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WOMEN'S OFFENDING BEHAVIOUR IN NORTHERN IRELAND:

A STRATEGY TO MANAGE WOMEN OFFENDERS AND THOSE VULNERABLE TO OFFENDING BEHAVIOUR 2010-2013

OCTOBER 2010

**WOMEN'S OFFENDING BEHAVIOUR IN
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MINISTERIAL FOREWORD

I am pleased to publish this Strategy to Manage Women Offenders and Those Vulnerable to Offending Behaviour. This initiative further underlines my Department's and the Executive's commitment to addressing offender management, as reflected in the Hillsborough Agreement of February 2010.

Many years of experience in the field of social work have shown me that, for many, the pathway into crime is characterised by a plethora of social misfortunes, often typified by lifestyles marred by mental health problems, addiction, dysfunctional relationships, and family breakdowns. I am resolute in my belief that securing a reduction in offending and re-offending demands the provision of effective support and interventions for those people already caught up in the Criminal Justice System, as well as for those, often vulnerable people, who are at risk of becoming so.

Only a small proportion of offenders are women. However, the underlying causes of their offending behaviour and their subsequent experiences of the criminal justice system can have a huge impact on their children and families. The problems encountered by women are often complex, and differ in type and severity from those experienced by men. As well as mental health problems and addiction, issues such as poverty, homelessness, abuse, and domestic violence have been shown to be prime motivators for a woman's involvement in crime. To meet the specific needs of women offenders, the criminal justice system must provide a different response to that targeted at men.

A public consultation on a draft of this strategy was carried out in 2009. The views expressed in response to that consultation have helped to shape the final strategy and the structured, co-ordinated, multi-agency approach which it articulates. The strategy builds on initiatives already in train and outlines how interventions designed specifically for women will be developed in the coming years.

The strategy is an important component of a wider vision of reducing offending in Northern Ireland. To achieve this requires actions, both by the criminal justice system managing and redirecting offenders, and by wider government, tackling some of the underlying factors I have already described.

It is only by taking a coordinated and joined-up approach, both within the justice system and beyond, that we will deliver a significant reduction in the number of women offending and re-offending in Northern Ireland. Much is already being achieved by the criminal justice agencies, working together with other statutory agencies, and the community and voluntary sector, with the common goal of addressing the particular vulnerabilities which women offenders present.

For those women who do offend, and for whom a custodial sentence is appropriate, I am committed to ensuring that they receive the interventions and support they need in custody to help reduce their risk of re-offending. My 21 June statement to the Northern Ireland Assembly announced the commissioning of a review of the conditions of detention, management and oversight of prisons. That review is looking at issues at Hydebank Wood, relating to the development of this strategy, including the scope for a discrete facility for women.

This strategy is a key strategic development which will contribute directly to my wider vision of reducing offending in Northern Ireland. I am pleased with the progress and achievements already realised. However, more needs to be done to deliver services and interventions to women in a holistic and co-ordinated way. I know I can rely on the continued cooperation and support of all those involved; a factor that is even more relevant in the current challenging financial circumstances which face all public services.

DAVID FORD MLA
MINISTER OF JUSTICE

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Women make up only a small proportion of those who offend or who exhibit offending behaviour in Northern Ireland. However, their experiences of the criminal justice process, and the interventions and services available, can have a disproportionate impact, particularly on children and families. The problems underlying women's offending are often complex. Issues such as poverty, homelessness, mental illness, abuse, domestic violence, and addictions are often the prime motivators underlying a woman's involvement in crime. To reduce offending, ways to address the factors contributing to women's offending need to be developed, within the community where possible.

1.2 To progress thinking in this area, a "Draft Strategy for the Management of Women Offenders in Northern Ireland" was published by the Northern Ireland Office (NIO)¹ in February 2009. The document set out a proposed strategy for meeting the complex needs of women offenders. It signalled the government's commitment to the development of a structured, co-ordinated, multi-agency approach to developing women-specific interventions designed to address their offending behaviour.

1.3 The draft strategy was developed following pre-consultation with women offenders and those who work with them, and a four-day consultation event with key stakeholders in April 2008. A public consultation on the draft strategy took place between February and June 2009 and associated workshop events were held in the community and with staff and inmates in Ash House, the women's prison at Hydebank Wood. Responses to the draft strategy were received from a wide range of organisations and individuals, and a summary of those responses was published in November 2009.

¹ Now the Department of Justice

1.4 Building on the draft strategy, and taking into account the responses from the consultation, this 'Strategy to Manage Women Offenders and Those Vulnerable to Offending Behaviour' sets out an ambitious cross-cutting programme of work. It seeks to build on existing partnership working between criminal justice agencies and other statutory, community and voluntary sector agencies, to deliver services and interventions to women in a holistic and coordinated way.

1.5 Responding to the vulnerabilities and often complex needs of women offenders poses considerable challenges to service providers. Delivering a cohesive approach and marshalling available resources in a more effective way will assist vulnerable women to take responsibility for their own lives; reduce the cycle of offending and re-offending; and contribute to reducing crime and making the community safer.

1.6 This strategy sets out four strategic strands: Providing Alternatives to Prosecution and Custody; Reducing Offending; INSPIRE Women's Project - Gender Specific Community Supervision and Interventions; and Developing a Gender-Specific approach to the Management of Women in Custody. The Department of Justice (DoJ), in collaboration with the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) and the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS), will use this strategy to ensure the effective management of women offenders in Northern Ireland, both in the community and in custody.

1.7 While this strategy has been in preparation, work has been progressing, and in some cases has been completed, on a number of the key initiatives set out in the draft strategy. These developments, which were broadly supported by consultees, are referred to in Chapter 9 and set out in Annex 1.

CHAPTER 2

WOMEN OFFENDERS- CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

“Women and men are different. Equal treatment of men and women does not result in equal outcomes.” – Baroness Jean Corston

The Corston Report

2.1 In 2006, the United Kingdom Government commissioned Baroness Jean Corston to carry out a review of women with particular vulnerabilities in the criminal justice system in England and Wales. This followed extensive previous research, much of which showed that women offenders present particular problems.

2.2 Baroness Corston was asked to examine women’s experience of the criminal justice process and the interventions and services available at each stage of that process. Her task was to identify what more could be done to tackle problems at an earlier point and, where possible, avoid vulnerable women ending up in prison. Her report, published in March 2007, contained 43 recommendations aimed at improving the approaches, services and interventions for women offenders and those at risk of offending.

2.3 Nearly all of Baroness Corston’s recommendations were accepted by the Government, and considerable progress has been made in delivering on them through a co-ordinated cross-government approach. While her report’s analysis and recommendations relate to England and Wales, there is much in it that resonates with experiences in Northern Ireland.

2.4 In the course of her review, Baroness Corston identified some of the problems that, in different combinations, often trigger a crisis point in women’s lives that in turn leads to offending. These include:

- **domestic circumstances** and problems such as domestic violence and childcare issues;

- **personal circumstances**, such as mental illness and substance misuse; and
- **socio-economic factors**, including poverty, isolation, unemployment and homelessness.

2.5 Baroness Corston was clear that addressing these issues is vital to ensuring that women are properly supported to lead law-abiding lives, and to reducing levels of re-offending. She concluded that a more women-centred, integrated approach to their offending was required; and she stressed that securing equal outcomes sometimes requires different services and policies for men and women. Some of the fundamental differences she identified include:

- women victims of violence and abuse are overrepresented in the criminal justice system and can be described as victims as well as offenders;
- the biological difference between men and women generates different social and personal consequences;
- relationship problems feature strongly in women's pathways to crime;
- coercion by men channels some women into criminal activity;
- mental health problems are far more prevalent among women in prison than those in the general population;
- drug addiction plays a major part in all offending but disproportionately so in the case of women;
- women prisoners are far more likely than men to be the primary carers of young children, making the prison experience significantly different for women than men; and
- prison is disproportionately harsher for women because prisons, and the practices within them, are largely designed for men by men.

Issues facing women offenders

2.6 Overall, women offenders experience a broad range of vulnerabilities relating to family relationships, children, health and mental well-being, and addictions. Many have led very chaotic lifestyles and some have spent long periods of their childhood in care, achieving only very low educational attainments and gaining little, if any, experience of employment.

2.7 They also often have additional concerns about their financial situation and accommodation needs. Poverty and a lack of choices can lead to women feeling that they have little control over their own lives. Such issues can be particularly devastating when a woman is also a mother.

2.8 Many women offenders also have a history of serious and sustained sexual or other violent abuse, including domestic violence. Statistics from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP), Her Majesty's Prison Service (HMPS) and the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) in 2008/09 show that up to 50% of women in prison in England and Wales reported having experienced violence at home.

2.9 The 2008/09 Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales (HMCIP) Annual Report indicates that, as in previous years, there continued to be significant levels of self-harm amongst women prisoners, with 47% of recorded self-harm incidents involving women. This has to be seen in the context of women representing only 5% of the overall prison population at that time.

2.10 A wide range of issues can underlie women's self-harming, including substance misuse, depression, personality disorder, anxiety in relation to children and families, bereavement, relationship problems, bullying and worries about losing accommodation.

2.11 In Northern Ireland, 18% of the women committed to Ash House (the women's prison at Hydebank Wood), in the first 6 months of 2010 were subject to the NIPS procedures for supporting those who have self-harmed, or who are at risk of, self harm. That compares to 9% of the male offenders committed to Maghaberry Prison during the same period.

2.12 Baroness Corston's findings regarding factors underlying women's offending mirror the experiences of women offenders in Northern Ireland, although the relative importance of some of them may differ. Baroness Corston and others have shown that women experience issues in a very particular way, and that addressing the often complex needs of women offenders requires a targeted and tailored approach.

Women offenders in Northern Ireland

Background

2.13 The number of women offenders in Northern Ireland is relatively small compared to the number of men who offend. Women offenders attending court mainly receive non-custodial disposals such as, Suspended Custody, a Custody Probation Order, a Probation Order, Community Service, a Combination Order, a Fine, a Conditional Discharge or Youth Conference. For those women who receive custodial disposals, Ash House at Hydebank Wood accommodates fine defaulters, remand prisoners and women offenders sentenced by the courts to immediate custody for criminal offences.

2.14 Effective offender management is characterised by a rounded approach where interventions are matched to meet identified re-offending risks and needs. It is essential that women offenders receive the right disposal. An important part of this is ensuring that the courts have access to Pre-Sentence Reports on women offenders coming before them and that assessments for women offenders include information on their specific needs and provision.

Court disposals in 2006, by gender and offence type

2.15 The table in Annex 2² shows the disposals in all courts by gender and offence classification in 2006 (the latest statistics available). In 2006, 3428 women passed through the courts (13% of the total figure) compared to 22,935 men. Women were most likely to receive a “Fine” (66%), “Supervision in the Community” (9%) or a “Conditional Discharge” (9%). Men, however, were most likely to receive a “Fine” (66%), “Immediate Custody” (9%) or “Suspended Custody” (9%).

2.16 In 2006, the most common crime category for women coming through the courts was “Theft” (373). These women were most likely to receive a “Fine” disposal (26%), with the second most common disposal being “Supervision in the Community” (23%). Theft was the second highest crime category for men (1355) and these men were also most likely to receive a “Fine” (31%) or “Supervision in the Community” (20%).

