reduce incarceration of young men; is this an outcome of YJA diversionary conferences helping to prevent criminalisation? If so, how can this be applied to reduce criminalisation and imprisonment of women? Referrals of young women have increased within YJA, with the proportion of girls rising from 19.8% to 21.4% between 2015/16 – 2019/20 (DOJNI 2020b). Why are the processes not achieving the same outcomes for girls, and how they can become more gender responsive?

2 lines of enquiry are therefore:

- (i) What of the interventions designed for young people can be applied to women?
- (ii) Can we evidence whether early interventions have been more effective for boys than girls?

Women/girls who may be at risk of offending and those who have had 'early' contact with justice are often cited together. However, in terms of the justice system's ability to identify them, they are distinct groups. We highlighted previously justice's reliance on other disciplines to reach in and engage in preventative work, and of the appropriate use of other agencies in support of diversionary work too.

Preventative work may be 'easier' to achieve with girls, through care and health contacts, but consideration needs to be given of how women who would benefit from preventative work may also be identified. McGuigan & Walker's research highlighted that victims of domestic abuse are considerably more vulnerable to offending; for this reason we highlight the significance of PBNI's Partner Support initiative (delivered by PBNI to the partners of adjudicated offenders on their Building Better Lives (BBR) programme, and delivered by Women's Aid on PBNI's behalf to partners of those undertaking the non-adjudicated Promoting Positive Relationship programme). PBNI delivers the PPR across all HSC Trust areas on the Trusts' behalf.

We are aware of PBNI's ambition to co-design with women a healthy relationship programme to be offered to all coming into contact with PBNI. Whilst this would be 'diversionary' rather than 'preventative', we welcome this type of approach; knowing that women in abusive intimate relationships are more likely to be drawn further into offending, if they can be helped to realise the abusive nature of a relationship, and supported to leave such relationships, they are more likely to lead healthier, crime-free lives. Indeed, all early encounters

with PBNI create an opportunity to for disclosures and routes into Women's Aid, Nexus etc. This is why McGuigan & Walker's research recommended that all women coming into contact with PBNI should be asked about domestic abuse. It is a perfect opportunity to be directed into services (which PBNI need to be able to fund), particularly in rural communities where they may be less accessible.

We cannot over emphasise the prevalence of domestic abuse amongst women who offend. This often has its roots in childhood, so that many women coming through the justice system may never have experienced healthy relationships and may therefore not recognise abuse. This only serves to increase the likelihood of them remaining in abusive relationships.

We observe the, at times, inequitable criminalisation of women following police incidents including many women who are victims of domestic abuse. When police were called to the home, there was a lack of understanding or a lashing out resulting in the woman being arrested. In these circumstances, can the police be better equipped to support the women to leave the situation and referred onto appropriate services? The police are a 'trauma' informed service. What does that look like when responding to traumatised

people? What about specialist services working alongside the police to de-escalate and decriminalise responses? One such example was the MATT (Multi-Agency Triage Team) Pilot in Ards, North Down, and Lisburn, 2018-2020, in which mental health practitioners and paramedics worked alongside PSNI to respond to distress calls. We would welcome roll out of this or similar approaches.

A further critical element of supporting diversion will be consultation with court decision makers; we need to understand what lies behind the increasing numbers of women receiving custodial sentences: is reform of judicial decision making necessary? We are aware of instances of the judiciary passing custodial sentences or remanding women into custody where the primary concern may be mental health or other vulnerabilities. Whilst this has been done to protect a woman, are they aware of how traumatising custody is? Many women we work with speak of the long-term trauma experienced in and beyond custody. The judiciary need to be educated about the experiences of women who go to custody including the long-term impacts and be made aware that very few supports are available to women on remand/short sentences. They also need to be educated in the benefits

of referral to local specialist services which enable women to connect into communities and develop supportive relationships.

NIACRO's Base2, a verification service for people who allege to be under threat, has seen a 30% rise in girls and women using the service since March 2020. This is disturbing evidence of increasing numbers of women and girls coming to the attention to paramilitaries and of their exploitation, with serious implications for their mental and physical health and future opportunities and choices. This trend requires urgent attention as it is likely result in increasing numbers of women coming into conflict with the law, with exploitation being the root cause.

The theme outlines a range of current and promising practice at early stages of contact.

Q18 [Is there any further practice you think should be highlighted here?](#)

Yes

No

Q19 [If yes, please provide some detail](#)

Whilst the document references the importance of education, training, community groups etc. in helping women and girls to build their sense of self, and find belonging, we do not see sufficient

commitment to resourcing or prioritising this work. We refer to earlier comments about the OCN in Offending Behaviour which NIACRO delivered under the Inspire model. This was a necessary element of women being 'welcomed in', particularly to women's centres. It is not realistic to expect women who have offences (particularly higher profile offences) to find a 'warm reception' and settle successfully if we do not resource and educate the places we hope to see them settle in.

