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Prison Strategy White Paper - One Small Thing Response

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 and we are currently building Hope Street, a pioneering residential community for women and children. We have three work strands:

- **Redesign** the way the justice system responds to women and their children in a way that can be replicated and scaled nationally.
- **Educate** prisoners 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.
- **Influence** politicians and policy makers to encourage culture change across the justice system and the people who work within it.

In response to the call for evidence we are responding to all questions but with a particular focus on **trauma-informed support** and provision for **women and their children**

One Small Thing Prison Strategy White Paper Response Summary

We welcome the commitment to **embedding trauma-informed support** and improving conditions in the current prison estate, however the overall focus and ambition of building more prisons we do not believe is the right direction of travel. Prisons are presented as the only solution to tackle crime, and **there is no mention of the balance needed with community-based approaches**. The Strategy asserts that 'our prisons and prison regime must protect the public' but we know that many of those in prison, and particularly women, are imprisoned for non-violent offences and are not a direct risk to the public.

The long-term ambition for women should be based on **properly resourcing and operationalising the evidence-based Female Offender Strategy (2018)**. It should not be to build new prison places, or to hold women on short sentences in smaller 'custodial environments'. Instead of being 'stabilising' as suggested, this can still tear women's lives apart including losing care of children and housing.

The ambition should be investment in **prevention and women's centres**, and when not possible to divert from the justice system entirely, **community rather than custodial sentences alongside long-term housing, support and access to health services such as substance use treatment**.

We are currently building Hope Street, a residential community for women and their children in Hampshire that we believe can be a blueprint for change, and welcome the opportunity to continue to share our learning from this project with the Ministry of Justice.

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Consultation Question Responses

Chapter One – A Roadmap to Building the Future Prison Estate

1. Do you agree that these are the right long-term ambitions for the prison estate?

The overall focus and ambition of the strategy of building more prisons we do not think is the right direction and there needs to be more in the strategy on the balance with community-based approaches particularly for women. Other than the chapter on women's prisons, a gender responsive approach is not evident anywhere in the overall vision and strategy, and women are only mentioned in reference to needing better physical 'infrastructure' to meet a rising and diverse population.

Refurbishment alongside a reduction of prison places for women

We support plans to refurbish and improve maintenance of the estate, accompanied by a wholesale reduction of women in prison, and therefore the need for prison space. The Government should halt plans to build 500 new prison places which runs counter to the Female Offender Strategy (2018).

One element of the Becoming Trauma Informed programme we deliver across the prison estate, includes training for staff to understand how the physical environment can be re-traumatising, and looks at ways to mitigate this if possible. We hear regularly from prison staff their frustrations about the restrictive and poorly maintained physical environment and how residents' mental health is adversely affected.

Improved digital and data capability

The commitment to digitally enable the estate for prisoners and staff is welcome to improve efficiency and allow prisoners vital access to contact with children, family and other support. The increase in access to video contact with children during the pandemic should be sustained and expanded for all parents across the prison estate.

The outlined improvement of NOMIS and data systems should include better intersectional data, such as the particular challenges faced by black and minoritised women, and what support and opportunities are offered to them. It also needs to include more comprehensive data on pregnancy, family and children.

Chapter Two – Tackling Violence and Reducing Harm

2. Do you agree these are the guiding principles around which the future regime should be designed?

3. How should we develop outcomes frameworks to ensure our Future Regime Design ambition is realised?

Balancing security measures with prevention and emotional safety

The principles of a tailored approach to meet diverse needs, embedding technology and improving safety, are all important but broad themes that can be interpreted in a variety of ways, particularly what is meant by 'safety'. The new measures in the Strategy related to

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heightened security and drug and weapon detection need to be better balanced with commitments around prevention and emotional safety.

We support the suggestion that regimes should promote interaction between staff and prisoners and allow them to build relationships which support a safer prison. We know that the trauma women in prison have experienced in very often 'relational' such as domestic abuse (Covington, 2015), and so building trust with staff is vital to feeling safe.

If Governors are to have more powers to design their own regime based on these themes, this needs to be accompanied by central oversight and robust reporting measures, including on to what extent prisons have a trauma-informed and gender responsive approach. We have found through our work that a key variable as to the extent to which a prison takes on a trauma-informed approach is how invested the Governor and senior staff are in the programme

At One Small Thing, using a comprehensive evidence base we have developed a Working with Trauma [Quality Mark](#) and would be happy to share more information on this to inform regime outcome frameworks.