2.17 The second highest crime category for women in 2006 was “Violence against the person” (296 offences). Women committing such an offence were most likely to receive a “Fine” (33%); with the second most common disposal being “Supervision in the Community” (21%). “Violence against the person” was the highest crime category in 2006 for men (2000) with the most common disposal being a “Fine” (36%) and the second highest disposal being “Immediate Custody” (20%).

Community Disposals

2.18 With most women offenders coming before the courts in 2006 receiving a community disposal, 9% of these were sentenced to community disposals under the supervision of the Probation Board (PBNI). Such community disposals include: Custody Probation Orders; Probation Orders with or without requirements; Community Service Orders; and Combination Orders.

² Source: Court Prosecutions and Sentencing 2006. NISRA Research and Statistical Bulletin 11/2008

The new Public Protection Sentences also require offenders, sentenced to 12 months or more for offences committed after 15 May 2008, to be supervised on release from prison as a condition of their licence.

2.19 Around 3,000 new orders are made annually by the courts requiring PBNI supervision, with only a small proportion of these orders relating to women offenders. During 2009/10, the courts made 3,290 orders subject to PBNI supervision - 12% of which (392 orders) related to women.

2.20 Of the new orders relating to women offenders in 2009/10, 47% were assessed by PBNI as being of low likelihood to re-offend; 38% were assessed as being of medium likelihood to re-offend; the remainder (15%) had a high likelihood of re-offending.

2.21 The INSPIRE Women's Project³ opened on October 2008 with a caseload averaging 150 women offenders; mainly comprising those women in its catchment area who are subject to statutory supervision orders or whose court cases have been adjourned for Pre-Sentence Reports. The INSPIRE Women's Project also provides a day release placement for those women prisoners on resettlement leave.

Custodial Disposals⁴

Women Offenders

2.22 Historically, the number of prison receptions⁵ for women in Northern Ireland represents a relatively small proportion of the overall figure. In 2009, women accounted for 4% (251) of all receptions into prison while 5641 men were received into prison during the same period. The number of prison receptions for women (as a percentage of the total) has fallen since 2006, when women accounted for 6.6% of all receptions.

³ Further information on the INSPIRE Women's Project is included in Chapter 6

⁴ Source: The Northern Ireland Prison Population in 2009. NISRA Research and Statistical Bulletin 02/2010.

⁵ Annual prison receptions are calculated simply as the sum total of admissions into prison during the year.

2.23 The average overall prison population⁶ in 2009 was 1465, with women representing 3% (48) of the total. This proportion of women offenders in custody has remained fairly stable over the last decade. The average number of women in prison in Northern Ireland in 2010 is, proportionately, relatively small compared to the rest of the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland and most of Western Europe⁷:

Prisoner Type

2.24 In 2009, 23% (1293) of all receptions for men were received under a sentence of immediate custody compared to 13% (32) of all receptions for women. On average, 48% of women in prison had been sentenced to immediate custody, compared to 64% of men.

2.25 Remand prisoners accounted for 61% of all receptions for women, compared to 52% of all receptions for men. On average, 48% of women in prison were on remand (8.7% of these were under 21 years of age) compared with 34% of men (17% of these were under 21 years of age). In 2009, 51 women were committed to custody for fine default. This represents 20% of all prison receptions for women and compares to 24% of all prison receptions for men.

2.26 The drop in the number of women committed to custody for fine default is a positive step forward; historically, most fine defaulters who end up in custody have defaulted on low level fines imposed for relatively minor offences. A reminder scheme, whereby courts advise those men and women approaching a default period, has been an important initiative. The scheme has had the positive effect of reducing the number of default warrants being issued by around 30%.

⁶ The prison population fluctuates throughout the year and within each week. To remove within-week variation and provide a more consistent approach, prison population statistics are based on counts taken on the last Thursday night of each month. The annual average prison population is derived from twelve such monthly counts.

⁷ Kings College London, World Prison Brief. 2010.

2.27 Although there were 51 women committed to custody for fine default, the average number of women in prison in 2009 for fine default was 1. Fine defaulters usually represent a very small proportion of the overall average annual prison population due to the short duration of their time in prison. For example, the average time served by a fine defaulter in 2009, covering both men and women, was 4 days.

Immediate custody prisoners

Principal offence

2.28 Of the 32 receptions for women received under a sentence of immediate custody in 2009, the most common offences were for “Violence against the Person” (25%), “Breach of Suspended Sentence” (21.8%), “Fraud and Forgery” (15.6%) and “Possession of False Identity Documents” (12.5%).

2.29 “Theft” represented a small percentage of receptions for women received under a sentence of immediate custody in 2009; in previous years “Theft” had represented a higher proportion of receptions. Figures from the Home Office show that men and women originally convicted for theft re-offend most quickly after their release.

Length of sentence

2.30 In 2009, of those sentenced to immediate custody, 60% of women received a sentence that did not exceed 1 year and 25% of all receptions for women received a sentence equal to or less than 3 months.

2.31 Such short sentences for minor offences may not help to reduce re-offending amongst women as they are unlikely to have had enough time to address their offending behaviour, given that many women offenders need to overcome a number of complex issues.

2.32 Moreover, even a short sentence can have an enormous impact on a woman, particularly if they are mothers; again supporting the need to divert

women away from custody where possible. However, custody must remain the ultimate sanction for more serious offences. Statistics from St Giles Trust⁸ indicate that re-offending rates are highest amongst those men and women who have been sentenced to prison for less than a year.

Age

2.33 The peak age for both men and women received into prison under a sentence of immediate custody is between 21 and 29 years. There is a steady decline in the percentage of such men in older age groups. However, this is not the case for women, with a high percentage of receptions into immediate custody falling into the 40-49 years age group.

2.34 Research⁹ suggests that an estimated 85% of offenders desist from crime by the age of 28. The number of prison receptions for men in 2009 appears to drop significantly after this age, but the same cannot be said for women, again suggesting that women's offending pathways differ significantly from men's.

Juveniles

2.35 Custody for juveniles is limited to serious and persistent offenders, and only used as a last resort. The number of girls held in custody is traditionally low, typically fewer than 4 at any one time. Provisions were introduced in the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008 enabling all girls under the age of 18 requiring custody to be accommodated in Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre, which is run by the Youth Justice Agency. This resolved a long standing difficulty which had resulted in a very small number of 17 year old girls being accommodated on occasions with adult women prisoners.

2.36 Woodlands is the only custodial facility solely for children in Northern Ireland. It is a purpose-built facility for a maximum of 48 children (girls and boys), with a typical average population of around 30.

⁸ St Giles Trust aims to help offenders in England break the cycle of offending and turn their lives around through practical support.

⁹ Bringing prisoners back home. Shadd Maruna, July 2010.

CHAPTER 3

A CO-ORDINATED APPROACH IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Strategic Context

3.1 The Minister of Justice is committed to a co-ordinated, long-term and sustainable approach to addressing the needs of women offenders in Northern Ireland. This includes promoting a cross-cutting programme of work at a strategic level, maximising the opportunities to address the social factors that contribute towards offending and re-offending by women and improving current service delivery.

3.2 The draft strategy was subject to public consultation from February to June 2009. There were a number of consultation events including a workshop with staff and prisoners from Ash House. A “Summary of Responses” published in November 2009 reflects the range of views expressed by all those who participated in the consultation process.¹⁰

Vision

3.3 The extensive consultation proved valuable and highlighted the breadth of support for the overall vision for the draft strategy:

“To provide a criminal justice system in which the particular needs of women offenders and those at risk of offending are recognised and addressed, and effective pathways out of crime are delivered.”

Outcomes of the strategy

3.4 It is envisaged that successful outcomes for this strategy will be:

- Reduced offending and re-offending amongst women.
- A range of women-centred interventions available within the community to support women offenders and those at risk of

¹⁰ Copies of the Draft Strategy for the Management of Women Offenders in Northern Ireland and the Summary of Responses to the Draft Strategy are available from www.nio.gov.uk

offending, and to help women desist from offending behaviour at an earlier stage.

- Custody being used only for those women who have committed serious and violent offences.
- A better experience and outcome for those women who receive a custodial sentence.
- More effective rehabilitation and re-integration of women offenders into the community.

Structure of the Strategy

3.5 Building on the draft strategy, and incorporating responses to the consultation, this strategy supports an integrated approach to managing effectively all women who are offenders or who exhibit offending behaviour. The strategy covers the period 2010-2013 and is broken down into 4 strategic strands. Each has a strategic aim and a number of key initiatives which, in turn, are supported by a number of actions detailing work being taken forward.

3.6 The detail of the four strands is set out in Chapters 4 to 7, and an Action Plan is included at Annex 1. A number of action points which have already been taken forward are listed at Annex 2. The planned activities, to complete outstanding actions, are set out in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 4
STRATEGIC STRAND 1
PROVIDING ALTERNATIVES TO PROSECUTION & CUSTODY

Strategic Aim: To provide alternatives to prosecution and custody by looking at alternative diversionary approaches in relation to lower level offences, where prosecution through the courts may not be the most effective way of delivering a proportionate justice outcome; or where non-custodial sentences might achieve a better outcome than imprisonment.

Background

4.1 Whilst imprisonment and non-custodial sentences provide options for dealing with offenders on the basis of the risks posed and the seriousness of the offence, there are a range of offences at the lower end of the spectrum which offer the opportunity for alternative diversionary approaches.

Prosecuting minor offences through the courts, particularly those committed by persons unlikely to persistently re-offend, may not always be the most appropriate and effective way of delivering a proportionate justice outcome.

4.2 Receiving a criminal record for a minor offence may also have a significant long term impact on employment prospects and on the ability of individuals to lead law-abiding lives after a period of offending. That is not to say that low-level offending should be ignored. What is important is that the offence is acknowledged and, where appropriate, the harm caused to victims is repaired and the root cause of offending behaviour is tackled in a meaningful way.

4.3 The draft strategy highlighted a number of initiatives being developed. These included alternatives to prosecution and making use of electronic monitoring.

Key Initiatives

New Legislation

4.4 A wealth of research indicates that too many women still end up in prison when their offending behaviour could be better addressed through a range of more creative and constructive alternatives. For some women, custody will be the proportionate response. However, to be truly effective, the criminal justice system must also provide alternatives which give the courts greater opportunity, where appropriate, to apply sanctions that enable the complex needs of women offenders to be addressed more effectively in the community.

4.5 Legislation is required to develop diversionary measures that will act as an alternative to traditional prosecution through the courts for women, and other offenders, admitting to relatively low level criminal offences. Provisions to provide alternatives to prosecution are included in a draft Justice Bill due to be presented to the Assembly in autumn 2010. The target date for new legislation to be enacted is May 2011.

Action- *'To have new legislation enacted which expands the range of alternatives to prosecution and also reduces committal to custody for fine default and to implement in line with available resources.'*

4.6 Subsequent to the publication of the draft strategy, it was recognised that legislation was required to improve the defences available in cases where killing occurs as a result of sustained physical abuse. Such a defence would be particularly important for vulnerable women in what are often tragic circumstances. New powers have been created and it is envisaged that improved statutory defences will come into force by December 2010, covering those vulnerable and abused women who are involved in domestic homicide cases.

Action- ‘To provide improved statutory defences for vulnerable and abused women involved in domestic homicide cases.’

Alternatives to Custody

4.7 The draft strategy highlighted the need to identify possible enhancements to existing community disposals, or the development of additional interventions, to support the increased use of non-custodial sentences. A discussion paper examining whether the current community sentencing framework provides a sufficiently wide range of robust disposals for lower risk offenders is being prepared for public consultation. This is expected to be published by December 2010.