The overall aim of the theme is 'A culture of prevention and early intervention for women'

Q20 Do you agree with the aim?

Yes
No

Under this aim we have outlined a number of key priorities around women and girls' pathways into and out of offending and providing support in partnership to reduce the number coming in contact with the justice system.

Q21 Do you agree with the priorities?

Yes
No

We have also outlined what we will do to deliver these priorities including strengthening links with partners, improving communication and maximising opportunities and preventative measures.

Q22 Do you agree with what is proposed in 'to deliver this we will'?

Yes
No

Q23 If no, suggested additions or changes

Whilst we do not disagree, ideologically with the points under the heading 'To deliver this we will', they fall short in offering specific deliverables under which the successful outworking of this strategy might be judged. E.g.:

- with whom and how will you improve communication and share information and what type of information?
- Why was the activity of seeking out good practice and evidence base not done in the preparation of this strategy rather than being something which is to be engaged in now? The document does not benefit from any examples of good practice in NI or elsewhere.
- What partners will you strengthen links with and how? Will this result in improved inter-departmental and agency approaches?
- Taking stock of services available for women and girls: we are happy to support the DoJ in doing this, along with the membership of the ASFO group.

With respect to girls, we understand that the relationship between YJA and PBNI is strong, with good communication and a joint concern to adopt a trauma and gender - informed approach to the support of girls and younger women. They understand the need to help them to build a community of support around them, taking into account their emotional readiness to make positive choices, as well as the very significant impact of having

children brought into care, as if often the case.

One further possible early intervention not referenced is with children of people in prison / who have received a community sentence, given the prevalence of inter-generational offending. NIACRO deliver Family Links and the Visitor Centres – which includes work with children and teenagers.

Theme 2 – In the Community

This second theme outlines the need to promote and provide community solutions to reduce women’s offending and reoffending.



Q24 Do you broadly agree with the introduction and basis to this theme?

Yes

No

Q25 If applicable, proposed additions or changes?

The document cites “many good examples of community initiatives which work to reduce offending and reoffending” and also of “sustainable local gender informed community solutions” but doesn’t

give any specific examples of success in NI or other jurisdictions.

We are supportive of management in the community where possible and yet thought needs to be given to the resources that will be required to offer adequate support in the community if women are increasingly to serve community rather than custodial sentences.

We feel a reference to recall would be helpful in this section. The chaotic lifestyles many women lead mean they need help to add structure to their lives. Being recalled for not attending appointments or for using alcohol/drugs is not helpful. Women in chaos cannot be expected to adapt and adhere to rules quickly. Having been hurt, abused, or experienced trauma, attending an appointment and putting their own needs first does not come easily. We are often

setting them up to fail. They will often need addictions treatment (for example) to develop healthier coping strategies and help with unresolved trauma before anything else.

We need a model that demonstrates that the system cares and will work alongside women. Many of the women believe they are no good and nobody cares about them; we need a system that shows them this is not true. A trauma informed approach, for PBNI and NIPS, will mean in practice to understand why an appointment may be missed and to put systems in place that will help women to attend in future.

The negative way in which women who commit crime is represented in the media also needs to be considered, given its detrimental impact on women and families. The reporting of the offences can make it extremely difficult for women to feel part of their community as they are often vilified in the reports and subsequently on social media. Some of the women we support report the impact on their self-worth, confidence and mental health. This reporting does not make it easy for women to move forward and try to live a 'better' life. It can also be traumatic for family members, who may become the subject of bullying and harassment due to reporting. We have examples of children who refuse to return to school due to bullying following their mum/dad's stories being in the newspaper.

The theme outlines a range of current and promising practice used in the community.

Q26 Is there any further practice you think should be highlighted here?

Yes

No

Q27 If yes, please provide some detail

Whilst Problem Solving Justice is potentially an effective framework particularly for women, the model is still only being piloted in limited areas, and we understand that it is uncertain if it will be rolled out fully across NI in the near future. There are therefore inequalities of access (for men and women); the sentence type being dependent upon court location. So, this is not an option open to all women. Similarly with ECOs; whilst a very helpful model (which NIACRO fully supports), it too is unlikely to be rolled out beyond its pilot areas soon, so will also not be available to all women for some time.

Aware of different disposals available for young people including restorative approaches that help to explore the impact of an offence, we are concerned that similar options are not available for adults, and particularly women. We understand from DoJ's Restorative Justice for Adults Consultation that this is an area which is likely to be developed, but again, but there will be some time lag before we see such approaches become a reality

with adults. Without the same 'lighter touch' disposals available to sentencers, including those which help people to explore victim impact, this Strategy will face some limitations for some years to come.

