Housing needs of women from minority ethnic groups leaving HMP Holloway

A research report for St Mungo's

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St Mungo's
Opening doors for homeless people

CENTRE FOR CRIME
AND JUSTICE STUDIES

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Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

St Mungo's provides a specific housing and support service for women from black and minority ethnic groups leaving Holloway prison**.** The research has aimed to identify the housing needs of women leaving prison and from minority ethnic groups and to focus on needs that may affect outcomes from the service so that St Mungo's can review its recording system and make plans for the future.

Key points

Housing needs are common among prisoners and are very prevalent among women in Holloway prison.

Finding accommodation for women leaving prison is very challenging. There have been cuts in available accommodation which varies across London Boroughs. Residence rules disqualify women from access to local accommodation unless they have a local connection.

In addition to housing needs, women had multiple needs (particularly drugs, education and employment) and the worker tried to provide support to them after leaving prison, linking them with other services or making referrals.

Women interviewed placed a lot of importance on their family needs, such as being reunited with their children or finding accommodation where they could look after newborns. Women valued a respectful, supportive and diligent service that advocated for them. In turn they spoke about how their own cooperation with the worker could help to secure good outcomes. Their plight meant that accessing accommodation was critically important to them, not simply having the worker's support.

Assistance in dealing with a homeless persons' team or unit was the most common work outcome and the number in temporary housing after leaving prison was higher than in their previous situation. Support to obtain welfare benefits was the most frequent type of support given, followed by family support and support in relation to substance misuse.

About a quarter of the former users returned to custody; women with a previous custodial episode were more likely to return. Data on reconvictions were not available.

Given the multiple needs of many women facing a very bleak housing environment, St Mungo's faces several policy and service coordination challenges which are addressed in the report's recommendations.

Methods

Interviews with 6 users and 3 staff; analysis of project data on users and services provided.

1 Introduction

Prisoners and housing need

Criminal justice involvement is associated with increased problems in accessing accommodation. A very high proportion of prisoners - both men and women, and across ethnic groups - are known to have accommodation needs at release. According to the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) survey:

'Thirty-seven percent of SPCR prisoners stated that they would need help finding a place to live when released. Of these, 84 per cent reported needing a lot of help and 16 per cent needed a little help. Male and female prisoners did not respond significantly differently to this question. There were also no significant differences between white and BAME prisoners, or by sentence length.' (Williams et al., 2012, p.4)

A substantial proportion - 22 per cent - of female prisoners in 2011 was known to belong to a minority ethnic group (MOJ, 2012).

There is also an established link between accommodation problems and subsequent reconvictions.

'More than three-quarters of prisoners (79 per cent) who reported being homeless before custody were reconvicted in the first year after release, compared with less than half (47 per cent) of those who did not report being homeless before custody.' (Williams et al., 2012, p.1)

Policy on prisoners' needs is set within a criminal justice framework that highlights risk of reconvictions. Housing need - in particular, transient accommodation - is scored as an independent factor in risk assessments. However this is not simply a criminal justice issue: the needs of women and families for safe and decent accommodation are overriding concerns for society.

'Through the gate' services are seen as necessary in order to manage the various challenges of re-entering the community.

'It is essential that resettlement services are coordinated well in advance of release to enable women to access appropriate support within the first twenty-four hours of discharge.' Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group (RR3) (2012, p.16)

Beyond the gate, women face further challenges which call for support.

The aim of the research

In addition to a generic housing service responding to needs among women at HMP Holloway, St Mungo's is responsible for a more specialised service which provides individual support and housing advice for women from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups leaving the prison. A

single project worker takes care of that specific caseload. The research has aimed to work with St Mungo's to generate evidence, firstly, about the housing needs of women leaving prison and from minority ethnic groups and , secondly, about needs that may affect outcomes from this service based at HMP Holloway so that St Mungo's can review its recording system and make plans for the future

Beneficiaries

Women leaving prison; staff working with the women; St Mungo's management; other providers in due course

Objectives

1. To obtain, with St Mungo's help, evidence based on the existing records about need and outcome
2. To explore the views of users about a good service and how it can engage with users
3. To find out from staff and management how the service addresses its tasks, how they view the relationships between needs and outcome, and whether there are changes that would help to improve outcomes for this group
4. To produce a report about the findings, with recommendations to St Mungo's about future recording of client needs and outcomes and future service development

Questions

The following questions set out the intended focus of the research. Ability to respond to all questions has depended on the data available. The research questions were therefore refined and agreed by the Centre and St Mungo's following the initial data scoping stage.

What is known about the needs? (e.g. substance misuse; no fixed abode; existing accommodation at risk; other known needs)

What is known about the risks of return to custody after release? What is known about the housing outcomes for the user group (e.g. hostel; supported housing; private tenancy)? Is there evidence about stability or suitability of housing outcome?

Is there any evidence about a relationship between return to custody and housing outcome? Is there a relationship between housing needs (e.g. no fixed abode; existing accommodation at risk) and outcome?

How do users view a 'good service'? What should it be trying to do? How should it seek to serve their needs? What would increase engagement?