Action- ‘To review the pathways to custody for women offenders to identify areas where enhancements to existing community disposals, or the development of additional interventions, could support greater judicial use of non-custodial (as opposed to custodial) sentences in appropriate cases.’

Electronic Monitoring

4.8 Electronic monitoring (“tagging”) has been available in Northern Ireland from April 2009 to support the monitoring of curfews. Electronic monitoring is not the same as satellite tracking and is designed purely to show whether someone is in their place of curfew during the hours of their curfew. An electronic monitoring requirement can be directed in a variety of ways and the associated curfew can be adapted to suit the needs of the individual. For example, it can be used as a condition of bail, potentially reducing the levels of women remanded to custody.

4.9 Electronic monitoring can also be applied as part of a community sentence: a woman so monitored can remain at home with her family, and undertake education, training, work or rehabilitative programmes in the community. It is hoped that this will, in many cases, have a positive impact on women offenders, possibly contributing to a reduction in re-offending. The

comment made by most respondents to the consultation was that electronic monitoring must be used only in appropriate circumstances and that it should be independently monitored.

4.10 Work is continuing to promote the effective use of electronic monitoring, and there is no evidence of its inappropriate use. Between 1 April 2009 and 31 August 2010, 31 electronic monitoring orders were imposed by the courts on women as a condition of their bail curfew.

Action- *'To continue to promote the use of electronic tagging for monitoring compliance with bail curfews as an alternative to remanding women in custody.'*

Fine Default

4.11 Most respondents to the consultation agreed that it is necessary for sentencers to be appraised of the issues that underlie many women's offending behaviour, and to be made aware that these problems were often better addressed outside prison. It was also suggested that sentencers should be made aware of the low level of some women's income, so that they could better appreciate the full impact of fines and how inappropriate they can be in some cases.

4.12 Better information for sentencers on incomes, reminder systems ahead of default, and community alternatives instead of custody (where default occurs) will all be important developments. Reminder systems are already very effectively in place and powers now exist to progress community alternatives to custody. An information initiative to highlight existing options for payment and to emphasise the importance of providing information on offender's financial circumstances to courts will be in place by March 2011.

Action- *'To improve the information provided to courts on women offenders' financial circumstances.'*

Mental Health

4.13 There is a need to improve the processes for diverting women offenders with mental health problems and personality disorders away from prison. Since the publication of the draft strategy, work led by Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) has been continuing to ensure that new mental capacity legislation will be introduced into the Assembly by December 2011. Agreement has been reached with DHSSPS on a joint criminal justice/health legislative approach.

4.14 A Criminal Justice Board sub-group has been established to take forward the recommendations of the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) report, 'Not a Marginal Issue – Mental Health and the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland.' The report's key conclusions are that: early assessment and screening of mentally disordered offenders is critical; diversion from custody should be a core objective; systems and quality of care should be improved; and there should be better coordination and collaboration across criminal justice agencies and with key health partners/providers.

Action- 'To continue to work with other Government departments to improve the processes for diverting women offenders with severe mental health problems away from the criminal justice system.'

CHAPTER 5
STRATEGIC STRAND 2
REDUCING OFFENDING

Strategic Aim: To reduce the number of women entering the criminal justice system, by supporting women who are at risk of offending and responding effectively to their needs in relation to issues such as abuse; domestic violence; mental well-being; substance misuse; poverty; isolation and unemployment; and by directing women out of pathways that lead to crime.

Background

5.1 The Programme for Government gives a commitment to reducing offending and dealing with its consequences. Addressing women’s offending is a key strand of the work being taken forward to develop a reducing offending strategic framework for the criminal justice sector of Northern Ireland.

5.2 This work also has relevance to the forthcoming Community Safety Strategy, which will seek to create opportunities offering alternatives to involvement in crime and to support the rehabilitation of offenders.

5.3 This strategy aims to reduce offending amongst women by drawing on the strategic framework for reducing offending aimed at targeting pathways that contribute to offending and re-offending; developing restorative interventions; and carrying out gender-specific research. The consultation highlighted a range of views on how to reduce offending amongst women and the following key initiatives are being taken forward.

Key Initiatives

A Partnership approach- establishing a Ministerial Group on Reducing Offending

5.4 The draft strategy stressed that while much can be done to address offending behaviour within the criminal justice system, a justice-based approach is not enough. To be really effective, a coherent cross-government approach is essential to addressing the pathways to offending behaviour, as well as dealing with its consequences.

5.5 Experience in Great Britain and elsewhere has shown that establishing effective partnerships and developing a co-ordinated, cross departmental and inter-agency approach is vital to reducing offending. A cross-Government approach should assist Departments and agencies in identifying how their policies and practices can impact on women's offending, and provide a valuable impetus to co-ordinated action. In Great Britain, the previous administration set up a Ministerial sub-group specifically to address women's offending and to guide cross-departmental developments in this field.

5.6 Work is progressing on the development of a Reducing Offending Strategic Framework covering the criminal justice system, and a broad collaborative approach between all relevant interests across government is required to identify and address the underlying contributory factors leading to offending behaviour. The aim is to promote early and targeted interventions as a means of "heading off" future offending. This "systems" approach to addressing offending is important in identifying it as a challenge to Government as a whole rather than to the criminal justice system.

5.7 To take this forward, The Justice Minister undertook a series of bilateral meetings with other Executive Ministers in the summer to discuss the way forward in terms of a government wide approach to reducing offending. Respondents to the consultation broadly welcomed the proposed approach, and machinery to take forward collaborative working will be put in place in autumn 2010.

Action- ‘To develop a cross-departmental approach to Reducing Offending, to promote and facilitate the development of a coherent Northern Ireland response addressing all aspects of offending behaviour.’

Addressing Offending Behaviour – The Pathways

5.8 Research has shown that there are a number of social factors which contribute to offending and re-offending. These were previously embedded within the NIPS/PBNI Resettlement Strategy, launched in June 2004, as 7 key “pathways” around which partnerships helped to support offender management and reduce re-offending by addressing personal needs. However, it has since been recognised that the original 7 pathways failed to take account of two issues that are of particular significance to women - women who have been abused, raped or who have experienced domestic violence; and those who have been involved in prostitution.

5.9 These issues have now been adopted as pathways 8 and 9, and are now part of the gender-specific approach to reducing offending, through supporting women who offend and those at risk of offending in Northern Ireland.

5.10 The Government is committed to focusing on these 9 pathways to meet the needs of women in the criminal justice system through a multi-agency approach. To ensure that the pathways lead to women offenders and those at risk of offending being able to access mainstream and specific services, work is being focussed on a number of fronts, both in the community and in custody.

5.11 PBNI continue to work with NOMS and other health and criminal justice agencies to develop interventions and programmes for best practice, aimed at specific needs of individuals to reduce offending behaviour. This includes strategies targeting gender specific programmes and interventions, including mental health, personality disorder and learning disability needs.

Pathway 1 - Accommodation

5.12 Problems with homelessness are often linked to offending which is often complicated by mental health issues. Accommodation for women offenders in the community is currently provided through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) Homeless Advice Unit, through access to voluntary sector accommodation. PBNI have service level agreements with the Must hostel and Women's Aid, to provide dedicated provision within approved accommodation.

5.13 PBNI is represented on the Strategic Management Group of Supporting People which is an NIHE programme aimed at preventing homelessness. It works by supporting vulnerable people at risk of homelessness to maintain their independence, or by assisting people who are already homeless to regain a level of independence so that they can manage a tenancy on their own.

5.14 The INSPIRE Women's Project as detailed in chapter 6, focuses on developing women-specific community programmes on a 'day' basis. It is not set up or resourced to operate as a hostel but it offers real scope to develop creative partnership arrangements with community-based women's organisations which provide accommodation under "Supporting People", such as women's groups and housing associations.

5.15 In custody, the "Housing Advice in Prison Project", funded by NIHE and NIPS, is aimed at assisting in the prevention of homelessness amongst those leaving prison, thereby enhancing their opportunities for rehabilitation and community re-integration, and contributing to the reduction of re-offending. This is achieved through direct delivery of advice and support services within prisons by the Housing Rights Service (e.g. advocacy/representation services to those prisoners with more complex housing issues; a specialist housing consultancy/support and referral service to those advisers and resettlement staff currently operating in the prisons).

5.16 The Housing Rights Service also uses the evidence gathered from this work to identify barriers and bring about improvements in housing policy, practice and provision for those entering and leaving custody.

5.17 However, separately, there may be a potential need for dedicated accommodation, outside of a prison setting, to be used for women approaching the end of custodial sentences or, on occasions, as an alternative to custody for appropriate women offenders. The advantage of providing such hostel accommodation is that it could provide a real alternative to sending women offenders to prison and facilitate the earlier, controlled release of women from custody. It would, therefore, support and promote the continued involvement of women in the community and so ease them back into community-living after a period in custody. Against this, the number of women that might require, or would elect to use, such hostel accommodation is likely to be very small while the hostel would have to operate and be staffed on a 24/7 basis.

5.18 A hostel would also have a fixed location, which would, inevitably, limit its capacity to build or sustain its residents' links into their local communities, which could be anywhere in Northern Ireland. Consequently, there are concerns that such a hostel would be underused and would not prove cost-effective, possibly drawing funds away from other priority women's services at a time when there is publicly funded "Supporting People" accommodation readily available. There are strong advocates both for and against women's hostels in Great Britain, and further analysis is required in Northern Ireland to test the need for, and viability of, such a facility locally.

5.19 Building on current provision, most respondents to the consultation agreed that a multi-agency response was needed involving criminal justice agencies, NIHE and community-based housing providers. An initial scoping study will, in collaboration with other government departments, review the accommodation needs of women offenders and vulnerable women and how these are met by the current arrangements, with a view to providing support to existing accommodation providers.

5.20 The position will be reviewed after the evaluation of the INSPIRE Women's Project. The target date for completion of this action is the end of 2011.

Action- 'To review accommodation needs of women offenders and vulnerable women, and existing arrangements, with a view to working in partnership with other accommodation providers, taking cognisance of the results of the evaluation of the INSPIRE Women's Project.'

Pathway 2 – Education, Training and Employment

Addressing the learning and skills needs of women

5.21 There is strong evidence to suggest that many offenders have serious deficits when it comes to basic skills, education and training, and that this limits their capacity to avoid re-offending during and following periods of supervision, or when released from custody.

5.22 The NIPS Learning and Skills Strategic Plan 2010-13 (launched by the Minister of Justice on 28 July 2010), acknowledges the increasing recognition of the importance of addressing the specific needs of women prisoners, as a distinct group. One of the early objectives is a review of all learning and skills services and a Working Group on Education, Training and Employment for Women Prisoners has already been established to take forward progress in relation to the provision of improved opportunities and facilities to keep women purposefully occupied. A review of Essential Skills provision within NIPS has also been carried out.

5.23 NIPS is also taking forward work on the specific needs of women in relation to learning disability and other special needs including:

- developing user friendly screening tools for learning difficulties and learning disabilities;
- developing a matrix of support with specific referral routes and areas of staff and departmental responsibility;

- raising staff awareness of how these issues may manifest themselves in the prison environment; and
- bringing forward specific women centred interventions, as appropriate.

Action- ‘To further develop work within the Prison Service to address the specific educational needs of women offenders, including where needs have been identified in relation to learning disability and other special needs.’

