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Evaluability Assessment for the Wales Women's Justice and Youth Justice Blueprints: Additional insights to support future evaluation

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government.

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Glossary

Acronym/Key word	Definition
ACE	Adverse Childhood Experience
APVA	Adolescent to Parent Violence
CJS	Criminal Justice System
CRL	Childcare Resettlement Licence
CSCS	Construction Skills Certificate Scheme
EA	Evaluability Assessment
ECM	Enhanced Case Management
ETE	Education, Training, and Employment
FTE	First Time Entrant (to the youth justice system)
HMPPS	Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
OPD	Offender Personality Disorder (Pathway)
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
PSR	Pre-Sentence Report
ROTL	Release on Temporary License
SCH	Secure Children's Home
STC	Secure Training Centre
YCS	Youth Custody Service
YJAP	Youth Justice Advisory Panel
YJB	Youth Justice Board
YJS	Youth Justice System
YOI	Young Offender Institution
YOS	Youth Offending Service
YOT	Youth Offending Team
YPU	Young Person's Unit

1. Background

- 1.1 This document summarises additional feedback from the stakeholders, young people, and women who participated in interviews as part of the Evaluability Assessment (EA) for the Wales Women's Justice and Youth Justice Blueprints. It will be useful when planning and delivering any future evaluation of both Blueprints.

2. The Youth Justice Blueprint

Prevention

Stakeholder's feedback

- 2.1 There was some feeling that prevention was the most important of the Youth Justice Blueprints' priorities. Stakeholders emphasised that prevention helped to prevent the labelling and criminalisation of children and young people, reducing the negative impact of entering the Youth Justice System (YJS) on their lives and opportunities. Prevention was also seen as crucial in preventing reoffending and the escalation of offending among children and young people.

'I think it's absolutely crucial to preventing reoffending. The moment children enter the criminal justice system, their lives are blighted. It's as simple as that. They find they're excluded from education, which leads to difficulties in finding employment, which leads to difficulty in housing, which leads to a chaotic lifestyle. If you can prevent them coming in by early intervention, they stand a far better chance in life'

- 2.2 The priority's alignment with wider Welsh Government and UK government policies was noted by stakeholders, along with the need for both governments to continue to work together to achieve them. The prevention priority was also said to place greater accountability on wider statutory services over and above youth justice.

'I think prevention is a system-wide approach. I think historically youth justice prevention has been seen as a youth justice matter. The Blueprint particularly highlights the responsibilities from the justice partners to deliver and that the risk factors associated with offending is cross cutting and prevention is a responsibility of a broader range of statutory partners, so I think it is really important'

- 2.3 Although it is not explicitly included in the Youth Justice Blueprint, the Youth Justice Blueprint implementation plan includes the recommendation to develop a national approach for targeted Youth Offending Team (YOT) prevention activity and ensure it is embedded in a joint framework model.

- 2.4 Stakeholders welcomed the potential introduction of a youth prevention framework. Some felt that this would reflect the system's broader focus on trauma-informed practice and ensure that early intervention and prevention remained priorities.

Several considerations for developing a youth prevention framework were noted.

These included the need to:

- Co-create it with partner agencies (whilst retaining overall youth justice ownership), reflecting a public health approach.

'But for me, in youth justice it ought to be something that's built not by youth justice alone but in partnership with youth services, childcare services, education, all sorts of other services should be involved in a) setting out a prevention plan and b) delivering on it. It shouldn't just be youth justice'

- Avoid duplicating or contradicting existing strategies.

'I agree with [a youth justice prevention framework] in principle, provided that it is mindful and considerate of existing strategies in the space. I think sometimes, and I think this happens not just in the Blueprint but in lots of areas of policy in practice, new things can get launched and put into place without due consideration of what already exists or what already is happening'

- Be flexible and adaptable in line with updated research, policy, and practice.

'[The prevention framework] should have sufficient flex in it so that it can adapted in light of...new learning...particularly when we're talking about Blueprints which have several years of, of lifespan...provided all of those things get taken into account and that it's an active strategy and not something that just sits on a shelf gathering dust, it's got meaningful connection into the programme and the projects, then it's a good thing'

- Receive adequate funding.

'Prevention is underfunded...we need to ensure that there's proper funding to all those levels and all those types of services'

2.5 Some stakeholders reflected on what the proposed prevention framework for children and young people in Wales should focus on. Their suggestions included:

- Educating children and young people about pro-social role models;
- Tackling the criminal exploitation of children and young people;
- Considering the needs of children and young people with protected characteristics;

- Exploring how education and schools can help prevent offending;
- Clarifying partner agencies' roles in prevention and holding them to account.

Young people's feedback

2.6 Boredom and the need for money were the most common motivations for offending among the children and young people we interviewed as part of the EA.

'Just more things to do, that's all. If there were more things to do, it'd cause so much less trouble. There's nothing to do each day'

'Like, it's not even trouble that grabs people it's more, do you know what I mean? Most people get into trouble these days, like nine times out of ten, because of some sort of money, because it's the most addictive thing in the world now, money'

2.7 Negative influences and exploitation from peers led one young person to offend.

'It's more the boys would egg me on to nick something then I'd nick it but then I would be the only one that's nicked something because obviously they don't [care] about you'

2.8 One care experienced young person said that having clear messaging and support from his corporate parents would have helped him to stay out of trouble.

'[I] went from foster placements- they kept breaking down - into residential care homes then...I think that that's what stirred all my behaviour because I didn't know what I was doing when I was there... I can't blame it all on being in care, but if I had one set of people telling me right from wrong... I was being told by hundreds of different people'

2.9 Most children and young people had previously been excluded from school or Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). Some said that their offending worsened following their exclusion.

'All through the time from getting kicked out [of school] I was committing petty crimes; just stupid stuff, then when I got kicked out of the PRU that's when I started to do more serious stuff. I was doing burglaries...and a lot of that caught up with me'

2.10 Accordingly, several felt that staying in school and socialising with pro-social peers would have prevented them from offending.

'When I was younger, I used to play a lot of football and have a lot of friends who wouldn't have done this kind of [thing], so that kept me on track. I think if I could have a little preview of what would happen if I didn't stay in school then this might not have happened'

2.11 YOTs were said to play a key role in introducing children and young people to constructive, enjoyable activities, which offered viable alternatives to re-offending. Having these options available encouraged children and young people to think twice before getting involved in crime again, it was said.

'If you help someone instead of punishing them and you just help them to chase their dreams and chase their passions, then even if they don't even see that in themselves but they have told you that they have some sort of interest, if there is more offers on the table, they are going to be chasing them more'

2.12 The importance of branding and publicising prevention activities in a way that appealed to children and young people was emphasised.

'Maybe it is because of the titles [of the YOT's activities] ... It is not that it sounds nasty or bad, it just sounds a bit boring. Youth centre – it sounds like you will go there, and it will be a lot of youths sitting round a table telling me stories and things... I think if it said it was some kind of activity, like a particular project'

Pre-court diversion

Stakeholder's feedback

2.13 Pre-court diversion was seen to align closely with the child-first agenda advocated by Welsh Government and the Youth Justice Board (YJB). Stakeholders emphasised the importance of pre-court diversion in helping to keep children and young people out of the YJS and preventing their offending from escalating. This, in turn, reduced stigmatisation and improved life outcomes.

'The work that's currently being rolled out for diversion...and the chances that gives...to build different lives, more positive lives for them and their families and communities, is essential and should never be forgotten. It should always be funded'

2.14 Stakeholders highlighted the significant success achieved by youth justice services in Wales in reducing First Time Entrants (FTEs) through the Triage and Bureau models. They linked this to the approaches' focus on early intervention, individually tailored support, and strong collaboration between YOTs, the police, children and young people, and families. Courts and sentencing were far less effective in reducing reoffending than pre-court diversion and should be reserved only for the most serious cases, it was said.

Children and young people's feedback

2.15 A few children and young people said that they had worked with YOTs as part of a diversionary approach. Most expressed positive views of the support provided by YOTs, which are explored in depth against the 'community' priority. Some had reoffended despite being diverted multiple times.

'That was my second chance.... I had to do like two or three meetings a week, and that would keep me out of jail. That was it: the last day before I went to jail then I messed up on the YOT and that's why they sent me to jail'

'I can't say it was that effective because I reoffended.... It don't really feel like rehabilitation, more like punishment for what I've done. I go there and after ten minutes I leave and [it's] not like I go there and being given [support] to change'

2.16 In several cases, children and young people said that their Youth Offending Service (YOS) workers had written pre-sentence reports which they felt had helped them to stay out of custody. One young person reflected on when their YOS worker produced a pre-sentence report which proposed that it would be more beneficial for them to work intensely with the YOS rather than receive a custodial sentence. This had been accepted by the court.

'He was coming with me to court. He got me out of court. He wrote a report for me to be with him for how long, whatever, I don't know how long he said, six months or something. And then [I] worked with him, and everything [went] well, then'

Community-based support

Stakeholder's feedback

- 2.17 Most stakeholders strongly agreed that trauma-informed practice should be a focus of the Youth Justice Blueprint community priority. More than simply a tool or an intervention for working with young people, trauma-informed practice was said to be the 'cornerstone' of preventing offending and securing better outcomes for children and young people.

Examples of effective practice in community-based support for children and young people, provided by stakeholders

- 2.18 Stakeholders provided the following examples of effective practice in community-based support for young people in Wales.

- Enhanced Case Management (ECM)¹.
- YOT's diversion work, including supporting young people to challenge their pro-offending attitudes and beliefs.

'The biggest way to stop people offending is for them to think it's unacceptable...There's a lot of that sort of work going on in youth offending teams, and services around the country...It's a little bit like racism; you can tell people, but the only way to stop it is by you thinking it's unacceptable to act and behave in that way...That approach to making them accept it's unacceptable is some of the best practise that I've seen'

- YOT's work on restorative justice, e.g., use of panels.
- YOT's work with children who are displaying sexualised behaviour.
- Resilience and strength-focused interventions, delivered by YOTs.
- Taking services to young people (and families), e.g., moving away from delivering services from YOT buildings, which can be uninviting or intimidating, and out in the community.