4. Do you agree with our long-term priorities for making prisons safer?

5. Where can we go further?

Trauma-informed support

We fully support the aim to drive a cultural shift amongst staff to improve understanding of the root causes of violence and self-harm, providing staff with trauma informed training, and positioning staff-prisoner relationships as a tool for improving safety in our prisons. This should be the core priority above heightened security, as it has the potential to intervene early to improve safety and prevent traumatic incidents occurring.

One Small Thing has been working with the women's prison estate to deliver a gender specific Becoming Trauma Informed (BTI) programme since 2015, and in 2018 rolled out a specific curriculum for the men's long term high secure estate. We are now at a point where we believe both prison estates are better able to recognise, understand, and respond to trauma. The programme includes:

- The establishment of BTI leads within in prison who lead the work locally, delivering out on the agreed action plan and managing a local Guide Team who provide governance and oversight of the work.
- Training on Becoming Trauma Informed for all staff at all levels, including Train the Trainer to upskill and capacity build the workforce.
- A six week Peer Led Trauma Intervention (Healing Trauma (women), Exploring Trauma (men)).

Throughout the pandemic our BTI leads have continued to support and deliver elements of the BTI programme, where possible, and we have continued to meet with them regularly remotely. Healing Trauma is now delivered across all 12 women's prisons and an externally

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commissioned evaluation in 2019 found that women reported a significant reduction in symptoms of depression, anxiety, psychological distress and PTSD.¹ Healing Trauma delivery has been possible over the last year but necessary Covid restrictions have meant much of the work has been disrupted. We hope to see all elements of the BTI programme restarted as soon as restrictions allow.

Responding to self-harm and suicide

The Strategy in parts groups together violence, self-harm and suicide. Although experiences of trauma are often root causes for all, there also needs to be careful exploration of each topic separately. Staff need to be able to understand both individual circumstance and cultural and gendered factors that influence experiences and responses to trauma, as evidenced by the much higher and increasing rates of self-harm for women as compared to men.

The 'Enhanced Support Service' to local prisons planned to be provided where there is the 'most complex behaviour' with a roving team with a mental health nurse and psychologist should be something provided across the entire women's estate as standard in light of rising self-harm rates. The strategy commits to continue funding the Samaritan Lister programme and increased support following a suicide, however this could go further. As our Women's Involvement Advisor Lilly Lewis suggests:

The Self harm that I witnessed was so disturbing. Samaritan listeners are most definitely not enough. I myself was a Samaritan listener however our role was to just listen and if anybody disclosed that they wanted to commit suicide we weren't allowed to discourage them to do so, we would ask questions like 'have you thought about when you would do it?'. Samaritan listeners are not health professionals and to manage self-harm in custody this needs to be dealt with health professionals that are educated and trained to deal with such issues.

Gender responsive approach to drug policy

The ambition to operate a zero-tolerance approach to drugs and crack down on the smuggling of drugs, weapons or other illicit items, needs to recognise how this might impact differently on women, and the exploitation that exists, including in relation to prescription drugs. A gender responsive approach is needed to drug policy that recognises the role that coercive relationships and exploitation can also play from outside prison walls.

'I felt the biggest problem in most women prisons was the swapping, selling and being bullied for prescription medication. Especially with drugs such as Subutex. I witnessed women collecting medication from the medical centre then coming back to their cells making themselves sick and passing on their medication that way. Many repeat offenders would come back to prison concealing drugs inside their bodies and young girls would be pinned down by other prisoners who would look inside their vagina to see if they have brought drugs in. In my experience if you disclose to any member of staff you were in any type of debt for any drug the person making the disclosure would be penalised and

¹ <https://onesmallthing.org.uk/news-1/2019/6/12/healing-trauma-research>

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punished. I'm not sure how zero tolerance would be managed or is even achievable, the better option would be to treat people who are addicted to substances in the community and in centres such as Hope Street.

Lilly Lewis, Women's Involvement Advisor, One Small Thing.

Chapter Three- The Role of Prisons and Probation in Cutting Crime and Protecting the Public

6. Where can we go further to give prisoners the skills to secure stable employment on release?

7. What are the main issues and barriers that prison leavers face when they are making a claim for Universal Credit? What impact do they have on prison leavers?