Employment needs of women offenders

5.24 The employment needs of women offenders can be complex and might have to be balanced against family responsibilities making it more difficult to find suitable employment opportunities on release. Since publication of the draft strategy, Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO) has introduced a Jobtrack Women’s Project.

5.25 This is a pilot initiative which targets both women in the community and custody to gather information about the needs of women offenders and to develop an effective model of engagement to support their learning and skills development with a view to accessing the labour market. An employment officer’s post was created to work specifically with women in Ash House and the INSPIRE Women’s Project. The programme works on motivation, and delivers direct training interventions to ensure that individual employment action plans are achieved. It also helps to identify suitable employment opportunities and support with the job application process.

5.26 The Jobtrack Women’s Project pilot commenced in October 2009. During 2009/10, 35 women were referred to Jobtrack. Of these referrals 33 were by PBNI and 2 were referred by NIPS. Considering those with sole responsibility for the care of children, 46% of women participating in Jobtrack were lone parents, the comparable figure for men was 4%. This illustrates the need for separate provision tailored to the needs of women offenders.

Action- 'To further examine how the employment needs of women offenders can be addressed as a discrete group.'

Access to community resources

5.27 PBNI and NIPS have established the Ash-INSPIRE Resettlement Initiative as a means of providing information, support and access to community resources for women prisoners, as they move towards release and resettlement within the community. The Initiative involves working with a wide-range of services and interventions through the INSPIRE Women's Project, including the services of the Women's Community Support Project (WCSP).

5.28 As part of this new initiative, representatives of the women's community centres linked to the INSPIRE Women's Project visit Ash House regularly, and all women prisoners there have access to the advice and information they provide, and to the links they can facilitate to women's centres or other services in the community in preparation for release. The intention is to provide a seamless service, tailored to the individual needs of each woman, ensuring that interventions are co-ordinated with, and inclusive of, the network of support that already exists within the local communities to which the women are returning.

Learning and Skills Forum

5.29 The draft strategy recognised that an over-arching, co-ordinated approach is needed to improving the learning and skills of offenders. To facilitate such an approach, a cross-Department Learning and Skills Forum has been formed to explore ways to improve the coordination of education and skills provision, leading to reduced levels of re-offending. The forum, chaired by the DoJ has representatives from Department of Education (DE), Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), NIPS, YJA and PBNI. A Learning and Skills Workshop was held in July 2009 to establish a baseline of connections and provision to inform development work.

5.30 An Information Sharing subgroup was also established to identify gaps in, and duplication of, data; to strengthen communication lines; and to develop protocols for sharing and transferring information. The subgroup has identified the information on a learner that needs to be shared between NIPS, PBNI, YJA, DEL, Education and Library Boards (ELBs), Schools and Further Education (FE) Colleges/Training Organisations. The work of the Learning and Skills Forum will be further developed and progressed by the end of 2011.

Action- 'To further develop and progress the work of the Learning and Skills Forum which will focus on making better use of existing education and skills training to provide a more joined-up service for existing offenders, and those at risk of offending.'

Pathway 3 - Health

Mental health

5.31 Mental health/well-being is often a key factor in women's offending. In many cases serious mental illness or personality disorder leads to women experiencing social exclusion and chaotic lifestyles. Baroness Corston reports that up to 80% of women in prison in England and Wales have diagnosable mental health problems and the Thematic Report by HMIP states that 49% of women in prison interviewed in 2006-08 had an emotional well-being or mental health problem.

5.32 PBNI's June 2010 desktop study of the needs of women offenders under supervision indicated a relatively high prevalence (44%) of women offenders in Northern Ireland with mental health issues. A number of respondents to the consultation considered mental health fundamental to the success of many elements of the overall draft strategy and the commitment to provide new services for those deemed 'high risk' was deemed a positive development.

Personality disorder

5.33 The DHSSPS published 'The Northern Ireland Personality Disorder Strategy,' on 29 June 2010 which includes a number of recommendations with a criminal justice focus. For example, the strategy recognised that there is a high prevalence of personality disorder among those in contact with probation and also within prisons (60-80%). It is estimated that 31% of women prisoners have anti-social personality disorder, which is characterised by disregard for social norms, an inability to maintain relationships and low thresholds for frustration and aggression.

5.34 Although there are fewer numbers of women in prison, proportionately women are more likely than men to commit suicide when in prison and five times more women self harm in prison than men. The strategy recommended that the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and Public Health Agency (PHA) should work in partnership with Criminal Justice Agencies to develop as a priority, services to address the gender-specific needs of such personality disordered individuals both within prison and in the community.

Action- 'To establish joint working groups with relevant parties to ensure development of cohesive integrated services for women with mental health difficulties in prison and in the community who exhibit offending behaviour.'

Prison Healthcare Strategy

5.35 The transfer of lead responsibility for prisoner healthcare to the DHSSPS took place in April 2008, and the South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust (SET) has been working in partnership with NIPS to develop a comprehensive Prison Healthcare Strategy for 2009 to 2014. The Prison Healthcare Strategy aims to provide an effective mechanism for responding to the healthcare needs of prisoners, including the delivery of gender specific services, and interventions to address the needs of women prisoners.

5.36 With regard to women prisoners, the Prison Healthcare strategy will:

- review their health needs and develop specific objectives around issues such as gynaecological health, sexual health, past abuse/domestic violence, and mother and baby;
- assess the mental health needs of women prisoners and provide appropriate interventions, on a multi-agency basis, in relation to mental health issues and personality disorder;
- assess the needs of women prisoners in relation to addiction and develop options for the delivery of a response tailored to women's needs;
- work to create a more therapeutic environment for the promotion of women's health and well-being;
- assess the specific needs of particular groups of women prisoners, including foreign nationals and women from a black or minority ethnic background, older women, young women, and women with disabilities; and
- develop gender specific standards for healthcare.

5.37 Work on the Prison Healthcare Strategy is well advanced.

Commissioning documents have been issued from the Health and Social Care Board.

Pathway 4 - Alcohol and Substance Misuse

5.38 Drug addiction (including prescribed drugs) is now a significant factor in much offending, but as Baroness Corston's report highlighted this seems to be disproportionately the case with women, who often have more complex poly-substance misuse. A snap shot view of women prisoners in Northern Ireland early in 2008 shows that half had a history of alcohol misuse, with 40% misusing drugs.

5.39 In addition, a needs analysis of women offenders under PBNI supervision on 30 June 2010 found that 32% had alcohol related problems, a further 9% had drug problems and 16% had problems with both alcohol and drugs, all related specifically to their offending behaviour. These problems range in severity and therefore require a spectrum of interventions to effectively address these diverse needs.

The Drugs and Alcohol strategy for Northern Ireland

5.40 Effective delivery of interventions to deal with alcohol and substance misuse makes an important contribution to a woman offender's ability to engage in programmes and activities that might contribute to her rehabilitation.

5.41 The DHSSPS-led Drug and Alcohol strategy for Northern Ireland,¹¹ published on May 2006, identifies a number of key priorities including a measure to specifically target those who are vulnerable and at risk. Those specified as being included in this category are: the homeless, people living with domestic violence, sex workers, ex-offenders, people with mental health problems, street drinkers and people with learning disabilities.

5.42 Commitments in the strategy include reviewing local treatment and support services; and, if necessary, developing new services across a range of settings for those deemed as high risk; as well as delivering a range of regional and local programmes and projects that inform and educate families about alcohol. PBNI continues to commission services from voluntary organisations such as Northern Ireland Community Addiction Service (NICAS); Breakthru; Reconciliation, Education and Community Training (REACT); and Northlands to deliver focussed interventions for offenders with alcohol and addiction problems.

¹¹ New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs 2006-2011 DHSSPS

Interventions in custody

5.43 To date, a needs assessment has been undertaken by the SET in relation to addictions within the prison population. Gaps in service provision have been identified and will be addressed within the Prison Healthcare Strategy. The key provider of services within prisons is the AD:EPT Drugs and Alcohol Service, which offers a range of services to those who have problems associated with the use of substances.

5.44 The service is funded by the SET, and is delivered in partnership with NIPS, as part of a multi-disciplinary team approach in the prison establishments, and in the community. In addition to approved substance misuse programmes, the interventions provided are tailored to the needs of individuals, and include harm reduction awareness sessions; addictions assessment and individualised care planning; one to one casework; one-to-one behaviour change counselling; and one-to-one pre-release work.

5.45 SET has appointed a sessional Consultant in Addiction Psychiatry and two specialist Addiction nurses who provide clinical assessment and treatment across the three prisons. This has enabled the provision of a Substitute Prescribing service for those who are opiate dependant and also alcohol and/or drug detoxification. The clinical team works in close partnership with AD:EPT to provide a comprehensive service which replicates that available in the community.

Action- *'To continue to work with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SET) and other agencies to develop and deliver services and interventions based on assessed need.'*

Pathway 5 - Finance, Benefits and Debts

5.46 Financial problems are often a major contributory factor in women's offending. Many women are on low incomes, and advice in relation to managing money, accessing benefits and reducing debt can be an integral part of the support they need to help prevent them re-offending.

5.47 NIPS and PBNI work in partnership with NIACRO to deliver budgeting and money management skills, debt management services and benefits advice to women offenders, both in prison and in the community. Since the publication of the draft strategy, NIACRO has delivered a pilot project (from 1 October 2009 to 31 March 2010) involving employing a full-time specialist finance services/money advisor working part-time in the prison and part-time with the INSPIRE Women's Project in the community, with the aim of empowering women to take ownership and responsibility for their finances.

5.48 NIPS has since worked with NIACRO to build on this proposal, and a new "Managing Money" training programme will be in place for women offenders from October 2010. This will have a "modular" format, enabling women to complete the course in the community following release, if they wish to do so. PBNI also provides funding for an APAC worker (Assisting People and Communities) based within the INSPIRE Women's Project to support individual women in money management and budgeting skills.

5.49 Further initiatives include working with NIACRO, the Social Security Agency (SSA), the British Banking Association and local banks to enable women offenders to open bank accounts prior to release from custody. The INSPIRE Women's Project also refers women to a range of community services including the Citizens Advice Bureau, and a variety of local women's centres.

Pathway 6 - Children and Families

Childcare

5.50 The difficulties caused by lack of childcare can impact adversely on a woman's ability to comply with the terms of any community disposal. The INSPIRE Women's Project is registered as a day care provider to enable women with young children to attend programmes and meet with their Probation Officer whilst their children are being cared for. The INSPIRE Women's Project also links into local Sure Start schemes for child care provision from ages 0-4 years in local areas.

Maintaining family links in custody

5.51 Helping women to maintain their family ties is critical to reducing re-offending (66% of women in prison in Ash House have children under the age of 18).¹² Family Links is a NIACRO service commissioned by PBNI, YJA and NIPS to provide both practical advice and support to families of all prisoners in Northern Ireland. Recognising that a child whose parents are in custody can suffer real trauma, the Family Links service involves contacting a family within 24 hours of receiving a referral from PBNI staff based within the prisons.

5.52 NIPS is working with Barnardo's to take forward a comprehensive Family Strategy. Key elements of the strategy include providing information, advice and support to families; and giving assistance with visits, including family visit arrangements, and family programmes. It is intended that the Family Strategy will evolve as new initiatives develop, and progress will be taken forward through co-ordinated multi-agency working, including Barnardo's, NIACRO, the Quaker Service and NIPS.