¹ Enhanced Case Management (ECM) is a psychologically led approach that sits alongside other initiatives which aim to reduce reoffending among children and young people. Based on the Trauma Recovery Model (TRM) ([Skuse and Matthews, 2015](#)), it uses multi-agency case formulation to understand children's history, their developmental needs, strengths, and protective factors, to inform how YOT practitioners work with children and young people to achieve better outcomes.

- Adolescent to Parent Violence (APVA) programmes (although this was also cited as a gap in community-based services for young people).

Children and young people's feedback

2.19 YOTs were said to support children and young people to participate in a variety of activities in their communities, in line with their needs and preferences. These included:

- Doing sports, e.g., rugby, sailing, boxing;
- Going to the gym / providing gym memberships;
- Recording music;
- Budgeting plans to support independent living.

2.20 Children and young people also said that YOTs had supported them to do reparation work in the community, such as:

- Building a greenhouse;
- Building wooden items for an outside classroom for a local primary school;
- Gardening;

'We used to go and help old people... and clear their gardens, and stuff like that.... [We] did this woman's house, the whole of it, the shed and brambles and the ground for her fence... We cut it all out and she started crying over what good of a job we'd done'

- Litter picking;
- Beach cleaning.

2.21 YOTs were also supporting community-based children and young people to access volunteering and education, training, and employment provision and support, including:

- Construction skills, e.g., bricklaying and carpentry;

- Obtaining a CSCS² card to enable children and young people to work on construction sites;
- Assistance with accessing vocational courses at college;
- Brokering experience with a music producer.

2.22 One young person said that although his YOT worker had tried hard to establish links with the local college, he was frustrated that college staff did not seem to take any note of his YOT worker's communications.

'She asks people but people in the college don't care, they don't even look at it'

2.23 YOTs also brokered a range of support for children and young people, including drug and alcohol support, and assistance with finding appropriate accommodation.

2.24 Suggestions for what the YOT could do to improve their support for children and young people included:

- Helping to run enterprise schemes, where children and young people could sell items they had made when engaged with the YOT, like chairs/tables;
- Offering paid work experience in construction trades, such as bricklaying;
- Setting up a recording studio on-site.

2.25 Children and young people felt that this would encourage them to continue to engage with education and training of their own accord in future.

'Because if that was a thing that people have to do, and then they start doing it, and it was getting some money for it, and they would be like, I am going to carry on doing this'

2.26 Children and young people's relationships with their YOT workers were said to be central to the effectiveness of the support they provided. Most reported having positive, trusting relationships with their YOT workers.

'I have told [YOT worker] things that I haven't really told anyone else'

'...All the YOT people are sound, to be fair'

² A CSCS (Construction Skills Certificate Scheme) card is a smart card which provides evidence of construction sector health and safety training.

'I've got so much respect for the guy because I wouldn't be where I am if it wasn't for him'

- 2.27 Children and young people particularly welcomed being able to talk openly to their YOT workers.

'I see them as mates. Instead of having a bunch of bad mates, I can come and talk to my good mates. This is the thing that I don't really bother with good people my age because they haven't really experienced much and you can't really talk to them much, but in here, you can have a conversation, you can talk'

- 2.28 YOT workers' no-nonsense yet respectful attitudes were also appreciated by children and young people.

'[YOT worker] gives me the same energy I give him. If I'm happy, he's happy, and he doesn't come to work just to get on with work, but he does it because this is what he enjoys doing.... I've never had someone really tell me because he cares'

- 2.29 Two children and young people expressed how important it was to be matched with a YOT worker who they trusted, got on well with, and felt supported by.

... I don't get on with my YOT worker at all...my mum passed away the day I got out of custody. The YOT worker I was working with at the time...she was really good and supported me really well and then I swapped to a guy I didn't get on with at all, which has resulted in me being recalled'

- 2.30 Conversely, another felt that the lack of continuity from social services was a problem.

'When I had a social worker, I had a lot coming in and out, so each time I met them [they would change a lot] ... I did want to speak to them about my issues and stuff but it's kind of hard to. There's no stability and I wanted to be able to open up to someone but you're knowing that there is going to be another person you're going to get'

Custody

Stakeholder's feedback

- 2.31 Stakeholders agreed that children and young people should be placed in secure accommodation close to their homes. Children and young people tend to fare better when in secure settings closer to home and to achieve better outcomes upon

release than when they are placed further away, it was felt. Being placed closer to home allowed family to visit more easily, enabled more regular contact to be kept with their YOT case worker, facilitated more use of Release on Temporary License (ROTL), and for children and young people to live and be educated in Welsh, should they wish. Conversely, Welsh children and young people placed in England were more vulnerable to gang influence and bullying, and some had reportedly stopped speaking Welsh where this was their preferred language because it singled them out, it was said.

- 2.32 Funding and service provision was also apparently more straightforward when Welsh children and young people were placed in secure settings in Wales. However, it was also pointed out that secure placement decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis. For instance, some children and young people's family may be abusive or negative influences, and in some cases, being placed in Wales meant that children and young people were actually further away from their families.
- 2.33 Trauma-informed, psychologist-led, relationship-focused provision was said to be fundamental to improving custody for children and young people and their outcomes upon release.

'I think it is really important to have the secure provision that is trauma informed, not just for children that are offending because of their trauma or ACEs, but because of children with severe mental health needs that means that by default they are offending through their mental health'

- 2.34 Stakeholders felt that the Invisible Walls Wales³ project which operated in HMP Parc (but was not currently available in the Young Person's Unit (YPU) within the establishment) should be adapted for use with children and young people in custody to help them maintain family relationships.

Children and young people's feedback

- 2.35 Over half of the community-based children and young people we spoke to had experience of custody. All had been remanded in a Secure Training Centre (STC). A similar proportion of the children and young people we spoke to who were currently in a Young Offender Institution (YOI) had been in custody more than once.

³ [Invisible Walls Wales](#) is a Big Lottery funded project based in HMP Parc. It aims to maintain and improve relationships between men in custody and their families through a "whole family" approach, providing support to those in custody, their partners and children for up to 12 months pre-release and six months post-release.

Two of the children and young people we spoke to from the YOI said that it compared favourably to other secure settings they had been in.

'My first experience was at [a] STC ... a lot of people say that STC would be more vulnerable than at YOI but I feel that at STC a lot more went down than what's happened since I've been here ... I think at STC you just have to learn that... young kids and that it's more hyper, so everyone is a bit more chilled at YOI'

2.36 Another young person recalled being 'stuck in your room' a lot more when he was in a STC, relative to the YOI.

2.37 A young person who had been in a Secure Children's Home (SCH) had experienced bullying and was pressured into gang involvement while in the establishment.

'It's alright, you get more freedom than in some places. But it's the people who make it rough because there were only like two Welsh people in there'

'It's just more gang affiliated up there, you know... some people had beef because of their gang... but you just got to keep your head down'

2.38 When asked if they could remember if they were asked about their backgrounds and any needs they had when they first arrived, some of the children and young people said they were asked and that the information and support given to them at the time was satisfactory.

'I explained everything to them around the [specific personal issues] and all that. They were really supportive of that'

2.39 However, others recalled that while they were probably asked about their needs, they may not have been asked about their background. A couple of these children and young people said that they did not feel like they could talk about their backgrounds when they were given the opportunity, although gave no specific reasons for this reluctance.

2.40 Some of the children and young people had had a tough time at the start of their sentence and had found it difficult to adapt but became used to it over time.

'It was a rocky month or two at the start of my sentence but now I've changed quite a lot. I've rehabilitated and I'm just getting on with it'

2.41 Most children and young people disliked the lack of freedom they had in the YOI, although felt that the regime was broadly satisfactory. Some would welcome having more access to personal items such as kettles, which were currently not permitted.

2.42 Most children and young people had been visited by their families while in the YOI, apart from a minority whose family lived a long distance away, and/or struggled to come to see them.

'I miss my family, I can't see my family, I'll see them on a video call for half an hour with someone different. I don't have social visits'

'... my little brother's always at school...'

'They don't really come and visit me. My nan hasn't visited, it's always my granddad...'

2.43 All children and young people were able to communicate with their family via regular phone calls. They expressed mixed views about the cost involved. Some felt that the cost of the phone calls was fine but for others it was prohibitive.

'The phones cut out every 10 minutes. You're on the phone 10 minutes and then it beeps and cuts out. I think it's 65p/70p for a call, for 10 minutes. So, it's a bit expensive. And the 10 minutes goes really quick. Things like that, it's a bit hard'

2.44 A couple of children and young people noted that the amount of credit available to them depended on which regime they were on, although the amounts had recently been increased, which made contacting family easier. It was also possible to receive emails and letters, but not everyone liked to use that option.

'I get a few letters sent in, but I don't really send them back out'

2.45 The children and young people who were formerly at the SCH felt that the amount of contact they had with their families was adequate. During COVID-19, they were allowed video calls and extra phone calls. One felt that the frequency of family visits was too much.

'They were there a bit more than they should have been, and I ended up getting to the point where I told them, I don't want you coming up every day to see me. I said just make it twice a week'

2.46 Some of the children and young people we spoke to who had not been in custody predicted that the lack of family contact would be the most challenging thing about

it, although one felt that children and young people in custody should accept this as one of the consequences of their actions.

'To an extent, I feel like your punishment is your punishment at the end of the day, and you can't be crying for mammy when you've put yourself in jail'

2.47 Children and young people said that a range of support was available to them when in custody and understood how to access it.

'This place is quite alright to be fair, you've got all the support and pretty much everything you need at [the YOI]. I wouldn't really change anything here. If anyone comes here, they'll be alright, it's other jails they might struggle with, they're not supportive as this place'

2.48 The support on offer targeted drug and alcohol misuse, smoking, mental health, and sexual health. One young person reported that his mental health nurse was running through some courses around his emotions and anger management which he felt very positively about. Staff at the setting were also on hand if children and young people wanted to talk about anything that was bothering them.

'You can talk to a key worker. You can talk to any of the staff if you wanted to. You could just ask, "Can you take me a room, and can I talk to you?"'

2.49 One of the children and young people interviewed mentioned that he spoke Welsh and appreciated the importance being able to speak to some setting staff in Welsh, even though their dialects were different.