8. Should we take a legislative approach, as described above, for those at risk of reoffending who would otherwise be released on a Friday? If so, how should we structure this approach?

Employment support tailored to women

The Prisoner Education Service that is focused on improving numeracy, literacy and the qualifications that increase prisoners' prospects of finding work on release, needs to ensure a wide range of options are offered. Feedback from women we work with who have been in prison suggests that training courses can be gender biased and orientated towards catering, health and beauty and customer services rather than other sectors.

We support plans to increase ROTL and reconfigure some provision to be open to allow better access to employment (but not by building additional open prisons). As well as support with CVs, support should include skilled mentoring and employment support tailored to women around skills for interviews, the workplace and advice on disclosure of criminal records such as provided by [Working Chance](#). Having only one work coach in large prisons is not sufficient.

Benefit delays and Friday releases

We see through our work with women as part of the probation contract with Advance in Hampshire that delays in accessing Universal Credit causes unnecessary hardship and distress. Universal Credit should be set up in advance prior to release from prison, or if there is a gap there should be a non-repayable grant rather than a loan that immediately creates debt. We support the proposal to end Friday releases as we see the chaos this causes when women have a whole weekend with no way to access services such as healthcare or substance use services.

9. Do you agree with the 'guiding principles' and priority outcomes and areas of focus we have identified for developing the Resettlement Passports?

10. How can we implement the Resettlement Passport approach in a way which is most effective for prison leavers and practitioners?

11. How should we encourage prisoners and prison leavers to comply with conditions and expectations in return for support provided, and what consequences should be in place if they do not?

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Access to safe housing for women

One Small Thing alongside many in the sector have signed the [declaration](#) asking Government to take urgent action to stop thousands of vulnerable women each year being set up to fail as they are released from prison without access to safe and secure accommodation. The Independent Monitoring Board shows that in July 2021, 77% of women from Bronzefield women's prison faced homelessness on release.

Our Complex Needs Community Keyworker in Hampshire meets women on the day of release, and often all they have is a black bin bag of belongings and no housing to go to. The bin bag is known by local people as a sign that a woman has just left prison and causes even more targeted harassment. We supply a suitcase to prevent this degrading treatment, alongside other basic necessities and support them to access safe housing.

Once our Hope Street residential community is open by 2023, we will finally be able to provide much needed housing for women leaving prison with nowhere safe to go. Housing should be arranged and provided by the local authority long before release however.

Resettlement passports

It is not enough for the resettlement passport to include a 'referral to probation-commissioned rehabilitative services, to get help in accessing accommodation' and a 'summary of appointments for local authority housing'. Secure and gender appropriate housing needs to be guaranteed before release.

The section on 'basics' should include a suitcase to contain belongings, phones when needed, and the subsistence payment should include shopping vouchers and a travel card as outlined by Switchback's reshape release [campaign](#).

The Strategy does not give enough information to know how the 'resettlement passport' will work in practice. We share the concerns with others in the sector that if not carefully implemented and explained, it could lead to an increase in recall when those leaving prison do not comply with 'conditions' related to it. There should not be conditions that are framed as 'in return for support provided', rather the support provided should allow prison leavers to live in humane and appropriate conditions in order to move on with their lives.

12. Do you agree with our long-term vision?

13. Where can we go further in turning prisoners away from crime?

Children and family support

Prison leavers avoiding homelessness and accessing employment should be fast tracked as an urgent priority rather than a long-term vision. The vision should also include more on support around relationships as key to reducing reoffending, including caring responsibilities.

We welcome the commitment to record data on prisoners' family circumstances and caring responsibilities, and to commission updated research on the number of children affected by parental incarceration of offenders. More data is important, but this should not be the only

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action in the Strategy as there is already evidence on ways that the lives of parents and children affected by incarceration could be improved, much of it included in Lord Farmer's review. The Strategy should acknowledge the importance of community-based solutions for pregnant women and women with children to keep families together and reduce reoffending.

'My vision would be to have more community-based solutions such as Hope Street where families can be kept together and women can be given the trauma-informed support they need around areas such as domestic abuse, poor mental health and substance use.'