5.53 A significant example of progress has been the development of improvements in relation to visits, most notably the introduction, in December 2009, of the Extended Visits Scheme for Mothers and Children in Ash House. This scheme enables mothers to have unsupervised visits of up to 6 hours

¹² Source: NIPS desktop exercise 30 August 2010

with their children in a safe and secure facility adjacent to Ash House. The visits are intended to provide mothers with the opportunity to engage with their children in positive activities and bond with them in a way that is not possible in normal visits.

Action- ‘To further develop the NIPS Family Strategy for women offenders in custody, exploring ways to enhance the range of family services, including identifying improvements in relation to visits, particularly child-centred visits, as well as wider family links issues.’

Role of the community and voluntary sector

5.54 Recognising the importance of the role of the voluntary and community sector, as well as faith organisations, in providing support for women and their families, PBNI and NIPS are continuing to work with relevant agencies, such as Barnardo’s, on one-to-one support for women. This includes delivering practical and emotional support for women offenders, using a variety of tools, including life skills, parenting skills and relationship skills training both in Ash House and in the community.

5.55 The Women’s Community Support Programme, a partnership project between PBNI, NIACRO and the Women’s Support Network also provides a programme for women in custody and in the community which contributes to resettlement and maintaining links with family and the community.

5.56 Women attending the INSPIRE Women’s Project are also being supported by the Barnardo’s Parenting Matters Project, which helps women offenders develop parenting techniques and maintain relationships with their children, alongside individual support programmes.

Pathway 7 - Attitudes, Thinking and Behaviours

5.57 Given that the background to women's offending is often very different from that of men, it is recognised that gender-specific programmes and assessment tools for women offenders should not be adaptations of those currently used for men.

5.58 To date, PBNI has completed a Programme options paper in relation to gender-specific offending behaviour programmes. Programmes and interventions have been identified, and a range of offending behaviour and life skills programmes are being delivered. This includes the GOALS Programme, which is offered to women subject to statutory supervision attending the INSPIRE Women's Project. GOALS is already delivered to women in prison, and so this will help to create a more consistent approach.

5.59 The Addressing Substance Related Offending programme (ASRO) will be introduced by PBNI in 2011. This programme has been accredited by the Correctional Services Accreditation Panel (CSAP) and is appropriate for women offenders.

5.60 Anger Management – PBNI's preferred option is to make modifications to the current Anger Management programme in order to cater for women, drawing from the experiences of Leicestershire Probation, the 218 Project and Together Women. PBNI will also introduce CALM, an accredited Anger Management Programme in 2010. However the programme is not suitable for women. The CALM team intend to adapt this programme for women over the next few years, so it would be worthwhile to keep this programme in mind for longer term delivery.

Action- 'To research best practice and develop gender-specific offending behaviour programmes for women offenders.'

Pathway 8 - Supporting women who have been abused, raped or who have experienced domestic violence

5.61 The draft strategy identified the need to work with specialist services identified in both the “Tackling Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy” and the “Tackling Violence at Home - A Strategy for Addressing Domestic Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland”, to provide greater support for women offenders who have been abused, raped, or who have experienced domestic violence.

Tackling Sexual Violence and Abuse

5.62 The Regional Strategy ‘Tackling Sexual Violence and Abuse’, is a joint initiative between DHSSPS and NIO¹³ which sets out the commitment of Government and its agencies, in partnership with voluntary and community sector organisations, to adopt a consistent and long-term approach to the prevention of sexual violence and abuse; and provide an effective and timely response when it occurs.

5.63 One of the key commitments is to establish a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) in Northern Ireland by December 2010. This will play a key role in encouraging women to come forward to receive the help they need. The SARC aims to deliver an integrated service to victims providing immediate medical aftercare, ongoing practical and emotional support services and a supportive gateway to the criminal justice system for those reporting offences committed against them.

Tackling Violence at Home

5.64 “Tackling Violence at Home”, a 5 year strategy for addressing domestic violence and abuse in Northern Ireland is implemented through a series of annual action plans and initiatives. To date these have included a series of media campaigns to increase awareness; the provision of a 24 hour free phone domestic violence helpline; routine enquiries at maternity units so

¹³ Now the Department of Justice

that help and advice can be offered if domestic violence is disclosed; and an information leaflet for victims on how the law can help.

5.65 These strategies are not gender-specific, however, the 'Tackling Sexual Violence and Abuse' strategy states that the majority of victims are women and the 'Tackling Violence at Home' strategy states that women are more likely to experience domestic violence than men (1 in 5 women compared to 1 in 9 men will experience domestic violence in the course of their lifetime).

5.66 All respondents to the consultation stressed the continuing need to provide psychological therapeutic support and services for women who have been victims of abuse, both in the community and in custody.

Strengthening legislative powers to protect the most vulnerable

5.67 Key provisions of the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act 2004 were specifically targeted at providing extra protections for women. Common assault was made an arrestable offence to provide police with sufficient powers to take action in domestic violence cases - even in cases where the victim felt unable to press charges. Restraining orders were made available to the court on acquittal.

5.68 Previously protection from harassment was only available on conviction but this was extended to provide extra powers in domestic violence cases. New powers are now being created to improve the defences available in cases where killing occurs as a result of sustained physical abuse – this is particularly important for vulnerable women in what are often tragic circumstances. However, there is a need to build on these developments and to work with specialist services to provide greater support for those women, both in custody and in the community, with emotional needs related to issues such as domestic violence, rape, and abuse.

5.69 Further work is being taken forward in relation to this issue – PBNI has, for example, introduced the Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme (IDAP), a new Domestic Violence Programme currently operating in 4 sites in Northern Ireland. PBNI and NIPS are also fully participating in Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) and Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland (PPANI) which were introduced to Northern Ireland in January 2010.

5.70 Nurses on the Healthcare staff at Hydebank Wood, have also worked in partnership with Women’s Aid to develop a specific domestic violence programme for the women prisoners in Ash House. This will be delivered in autumn 2010.

Action- ‘To work with specialist services to provide greater support for women offenders who have been abused, raped, or who have experienced domestic violence.’

Pathway 9 - Supporting women who have been involved in prostitution

Research into women involved in prostitution

5.71 The draft strategy identified the need to work with specialist services to provide greater support for those women, both in custody and in the community, with needs related to their involvement in prostitution. Most respondents to the consultation felt that expertise in this area should be sought to gain greater understanding of how women become involved in prostitution and of their specific needs and that a study of best practice from other jurisdictions should be commenced. A research paper is currently being developed and the target date for this to be published is November 2010.

5.72 A range of organisations have been contacted regarding prostitution in Northern Ireland and the support that is available for the women involved and lessons learned from best practice in other countries have been incorporated into the research. In addition, the research paper identifies the laws relating

to prostitution in Northern Ireland and highlights the scale of the issue and the locations where it is believed to be most prevalent.

5.73 The research also identifies a number of issues that women involved in prostitution in Northern Ireland are likely to encounter, for example, drug addictions, experiences of being in care, domestic violence, homelessness and mental health problems. In addition to focusing on the women involved in prostitution, the research also refers to tackling the demand for prostitution.

5.74 When the research is published, PBNI and NIPS will work with DoJ to develop a response to the findings by early 2011. The organisations will address what interventions might be made available to support women involved in prostitution in Northern Ireland.

Action- ‘To publish the research paper on prostitution and human trafficking in Northern Ireland and identify what supportive interventions might be made available.’

Northern Ireland pilot scheme for providing support to victims of human trafficking

5.75 Trafficking and the sex industry are fundamentally linked, as some women may be trafficked into Northern Ireland and forced into prostitution. The draft strategy set out a proposal to develop specific arrangements for the care of women who are victims of human trafficking in Northern Ireland. However, a DoJ pilot project is already in place to meet the Government’s obligations under the Council of Europe Convention on the trafficking of Human Beings. The pilot has been in place since April 2009 and the Minister of Justice has recently extended it until the end of January 2011.

5.76 Through this pilot the Women’s Aid Federation and Migrant Helpline provide comprehensive support services for potential victims of human trafficking recovered in Northern Ireland. This includes access to secure accommodation and healthcare as well as counselling, financial assistance

with living expenses, translation services and access to required legal services. The Women's Aid Federation offers support to women who are victims of sexual exploitation and the Migrant Helpline offers support to victims of domestic servitude or forced labour, for example Madams who have been forced to work in brothels and also male victims of sexual exploitation.

Restorative Interventions

Adult Women

5.77 PBNI currently funds four Restorative Justice Projects in Belfast, Newry and the North West, following the completion of successful pilots in Belfast. Community Restorative Justice Ireland (CRJI) and Alternatives work in partnership with PBNI to provide restorative interventions and to enhance the prospect of effective rehabilitation. Alternatives and CRJI provide services to women subject to community supervision, where required. Restorative Interventions are also delivered through the PBNI Victims Unit.

Young People

5.78 The number of girls coming through the youth justice system is small. For those who do, the YJA adopts an individually tailored plan to address their offending behaviour and meet their needs. The YJA has a particular focus on the prevention of offending and re-offending and their innovative Youth Conference Service is a world leader in bringing young people face to face with victims of their crimes. There is a growing body of evidence that this type of restorative approach and diversionary work is particularly successful in keeping young people away from further criminal behaviour.

5.79 The YJA also works with statutory and voluntary partners in Children and Young People's Committees in each of the four Health and Social Service Board areas in the development of strategies to prevent offending and promote positive outcomes for children and families.

Gender-specific research

5.80 In the development of the draft strategy, the lack of relevant data on women offenders in Northern Ireland was a recurring theme. To effectively target offending, its causes and the impact of interventions, there is a clear need for more information that is specific to women offenders. Subsequent to the draft strategy, the following two research papers have been published.

5.81 “*Reducing Offending: A Critical Review of the International Research Evidence*,”¹⁴ was published by the NIO¹⁵ in February 2009. This independent report provides a review of the effective interventions used to reduce crime internationally (in particular in Ireland and the UK). The research was used to provide a discussion base to inform subsequent debate on developing a Reducing Offending Initiative which is currently being progressed by the DoJ.

5.82 “*Addressing Offending by Women: A Literature Review*,”¹⁶ was published by the NIO¹⁷ in January 2010. The report provides a review of recent published literature relating to women's offending behaviour and approaches adopted to address offending by women. The aim of the research is to improve the approach to the management of women offenders in Northern Ireland, both in the community and in custody, taking account of the need for gender awareness in addressing offending by women.

5.83 PBNI will be participating in the Desistance Knowledge Exchange (DesKE) project aimed at advancing the exchange of knowledge between policy makers, academics, service users and practitioners, on desistance and how supervision practices can support this process.

¹⁴ Copies can be obtained from www.nio.gov.uk

¹⁵ Now the Department of Justice

¹⁶ Copies can be obtained from www.nio.gov.uk

¹⁷ Now the Department of Justice

5.84 In addition to the above pieces of research, an updated statistical report on gender and the Northern Ireland criminal justice system has been included in the 2010/11 work programme for the Statistics and Research Branch of the Justice Policy Directorate, and is due to be completed by mid 2011.

Action- *'To compile an updated statistical report on gender and the Northern Ireland criminal justice system by mid 2011.'*

5.85 Information on women offenders is currently collated by NIPS and PBNI in a similar manner to that collated for men offenders. In addition to reviewing the current information held, PBNI and NIPS will undertake a joint exercise to identify the needs of women offenders and highlight any potential gaps in the data collected. The target date for completion of this action is October 2011.