2.50 All children and young people with experience of custody fed back that the Education, Training, and Employment (ETE) provision in the settings was very positive. All of those currently in the YOI had completed some qualifications and were working towards achieving more. Many were studying for Maths and English GCSEs, and for qualifications in a range of other subjects such as art, music, business studies, cooking, and carpentry. A library was also available for use.

'The only benefit [of being in the YOI] is the education because all this time and trying to college and that, I messed up because I wasn't motivated enough, but being here, there's nothing that can really distract me from it, so I've got no excuse now'

2.51 Children and young people reported having a choice of recreational activities at the YOI, including going to the gym, watching films, playing football, rugby, and computer games. The children and young people who had formerly been in the SCH also noted that a range of activities were on offer, albeit a slightly more limited choice.

'You had a bit of a choice, but there weren't many choices. I did pool, go on the Appstore, go to the gym, or just do nothing'

'You could go to the gym, go down the sports hall, a chess board, do gardening. They had a TV on the wall'

2.52 Custody was ineffective in deterring children and young people from offending, according to some of those we spoke to.

'I would say stop trying to punish people and stop giving people longer time for stuff. Yeah, that might be bad, but it ain't gonna help them: that will make them worse. If you give someone longer in prison, that will make them worse and worse over the years, and they are going to fight more'

2.53 Most children and young people who were currently in custody said that they would warn others against it because of the 'risk to freedom', reduced family contact, negative impact on family, and the fact that it was 'a big waste of time'.

'Change your life, don't take the wrong path and don't learn life the hard way, learn life the easy way. You learn the hard way, you're the only one that has to suffer, you can't see your family but you're the only one that has to be taken away from them'

'Stop doing it; it's your mother that will suffer and go through the stress'

2.54 However, some spoke positively about being in custody and said that they would not mind returning because they had friends in custody, life in custody could be preferable to that in the community, and 'you get used to coming back'.

'I think personally that I've got comfy, so I don't really mind coming back. I'm getting to that stage now where I am [almost] 17...so in a year's time I'm going to be touching HMP so that would be a different experience, but I can't see that being much different'

'I don't know what could happen in my life. Obviously now I've been here it's a bit easier to come back, you know what I mean? I've got more of a chance of coming straight back so I can't really say that for definite'

- 2.55 All of the children and young people that we spoke to from the YOI understood how to make a complaint if necessary and felt that the establishment would consider the complaint.

'There's a complaints box on the landing.... I've seen it happen quite a lot, usually when one complaint gets put in. If that complaint happens more than once – it either happens or someone gets moved'

- 2.56 Some children and young people said that they knew how to make a complaint if they needed to outside of custody (e.g., about the police or the YOT) but most did not. Two had complained about the lack of support they felt they had received from social services, as discussed elsewhere.

Resettlement and transitions

Children and young people's feedback

- 2.57 All but one of the children and young people currently in the YOI were due to be released over the next few months. Most of them had been asked about their support needs leading up to their release.
- 2.58 Several reported having support from Barnardo's, The Howard League, Reach and YMCA, as well as general advice from the YOI staff. All found the support given to be positive experiences and no one could think of anything more than could have been done to support them. One said that *'everything's perfect'*.
- 2.59 Two of the children and young people we spoke to said they had regular meetings to discuss their accommodation upon release, although they did not yet have any details of where they would be living. This affected their ability to plan ahead for work.

'I can't really think about things until I know where I'm living, and the area.... I can't really just come out and have nothing to support my financial life. I need to have something; I can't really be living off the money I get from them because it's only £60 a week so it's not that much. I need to find a job or some sort of way for me to make money'

2.60 Most of the children and young people we spoke to said that their YOT workers stayed in regular contact with them throughout and after their time in custody. YOT workers had helped these children and young people plan for their release and brokered the support they needed when in the community.

'I had to come up with options for things I wanted to do and tell her...and she would ring people to sort all that stuff out for me. I am not the best at sorting stuff out'

2.61 However, one young person said that they had received minimal support from social services and the YOT when in custody. Designated workers from both agencies were also difficult to contact, he said.

'Social Services is absolutely useless...the only thing my social worker's done is get me clothes for [a relative's] funeral and found me accommodation but apart from that I don't hear from her for months... especially when I needed help, she didn't really do anything. My YOT worker didn't care either, he just put me in the back of his head pretty much'

2.62 One young person had recently turned 18 and expected to be transferred to an adult prison. He did not feel that anyone had prepared him for this transition, but he anticipated that it would be very different. He had previously been in care and had been assigned a 'leaving-care' worker but was unsure of what support he would be offered when he was released because he was now over 18.

'I heard that once you are 18, there is a lot less they can do for you. They have already allocated a leaving-care worker and all that.... She pretty much steps in when I get out. I can speak to her about it if I have concerns and that, but there's nothing really that she can do unless I come out'

2.63 This young person was told that he had a place to do an apprenticeship upon his release, but later found out that this had yet to be confirmed by the college. He consequently felt that the college prioritised mainstream students over those leaving custody.

'Some people are doing things slowly, they're not bothered, like the college...they do everything for people who've been through school, they give them a lot more chances'

2.64 Another care experienced young person we spoke to had transferred to probation when he turned 18. He felt that support services dropped off abruptly for children and young people as soon as they reached his age.

'When you move into probation, it's different. There's no support: it's just, 'You're 18 now'

2.65 This young person compared probation less favourably to the YOT in terms of its reduced support offer, stricter approach, and lower tolerance to missed appointments.

'The way they treat you is completely different and you're an adult at the end of the day and ...they deal with the nasty side of life, not so much the younger kids who can change'

2.66 He added that probation had not offered him any other support apart from with his accommodation, which had not been successful, because he was currently living in a hostel since being made homeless on his 18th birthday. He said that this was because his social worker had not done enough to find him somewhere suitable to live, despite making promises to find him a flat when he reached 18.

'I was homeless on my 18th birthday, and I had nowhere to go, and I wasn't allowed back into my care home because I was now 18 so that morning, I was chucked out with all of my stuff and nowhere to go because my social worker hadn't found anywhere for me to go'

Research and evaluation

Children and young people's feedback

2.67 Most of the children and young people we spoke valued having the opportunity to take part in research and to have their views heard by Welsh Government, delivery partners, and service providers.

2.68 Some had taken part in research before. Most of these children and young people also said that they would be open to participating in research again in future, to try and to improve things for other children and young people who are in their position in future.

'I've got a lot of friends that get in trouble, and I know it's kind of hard for some people so obviously if I can make things a bit better for them it would be better in my eyes because I've done something then'

- 2.69 Some were unconvinced whether their voices would 'make a difference', although one young person felt that hearing the perspectives of peers in custody may deter others from committing crime and entering custody in future.

'My voice will go out to people who are in a situation where they could be on that borderline of ending up in custody, and they could hear it from people who have actually been in that situation...and now are getting on with their lives and have got through their sentence. Whether they choose to listen is their choice and if they listen, they'll avoid it as much as they can and if they don't listen then they'll do something stupid and end up in custody and realise that they should have listened to what they were being told by people in custody previously'

- 2.70 Researchers' age, gender, and race were said to be unimportant to the children and young people we spoke to.

'I don't categorise people. A person is a person, no matter whether they are black, or white. It doesn't matter'

- 2.71 Understanding children and young people's needs and preferences (including how and when the research should take place), and treating them with respect when engaging them with research, was said to be more important.

'As long as they have a neutral understanding of how that young person is and what their needs are and how to talk to them in a way they will understand, then it should be okay'

- 2.72 Another young person highlighted the importance of considering children and young people's emotional state before engaging them in research.

'It depends on how a person's doing. If this was back about three months ago, I wouldn't be sat here right now, I'd probably be on a nicking because I was in a dark place when I first came in, but it depends where that person is'

- 2.73 A few children and young people said that they would rather avoid participating in research in the morning and would instead prefer an afternoon or evening session. Several thought that peer-led research would be easier and 'more chat-able'

because children and young people may be more open with someone with similar experiences.

2.74 When asked how they would like to give feedback in future, most children and young people would not be keen to give feedback via a panel. Some said that they would consider sharing information via social media, such as TikTok.

2.75 Some children and young people said that they would feel uncomfortable participating in a group research session and would rather speak to a researcher one-to-one.

'I don't know about a group because I'm not really a fan of a lot of people'

2.76 However, others said that they would be interested in listening to others' experiences and opinions in a group setting.

'I'd like to see what their experiences are like... I only know what my mates have been through, and my mates are not like me... Because my mates are not like me, their opinions and their outlook is probably completely different to mine'

2.77 Children and young people were not very keen on producing diaries as part of research projects.

'I think I'd get lost; I have a habit of putting things safe and never finding them again'

'I don't know about writing because that's quite a lot of time and quite a lot of effort. I'm happy to have a chat'

System oversight

Stakeholder's feedback

2.78 As noted in the main body of the report, the system oversight of the Youth Justice Blueprint has been discontinued since the EA was commissioned. Stakeholder's feedback is presented here, for information.

The Youth Justice Blueprint states that effective delivery of youth justice services requires robust oversight and partnership arrangements.

Options will be explored for:

- A national trauma-informed approach for the delivery of youth justice services in Wales. This will require continued partnership arrangements between the UK Government and Welsh Government to enable the co-ordinated exercise of respective functions to deliver the Blueprint and embed new systems and arrangements.
- Strengthened partnership arrangements between the Welsh Government, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service Wales, Youth Custody Service, and the Youth Justice Board to enable the co-ordinated exercise of the respective functions to deliver the Blueprint and embed new systems and arrangements.

2.79 Stakeholders were asked what oversight of the YJS in Wales should look like. They made a variety of recommendations, including that the YJS should:

- Adopt a child-first, social justice approach. Although this is a key tenet of Welsh Government's policies and strategies for children and young people, some stakeholders felt that it had not fully been achieved.
- Retain the YJB and the Youth Justice Advisory Panel (YJAP) to ensure that standards are maintained in YOTs and partner agencies, although one stakeholder suggested that the YJAP should have a more complete oversight of Wales-specific issues.
- Be fully devolved in future to ensure the best standards of care for children and young people in Wales. The semi-devolved nature of youth justice was said by some stakeholders to have added unnecessary complexity, caused delays to services for children and young people, and meant that Welsh children and young people's unique needs were not always fully considered, including those related to the Welsh language.

