

One Small Thing's response to the Home Affairs Committee inquiry into policing priorities, October 2022

About One Small Thing

One Small Thing's vision is a justice system that can recognise, understand, and respond to trauma.

Our mission is to redesign the justice system for women and their children.

We do this by:

- **Redesigning** the way the justice system responds to women and their children in a way that can be replicated and scaled nationally- we are currently building Hope Street, a pioneering residential community for women and children.
- **Educating** prison residents to understand how trauma can affect them and equip them with the skills to respond; and train frontline staff to understand and respond effectively to trauma and adversity.
- **Influencing** politicians and policy makers to encourage culture change across the justice system and the people who work within it.

Response Summary

We are responding to this call for evidence to highlight how the Police service can better respond to the needs of the women they work with, and what role they can play in diverting more women away from the justice system altogether.

We are focussing on the first question, *What a modern police service, fit for the 2020s and beyond, looks like*, as we believe our points are fundamental to this aim, and can contribute to building the trust that is alluded to in later questions.

We believe a modern Police service:

- Responds in a trauma informed and gender responsive way considering that a huge number of women they will be interacting with have deep experience of trauma and abuse.
- Prioritises diversion and de-escalation and seeks to build meaningful referral pathways with local services that can offer women support around domestic abuse, addiction, homelessness and mental health.

Full Response

What a modern police service, fit for the 2020s and beyond, looks like;

- 1) **A modern Police service must be trained to respond in a trauma informed and gender responsive way.** Women who become involved in the justice system often have deep experience of trauma with nearly 60% of women in prison and under community supervision in England and Wales being

victims of domestic abuse¹. Considering this, it is vital that those who come into contact with women at risk of entering the justice system such as the Police, are able to respond to their needs in a trauma informed way.

- 2) Lilly Lewis, Women's Involvement Advisor at One Small Thing who herself was locked up for 13 consecutive hours following her arrest, has described how unnecessarily traumatising the experience of being arrested was. For women with experience of trauma and abuse, being locked in an area where people are screaming and banging, and with little communication from officers, can be extremely triggering:

'Those working with women, especially the police, should have trauma informed specialists when dealing with women in custody in police stations.' Lilly Lewis, Women's Involvement Advisor, One Small Thing

- 3) Trauma-informed services are designed specifically to avoid retraumatising those they support and should as far as possible embody the five core values of safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, empowerment (Harris and Fallot 2015). One Small Thing has developed a quality mark² which provides a national benchmark for trauma aware, trauma informed and trauma responsive practice, and provides Trauma Informed Awareness Training³ in the justice and community sectors.
- 4) A gender-responsive approach needs to recognise the particular form of trauma and abuse that women or men are more likely to have experienced and to tailor support accordingly. Women are more likely to experience relational trauma, and if a woman has experienced childhood or domestic abuse, then building any kind of trust with authority figures such as police could be a significant challenge.
- 5) A gender responsive approach also has to recognise the specific needs of women who are mothers, and often primary carers for children. Too often we hear of arrests that do not appropriately safeguard the children:

"There was a mother with a baby being arrested in the middle of the night by police at her home, and being told in the police car 'tell us where we are dropping the baby or it's going into care.'" Dr Shona Minson, British Academy Post Doctoral Fellow at the Centre for Criminology, University of Oxford, featured on JUSTICE Podcast⁴

- 6) **A modern Police service prioritises diversion and de-escalation.** Many women arrested for minor offences such as shoplifting, or who are experiencing mental health crises are often met with a disproportionate

¹ Ministry of Justice (2018) Female Offender Strategy

² www.onesmallthing.org.uk/quality-mark

³ www.onesmallthing.org.uk/training

⁴ <https://play.acast.com/s/justice/in-conversation-withdr-shona-minson>

criminal justice response⁵ – whether that be a police caution which stays on her criminal record, or being inappropriately held in police custody for her own protection.

- 7) From as early as the moment of arrest or caution, opportunities should be taken by the Police to divert women to more appropriate support, and develop durable pathways between themselves and local services that can offer support around domestic abuse, addiction, homelessness, finances, and mental health. This in turn will not only support the wellbeing of these women, but can also play a role in further diverting them away from the justice system altogether.
- 8) As the cost-of-living crisis deepens and people struggle to afford basic necessities, and where we may see an increase in low level acquisitive crimes, it is especially important that the Police are equipped to divert women away from the justice system and towards appropriate support.

'I see that women are really struggling with the cost-of-living crisis... many are becoming desperate now and this can lead to stealing to feed themselves and their children.' Lilly Lewis, Women's Involvement Advisor, One Small Thing

We welcome the opportunity to share more information and discuss our response further. For more information, please contact: sarahs@onesmallthing.org.uk

⁵ *'Theft from shops was the most common indictable offence for which 34% of females and 14% of males were convicted in 2019. Of the 34,300 defendants convicted for shoplifting, 9,600 (28%) were female.'* Statistics on Women and the Criminal Justice System 2019, Ministry of Justice.