Action- *'To review the current information collated on women offenders against their specific needs and identify any gaps in the data requirements.'*

CHAPTER 6
STRATEGIC STRAND 3
INSPIRE WOMEN'S PROJECT- GENDER-SPECIFIC
COMMUNITY SUPERVISION AND INTERVENTIONS

Strategic Aim: To ensure that, where women are sentenced, their needs, wherever possible, are met in the community. That means offering women gender-specific assessments and women-centred interventions to support them in the community. This includes piloting the INSPIRE Women's Project in the Belfast area as well as the use of the existing network of community resources to bring a multi-agency partnership approach to directing women to appropriate services.

Background

6.1 Statistics on reconviction in Northern Ireland suggest that community supervision is effective in reducing re-offending. Figures for the 2007 offender cohort show that the 12 month re-offending rate for offenders subject to a Probation Order was 25%, for those subject to a non-probation order community sentence was 32%, and for those discharged from immediate custody sentences was 38%. Of those offenders who received a Probation Order, 20% of women and 27% of men reoffended within 12 months; the corresponding figures for those subject to a non-probation order community sentence are 18% for women and 34% for men. Of those discharged from an immediate custody sentence in 2007, 47% of women reoffended within one year, compared to 38% of men.

6.2 The draft strategy emphasised that more could be done to address women's re-offending, noting that there were very few interventions designed specifically for women. The development of interventions has been focused on male offenders, who comprise a much larger segment of the offender population.

6.3 Interventions based upon male offending characteristics may not be appropriate for women, who have different offender characteristics and needs. Women receiving Probation Orders who receive additional requirements such as the Alcohol Management or Anger Management Programme may end up completing this work on a one-to-one basis, rather than within a group as intended, given the small number of women offenders in any particular area.

6.4 The opening of The INSPIRE Women's Project in Greater Belfast area has allowed such programmes to be delivered on a group basis. However, it is recognised that programmes will continue to be delivered on a one-to-one basis in rural areas of Northern Ireland, given the relatively low numbers of women offenders in those areas.

Key initiatives

INSPIRE Women's Project Pilot

6.5 Baroness Corston's report examined how services and interventions for women offenders are delivered, both in prison and within the community. She was particularly impressed by the model of the Women's Centre as a referral centre for women who offend or who are at risk of offending, and she concluded that these centres are able to provide much-needed support for women with particular vulnerabilities to take responsibility for their lives. Taking on board Baroness Corston's findings, PBNI, NIO¹⁸ and NIPS coordinated the piloting of the Women's Centre concept in Northern Ireland.

6.6 The INSPIRE Women's Project became operational from a temporary base in the Belfast area on the 27 October 2008, under the direction and staffing of PBNI, and moved to a city centre location in December 2009. The then Criminal Justice Minister, Paul Goggins MP, officially opened the new premises on 12 January 2010.

¹⁸ Now the Department of Justice

6.7 The aim of the INSPIRE Women's Project is to develop and deliver in the community a new, enhanced range of women-specific services, which directly contribute to reducing women's offending through targeted community-based interventions. The pilot, which will run until March 2011, was established as a test-bed for developing and refining a range of women-specific services to meet the needs of women offenders.

6.8 The project, once fully developed, should be influential in shaping future community-based provision, and will provide a model for a managed roll-out of women-focused services beyond Belfast.

6.9 The INSPIRE Women's Project takes account of related research in Northern Ireland and lessons from the establishment of women offenders' services elsewhere. In both prison based analysis and PBNI research, the needs of women offenders in Northern Ireland largely mirror those identified by comparable research in other areas of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

6.10 Since its opening, INSPIRE's caseload has averaged at 150 women offenders from the Greater Belfast area, which includes Belfast, Newtownards, Bangor and Downpatrick. Links have also been developed with PBNI staff supervising women offenders in Newtownabbey, Carrickfergus and Larne to ensure that women from these areas have access to the INSPIRE Women's Project.

6.11 The target group of women offenders who make use of the INSPIRE Women's Project are women on statutory supervision orders and women whose court cases have been adjourned for Pre-Sentence Reports.

6.12 The INSPIRE Women's Project delivers a number of programmes for users, some are gender-specific and most are delivered to a women only group. The Think First Programme, a cognitive behaviour programme is suitable to be delivered on a mixed gender basis.

6.13 Programmes delivered within INSPIRE include, GOALS UK - a motivational primer course, Offending Behaviour Programmes such as Think First, Alcohol Management and Anger Management.

6.14 The INSPIRE Women's Project also provides personal development programmes such as a Creative Arts Programme, and an Art Therapy Programme. In addition to this, Barnardo's deliver the Parenting Matters Programme; the Forum for Action on Substance Abuse/ Forum for Action on Suicide Awareness (FASA) provides individual counselling sessions and stress management programmes; and the Duke of Edinburgh Award programme commenced in March 2010.

6.15 PBNI, DoJ and NIPS are all fully committed to using the INSPIRE Women's Centre as a spring-board for subsequent developments to meet the challenge of identifying the precise components of the community-based women's services that are needed in Northern Ireland. The principle of partnership runs throughout the work of the Project, as well as through all of the work aimed at reducing offending. As the pilot develops, inter-agency and cross-sectoral working and co-operation should increase, resulting in the better targeting of resources on the needs of women offenders in the community.

The Ash-INSPIRE Resettlement Initiative

6.16 Strong links have been forged with the women's prison (Ash House at Hydebank Wood) and PBNI and NIPS have been piloting the "Ash-INSPIRE Resettlement Initiative". This resettlement initiative, in place since January 2010, allows for the day release of suitable prisoners to the INSPIRE Women's Project. The women prisoners can participate in the programmes and activities on offer at INSPIRE and are linked into services within the community. The initiative has a focus on relationship building, ensuring that women leave prison with direct links to both people and services that can help to support their resettlement and thereby reduce re-offending.

The Women's Community Support Project (WCSP)

6.17 The Women's Community Support Project (WCSP), funded by the LankellyChase Trust Foundation, is a partnership project involving PBNI, NIACRO and the Women's Support Network (WSN). Three women's centres are also involved - Falls Women's Centre, Shankill Women's Centre and Windsor Women's Centre. The project also links to the other women's centres throughout the Greater Belfast area, including the Atlas centre in Lisburn.

6.18 The WCSP has been established, under the auspices of the WSN in the community, as a means of forging links and relationships between the community-based women's sector, NIACRO, the INSPIRE Women's Project and women in prison.

6.19 Together, the WSN and the WCSP can link women into the services of over 50 community-based women's centres, women's projects and so on across Northern Ireland. These centres provide a diverse range of services, including education, training and employability programmes; advice clinics; complementary therapies; life-coaching; arts and crafts; cookery; counselling; and health and well-being programmes. They also offer programmes tailored for specific groups such as young women and older women.

6.20 Representatives of the women's community centres linked into the INSPIRE Women's Project also provide direct support to the women within Ash House. They visit the women regularly, and all women prisoners now have access to the advice and information that they provide, or to the links they can facilitate to women's centres and other services in the community, in preparation for release. Additional visits to Ash House from representatives of the women's centres are made on an ad hoc basis where requested.

Partnerships with other external organisations

6.21 INSPIRE continues to establish links with external organisations that provide services/advice to women. In addition to the linkages formed with the WSN, relevant advice, guidance, training and services are provided by a range of other statutory, voluntary and community services including: the Housing Rights Services; NICAS; Women's Aid; NIACRO; FASA; REACT; New Life Counselling Service; and Cruse Bereavement.

6.22 The INSPIRE Women's Project has also forged links with women's centres in Scotland, England and Wales and the Republic of Ireland, to learn from best practice elsewhere. A reference group, made up of representatives from other women's centres, was established in 2009 to learn from and share experiences.

Child Care

6.23 The INSPIRE Women's Project has been awarded a certificate of Registration to provide Child Care provision, approved by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. This allows women who have responsibility for children to attend the Project for assessment for Pre-Sentence reports for Courts and to participate in group work programmes. The INSPIRE Women's Project also makes use of other Child Care provision within the Community, including crèche facilities within the Women's Centres, and can refer to the Surestart schemes within local communities.

Communications

6.24 A Communications Plan has been developed to support the INSPIRE Women's Project. The basis for all of the communications planning is a commitment to openness and transparency and partnership working. Underpinning all communications will be a respect for the privacy and rights of those using the project. An internal poster and leaflet set is currently being developed for the project.

Assessment

6.25 PBNI is currently redrafting its standards and service requirements on Assessment and Case Management. Particular work has been undertaken to ensure the standards are sensitive and responsive to the specific needs of women offenders. PBNI will link the development of these standards to its separate objectives in relation to the implementation of a new strategy for community service; and to the development and implementation of new practice standards to support delivery of the Criminal Justice Order (NI) 2008.

Action- *'To review current assessment tools to establish the need for a gender-specific approach.'*

Evaluation of the INSPIRE Women's Project

6.26 Most respondents to the consultation agreed that an evaluation of the INSPIRE Women's Project pilot should be conducted within 2 years of the scheme beginning. An independent evaluation of the pilot is due to be completed by December 2010. The evaluation will assess how well the INSPIRE Women's Project is meeting its aims and objectives. It will include qualitative research with the clients, staff and sponsors of the INSPIRE Women's Project as well as a quantitative assessment of clients' progress.

6.27 The evaluation will also include a cost-benefit analysis of the INSPIRE Women's Project, comparing it with alternative mechanisms for service delivery, and will incorporate approaches and information from evaluations conducted on Women's Centres elsewhere. The establishment of a permanent INSPIRE Women's Project in Belfast will depend on the outcome and recommendations of the evaluation and the resources that are available.

Action- *'To complete an evaluation of the INSPIRE Women's Project pilot by December 2010 and, subject to the outcome and recommendations of the evaluation, to establish a permanent dedicated INSPIRE Women's Project in Belfast.'*

6.28 Building on the learning from the pilot and subject to its evaluation being positive, it is envisaged that programmes and practices pioneered at the INSPIRE Women's Project will subsequently be carried to other parts of Northern Ireland. The potential to roll out the INSPIRE Women's Project model throughout NI was widely welcomed by respondents to the consultation. However, the way forward will again depend on the evaluation of the pilot and the resources available.

Action- 'Subject to the evaluation of the pilot being positive and resources being available, roll out the programmes and practices pioneered at the INSPIRE Women's Project across Northern Ireland.'

CHAPTER 7
STRATEGIC STRAND 4
DEVELOPING A GENDER-SPECIFIC APPROACH TO THE
MANAGEMENT OF WOMEN IN CUSTODY

Strategic Aim: To develop a tailored approach to the management of women in custody, recognising that men and women should be treated with equivalent respect according to need and that this will result in different approaches and services for men and women. This includes implementing gender-specific standards and guidance for those working with women prisoners.

Background

7.1 For some women offenders there will be no alternative to custody, either because of the severity of their offence, or for reasons of public protection. Baroness Corston acknowledged, however, that “prisons are being asked to do the impossible.” She concluded that many women in prison have been failed long before they arrive at the prison gates, and that many are simply too ill for prison to be an appropriate location for them.

7.2 While such women continue to be given custodial sentences, NIPS recognises that it is critical to find ways to improve their experience of custody and to respond to the considerable vulnerabilities that they often present.

7.3 The consultation process provided an opportunity for respondents to share their views on developing a gender-specific approach to the management of women in custody. This feedback has been used to build on the work from the draft strategy, including the development of greater opportunities for women to link into community support and resources whilst in prison.