How do staff view the needs and how best they can be met? What are the needs and characteristics of women who use the service? How does the service respond to the needs? What is the range of outcomes? Are the ones helped to achieve positive outcomes different in

some way? What kinds of help does the service provide? What further kinds of help would be useful?

What are the external factors (in relation to the prison, and the wider housing environment) that affect outcome? How does the service address these factors? What changes would be helpful to women?

What are the information gaps that if filled would help St Mungo's to assess more completely the relationship between needs and outcomes?

Methods

Data on needs and outcomes for women served by the project were obtained from St Mungo's in a spreadsheet created by the project. Data were analysed in SPSS.

Six women users and three staff were interviewed, including the worker who manages the caseload.

Ethics

This research received ethical approval from the Open University Research Ethics Committee (reference HREC/2013/1365**)**. A report has been given to the Committee and a version will be made available to the women interviewed.

Overview

The report is divided into a number of sections. The first part deals with the aims and context of the BME service, especially how it is linked to work at the prison.

 The second deals with views of women about what they value in a good service, and how it should interact with them. The following sections focus on the outcomes of the service and their relationship with needs.

The final section deals with the environment of the service, especially the challenges of accessing suitable accommodation and how these might be ameliorated.

2   The service context and women's needs

It was explained that the aim of the service for BME women was to help meet housing need and to provide 'floating support' which could follow the women beyond their placement in housing and link with, or refer to, other services.

HMP Holloway is a large establishment: according to figures made available to St Mungo's, 1247 women were released in 2012; in the same period, according to St Mungo's, 1013 women said they had a housing need. The crucial impact of housing needs was evident to the project: homelessness at release put at risk work by services to meet other needs.

'...if someone's going to go out homeless, there's absolutely no point in all the other work that's been done.' (Prison-based housing worker)

As many as six 'meet at the gate' services existed, in addition to the one for BME women, though not all had housing as their main brief. It is important to be aware of that context when considering the service for BME women. St Mungo's main housing service in the prison made referrals to other services where this was felt to be appropriate.

Post-release support to obtain housing was perceived as necessary because vulnerable women on their own were unlikely to be successful or would not fulfil an appointment.

'...if we think someone's suitable for, in terms of housing legislation they'd be a priority need, we'd ask one of the services to take the client to the homeless persons' unit for their assessment, because we know if they go by themselves they'll just get turned away. Or if we get someone into a hostel but we think that there's a chance they probably won't make it to the hostel because they'll end up using drugs on the way or get side-tracked, we'll ask a "meet at the gate" service to physically take them to the hostel and just get that housing need sorted.'(Prison-based housing worker)

Referrals to the St Mungo's 'floating support' project were said to come mainly from the St Mungo's housing service inside the prison. The Housing Needs Initial Assessments which the prison is obliged to do were seen as administratively separate, and women came into contact with the service largely through self-referrals. Having an established base in the prison was seen as an important advantage for the service. There were a number of pathways onto the caseload.

'Any member of staff can tell us that they know someone that needs to see us, they do the passports {initial reception interviews} and we get the referrals that way or through applications from the prisoners, so there's lots and lots of ways we can get referrals and then they're put onto a database and then we prioritise who we see.'(Prison-based housing worker)

It was said that the work undertaken in Holloway enables the user to meet someone who is already familiar, instead of meeting someone who is unfamiliar. Early contact – at least a month before release- was felt to be a good basis for successful work- whereas a fortnight was not enough.

'I do my own in-depth interview with the women. So I could be working with the women like four or five weeks before they're released. And I think it's good in the sense that I can get a better result and support them better rather than going to the prison a week or two weeks before they're released just to introduce myself, because I'm supposed to be the support, I pick up that work. But if I wait for that two weeks, how much can be done for those women, very little. And we've seen the result, although it's a lot of work, we've seen the result with working with the women quite early.' (Project Worker)

Having enough staff resource to see all women properly in the prison would help to smooth the passage of cases from prison to community, according to the manager.

After release the project worker was able to accompany women to interviews and undertake work to secure housing, benefits and healthcare.

3   Users' views about a good service

This section focuses on what the users saw as a good service, while referring at the same time to their own experiences.

Needs

'Well, my plan is in the future that I have a home, that I have my son back. Everything that I'm doing is for me and for my son, especially for my son. Yes, I did horrible things and I need to make up with my son. I want to be a better mother; I want to make a better home for my son…' (Service User A)

The opportunity to care for a family was a common theme in the aspirations of women interviewed. A number had been pregnant, and were seeking accommodation for their family. Maintaining existing family accommodation or reunification with separated children was a key goal for women who spoke with us. Uncertainties at release made support especially valuable: a woman interviewed had been on immigration 'hold' while her status after leaving prison was reviewed.

Prison

From the perspective of women who had come out, the service in the prison was perceived as a preparation for what to do at release. As prisoners, they could not do much to organise what needed to happen when they came out, so help inside the prison and any progress achieved were met with gratitude. One described how the worker intervened to alter the release date so that the housing need could be dealt with in an effective way. Coming out was described by some as emotionally powerful, a 'heady' moment which could mean that they were vulnerable to adverse influences.

