

Major funding boost to divert women from a life of crime

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Thousands more vulnerable women trapped in a revolving door of crime will receive drug, employment and housing support as part of £31.6 million funding boost.

- Almost £32m investment for women's services to tackle root causes of reoffending
- Life-changing support will help female offenders get their lives back on track
- Fewer women sent to prison as Women's Justice Board publishes landmark report

New government investment will enable women's centres and charities across the country to deliver vital specialist help to female offenders, the overwhelming majority of whom are themselves victims of crime.

The multi-year package represents a 50 per cent increase in funding to help women get clean, find work and accommodation, and move away from abusive relationships.

This support is key to cutting crime with evidence showing how more than two-thirds of women in custody report being victims of domestic abuse, a factor which is a known indicator of crimes.

Further statistics show how more than half of female offenders have sustained brain injuries while roughly the same percentage have drug addictions.

Tackling these underlying issues and addressing the root causes of crime helps to prevent more victims and reduce the £18 billion overall cost of reoffending to the taxpayer.

Deputy Prime Minister David Lammy said:

Punishment must help women break away from lives of crime, not send them back to a prison cell time and again, disrupting their own lives and those of their children.

Today, I am making this landmark investment to help female offenders get their lives back on track and reduce reoffending. By helping women break free from addiction, abuse and homelessness, we are stopping future victims and making our streets safer.

The funding commitment comes as the Women's Justice Board – formed of a panel of experts including former Victims' Commissioner Dame Vera Baird and the Prison Reform Trust director Pia Sinha – publishes its independent report setting out how the Government can reduce the number of women in custody.

While women who commit the most serious crimes will always be sent to prison, custody should be a last resort. The report highlights how community alternatives to custody are more effective at tackling the root causes of crime and protecting the public.

This investment directly aligns with the board's recommendation for sustainable investment in specialist services that prevent crime and make communities safer.

Anne Fox, CEO Clinks and Women's Justice Board member

This announcement of increased funding for diversion is hugely welcome. We know that many women enter the criminal justice system following long histories of trauma, poverty, abuse and unmet health needs. This is need that can and should be addressed well before any initial contact with the CJS, and this funding will be crucial in supporting this work. Specialist women's services across the voluntary sector are best placed to provide this much needed support.

This builds on recommendations made both by the Independent Sentencing Review and the Women's Justice Board in its report published today, to fund diversion and support community services.

Natausha van Vliet, CEO of PACT, which runs Alana House Women's Community Project, said:

This long-overdue investment is hugely welcome. At Alana House we see how trauma, abuse and poverty pushes women into the criminal justice system, and this funding will enable us to support and empower more women to achieve positive, sustainable changes.

Community-based, trauma-informed support works — it keeps women safe, reduces reoffending and strengthens families. We look forward to working with partners to ensure this investment delivers real, lasting change.

The report also recommends greater use of Intensive Supervision Courts which the Government has committed to expanding — including a new site for female offenders in Liverpool, due to open later this year.

These crime-cutting courts support offenders who have committed low-level crimes and are also dealing with issues such as addiction or trauma.

They require participants to attend appropriate treatment and appear regularly before the same judge, who closely monitors their progress. Those who fail to comply face tough consequences, including time in prison.

Countries using this model have been shown to experience arrests for further offences drop by a third compared to offenders on a standard prison sentence.

As the Government looks to support the next phase of work to divert women from custody, the Women's Justice Board will transition into a Women's Justice Advisory Group, offering independent expertise as reforms develop.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-funding-boost-to-divert-women-from-a-life-of-crime>