'We have made massive strides with how youth justice in Wales has progressed, developed and achieved outcomes for children who are involved with youth justice. We...have got some sector leading initiatives...The issues for YOTs in England are not relevant sometimes to the YOTs in Wales...We have our own language here in Wales. We have got a very different outlook'

'The complexity of some devolved, some not devolved is problematic. There is not a consistent approach, there are not consistent outcomes.... the way that the UK Government and Welsh Government interrelate does not help youth justice in Wales, so I'd [like to] see a more devolved element of the youth justice element. And if that probably means that policing should be looked at to be devolved for all criminal justice in Wales to have a Welsh lens, then I'd support that'

- Have an overall governance and accountability structure to foster a culture of openness and transparency, to ensure that all partner agencies are held to account, and to facilitate information sharing between agencies in England and Wales.

'Welsh Government needs to take lower oversight in the delivery of their services that are devolved. They do that to a great extent with some funding arrangements that they have in place, but I don't think education, housing, health, [or] Careers Wales have been held accountable for what they do to prevent youth offending. It's left up to youth justice services... There needs to be a greater emphasis on it as a partnership effort'

- Retain the current model of operating.

'It looks like the right people looking at the right information to measure whether they are achieving [the agreed] outcomes or not, which I think is the YJB, Welsh Government, MoJ [Ministry of Justice], YCS [Youth Custody Service], all coming together to look at particular key metrics, and deciding whether or not they are happy with an independent inspectorate regime overlaid on top of that... That is basically what we have got at the moment, and I do not think there is anything wrong with that, to be honest'

Overarching challenges and other feedback

2.80 Achieving the aims of the Youth Justice Blueprint depended on overcoming a range of overarching challenges, according to stakeholders. Many of these were also raised in relation to the Women's Justice Blueprint.

- Sustainable, longer-term funding for partner agencies to continue to deliver services and employ staff.

'One of my perpetual concerns is always around short-term funding...annual funding schemes and opportunities are quite detrimental, particularly with third sector, at being able to deliver positive outcomes... sometimes it is quite difficult to get sustainable resources. We are quite often faced with vacancies because of funding'

- Ensuring that the Blueprints continue to be prioritised despite changes in government, key staff, and priorities.

'I feel like it has gone off the ball at the minute with changes in ministers, changes in the government...I do feel like perhaps the energy that was there at the beginning is slightly waning because it has taken so long'

- Ensuring that strategic and operational staff have enough time to focus on delivering the Blueprint.

'I think everybody puts in more time than they are actually accounted for in that sense. But the key thing is about ... having those strategic relationships and sufficient trust across those senior leaders, whether they're working in a devolved or non-devolved setting'

- Swiftly regaining any progress lost due to COVID-19.

'Pandemic recovery is [a challenge], and resources having to be allocated to just even doing the basic stuff, like getting services back to business as usual which is very hard in the criminal justice system when we're talking about risky people who've been supervised in a different way because of all of the restrictions'

- Having the right management infrastructure to deliver the changes in practice which are needed to achieve the Youth (and Women's) Justice Blueprints.

'I think we've now [got] the infrastructure to run the Blueprints but... now we know what it is we need to change, what's the infrastructure that needs to be in place to implement that change within agencies? And I'm not sure we've articulated what that looks like'

- A joined-up, consistent approach to achieving the Blueprint between all workstreams and initiatives, and equal commitment from all agencies involved.

'Sometimes it feels that we're doing a little bit of working in silos, rather than trying to join together some of the different elements, and it can often be some of the same individuals who are represented through the different aspects'

- A commitment to ensuring that children and young people are consulted meaningfully and respectfully, and their feedback integrated into service planning and provision going forward.

'One of the priorities is to treat children with fairness, transparency and respect. I think those are easy to say, but it is very difficult to do if you do not have a participation element to the work that you are doing, and young people do not feel valued or heard within the service. And a lot of the services I see, children do not feel valued'

- Collaborative working between the UK Government and Welsh Government to make policy decisions which are right for Welsh children and young people.

'I think if we are ever going to truly be better, we need to look at that devolved and non-devolved element and make some recommendations to UK Government on making some decisions'

- Outlining a clear set of outcomes for the Youth and Women's Justice Blueprints to articulate what they are seeking to achieve.

'We don't actually know how to describe what are the Blueprints doing. Actually, the lack of real, hard, and tangible outcomes that should have been materializing now to keep people's interest is a bit of an issue that needs to be looked at'

3. The Women's Justice Blueprint

Early intervention and prevention

Stakeholder's feedback

- 3.1 There was some feeling that this is the most important of the Women's Justice Blueprint's priorities. Stakeholders emphasised that early intervention, prevention, and diversion help prevent the labelling and criminalisation of women, reducing the negative impact of entering the justice system on their lives and future opportunities. They were also seen as crucial in preventing reoffending and the escalation of offending, and in preventing harm to victims.

'If we're intervening early and able to prevent harm, abuse, offending, then we're saving victims from harm and stopping people from going into criminal justice pathways ... We know ... that if people offend and continue to offend, then it's harder to intervene and take them off a pathway of offending if we catch them later. But if we get involved very early and target the right expertise and the right interventions ... at the earliest opportunity, then it's easier to take them off that pathway of offending. But also, for me, it's about recognising that everyone has potential, including people who offend. And if we can help them to fulfil that potential without offending, then they're more likely to be able to have satisfying, law-abiding lives'

- 3.2 Of particular importance to stakeholders in relation to preventing women from entering the Criminal Justice System (CJS) is the positive impact of doing so on their families, especially their children.

'... the early intervention pathways, particularly from a women's perspective, historically did not exist. So, I think those elements of the Blueprint are particularly relevant ... recognising that impact of criminalisation in the longer-term ... Obviously, in terms of an adult woman you have got the impact not only on her but ... her children, the wider family, the community that she lives in ...'

- 3.3 Stakeholders praised the provision of trauma-informed services that take account not only of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Such provision was considered essential in reducing the risk of women becoming '*entrenched*' in the system, and of their children suffering ACEs themselves as a result.

‘... most of our women have some adverse childhood experience ... or trauma of relationships ... and if that is done well then that isn’t passed on down the generations. I feel the more you can do, the less it’s likely to have a generational effect as well’

3.4 Designing prevention and early intervention services that are trauma-informed and trauma-responsive was also considered key in ensuring women receive the right help from the right organisation – for instance by identifying those requiring health services as opposed to criminal justice intervention.

‘The priority around being trauma-informed [is] underpinning absolutely every workstream that we are delivering ... The need to understand why we may be picking women up in the system who ... should be under health services, who are experiencing significant trauma, is key to understanding how we design the service ... at the front end by including the trauma-informed services ... ‘

3.5 The priority’s alignment with wider Welsh and UK Government policies - both in criminal justice and in public health more widely - was noted by stakeholders, as was the need for both governments to continue to work together to achieve them.

‘The early intervention theme running through both Blueprints for me is something that is very much aligned with wider policy in Welsh Government; very much taking that early intervention/prevention sort of stance ... ‘

Women’s feedback

3.6 Several of the women interviewed were currently engaging with diversion programmes. They were receiving a variety of needs-led advice and support through these programmes, including help to access:

- Appropriate accommodation;
- Health services such as GPs and dentists;
- Counselling;
- Social services support;
- Food parcels;
- Domestic abuse support services
- Paid-for programmes such as the Freedom programme;

- Substance misuse treatment.

3.7 Diversion programme support workers had also helped participating women to chase up social services and solicitors for information or progress updates.

3.8 Before starting the diversion programme, most of the women we spoke to had not received the support they needed, often despite repeatedly asking for it. This lack of support had led these women's issues to spiral out of control, leading them to a crisis point which culminated in their offending.

'Up until that point, I felt like no-one was listening to me, and I felt like I wasn't being heard and I was going to get into more trouble now, and then [name] the detective at the time that I spoke to, they could see that they knew I was genuine, and I needed help and I wasn't getting it'

'I have been waiting a long time to see counsellors and therapists and when you're waiting you just lose hope and I waited so long I just lost hope and kind of lost myself and I didn't really want to be here anymore and that's how I ended up getting in trouble'

3.9 This was echoed by a woman currently in custody and who had, in fact, spent much of her young adulthood in and out of prison. She had first come into contact with the CJS at a very young age, but this had never resulted in any sort of follow-up or diversion programme. She had received some input from social services as a child but did not find this helpful as she thought it was simply 'ticking boxes'.

'I used to have a lot of social workers who would say, "Is there anything we can do for you?" and no matter how many times you say, "Can you just sort this? Can you just do that?" they never did ... They were just ticking boxes; they didn't [care] about what you wanted and what would make you better'

3.10 All of the women on diversion who expressed this opinion said that their programme support worker had been key to brokering the support they needed following their arrest and subsequent referral onto the programme. Most spoke very highly of the support they were receiving, and of the diversion programme delivery staff. Positive feedback centred on:

- Staff's pleasant, approachable, and friendly demeanour.

'The person I was talking to ... she was lovely and understanding and was really helpful'

- The trusting relationships built up between service users and staff.

'She's been absolutely brilliant, and she rang me this morning to check if I'm alright and she does give me that "come on get yourself sorted" and she's been absolutely marvellous really. She's just somebody who I can just talk to, and I find it hard to talk to different people, but she gained my confidence straight away and I just felt really happy, and I can talk to her about anything'

- Staff's supportive and non-judgemental outlook.

'Talking to her, there was no judgemental from her end – she was very understanding. She was very pleasant to talk to as well'

- Staff's reliability and willingness to engage with service users, even once they have left the programme.

'She's really, really lovely and she's like "I'm here to support you, here's my number, I'm not blocking you out just because our sessions have ended"

- Staff encouraged women to express their support needs and took steps to meet them without being forceful.

'...it was "Is there anything I can help with? Do you need help with anything? What about housing?" She'd enquire and she wouldn't push. She wouldn't be like "Right, I'm going to help you sort your housing now" – to me that's (I might be wrong) control. They are deciding what I do and that to me is control'

- The support's impact on helping the women to achieve better outcomes, such as improved mental health and family relations, and progress with child residency cases.