The reference to the Inspire model may require clarification. NIACRO delivered the Model in partnership with PBNI, NIPS and the Women's Support Network up to 2015. PBNI continue to deliver gender-informed support: through a specific Inspire team up to 2020; and now through each area office. Therefore, whilst a gender-informed approach still is in existence, it is not the full model of resourced multi-disciplinary support it once was.

We are aware of BRIO, an initiative of the SAOL Project in Dublin, which has implemented a successful model of training women with 'lived experience' as peer mentors based on their experiences of trauma, addictions and offending. Funded by the Probation Service, BRIO recognises the expertise the women have in having battled trauma, recidivism and addictions and what it takes to overcome. The guiding principle is to regard participating women as experts, referring to them as 'wounded healers'. This link to the video features women who've engaged in the training and gone on to participate in legal, prisons and probation training and

conferences.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ijXR99gz5to>

NIACRO has successfully involved peer mentors in our weekly Women's Group. Supporting women who have been through the justice system to, in turn, support others is a powerful model but it requires significant investment and commitment, and so cannot be undertaken at scale without significant commitment and resource. With respect to peer support models, we would also point to St Giles Peer Support Hub which has recently been established in Northern Ireland and is providing training and supported placements to people with a range of lived experience. We would be happy to provide further details of this.

The overall aim of the theme is 'Robust alternatives to custody and management of women in the community'

Q28 Do you agree with the aim?

Yes
No

To deliver this aim we have outlined a number of key priorities around tailored and sustainable support in the community and promoting the need for community solutions for women and girls.

Q29 Do you agree with the priorities?

Yes
No

We have also outlined what we will do to deliver these priorities including improving work and enhancing understanding around community solutions to support pathways from offending for women and girls.

Q30 Do you agree with what is proposed in 'to deliver this we will'?

Yes
No

Q31 If no, suggested additions or changes

The commitment to "Explore the support available in the community (including safe and secure accommodation)", we do not regard as a deliverable. We believe that it is widely accepted that there is no suitable accommodation in NI. Creating such accommodation must be a priority; for women who are otherwise remanded and for security upon release. We understand the responsibilities of the DfC with respect to accommodation, but we look to DoJ to provide leadership on the urgency of a new provision. Indeed, if this was the only

outcome of this 7-year strategy, that in itself would be welcome, specific (and measurable) progress.

The deliverable, *alternatives to remand*, may be a mentoring scheme for women on remand (of which NIACRO would be strongly in favour). However, without safe accommodation any mentoring support may be rendered insufficient for many women.

The 2020 incorporation of women into caseloads by PBNI and loss of the dedicated Inspire team is of relevance to the reference to "gender-informed approach to management in the community". We understand that the expertise of the Inspire team and a gender-informed approach continues within PBNI practice. However, we would welcome a commitment to evaluating the impact of this change in the management of women by PBNI particularly if community sentencing becomes more prevalent.

Under enhanced information sharing, what kind of information sharing does DoJ have in mind and with whom?

Theme 3 – In Custody and Reintegration

This third and final theme outlines that custody should be reserved for the most serious cases and should be a

trauma informed and rehabilitative environment for women and girls.



Q32 Do you broadly agree with the introduction and basis to this theme?

Yes

No

Q33 If applicable, proposed additions or changes?

We welcome the aspiration that prison should be for the most serious offences, and that it must serve as a time for restoration and rehabilitation and recognition. We also welcome the recognition that women in custody present with a wide range of complex needs and we recognise the potential opportunities and pitfalls associated with custody introduced in this section.

The theme outlines a range of current and promising practice in and beyond custody.

Q34 Is there any further practice you think should be highlighted here?

Yes

No

Q35 If yes, please provide some detail

Referenced earlier, we would reiterate, the importance of educating the judiciary about the impact of using imprisonment as a disproportionate response to

women's offending; true for all but particularly so for those who are mothers. We would point the DoJ back to the very helpful research of Dr Shonna Minson who, at NIACRO's invitation, addressed a gathered audience of statutory and voluntary representatives about the impact of imprisonment of mothers and her initiative in England and Wales to educate the legal professional of the impact and promote alternatives to custody when possible. We would encourage the DoJ to re-consider resourcing the modification of her training materials / videos for the NI context as is currently being undertaken in Scotland.

With respect to mothers, we would also encourage consideration of the management of their contact with their children. We have supported women who have had very mixed experiences. There is a need for improved and consistent understanding between Social Services and DoJ; for Social Services to have a better awareness of the need / circumstances of the mum and to support contact whenever this is possible and for the mum to be involved with/made aware of LAC reviews. We often find ourselves 'educating' social workers: but consistent and effective practice will require more formal DoJ-led approach to help avoid further trauma to children and parents.