Lilly Lewis, Women's Involvement Advisor, One Small Thing,

Chapter Four – A New Approach to Women's Prisons

14. Do you agree with our long-term vision for women's prisons?

Reducing the number of women in prison

We support proposals to provide trauma-informed and trauma-responsive support and improve conditions in the existing women's estate, however in line with the Female Offender Strategy, this should be accompanied by a wholesale reduction in women sent to prison that will mean less prison places need to exist. We support reconfiguring the existing estate to have more open rather than closed places and improving access to space for therapeutic and group work, however this should not be additional spaces.

The reduction of women in prison can only be achieved by investment in community-based solutions and support such as women's centres. These services can provide the practical, emotional and holistic support that prevents offending in the first place, alongside support that reduces re-offending. We recently partnered with Crest Advisory to do public polling which found that the majority of the general public (56%) agree that the funding for 500 new women's prison places should instead be used to fund women's support services, such as women's centres. Similarly, less than 1 in 5 people (18%) disagreed with the statement: "The government should be reducing, not increasing the number of women in prison".

Investment in community-based approaches

The White Paper highlights a 'longer-term ambition' for the estate to introduce smaller, trauma-responsive 'custodial environments' for women on short sentences that are designed to stabilise women who have substance use issues and complex needs closer to home so as to 'gradually scale down the size of women's prisons'. It is not clear from this description if this refers to plans for residential women centres or what sounds more like smaller women's prisons. The recent NAO report suggests that for residential women's centres '*The programme team hopes to secure a site by March 2022. For its other four planned pilot sites in England, it is exploring options to expand residential provision at existing women's centres.*'²

² <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Improving-outcomes-for-women-in-the-criminal-justice-system.pdf> p.39

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The ambition in the Strategy should not be to hold women on short sentences in ‘custodial environments’, as instead of ‘stabilising’ this can tear women’s lives apart, even if based closer to home. As our Women’s Involvement Advisor Lilly highlights from her experience: ***The strategy suggests that the average sentence for women is 11.3 months but that their ambition is ‘rehabilitation’. These short sentences are not enough time to rehabilitate, to reduce substance use or to undertake any therapeutic work that women in prison require. In this time children are removed from their mother, housing and benefits can be lost and those with mental ill health leave even worse.***

The ambition should be investment in prevention, and when not possible to divert from the justice system entirely, community rather than custodial sentences alongside long-term housing, support and access to health services such as substance use treatment.

Blueprint for change

We are currently building **Hope Street**, a residential community for women and their children in Hampshire that we hope can be a blueprint for change. Hope Street is being established to pilot a new approach to working with justice involved women. In a healing, residential environment, women and their children will have access to a range of specialist support including mental health, domestic abuse and substance use services.

Women will be able to stay at Hope Street instead of being unnecessarily sent to custody prior to sentencing, if they are at risk of homelessness after leaving prison, or so they can complete community service with somewhere safe and supportive to stay. Hope Street will include a network of housing across Hampshire allowing us to support women over the long-term rather than just the time of a short custodial sentence. By taking a positive, compassionate and trauma informed approach, the aim is to achieve better outcomes for women, their children and society. Our experience liaising with magistrates is that they feel too often they have to give custodial sentences to women, even for non-violent offences, because they think they would not be safe or supported in the community and would quickly reoffend. This system has to change. Those in the courts we have spoken to are very keen for a new solution such as Hope Street.

We have a representative from the Ministry of Justice Evidence-Based Practice Team on our evaluation steering group for Hope Street and have appointed Southampton University alongside Prison Reform Trust and EP:IC to deliver a 5 year longitudinal evaluation of the project. We welcome the opportunity to continue to share all learning from this project.

Reduce the imprisonment of women on Remand

The Strategy highlights that approximately half of all women entering prison do so on remand and approximately two-thirds of those remanded to prison at the Magistrates’ Courts are later found not guilty or given a community-based sanction following conviction. We support the ambition to reduce the number of women held in prison on remand. The imprisonment of women on remand, often because they have nowhere safe to stay in the community is hugely unfair and inappropriate. In Hampshire we seek to address this by

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providing safe accommodation and support at Hope Street to women who would otherwise would have been imprisoned on remand.