'[Social services] can see now the change in me and they can see that my son is better off with me now, because of the support I've had from [support worker]. Before, I felt like my solicitor wasn't listening to me, I felt like the social worker wasn't listening to me and [support worker] has contacted them for me and she has got me an advocate now, who they're listening to'

3.11 Some women reflected on why they had come into contact with the CJS, and what would help them to stay away from it.

3.12 Some felt that understanding of the relationship between alcohol and/or drug dependency is key. Indeed, one woman said that when under the influence of drugs, she could have been offered all the preventative support available but would still have offended to feed her addiction.

'I think I have an issue with alcohol, and I have an impulsive streak in my nature which brings out the least inhibitions in me which means I can get into trouble. I just need to stay away from alcohol...I probably find a lot of things fall into place if I do [stay away from it]'

'I think it depends on the individual at that time if you want their help and if you don't ... I've been offered the help loads of times and I ended up relapsing, God knows how many times.... No matter what was given to me I wouldn't have listened'

3.13 For others, it was learning to understand their 'trigger points' which their diversion programme support worker was helping with.

'This is the first criminal thing that [I] have had to deal with...She's given me loads of advice, just loads and loads, on how to deal with things'

3.14 We also heard that some women had offended due to frustration and disagreement with unfair and/or inappropriate child residency issues.

'I was losing the plot. I was a mother who just wanted to get to her son, and I felt like nothing and nobody around me could stop me. I didn't care. All I wanted was my son'

3.15 One woman, who was currently in custody following long-term involvement with the CJS, was asked whether anything could have been provided when she was younger that would have helped her. She suggested that if there had been something like a youth club in her local area, she may have been able to stay out of trouble.

'... a youth club or something like that for children and young people to keep them out of trouble'

3.16 When reflecting on her arrest, one woman said she would have preferred to have been dealt with by women officers rather than the seven male officers who arrived. This reflects the need to adopt a trauma-informed approach. This was due to her

previous experience of being raped. Having not been asked about any previous trauma or physical or mental health issues (all of which she had experienced) by the arresting officers or given the opportunity to make care arrangements for the child she had at home with her, she was placed alone in the back of a police car with a male officer. This caused her to have a panic attack.

'Even when I was coming in, I couldn't breathe. I was having panic attacks and they just couldn't understand. I felt that male officers [couldn't understand], and they had to be aware as well, and I should have been dealt with by female police officers rather than males'

- 3.17 This interviewee emphasised the importance of asking women about their histories, including trauma and mental health issues, when they first come into contact with the CJS.

'That's the first thing you want someone to say: "How are you feeling?"'

- 3.18 Further support from a peer counsellor upon arrival at police custody would also be welcomed, it was said. Peer counsellors should have personal experience of the CJS to ensure that they fully understand others' experiences and can support them without judgement.

'I would have been much calmer if I had been in a situation where a girl had been through what I had, and she was there when I got [to the police station] ...nobody knows what's gone on in that person's life, either. They could be taking drugs or alcohol, and nobody's perfect, and that's their cry for help'

Courts and sentencing

Stakeholder's feedback

- 3.19 Stakeholders agreed that alternatives to custody should be considered for almost all women who offend, and especially those committing low-level offences that typically attract short sentences. Essentially, it was argued that women should not be sent to prison except for the most serious offences, and that the negative implications of short-term custody for not only the woman herself, but also their family, far outweigh any benefits.

'They're not going to do anything meaningfully rehabilitative in that short time in prison. And again, it's that separation from children, wider families that we know

can be particularly harmful for women and obviously that ripple effect that it has on the people in their lives'

3.20 Encouragingly, the availability of alternatives was thought to be improving continuously. Stakeholders mentioned not only specific initiatives like Future 4 Women's Pathfinder Whole System Approach (commissioned under the Women's Justice Blueprint), but also the electronic monitoring facilities that enable women to continue to lead their lives within their communities.

Improving Pre-Sentence Reports (PSRs)⁴

3.21 On the subject of PSRs, stakeholders were asked about the ways in which they could be improved to help achieve better outcomes for women. Chief among the suggested improvements were:

- Better involving women in their development to ensure their voices are heard.
- Ensuring they are written from a trauma-informed and gender-responsive perspective.
- Offering a women's report writer for women who offend.
- Ensuring authors are aware of the entire range of community-based alternatives to custody available locally (including those provided by the third sector).
- Emphasising women's strengths and skills, and potential for up-skilling.
- Improving the quality of the reports and the assessments that underpin them, so they are given attention by sentencers.

3.22 Improvements to PSRs were said to be evident in some areas, aided by pilots looking at, for example, more explicit guidance and aide memoirs that help report writers remember which areas need to be considered and addressed.

'I am pleased to say that there has been a lot of effort in trying to improve quality and improve PSR authors' understanding of women's needs so that the recommendations made are suitable, robust, with evidence that can provide sentencers with confidence ...'

⁴ HMPPS is currently delivering a programme of work aimed at improving pre-sentence reports.

3.23 Several stakeholders, though, highlighted the impact of 'speedy justice' on the quality of PSRs, which are often expected 'on the day', leaving little time for in-depth information gathering and assessment. This, it was said, creates conflict between ensuring swift justice is served, but in an appropriate, informed and inventive way that ensures the best outcomes for both victim and offender.

'... the challenge is going to be trying to make sure that we are able to get the richness of information to the court through pre-sentence reports but in doing so, make sure that we are able to adhere to those timeliness targets which ... have driven the fact there is sometimes some scant or no information that can help sentencers in making their decisions'

Women's feedback on courts and sentencing

3.24 Two of the women we spoke with had impending court cases. These interviewees explained that their diversion programme support workers had provided valuable support in advance of and during their court cases. This included:

- Providing written evidence to the court in support of their character, explaining that they had attended all of their diversion appointments.
- Attending court on the day to provide moral support.
- Brokering a court advocate.

3.25 One woman who had experienced being sentenced for a crime she was accused of felt that she was treated unfairly by the court, and that the whole process was difficult to understand. She also noted that the court had used the fact that she was raised in foster care against her.

'The worst thing they had done to me was that they used the fact I was brought up in foster care...which is absolutely disgusting'

3.26 Furthermore, one interviewee, who had been sentenced as a minor said they had no real understanding of what was happening at that time and felt completely isolated through having minimal contact with her family (some of whom were also on remand or bail at the time).

'... you've just took me away from all my family and I feel like I've got nothing'

3.27 The same woman said that during the trial she was able to speak to her solicitor and ask what to expect day-to-day. However, when she was giving her testimony,

their support disappeared, and upon sentencing, the woman did not feel that her solicitor was able to help her at all. She suggested the provision of an 'appropriate adult' for female minors going through the court process to support them with their mental health needs in particular.

'... when I was giving evidence, I wasn't allowed to talk to my solicitor or barrister, so it was like the rug was pulled from underneath ... it was scary ... I had quite an ill-fitting legal team at the time, to be honest ... they didn't really know what to say and what to do ...'

- 3.28 Another woman, who was placed on remand for ten months prior to sentencing, said that she did not know what to expect from the court process and that her solicitor did not prepare her for it either before or during.

'I was naïve ... My solicitor just left me, I didn't know what was going on. It was horrible, not knowing what's going on ... and when I was on the trial, they hid a lot of things from me'

- 3.29 Conversely, another who had experienced being sentenced said that she understood the court process, and that she was treated fairly and kept well-informed throughout it. However, the fact that her case took 18 months to get to court impacted negatively on her ability to live her life throughout that period.

'He remanded me for the last two weeks to do the pre-sentence report...I feel like if he had remanded me back at the beginning, it would have been time served. So I done two sentences because I done a sentence on the out because it was still hanging over me...looking back now, I believe that they should have remanded me because I was still trying to live my life but knowing not to live my life too much...because I am going to jail'

- 3.30 Frequent adjournments were also said to be difficult to deal with emotionally due to the stress of having to wait for certainty.

'The only thing I would change is the process of it to just get it dealt with instead of waiting and getting it adjourned.... You'd have that burden on your shoulders again for the next'

- 3.31 A different interviewee discussed her experiences of going to court to testify as a victim of crime. She also felt that the court process was easy to understand and added that she felt well supported and safeguarded by criminal justice agencies and

external support services throughout her court experience. However, a different perspective was shared by another woman who had been in the same position. She was scared by the lack of safeguarding in place for her, before, during and after the court hearing.

'It was terrible. The last day of court, I couldn't go in, because I was so bad. I thought if he comes out that court room now and gets me that's all I could think about'

3.32 There was some discussion of the fairness and appropriateness of courts and sentencing for women. In some cases, the women we spoke to gave examples of where courts had treated women fairly, appropriately and with respect.

3.33 A woman who had received a custodial sentence said that her sentence was fair, considering the seriousness of her crime. This interviewee felt that the court had listened to her and had thought about her needs when sentencing her.

'During the charging I was treated fairly, I had a fair trial, I suppose...Even though I had pleaded 'not guilty', I still got off really lightly...The judge did apologise. He said that he was sorry, but that he had to give me a custodial, and the minimum he could give me was 15 months...'

3.34 Another woman, though, felt she had not been listened to, especially in relation to the impact of a custodial sentence on her children and her unmet mental health needs.

'... I wrote a letter to the judge, and I gave it to my solicitor. She never passed it on to the judge. So, everything I wrote down in that letter was [mitigation] ... I would've got a lesser sentence'

3.35 Conversely, other examples were given of when courts were perceived to have treated women overly harshly, for example, being heavily fined for possessing a small amount of cannabis. This was said to be because of the male-dominated nature of the CJS, and especially applied to girls and younger women.

'I think it's a little bit silly sometimes, and I don't know if there are many female judges or anything like that, but I think sometimes it can be a little bit sexist regarding judges and young females. I think it's not so much adult females because they know their rights a bit more than young girls, and I think when it is aimed at the younger females, then it is a bit sexist'

'I think it was a bit of everything to honest. I think it was the fact that [I was] female, I think it was the fact of our ages, where we were from. I think everything had a little factor to play ...'

- 3.36 The differential treatment of women and girls by the courts could be partly addressed through having a balance of male and female jurors and various agency staff, it was said.