Key initiatives

Accommodation

7.4 At present, women prisoners are accommodated in Ash House at Hydebank Wood. This was originally a House of the male Young Offenders Centre and, while there are discrete self-contained accommodation units for the young offenders and the women, there are considerable shared services and facilities.

7.5 In his 21 June 2010 statement to the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Justice Minister emphasised his view that the current arrangements for women at Hydebank Wood are not appropriate for the longer term, and stressed the importance of thinking creatively to find ways that the current arrangements can be improved within the resources likely to be available.

7.6 NIPS has conducted a comprehensive options appraisal and developed a Strategic Outline Case in respect of providing a new, separate, purpose-built facility. However, consideration of this was deferred for the attention of the incoming Minister of Justice. The options appraisal is currently being refreshed and the population estimates within the Strategic Outline Case reviewed, to reflect the women's population movements over the last year and any impact arising from the implementation of the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008. An updated Strategic Outline Case will be available in the autumn of 2010, for consideration by the Justice Minister.

7.7 In the meantime, recognising that any new build facility would take some years to develop and taking into account the availability of capital funding, the Prison Service has been implementing a process of incremental change within the current facilities available to women at Hydebank Wood to promote a more gender-specific approach to the management of women in custody. This includes taking forward a refurbishment of the ground floor of Ash House, with the aim of providing tailor-made facilities for the delivery of more gender-specific regimes for women prisoners, including work, education and constructive activities. Work will begin in autumn 2010.

Action- *'To take forward the case for the provision of a new, purpose-built women's prison facility, as well as interim measures to improve the facilities within the current accommodation.'*

Gender-Specific Standards

7.8 To underpin the new approach to the management of women in custody in Northern Ireland, and to complement the development of this strategy, NIPS published draft Gender-specific Standards for Working with Women Prisoners in July 2009. These address all areas of the prison regime, and are complemented by the development of a practical guide for staff working with women prisoners.

7.9 The public consultation was completed in November 2009 and a summary of the responses, together with revised gender-specific standards (amended to reflect the outcome of the consultation), will be published in the autumn of 2010. An updated guide for staff working with women prisoners will also be published.

Action- *'To publish the gender-specific standards for the women's prison that will underpin the implementation of a gender-specific approach to all areas of custody.'*

Offender Management- the impact of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008

7.10 Following the introduction of the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008, new offender management processes are now in place and helping to provide a multi-disciplinary approach to addressing the needs of offenders, including women. Women prisoners now benefit from the services of a multi-disciplinary Offender Management Group established at Hydebank Wood. This group specifically addresses key issues, referring prisoners for support covering offending behaviour, addictions, learning and skills, employment and

family links. It helps to prepare women for release, including those being released on licence or whose release is directed by Parole Commissioners.

7.11 The Offender Management Group allocates dedicated Sentence and Case Managers who discuss release arrangements and supervision plans with community based staff. At the appropriate stage of custody, the Sentence and Case Managers also prepare all eligible women for release, to support their rehabilitation and assess their readiness for returning to the community.

Gender-specific guidance and training

7.12 NIPS accept that improvements to the physical environment must be complemented by progress in respect of the prison culture. To that end, the Service continues to foster an increased awareness of the need for respect and reciprocal relationships between prisoners, and between staff and prisoners.

7.13 Women prisoners, many of whom will have vulnerabilities, including mental health problems, can be highly dependent on staff for emotional support, and that this can be very stressful for staff. Appropriate training and continuing support and supervision, needs to be available for all those staff charged with meeting the complex needs of women in custody.

7.14 Most respondents to the consultation felt that staff training in gender-specific issues in relation to mental health, trauma and personality/mood disorders was essential. Disability awareness training was also considered necessary.

7.15 Comprehensive gender-specific training for staff working with women prisoners has been in place since January 2009, across a wide range of disciplines and service providers. Training addresses issues such as: mental health awareness; domestic violence and abuse; the effects of imprisonment of a mother on her children, and how to support a woman in her parenting

role; self-harm – how to reduce its likelihood, and how to respond constructively; respect for decency and privacy issues; promoting pro-social behaviour; and addressing anti-social behaviour.

7.16 NIPS has also delivered Disability Awareness Training as part of its Equal Opportunities Training Package; this is referenced in the Service's Diversity Training Package. In addition, in collaboration with Employers for Disability NI (EFDNI), NIPS is delivering a dedicated awareness seminar, incorporating the Disability NI DVD, to all staff. Gender-specific guidance for staff working with women prisoners was published in July 2009, and is being updated for publication in the autumn of 2010.

Sustaining progress

7.17 A comprehensive action plan has been developed by NIPS to drive the implementation of a more gender-specific approach to custody. This work is being taken forward in association with key partners to address all aspects of regime and practice, and takes account of many of the specific criticisms that have been raised by inspectorates and other agencies in respect of the care of women offenders in Northern Ireland. Further developments will be taken forward throughout 2010/11 and beyond.

Action- *'To drive forward the implementation of a gender-specific approach to custody across all areas of the prison regime.'*

CHAPTER 8

EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES

Equality Implications

8.1 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires the Department of Justice in carrying out its functions to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity:

- between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group;
- regardless of age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- between men and women generally;
- between persons with a disability and persons without; and
- between persons with dependants and persons without.

8.2 This strategy sets out a policy framework for the delivery of improved services and interventions for women offenders. All respondents to the consultation considered the proposals should have a positive impact on the equality and human rights of women offenders and their children. The strategy will impact most positively on women within all of the section 75 equality categories. Data and research shows that these women experience greater levels of disadvantage and gender inequality.

8.3 Respondents to the consultation were asked to consider if any of the proposals set out in the draft strategy will have an adverse equality impact on groups within any of the nine section 75 equality categories. Respondents felt that foreign national women and women from local ethnic minority groups, who speak little or no English, may be disadvantaged and that women without dependants might be discriminated against.

8.4 Some respondents also felt that the use of fines could adversely impact on economically disadvantaged women and their families, and that women living in rural areas might also be discriminated against as the INSPIRE Women's Project is located in Greater Belfast. Some respondents also felt that male offenders could be discriminated against.

8.5 Taking into account these responses, all significant policies arising from this strategy will be screened for their impact on equality of opportunity in accordance with the guidance produced by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. If it emerges that a policy could have any adverse implications for equality of opportunity for any of the section 75 equality categories, an Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out and ways of either avoiding or mitigating the effect considered.

Human Rights Implications

8.6 This strategy will have a significant positive impact on the human rights of all women offenders within Northern Ireland. It will increase the options available for the diversion of women from prosecution and from custody. It will also improve the conditions under which women are held if they are committed to custody, through the development of gender-specific standards for working with women prisoners that reference international human rights principles; as well as through the development of gender-specific policies and practices, and by advancing the proposal to build a new prison designed specifically to address the needs of the offender. The strategy will also provide for greater support for women offenders within the community, and improve the potential for successful rehabilitation.

8.7 Respondents to the consultation were asked to detail if any areas of the strategy could be a potential human rights issue. Concerns were raised relating to: children's rights to be with their mother; women being sent to prison for non-criminal reasons because there is nowhere else for them to go; and the treatment and management of foreign national women in the criminal justice system.

8.8 Taking into account the above concerns, the organisations involved in producing this strategy will be conducting human rights assessments on each of the strands to ensure that every opportunity is taken to uphold and promote the rights of all women offenders, and that obligations under human rights law, including the United Nations Conventions as well as the Human Rights Act 1998, are fulfilled.

CHAPTER 9

SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

9.1 As noted above, work has already been progressing (and in some cases completed) on a number of the key initiatives within the four strands of the strategy. For completeness, Annex 1 details completed actions previously highlighted in the draft strategy.

9.2 For example, the INSPIRE Women's Project has been established and is already making good use of the existing network of community resources (through, *inter alia*, the Women's Community Support Project), bringing a multi-agency partnership approach to directing women to appropriate services in the community.

9.3 The facility for day release of suitable prisoners from Ash House (Women's Prison) to the INSPIRE Women's Project, as well as the support provided by the Women's Community Support Project within the prison, are welcome developments. These enable women prisoners to participate in the programmes and activities on offer at INSPIRE and ensure that they are linked into services within the community on discharge.

9.4 Other key developments within the women's prison have included the provision of extended and unsupervised visits for mothers with their children; and the introduction of much less intrusive full search procedures for women. Work will continue to take forward the implementation of a more gender-specific approach to custody, including embedding the gender-specific standards that have been developed to underpin this work. This will include progressing the case for a new purpose-built women's prison facility, and, in the meantime, making significant improvements to the facilities that are currently available.

9.5 Two literature reviews have also been published on reducing offending and on what works in terms of reducing women's offending. Progress has been made within both the women's prison and the INSPIRE Women's Project in preparing women offenders for work, assessing childcare needs and improving family contact. Research on women involved in prostitution is nearing completion and will be published in November 2010.

9.6 In keeping with the multi-agency approach adopted throughout this strategy, the DoJ will continue to work with its partners, particularly PBNI and NIPS, to further develop and complete the outstanding actions. Lead agencies responsible for taking forward each action in this strategy, with target dates for completion, are set out at Annex 3. A Strategic Steering Group will monitor progress against the action plan and report biannually to the Criminal Justice Board.

9.7 All actions set out in this strategy should be completed by 2013. It should directly contribute to the complex needs of women offenders being addressed more effectively; and support an improved approach to managing women offenders in Northern Ireland, both in the community and in custody.

ANNEX 1 - List of Completed Action Points, as highlighted in draft strategy

Strategic Strand 2 - Reducing Offending

Pathway 2- Education, Training and Employment

Action- ‘To establish a support programme within and between the women’s prison/INSPIRE Women’s Project to help prepare women offenders for work, and to create job opportunities for women offenders in the community, and on release from prison.’

Pathway 5- Finance, Benefits and Debts

Action- ‘To work with the voluntary sector to support women offenders in relation to managing money, accessing benefits and reducing debt.’

Pathway 6- Children and Families

Action- ‘With the help of the INSPIRE Women’s Project, assess child care needs for those women subject to statutory supervision and consider the options to address provision of child care.’

Action- ‘To provide an extended family contact facility at Ash House where, in the appropriate circumstances, mothers in Ash House will be able to apply to have extended visits with their children.’

Action- ‘To develop work with Barnardo’s and other relevant agencies, to support women and their families.’

Pathway 9- Supporting women who have been involved in prostitution

Action- ‘To explore what specific arrangements might be appropriate for the care of women who are victims of human trafficking in Northern Ireland.’

Restorative Interventions

Action- 'To establish and evaluate pilot restorative intervention schemes in two areas.'

Gender-specific research

Action- 'To publish an independent literature review of the international research evidence on reducing offending.'

Action- 'To undertake further research to explore national and international evidence into what works in terms of women's offending.'

Strategic Strand 3 - INSPIRE Women's Project- Gender Specific Community Supervision and Interventions

INSPIRE Women's Project

Action- 'To establish new premises for the INSPIRE Women's Project pilot in Belfast in 2009.'

Action- 'To adopt a multi-agency partnership approach to routing women to appropriate services.'

Action- 'To begin to build relationships with other external organisations that may provide services/advice on a part-time basis to those accessing the INSPIRE Women's Project.'

Action- 'To work to provide greater continuity of the services offered to women offenders in the community.'