Ending the imprisonment of pregnant women

One Small Thing is a signatory of the Women in Prison, Level up and Birth companions' campaign to end the imprisonment of [pregnant women and new mothers](#). Our poll with Crest Advisory found that the majority of the general public support mothers being 'given support in the community to stop offending without going to prison'.³ Although more access to support such as family units, mother and baby units, liaison officers and on-site social workers might make conditions easier for mothers currently in custody, the ambition moving forward should be for pregnant women and mothers not to be given unnecessary custodial sentences.

15. What more could we do to support women in custody, with particular reference to meeting the needs of women prisoners with protected characteristics?

Better support for Black and minoritised women

Language barriers and a shortage of translators for women who do not speak English as a first language has been found to be a significant problem throughout the criminal justice system. Black and minoritised women have also reported that they are treated unfairly in the prison system and experience racism from both staff and other prisoners.⁴ As our Women's Involvement Advisor Lilly highlights:

We need to see more diverse officers and medical staff in the women's estate. Even specialist equalities staff were often white and could not relate to the issues that black and minoritized women had. When I reported what I felt was racist behaviour I did not get any response. This included women in the dinner queue using racist stereotypes in front of me or going to collect my medication and an officer handing me the prescription of someone else they saw as having a brown face. Discrimination could also be seen in who was allowed certain benefits such a reduction in the amount of their wages they had to pay to the victim support scheme. Lots of friends of mine had the standard 40% reduced to 20% or 15%, and some kept all their wages. I did not know one black or minoritized woman that had received this. When I have looked into this since, no statistics are available, despite this being recommended by the Lammy Report.

Clear processes around reporting discrimination must be in place so that prisoners are able to make complaints against other prisoners or prison officers and be assured these will be acted upon. The upgrade of the data systems proposed in the Strategy needs to include intersectional data not just on need, but on the opportunities offered and taken up.

Recruitment needs to prioritise a more diverse workforce, including for the delivery of proposed equalities training. The Tackling Double Disadvantage [10-point Action Plan](#) should be followed and implemented to see improvements in this area.

³ Guest blog: [maternal imprisonment polling shows clear support for better services in the community | Crest Advisory](#)

⁴ <https://weareagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Double-disadvantage-FINAL.pdf>

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Young Women's Strategy

We agree that tailored, age-appropriate care and services are needed for young women in custody. The new Young Women's Strategy should as much possible be co-produced to ensure the outcomes truly reflect the needs of young women. It should draw on findings and recommendations from Agenda and the Alliance for Youth Justice's Young Women's Justice Project including the lack of support for young women transitioning between youth and adult services at 18.⁵

Better support for disabled women

Having a community-based residential response that can be adapted to need, is again a much more suitable option for women with disabilities:

I came across a lot of disabilities for women that were the result of extreme drug use, such as loss of limbs. At Drake Hall you could volunteer to be a wheelchair pusher to assist those who found walking difficult, however that is the only prison I can recall did this most had nothing in place. Women's Involvement Advisor, One Small Thing.

Chapter Five – Our People

16. Are there specific areas of training you think we should be offering prison officers which we do not already?

17. Do you agree that more bespoke recruitment training will enable prison officers to better support the needs of prisoners? What other cohorts should we be focusing on and how can we do this in a manner that advances equality of opportunity for offenders with protected characteristics?

One Small Thing has been working with the women's prison estate to deliver a gender specific Becoming Trauma Informed (BTI) programme since 2015, and in 2018 rolled out a specific curriculum for the men's long term high secure estate. We are now at a point where we believe both prison estates are better able to recognise, understand, and respond to trauma. We would like to see the implementation of this strengthened, with more ownership at a strategic level and measurable action plans set up in every prison.

Chapter Six- Delivering Better Outcomes in Prisons

18. Are there any areas where we should extend autonomy for all Governors to support the delivery of improved outcomes?

19. How can we further strengthen independent scrutiny of prisons in future?

Any central inspection or scrutiny of prisons should include how they are embedding a trauma informed and gender responsive approach as outlined in the Strategy. We have seen that Governors and senior staff need to have ownership of the Becoming Trauma Informed programme to see real progress in implementation within a prison. This should be encouraged alongside national scrutiny and benchmarking of progress.

We would welcome the opportunity to share more information and discuss our response further. To arrange a call or for more information, please contact: esthers@onesmallthing.org.uk

⁵ <https://weareagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Falling-through-the-gaps-YWJP-transitions-briefing-paper.pdf>