'I think that there may still be, in some quarters, a bias against women, and some jurors or magistrates perhaps. I think there should be a really good balance of male and female magistrates and jurors, solicitors, barristers across the board - male and female - to ensure there is a really good mix. Which would be helpful for women'

Community-based solutions

Stakeholder's feedback

- 3.37 The provision of women-focused community-based solutions was considered crucial to the success of the Women's Justice Blueprint, for the fundamental and underpinning principle of sending fewer women to prison simply cannot be achieved without them.
- 3.38 Furthermore, evidence was said to show that offending and re-offending rates are positively influenced when people have a stake in, and support from, their communities. As such, it was considered essential that women are based in their local areas whenever possible, receiving services and interventions as members of the community rather than as people involved in criminal justice.
- 3.39 The significant reductions in children and young people receiving custodial sentences were referenced by a couple of stakeholders, who were pleased to see that the accepted notion that children and young people should not be sent to prison except in the rarest of serious circumstances is also now being recognised with respect to women.

'I think that agenda is probably ten years behind where we are on the youth side. So, it's up to the Blueprint to drive this idea forward and ... making sure that those services are actually available for women ...'

3.40 Most stakeholders also strongly agreed that trauma-informed practice should be a focus of the Women's Justice Blueprint's community priority. More than simply a tool or an intervention for working with women, trauma-informed practice was said to be the '*cornerstone*' of preventing offending and securing better outcomes for women who offend, many of whom have lived lives of '*horrendous*' suffering. Indeed, there was a strong sense that trauma-informed practice should be the golden thread running through all community provision for women.

3.41 Specialist, trauma-informed, one-to-one counselling was said to be particularly important for those with ACEs or a history of domestic abuse who do not - at least initially - wish to discuss their experiences in a group setting. This was seen as a crucial stepping-stone to women developing the confidence to engage in peer activity such as '*small group work with women that they know and trust*'.

Examples of effective practice in community-based support for women

3.42 Stakeholders provided the following examples of effective practice in community-based support for women in Wales:

- The Women's Pathfinder Whole System Approach in Gwent and south Wales which '*supports women at all stages of the criminal justice system.*'
- PACT in north Wales, providing support to the families of women who offend.
- Bont, also in north Wales, which offers family conferencing mediation between individuals and their children and young people and families where contact or relationships have broken down.
- The provision of probation services in community settings.

'... In adult services usually to see a probation officer you have to go to the probation office, and they're horrible ... So, more moving probation officers out into the voluntary sector offices ... I think that opens up the possibility of working with women and children differently. Probation officers, YOT workers will feel differently if they're not in their own offices. When they're sitting everyday talking to voluntary workers ... it changes mindsets, and it changes the services they use. The women and children may feel far more positive about walking into a place that's much more pleasant, with comfy seats for them, for females where men may be excluded. A lot of the women that go into central probation offices

are probably frightened of men. They have suffered domestic violence ... So, for a woman walking in there it may be very difficult ... If you make it far more pleasant, somewhere they like to go then they will go; they will engage ...'

3.43 There was also significant praise for the forthcoming women's residential centre model which, it was hoped, will eventually be upscaled and replicated across Wales. Stakeholders envisioned women-led safe spaces for women both within and outside the CJS to access specialist and semi-universal generic support – a holistic model that already exists in England and Scotland, delivering excellent outcomes.

Women's feedback

3.44 In addition to the support they received through the diversion programmes, probation services, and the Women's Pathfinder Whole System Approach, some women were currently engaging with or had previously engaged with a range of community-based support services. These included:

- Change Step: Emotional and practical support for ex-forces / emergency services personnel;
- Drug and alcohol support;
- Counselling and psychotherapy;
- Community mental health.

3.45 Regarding what 'good' community-based support would look like in terms of community-based support, it was important to women that agency staff were approachable and took the time to understand their needs.

'I have to feel comfortable talking to somebody and I would prefer like somebody who isn't dressed all smart and I can't stand people who sit there and look at the clock or look at their watch to see what time it is because I feel like they're rushing me and don't want to talk to me'

3.46 Women expressed mixed opinions about the community-based support they had received. Some reported that the support received had not met their needs.

3.47 Women also expressed mixed opinions about the ease of accessing the support they needed in the community. As noted elsewhere, most of those we spoke to cited the lack of support in the community as a major influence on their offending.

3.48 Conversely, some had accessed support quickly and with relative ease.

'I personally have found it easy to be signposted from various points onto other agencies. I haven't experienced any difficulty [in not knowing how to access support] because I have always been given the information to be able to do that'

3.49 A minority of women reported that certain community-based service professionals were reluctant to help them because of their attitude or behaviour. In some of these situations, diversion programme staff had tried to mediate between service staff and users.

'Like, I go to them for help, and they tell me they can't help me because that is my problem and that is what I want help with. But I can't get help for that until I sort it, and I'm like "What??" But then my support worker turned round to me and she's like, "it's because you come across as such a strong person"...but they look at you and go like, "She's just being[difficult]; she can help herself"'

3.50 In other cases, women felt that community-based service professionals had been too quick to tell women what they should be doing and when, rather than letting women decide on and plan their next moves.

'It's not support, it's more like control...It's like they push constantly with "You need to do this, need to do that and you need to do it now" and no! No, no, no, no – you've got all that wrong. You should be sat there asking me if I'm ready to do and if and when I'm ready you should be there to help me. You don't sit and tell me that I need to do that, and I need to do it now, because how do you know that I'm...ready, mentally, to do that?'

3.51 One of the women we spoke to had previously completed a community sentence. Towards the end of her community sentence, she took up numerous educational opportunities, which she found beneficial.

'For the last half of my community service...I was going in the office and doing courses and I found that beneficial because you do feel like you're getting something out of it. And I've got loads of certificates now that I wouldn't have got...You're there to do your hours, but you are also gaining from it. I found that I was more motivated in that. I did my level 1 and my level 2 Maths and English. Basic things, but basic things that meant a lot to me'

3.52 However, she felt that some of the other activities she did during the community sentence were not as effective in encouraging her to achieve better outcomes or in deterring her from reoffending.

'So maybe with community orders and stuff like that, rather than going out and doing beach cleans... maybe it should be more courses. I was put in the direction where I could have had job opportunities and stuff like that, so when I left instead of going down [location] and causing havoc, I thought, 'I'm going to look for an online course'. It motivated me more and gave me the belief that I could do it'

Custody and resettlement

Stakeholder's feedback

3.53 While stakeholders again reiterated that women should not be sent to prison except for the most serious offences, they agreed that the needs of those in custody are likely to be complex and in need of properly addressing. It was considered especially important that links with families and children can be maintained, not only to benefit the women themselves, but also to address the inter-generational transmission of ACEs as a result of children being separated from their parents.

3.54 Ensuring the custodial environment is as productive and enabling for women as possible was also supported. For example, it was suggested that instead of women having to engage in therapy sessions and academic classes (i.e., maths and English) separately, more integrated programmes whereby they learn literacy and numeracy skills through a therapeutic, vocational approach.

'I would ... like that ... in the custodial setting, rather than what can be quite linear and siloed interventions, which of course is not how life works. And it is much better for women to be able to integrate those interventions'

Stakeholder's feedback on examples of effective practice in custody and resettlement for women

3.55 Stakeholders provided the following examples of effective practice in custody and resettlement for women in Wales:

- The Pathfinder whole system approach in Gwent and south Wales;

- The Visiting Mum⁵ initiative;

'We have got a project ... called Visiting Mum which supports women with children going into prisons ... they support their family in the community while the woman is in custody ... the priority for that is maintaining family links, which is one of the objectives of the custodial resettlement workstream ... '

- In-custody counselling services that are continued post-release;
- More use being made of videoconferencing to maintain contact between women and their families (which needs to be maintained post-pandemic);
- The Offender Personality Disorder (OPD) Pathway⁶, which is increasingly being used for women who offend in Wales;

'... that's a team full of expertise, like psychologists and probation officers, who work with people who are likely to have a personality disorder. And ... they have a mental health liaison nurse who goes into Eastwood Park Prison to work with the Welsh women and support them in readiness for their release back into the community. So, when you're talking about examples of good practice, I think that's a really good example of ... taking the service to where the woman is rather than saying, "Oh well, it doesn't exist there, so we're not going to give it to her"'

3.56 It was also said that joint working between the organisations and individuals involved in resettlement planning and re-modelling, including representatives of Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and the women's prisons themselves - has improved. The Blueprint has apparently been a catalyst for this, helping to shape plans and enabling those working within this priority workstream to influence them.

Stakeholder's feedback on exploring the use of Release on a Temporary Licence (ROTL) for women, especially a Childcare Resettlement Licence (CRL)

⁵ The Visiting Mum project, jointly funded by HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and the Welsh Government, operates in HMP Eastwood Park and HMP Styal to identify women who are at risk of losing contact with their children in Wales and offer specialist support to preserve and strengthen these vital family ties. There is also an opportunity for the women to engage in parenting and relationship programmes and to receive specialist one-to-one support, which may include support to engage with Social Workers and other services if required.

⁶ The Offender Personality Disorder (OPD) pathway programme is a jointly commissioned initiative that aims to provide a pathway of psychologically informed services for a highly complex and challenging offender group who are likely to have a severe personality disorder and who pose a high risk of harm to others, or a high risk of reoffending in a harmful way.

3.57 Stakeholders were positive about the use of ROTLs for women in supporting them to re-engage with society following a custodial sentence. CRLs were also supported in enabling women to better communicate with their families and repair relationships *'because it's easier to build it up over time than in one fell swoop on release'*.

3.58 Within reason and as appropriate to risk, phased release was considered especially important in terms of resettling those women serving lengthy sentences, benefitting not only the woman herself, but also allowing her to gradually re-build relationships with her children, her family and the wider community.

'..... any change is quite overwhelming and particularly for a woman who may have served a longer sentence who would be eligible for release on temporary licence; to simply make that transition from one day to the next can be quite daunting'

Women's feedback

3.59 One woman, currently in custody, recalled being asked about her background and any needs when she first arrived at prison but said that no-one had been with her during the first three days to support, reassure or give her any information; she was left to settle in alone. She agreed that she would have liked to have had a buddy or a mentor when she first arrived.