We would also welcome initiatives that help to support and maintain a woman's identity as a mum, and are happy to work with DoJ towards such specifics including, for example, being able to have an input into their education.

Given that this document is relatively silent on family ties, we would welcome opportunities to engage with DoJ about how positive family relationships are maintained and strengthened over a period of imprisonment. We would also welcome further thought from the DoJ about the specifics of how it sees this Strategy linking to the Supporting Families Strategy.

The resourcing of specialist supports for mental health, addictions and domestic abuse are so critical, and yet we are aware that many are under-resourced and some (including Women's Aid) self-financed rather than supported by NIPS/DoJ,

Whilst the new role of the Women's Support Officer is referenced, further detail about the specifics of this role, and specifically how it connects with (or could better connect with) the PBNi Partner Support Worker would be welcome.

We would highlight too the importance of multi-disciplinary release planning and we endorse

the suggestion brought forward by Start360 that a multi-agency planning meeting take place prior to women's release, so that appropriate supports, for the short and medium term, can be identified and put in place prior to release.

With respect to girls' custody, we refer to the DoJ/Health consultation on the plans for a Joint Campus facility in Bangor and highlight the need for further planning and specifics of the detail of how this campus will be managed and, in particular, how the satellite and other community provisions will be made available for young people being prepared to return to the community.

The overall aim of the theme is 'A fit for purpose, rehabilitative, restorative custodial environment for women'

Q36 Do you agree with the aim?

Yes

No

Under this aim we have outlined a number of key priorities around the bespoke rehabilitation, an environment focused on the welfare of women and girls in custody.

Q37 Do you agree with the priorities?

Yes

No

We have also outlined what we will do to deliver these priorities, e.g. focusing on rehabilitation, through-care and support within and beyond custody, using the unique insights of women and girls in contact with the justice system.

Q38 Do you agree with what is proposed in 'to deliver this we will'?

Yes

No

Q39 If no, suggested additions or changes

We question why a scoping of mental health services was not undertaken in advance to inform this document. Any significant improvement to mental health

services in custody and for women being managed in the community will require significant funding. Is this realistic in the current climate and to what extent is DoJ advocating for this as a priority spend? Investment here would also make a significant contribution to 'through care' given the significant difficulties associated with connectivity of health care, from community to committal and release back to community healthcare. What plans are there for improving the connectivity here? What are the potential implications of health constraints as a result of the pandemic on any development?

Framework for Delivery

The document outlines a broad framework for delivery including the fact that this can only be achieved through partnership across the justice system, other statutory partners and agencies, and the voluntary and community sector.



Q40 Do you agree with the proposed delivery framework?

Yes

No

Q41 If applicable, proposed changes or additions

There is nothing specific within the framework (or within each of the three priorities) to give the reader an indication of what 'success' might look like or how progress (or lack of progress) would be recognised. This framework will be more helpful when specific priorities or initiatives have been identified that might be put in place and resourced. For example, to follow through on an early reference to promising practice in Greater Manchester – to spell out what this is and how the DOJ might

consider it to be applied in the NI context.

That the document does not give any indication of whether any of the aspirations within it will receive a budget to achieve significant progress.

Potential impact

We have considered the impact of the strategy on everyone around equality, human rights and rural needs. We think it will have a positive impact but that measures may be needed to ensure access and delivery to all the women and girls in contact with the justice system.

Q42 Do you agree with our assessment in terms of Equality?

Yes

No

Q43 Do you agree with our assessment in terms of Human Rights?

Yes

No

Q44 Do you agree with our assessment in terms of Rural Needs?

Yes

No

Q45 Is there any addition information and evidence you think we should consider (please provide brief summary and source if available)

Other work

The proposed strategy also outlines a range of departmental and cross executive work that may realise benefits for women in contact with the justice system.



Q46 Do you agree with the list of work outlined?

Yes

No

Q47 If applicable, proposed changes or additions?

Final comments

We would also welcome any final comments you wish to make about the strategy and our proposed way forward with this important area of work.



Q48 Any final comments?

We feel that, if this document is to be a framework for a more practical Strategy document, it may be worth considering condensing each of the 3 themes into a more succinct perhaps bulleted summary that would give an 'at a glance' sense of the priorities under each theme.

One further comment is to highlight the importance of the voluntary and community sector's contribution to supporting women; the long history of partnership which have brought about successes to date, but the need for sustainable funding and long term commitment if this model is to continue to delivered sustained outcomes for women.

We would like to thank you for taking the time to shape how justice will support and challenge women and girls who come in contact with the justice system in the future.