Strategic Strand 4 – Developing a Gender-specific Approach to the Management of Women in Custody

Offender Management- the impact of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008

Action- ‘In response to the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008, to develop and embed offender management processes that provide a multi-disciplinary approach to addressing the needs of women, with improved sentence planning and case management that ensures appropriate access to protective factors, such as contact with family, learning and skills, employment and offending behaviour programmes.’

Gender-specific guidance and training

Action- ‘To provide gender-specific guidance and training for staff working with women prisoners.’

**ANNEX 2- Disposals in all Courts by Gender and Offence
Classification 2006 (figures for women in brackets)**

| OFFENCE TYPE | Immediate custody | Suspended custody | Supervision in the community | Fine | Conditional discharge | Youth Conference Order (1) | Other | TOTAL |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Violence against the person | 409 (24) | 400 (44) | 299 (63) | 728 (99) | 84 (52) | 34 (8) | 46 (6) | 2000 (296) |
| Sexual offences | 88 (1) | 24 (0) | 28 (1) | 14 (0) | 5 (0) | 0 (0) | 0(0) | 159 (2) |
| Burglary | 233 (4) | 117 (3) | 108 (3) | 23 (0) | 12 (2) | 23 (1) | 3 (0) | 519 (13) |
| Robbery | 123 (3) | 3 (0) | 14 (0) | 0 (0) | 1 (0) | 3 (1) | 1 (0) | 145 (4) |
| Theft | 234 (24) | 231 (74) | 265 (87) | 426 (98) | 122 (81) | 66 (6) | 11 (3) | 1355 (373) |
| Fraud and forgery | 40 (3) | 74 (20) | 37 (17) | 92 (10) | 19 (17) | 1 (0) | 3 (0) | 266 (67) |
| Criminal damage | 237 (13) | 188 (13) | 229 (43) | 263 (24) | 149 (30) | 74 (4) | 26 (2) | 1166 (129) |
| Offences against the state | 68 (4) | 67 (2) | 63 (3) | 91 (1) | 15 (3) | 22 (0) | 9 (0) | 335 (13) |
| Drug offences | 93 (6) | 75 (4) | 74 (9) | 410 (15) | 34 (2) | 7 (0) | 5 (0) | 698 (36) |
| TOTAL INDICATBLE OFFENCES (2) | 1539 (82) | 1194 (162) | 1120 (227) | 2057 (249) | 448 (188) | 230 (20) | 107 (12) | 6695 (940) |
| SUMMARY OFFENCES (3) | 192 (21) | 371 (54) | 279 (62) | 1420 (169) | 264 (107) | 45 (5) | 533 (123) | 3104 (541) |
| MOTORING OFFENCES (4) | 364 (6) | 529 (26) | 406 (31) | 11637 (1830) | 96 (23) | 8 (1) | 96 (30) | 13136 (1947) |
| ALL OFFENCES | 2095 (109) | 2094 (242) | 1805 (320) | 15114 (2248) | 808 (318) | 283 (26) | 736 (165) | 22935 (3428) |

Source: Court Prosecutions and Sentencing 2006. NISRA Research and Statistical Bulletin
11/2008

ANNEX 3- Action Plan

STRATEGIC STRAND 1 PROVIDING ALTERNATIVES TO PROSECUTION AND CUSTODY

| Key Initiative | Action | Target date | Owner |
|--------------------------------|---|---------------|-------|
| New Legislation | 'To have new legislation enacted which expands the range of alternatives to prosecution and also reduces committal to custody for fine default and to implement inline with available resources.' Page 20 | May 2011 | DoJ |
| | 'To provide improved statutory defences for vulnerable and abused women involved in domestic homicide cases.' Page 21 | December 2010 | DoJ |
| Alternatives to Custody | 'To review the pathways to custody for women offenders to identify areas where enhancements to existing community disposals, or the development of additional interventions, could support greater judicial use of non-custodial (as opposed to custodial) sentences in appropriate cases.' Page 21 | December 2010 | DoJ |

| | | | |
|------------------------------|---|------------|-----|
| Electronic Monitoring | 'To continue to promote the use of electronic tagging for monitoring compliance with bail curfews as an alternative to remanding women in custody.' Page 22 | April 2011 | DoJ |
| Fine Default | 'To improve the information provided to courts on women offenders' financial circumstances.' Page 22 | March 2011 | DoJ |
| Mental Health | 'To continue to work with other Government departments to improve the processes for diverting women offenders with severe mental health problems away from the criminal justice system.' Page 23 | March 2011 | DoJ |

STRATEGIC STRAND 2 REDUCING OFFENDING

| Key Initiative | Action | Target date | Owner |
|---|---|-------------|---------------|
| A Partnership approach- establishing a Ministerial Group on Reducing Offending | 'To develop a cross-departmental approach to Reducing Offending, to promote and facilitate the development of a coherent Northern Ireland response addressing all aspects of offending behaviour.' Page 26 | Autumn 2010 | DoJ |
| Addressing Offending Behaviour – The Pathways Pathway 1- Accommodation | 'To review accommodation needs of women offenders and vulnerable women, and existing arrangements, with a view to working in partnership with other accommodation providers, taking cognisance of the results of the evaluation of the INSPIRE Women's Project.' Page 29 | End of 2011 | DoJ/NIPS/PBNI |

| | | | |
|--|---|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Pathway 2- Education, Training and Employment | 'To further develop work within the Prison Service to address the specific educational needs of women offenders, including where needs have been identified in relation to learning disability and other special needs.' Page 30 | End of 2011 | NIPS |
| | 'To further examine how the employment needs of women offenders can be addressed as a discrete group.' Page 31 | Ongoing throughout 2010/2011 | NIPS/PBNI |
| | 'To further develop and progress the work of the Learning and Skills Forum which will focus on making better use of existing education and skills training to provide a more joined-up service for existing offenders, and those at risk of offending.' Page 32 | End of 2011 | DoJ |
| Pathway 3- Health | 'To establish joint working groups with relevant parties to ensure development of cohesive integrated services for women with mental health difficulties in prison and in the community who exhibit offending behaviour.' Page 33 | End of 2012 | NIPS/PBNI |

| | | | |
|---|---|---------------|---------------|
| Pathway 4- Alcohol and Substance Misuse | 'To continue to work with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SET) and other agencies to further develop and deliver services and interventions based on assessed need.' Page 36 | Early 2012 | NIPS/PBNI |
| Pathway 6- Children and Families | 'To further develop the NIPS Family Strategy for women offenders in custody, exploring ways to enhance the range of family services, including identifying improvements in relation to visits, particularly child-centred visits, as well as wider family links issues.' Page 39 | Early 2011 | NIPS |
| Pathway 7- Attitudes, Thinking and Behaviours | 'To research best practice and develop gender-specific offending behaviour programmes for women offenders.' Page 40 | Mid 2011 | NIPS/PBNI |
| Pathway 8 - Supporting women who have been abused, raped or who have experienced domestic violence | 'To work with specialist services to provide greater support for women offenders who have been abused, raped, or who have experienced domestic violence.' Page 43 | Early 2011 | NIPS/PBNI |
| Pathway 9 | 'To publish the research paper on prostitution and human | February 2011 | DoJ/NIPS/PBNI |

| | | | |
|--|---|--------------|---------------|
| Supporting women who have been involved in prostitution | trafficking in Northern Ireland and identify what supportive interventions might be made available.’ Page 44 | | |
| Gender-specific research | ‘To compile an updated statistical report on gender and the Northern Ireland criminal justice system by mid 2011.’ Page 47 | Mid 2011 | DoJ |
| | ‘To review the current information collated on women offenders against their specific needs and identify any gaps in the data requirements.’ Page 47 | October 2011 | DoJ/PBNI/NIPS |

STRATEGIC STRAND 3- INSPIRE WOMEN'S PROJECT- GENDER SPECIFIC COMMUNITY SUPERVISION AND INTERVENTIONS

| Key Initiative | Action | Target date | Owner |
|--------------------------------------|---|--------------------|--------------|
| INSPIRE Women's Project Pilot | 'To review current assessment tools to establish the need for a gender-specific approach.' Page 54 | End of 2012 | PBNI |
| | 'To complete an evaluation of the INSPIRE Women's Project pilot by December 2010 and, subject to the outcome and recommendations of the evaluation, establish a permanent dedicated INSPIRE Women's Project in Belfast.' Page 54 | End of 2011 | DoJ |
| | 'Subject to the evaluation of the pilot being positive and resources being available, roll out the programmes and practices pioneered at the INSPIRE Women's Project across Northern Ireland.' Page 55 | Mid 2012 | DoJ |

STRATEGIC STRAND 4- DEVELOPING A GENDER-SPECIFIC APPROACH TO THE MANAGEMENT OF WOMEN IN CUSTODY

| Key Initiative | Action | Target date | Owner |
|----------------------------------|--|--|--------------|
| Accommodation | 'To take forward the case for the provision of a new, purpose-built women's prison facility, as well as interim measures to improve the facilities within the current accommodation.' Page 58 | SOC for new facility to be available, and work to improve current facilities to start by autumn 2010 | NIPS |
| Gender-Specific Standards | 'To publish the gender-specific standards for the women's prison that will underpin the implementation of a gender-specific approach to all areas of custody.' Page 58 | Autumn 2010 | NIPS |
| Sustaining progress | 'To drive forward the implementation of a gender-specific approach to custody across all areas of the prison regime.' Page 60 | Ongoing throughout 2010/2011 | NIPS |

ANNEX 4- References

Agreement at Hillsborough Castle, 5 February 2010

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ANNEX 5- Glossary of Abbreviations

| | |
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| APAC | Assisting People and Communities |
| ASRO | Addressing Substance Related Offending |
| CSAP | Correctional Services Accreditation Panel |
| CJINI | Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland |
| CRJI | Community Restorative Justice Ireland |
| DE | Department of Education |
| DesKE | Desistence Knowledge Exchange Project |
| DEL | Department for Employment and Learning |
| DHSSPS | Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety |
| DoJ | Department of Justice |
| EFDNI | Employers for Disability Northern Ireland |
| ELBs | Education and Library Boards |
| FASA | Forum for Action on Substance Abuse/ Forum for Action on Suicide Awareness |
| FE College | Further Education College |
| HMCIP | Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales |
| HMIP | Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons |
| HMPS | Her Majesty's Prison Service Health and Social Care Board |
| HSCB | Health and Social Care Board |
| IDAP | Integrated Domestic Abuse Programme |
| MARAC | Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference |
| NI | Northern Ireland |
| NIACRO | Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders |
| NICAS | Northern Ireland Community Addiction Service |

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|-------|--|
| NIHE | Northern Ireland Housing Executive |
| NIO | Northern Ireland Office |
| NIPS | Northern Ireland Prison Service |
| NISRA | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency |
| NOMS | National Offender Management Service |
| PBNI | Probation Board for Northern Ireland |
| PHA | Public Health Agency |
| PPANI | Public Protection Arrangements NI |
| REACT | Reconciliation, Education and Community Training |
| ROI | Republic of Ireland |
| SARC | Sexual Assault Referral Centre |
| SET | South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust |
| SSA | Social Security Agency |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| WCSP | Women's Community Support Project |
| WSN | Women's Support Network |
| YJA | Youth Justice Agency |

Alternative formats

An electronic version of this document is available to view and download from the following websites:

Department of Justice - www.dojni.gov.uk

Northern Ireland Prison Service - www.niprisonservice.gov.uk

Probation Board for Northern Ireland - www.pbni.org.uk

Hard copies will be posted on request. Please contact –

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