3.60 When asked about contact with family, the woman reported that she was able to see her son and her father once a month. COVID-19 has made visiting harder, but a third sector organisation has helped with this. The woman is able to spend two hours a month with her son and phones him every day but said that this is not easy to do, and that she would like more contact with both her son and her father, who has been unwell:

'... the hardest thing is for me I'm not there to look after my dad while he's poorly'

3.61 This woman also said that no support had been offered to her family since her imprisonment. She felt that they should've been offered extra services in the form of support work, activities, or counselling to help them come to terms with the situation.

3.62 In terms of her experience in prison, the woman alleged inconsistent levels of support for women prisoners, often depending on whether her *'face fits'*.

'And the other thing is in here as well [is] if your face fits. One rule for one and one rule for another ... if your faces fits in the jail or if you've palled with an officer'

- 3.63 She has, though, successfully engaged with a lot of the educational and vocational opportunities on offer since being in custody and would like to go to college on release and complete her personal training qualification to enable her to earn a living within the community.

'I'm now a qualified gym instructor, swimming instructor, qualified chef, I'm a qualified beautician and hairdresser ... When I get out, hopefully when I go to open, I want to go to college to finish my personal training'

- 3.64 One of the things this woman pointed out was that she had been able to complete many qualifications inside prison that she might not have been able to afford within the community, and so this had been a positive aspect of custody. Moreover, she has also worked to overcome her alcohol dependency and anger issues.

'I've done loads of courses and if I wanted to do them on the outside it would cost me a lot ... So, in one way it's good that I've come to prison ...'

'Since, I've been here, I've grown a hell of a lot. My temper is set under control now, it takes a lot of people to push my buttons. I used to snap easily but now I don't ... I just walk away'

- 3.65 When this woman approaches release, she anticipates being able to have resettlement support. When asked what she might need or want at the point, she thought that help finding somewhere to live, and 'moral support' would be most important in coming to terms with living in society again.

'I would like more moral support, basically because I've been in for such a long time, obviously it's going to be scary for me when I get out of here. Because everything's changed ...'

- 3.66 Another woman had been in custody only for a short time. She also recalled being asked about her background and needs when she first arrived and was given the contact details of a Women's Aid charity to help with finding accommodation on release.

3.67 Even though this woman was only in prison for a few weeks, she was able to make use of the educational opportunities on offer and gained a level 2 certificate in English during that time. She did not recall being offered any mental, emotional, or spiritual support while in custody and identified this as an issue. She suggested that because so many women are in need of this type of support, it might be useful to do group work to discuss it.

'... there's that many women who need mental health, anxiety, and panic attacks it's quite hard for them to just focus on an individual. They could do more group work'

3.68 One woman had entered custody with detailed information regarding her 'complex health issues' and medication. However, she said that once she was in custody, she was prevented from taking a lot of her pain medication due to the prison's controlled substances regulations. While she was eventually permitted stronger painkillers, she said she had spent much of the early part of her sentence in considerable pain.

3.69 When asked about contact with family and friends during her time in custody, this woman had been able to receive emails and to talk to her family every day on the telephone but found face-to-face visits hard because she did not want her family to see her in prison.

'I was getting e-mails and I made sure that I always put plenty of credit on my phone so I could ring them every day, because there was a phone in the cell. They wanted to come and see me, but I asked them not to ... I didn't want them to see me in that environment ...'

3.70 She said that she found it difficult to speak to her sons, who were also in custody, due to the administration involved but found a way to do so by having a family member on the phone to them all at the same time.

'...to actually get inter-prison phone calls where I could speak to [my sons] direct you have to fill in two separate forms for each prisoner you want to have these with ... it takes forever because then you've got to get your solicitor to write in to approve your connection ... I filled them in and thought "stuff that..."'

3.71 One particular issue raised by this woman was that she did not know how long she was going to be in custody for after being sentenced and received little communication about this even during her time in custody.

'... an Offender Manager came into my cell to speak to me with paperwork to get me to sign ... and I didn't quite understand everything she was saying. She didn't give me any paperwork to keep so I was still in the dark on it ... It was about two days before I was actually released that another Offender Manager came to me and took me outside to sit on a bench and go through all the licensing details. I had mounds of paperwork to sign, and it was only then I realised I was going to be released ... [and] they were the only two people that I actually physically spoke to the entire time I was in prison that were anything to do with the justice system'

- 3.72 She also stated that she was not offered any emotional or practical support during her time in custody, even though she applied for it. This, she felt, had contributed to her present mental health issues, even though she is now no longer in custody.

'I was watching girls who were proper really bad heroin addicts coming in, they were putting in apps and resettlement and offender management and people were coming to see them straight away ... I was just left. Simply left. I was never spoken to by anybody really ... I would've appreciated someone sitting down with me properly and going through my sentence with me and outlining things proper, and possibly giving me something in writing. And also somebody speaking to me about my house ... because I knew nothing. They just weren't interested to be fair ... I ended up suffering really bad with anxiety while I was in prison, and I ended up having to go on anxiety medication which I'm still on now'

- 3.73 Another of the women we spoke to had a relatively positive experience of custody. She was asked about her needs and offered appropriate support on arrival at prison and did not feel that she had any unmet support needs. She said that she was not offered ROTL because of the seriousness of her crime.

- 3.74 This woman was allowed to see her child and family regularly for full days at a time and was able to make a tape of her reading a story for her child. She did not use the mother and baby facility because her child was aged over 18 months but would not have been keen to use the facility in any event.

'Once a month they did family days where my daughter could come up at 8 o'clock in the morning and stay until 6 o'clock at night. So, I would have the whole day with her. If she had been under 18 months she could have come and lived with me there, but I don't think I would have done that anyway. But they did

have a facility there where people could have their babies. They had family days, I made a tape, I just read her a story, but it was my voice on a tape reading her a story so I could send that home. They were quite good if you had kids'

3.75 However, travelling the long distance from home to the prison to see her, often with her child, put her mum under pressure. This worsened the anxiety and depression that her mum was already experiencing, forcing her mum to take time off work.

3.76 Regarding how her experience of custody could be improved, this interviewee felt that her mum should have been offered more support during the sentence. This included prison staff having an initial phone conversation with her mum to explain that she was in custody.

'When I went in, they could see that I was upset and they could see that I wasn't giving my mum any relevant information, so maybe they could have come over and just said "Look, she's OK, she is in [prison], this is what needs to be done now", but they just seemed to leave it to me, and obviously I couldn't speak!'

3.77 Allowing her to call her mum straight away upon her arrival at prison would also have helped, rather than having to wait to make phone calls.

'My mum didn't know where I was. She didn't know how to contact me...And then it took a while because you've got to get your pin number for your phone, and all our numbers to go, on, which I think your mum should go on automatically because she is your immediate family...I couldn't even contact my mum for the first three days'

3.78 She said that her experience of custody deterred her from committing further offences; in that sense, she felt that it was more effective than a community sentence she served upon her release.

'I stayed out of trouble for years after that. So, it obviously did what it was designed to do. For me it was a really big wake up call. I had community service when I got out because of a crime that happened before I went to jail, so I had a community order when I came out, and I didn't see any punishment in that...it was pointless. If I had had the community order before prison, I reckon I still would have ended up in prison'

3.79 One woman was a minor when sentenced so had a different experience at the start of her time in custody to the other women interviewed. She recalled not really

knowing what was happening when initially being moved to a STC a long way away from her hometown, as well as how scared she felt.

' ... I was like, "Where are we going?" and I remember I was with these escorts in like a normal car and she turned round to me and she was like, "You know if you want to talk to me about anything you can ..." and I said, "I don't know who any of these people are in this car" ... you didn't know where you were going ... I didn't know nothing ... I remember it took us about five hours to get to County Durham...'

- 3.80 This woman also recalled some bullying at her first STC, preferring the second unit she was subsequently moved to which was closer to home, partly because of culture shock of being in the north east of England.

' ... it was a lot easier, and I was quite glad because the first secure training centre I went to was horrendous ... [this setting] brought ... my head closer to home. Being in Newcastle, it was really weird because you had Geordies, people from Yorkshire, you had all these other people, but nobody who was actually Welsh, or that far from home that I was ... I'd never really been out of Wales unless it was with my family, so to be on my own in Newcastle ... obviously when you have your own little pet names, I don't understand what they are saying'

- 3.81 When this woman arrived in custody at the secure unit, she did not feel like she had been able to communicate her needs because she was confused. She also said that she had no mental health support and did not realise she was under observation because of her history of self-harm.

'I arrived ... and I spoke to a nurse, and she said, "Is there anything wrong with you? Anything we need to know? How are you feeling?" and I was like, "I don't understand what's going on. I don't really know who you are, and I don't really know where I am" and nobody showed me round the secure unit ... Nobody asked me if I needed to speak to a mental health worker or if I needed extra support ... but because of my previous self-harm, I was on observation anyway. But what they didn't say was, "Oh we'll be checking on you..."'

- 3.82 Once the woman was 18, she was moved to HMP Styal. When asked if she had been asked about her background and needs there, she said that it took her time to

open to up to yet another new set of staff members and found the staff turnover difficult. This resulted in her shutting down when asked about herself.

'I think it just took time, especially when I was going through YOT and things like that, I was getting new social workers quite regular ... So, I tried to not speak to people because what's the point? They are going to go and I'm going to get left again'

- 3.83 When asked about her contact with family, she stated how important it was to her. She was able to speak to her sister every day and was in contact with her mum 'all the time'. However, she did find it hard because it highlighted the restrictions of being in custody.

'I speak to my sister every day. My mum, I speak to her all the time ... she used to come up quite regular before COVID, but it was quite nice [that we had a] video link ... and she was showing us round her [new] house... to see it as she's walking round was brilliant. It's great having all the contact, but at the same time it's making you realise what you are missing out on ... I had my Grandad die when I first came here ... we were allowed to go to his funeral, and I think for me that was the point that made me realise that things are going to happen whether I like it or not ... it was just devastating really'

- 3.84 The woman had accessed mental health support during her time in custody but felt let down when the counsellor started to miss appointments because she was double-booked. She has, though, completed some qualifications that were not on offer at her school since being in custody. She felt that higher learning was something that should be on offer.

'I think there are some things that I have done, that I probably wouldn't have thought about before ... and they should provide higher learning'

- 3.85 When discussing the opportunities offered to prepare her for resettlement after her release, this woman talked about how prisoners used to be able to do town visits but that this had been stopped. She thought that could be useful for her because she has never lived in the community as an adult and did not know what Snapchat and WhatsApp are for example.

'I think [it] would be good if they brought [town visits] back ... my friends know what Snapchat is and WhatsApp and this, that and the other, and I'm sitting there thinking, 'Well, I don't have a... clue''

- 3.86 When asked how prison could be made better for women, she answered that she felt that staff should be more 'considerate' and that prisoners should be allowed to express their feelings without being censured for doing so.

'... my main thing rather is that the staff need to be more considerate. I'm not just a number, I am a person who has feelings, who wants to cry sometimes and who wants to shout sometimes ...'

- 3.87 Women who had not been in custody also speculated on what would be important to women in custody. Having regular contact with children and family was seen as essential.

'I think it is vitally important that if you are a female in prison and you've got children of your own, or if you are an auntie or a grandmother or sister. Children need to have contact not just with women but also blokes as well who are in prison and need that family contact. It's vital'

- 3.88 Some women disagreed altogether with the concept of custodial sentences for women. They suggested that prison is not a real deterrent and is seen by many women who offend as the 'easy' option, and that reparation or restorative justice approaches would be more appropriate.

'I think custodial sentences often aren't the way to go for women because they have young families to look after etc. ...maybe situations can be resolved and they can make reparation if you like, for things, without having to be incarcerated in prison'

'... it's not a deterrent... I can quite understand why they keep going back... They get their food, they get a warm bed, they get their washing done, they get to go out and exercise, they get to mingle with other prisoners and build friendships ... They were all on first name basis with every one of the staff in there because they'd been there that many times'

- 3.89 Others felt that women should receive custodial sentences for some crimes and in certain circumstances, and that, for them, prison had acted as a deterrent. It was

also said that women (and men) often needed support to address the cause of their offending rather than imprisonment.

'I've been jailed and it opened my eyes up and I haven't really been in trouble since last year ... I relapsed a few times, but I wasn't as heavy [substance abuse] as when I went into jail'

'It's depending on the crime, and it's the same for any man or woman....if a woman went out and murdered a man because he had sexually abused her then I am all for that, but they get the support for what happened to them for the reason they've done that. If a woman went out and sexually assaulted a man and she just wanted to do that, then I'm sorry but she should get every part of her chopped off so that she wouldn't be able to do that again....They should obviously get support for the reason they've done it but if they are really just relentless and rebellious then...lock them away and throw away the key, isn't it'

3.90 Regardless, it was said that more custodial options that allow Welsh women to serve their sentences closer to home were thought to be needed.

'I think they should have a prison closer to Wales than this. They definitely need to have a prison in Wales for us ... There aren't that many of us really, but it would be brilliant because you've got people in here from Caernarfon and it takes their family all day to get here ...'

3.91 In terms of resettlement, one woman openly admitted to struggling to adapt to life 'on the outside' – even though her sentence was relatively short.

'The only thing that I did notice that happened when I was released when I finally was outside in the real world... it felt wrong and that I shouldn't be there. It still does to a degree today'

3.92 Effective resettlement should include intensive, personalised support, which is led and brokered by a key individual or agency, it was said. It should start when in custody and continue seamlessly upon release.

'Regular contact with people they trust and who they could open up to and express their thoughts and feelings to, and who they know are working on their behalf on the outside with agencies that need to be involved as the umbrella network for their support. Then, when they come out of prison, those support networks and agencies are still in place for as long as that person requires them'

3.93 A couple of interviewees were in the process of resettlement. One was receiving support from probation officers with finding accommodation and continuing their drug and alcohol misuse treatment: she felt that probation is too focused on preventing reoffending at the expense of getting to the root of what might cause it to happen.

3.94 The same woman has also been working with a couple of third sector organisations, having been assigned caseworkers who have assisted her with her mental health, housing, and alcohol misuse. While this has been invaluable, she commented that that support she has received from statutory services has been far less effective.

'... the process to get here for the alcohol took me seven months and no-one was listening. [I was] beaten up and I had a blood clot because of the injuries, and I was telling them, and my mental health wasn't good, but no-one was listening to me to the point where I took an overdose ... I've asked my doctors ... to refer me to mental health and I've had a letter saying there was nothing wrong with me and I don't need to see them ... I gave up trying ... If I felt down or depressed, [my case worker] always came out to see me once a week ... I don't know what I would have done without her for the last 12 months'

3.95 The other woman complained about issues with her electronic tag, which has apparently been showing her as not being in her property, when she clearly was.

'I'm like "Why are you ringing me?" "Well, it's showing you're not in the property". "Well, I'm ... in the property because I'm...answering your phone..."

3.96 This could, of course, have had serious repercussions in terms of breach of licence.

'The next minute I get a letter from E&S that I'm in breach of my license and could be sent back to prison because I've not been in the house ... I was going absolutely mental with it because it was driving me insane'

Overarching challenges and other feedback

3.97 Achieving the aims of the Women's Justice Blueprint depends on overcoming a range of overarching challenges, according to stakeholders. Many of these were also raised in relation to the Youth Justice Blueprint.

- Sustainable, longer-term funding for partner agencies to continue to deliver services and employ staff.

'One of my perpetual concerns is always around short-term funding...annual funding schemes and opportunities are quite detrimental, particularly with third sector, at being able to deliver positive outcomes... sometimes it is quite difficult to get sustainable resources. We are quite often faced with vacancies because of funding'

- Ensuring more dedicated resource (including administrative support) for delivering the various Blueprint workstreams, as opposed to expecting individuals to do so as an 'add-on' to their existing work.

'... A lot of that has been set up initially, I think, on the goodwill of some of the key organisations involved. So, for example, it became part of my existing role to run certain workstreams of the Blueprint, and the same could be said for probably the majority, if not all, of the other workstream leads. And I think that unless we specifically invest in that programme and project delivery mechanism and give all of the administrative and project management support that is required, it's hard to maintain that discipline'

- Ensuring that the Blueprints continue to be prioritised despite changes in government, strategic leaders, key staff, and priorities.

'I feel like it has gone off the ball at the minute with changes in ministers, changes in the government...I do feel like perhaps the energy that was there at the beginning is slightly waning because it has taken so long'

- Ensuring the strategic national vision for the Blueprint translates to effective delivery at a local level.

'... we need to make sure that there is a really solid connection to local delivery so that when the programme moves away, there is enough embedded at local level to understand the importance of maintaining that focus on women as a priority ... '

- Ensuring that strategic and operational staff have enough time to focus on developing relationships and delivering the Blueprint.

'I think everybody puts in more time than they are actually accounted for in that sense. But the key thing is about ... having those strategic relationships and

sufficient trust across those senior leaders, whether they're working in a devolved or non-devolved setting'

- Swiftly regaining any progress lost due to COVID-19.

'Pandemic recovery is [a challenge], and resources having to be allocated to just even doing the basic stuff, like getting services back to business as usual which is very hard in the criminal justice system when we're talking about risky people who've been supervised in a different way because of all of the restrictions'

- Having the right management infrastructure to deliver the changes in practice that are needed to achieve the Women's (and youth) Justice Blueprints.

'I think we've now [got] the infrastructure to run the Blueprints but... now we know what it is we need to change, what's the infrastructure that needs to be in place to implement that change within agencies? And I'm not sure we've articulated what that looks like'

- A joined-up, consistent approach to achieving the Blueprint between all workstreams and initiatives, and equal commitment from all agencies involved (buy-in and engagement from mental health services apparently remains an issue, perhaps because of a lack of capacity).

'Sometimes it feels that we're doing a little bit of working in silos, rather than trying to join together some of the different elements, and it can often be some of the same individuals who are represented through the different aspects'

- Collaborative working between the UK Government and Welsh Government to make policy decisions which are right for Welsh young people.

'I think if we are ever going to truly be better, we need to look at that devolved and non-devolved element and make some recommendations to UK Government on making some decisions'

- Outlining a clear set of outcomes for the Women's (and Youth) Justice Blueprints to articulate what they are seeking to achieve.

'We don't actually know how to describe what are the Blueprints doing. Actually, the lack of real, hard, and tangible outcomes that should have been materializing now to keep people's interest is a bit of an issue that needs to be looked at'

3.98 Overall, there was a sense that both Blueprints are a positive vehicle for building system change and developing cohesive strategic and delivery partnerships across all relevant sectors.

'... Wales is far further ahead than England in terms of our work around the female offending Blueprint [sic.] and actually landing that work ... that does need to be recognised ... it is a real positive ...'

3.99 That their achievements must be assessed through research and evaluation was, though, stressed to demonstrate value for public money and to avoid failure through lack of evidence of benefit.

'I think these are flagships and the first time in my living memory that we have been working together across governments in this way. So, whatever you come out with in terms of evaluability, we have to be able to do something and we have to be able to demonstrate that [with] all of this public money, that something has been achieved and done differently ... otherwise we are at huge risk of scrutiny further down the line and I don't want these Blueprints to do that because I think they are so important and so needed that they cannot be allowed to fail in that way ... Fundamentally, I just think this is the right thing to do and we just need to evidence it so it is proves it was the right thing to do'

3.100 Furthermore, evaluation was thought to be required to hold strategic decision-makers to account on the extent to which they are enabling or creating barriers to implementing the Blueprints.

3.101 Finally, the need to ensure that any evaluation is ambitious, but pragmatic was stressed – as was recognising that there may be elements that cannot be evaluated yet should still be taken forward as it is 'the right thing to do'.

'I think the real trick for me is going to be ... working out which bits of this we can evaluate, which bits we cannot ... being realistic about the fact that if we can't capture everything perfectly, that's okay. That we still think it is a good idea to roll out PSRs for women [or] whatever the example might be, but if there's not a very good way of evaluating it, so be it, we'll do it anyway because we still think it is a good thing to do. So, I want us to be quite ruthless about ... really making sure that we are evaluating the things we know we can ...'