'Not easy, on top of that you're emotional, you think "Oh my god I'm out", and you have addiction that you still have to stay away from certain places, you can't say "Hey let me celebrate," because I celebrate or go to the, so much things are going on, so much overwhelming things. And it's very important that you're very open and that you discuss what's going on, yes.' (Service User A)

This suggests that good communication in prison can help to lay the foundations for the important joint actions of the women and the worker following release.

Support

It was clear that the support provided by a worker was highly valued, not least in emotional terms when the women were faced with stressful appointments and problems.

Also welcomed was the ability of the worker to advocate effectively on behalf of women who were denied resources. Assistance could come in various forms such as help with benefit applications.

The worker could also make referrals, for example, to a support organisation for people seeking reunification with their children. Comments from users indicated that the service should be ready to show understanding of their personal needs, such as addiction, mental and physical health problems.

Energetic activity -accompanying women to appointments, demonstrating effort and committing time- was appreciated. The perseverance and persistence of the worker was acknowledged.

'Yeah, she's good…Hard-working lady.' (Service User C)

'She doesn't give up on you.' (Service User F)

Treating people equally was regarded as a significant principle. The safety of placements for women was mentioned as an example of such consideration. Judgemental attitudes should be avoided, so that users were not looked down upon.

'Well I think in theory no one should be judgemental to start with, because passing judgement is so wrong, it's so negative, and if a person is slow or a person can't read or a person is from a different ethnic background, I think everyone should be treated as one. Say for instance myself, I'm a Jamaican, and like you will point fingers but not until you know that person, because I've been living here for thirteen years, so I think that gives me the right as well as the next person.' (Service User C)

4   Interaction

From a user perspective

A picture emerged from the service user interviews in which aspects of an 'alliance' between the worker and the user were described.

Being treated as a person not as a prisoner meant being talked with respectfully. The worker should be straightforward in offering help but only if this was wanted. By the same token the women should be frank and open with her so that she could help in the most effective and timely manner.

'I guess they should just try and be as sensitive as possible like with asking those questions (about family and drug problems), but I don't feel that they should have a problem with asking those questions. Because I guess some of them will hold back, they might not want to ask certain questions in case of the way that you're going to react to it.' (Service User D)

It was also recognised that it was up to the person herself to face up to her problems. Users acknowledged that the women should be expected to play their part in making progress towards goals.

'So if they're working to help you, you do something to help them back as well, and come out and, you know. It's their job, but it's my job as well to put a foot in there because I need somewhere to live, and these other women in prison, we do need places to live, and it's hard to come out of prison and be homeless, it's hard.' (Service User C)

Keeping appointments was seen as important, as part of a commitment shared with the worker to achieve goals. Occasional feelings of demotivation when faced by an appointment were mentioned. A setback such as being arrested was mentioned, creating reluctance to meet the worker. It was recognised that failing appointments could put at risk the help that had been offered; the appointments were, after all, about priority issues in their lives. Being preoccupied and losing track of time was a problem that the worker had addressed by reinforcing time awareness and time management, for example, making sure that a woman had a diary.

From a staff perspective

The project worker considered it important to encourage the women to share information but this was admitted to be difficult for them initially.

'I think you need time to talk to the women, to build up that trusting relationship.' (Project Worker)

Women who have been through the prison system previously will cite past 'broken promises' about help that did not materialise.

'...everyone says: "Well I've heard it before, I've heard it before, it's not going to happen...I've left prison before and nothing happened and it's going to be the same thing." So sometimes when I meet them at the gate they will disappear.' (Project Worker)

Assisting women to obtain housing depended on access to housing resources, and outcomes were partly reliant on the women's input. Engagement was an important issue.

'...they will probably want to be housed, and that's not obviously that easy. So it can't always be met, but we can work towards it. But that obviously takes time and it takes engagement from them as well as the work that we would do.' (Manager)

'Once the accommodation has been secured, that's when they start to not engage, because their main need does appear to be housing.' (Manager)

There was therefore a question about how far a service with a clear housing function and connection could be sustained as a floating support service after its immediate goals had been reached.

Feedback

Users were asked how a good service should   seek their opinion about its effectiveness. While there was support for indirect feedback by internet, survey or phone, there were also views that direct conversation and comment at intervals were good ways of providing feedback.

'Well I do tell my keyworker how she helped me, she is with me, I say: "You're wonderful, thank you so much."' (Service User A)

Comparing these views with St Mungo's perspectives, it was found that feedback was described in more distanced terms: while the manager was able to obtain some feedback from women in custody, other feedback was in principle accessible through the St Mungo's client survey and was therefore available to management.

5   Women and their needs

Recording

The data records examined in the present research showed that the Opal system of recording was maintained with a high degree of completeness. It was felt to be flexible enough to allow for the addition of particular details; the fact that the caseload was small meant that additions were not as time-consuming as they might have been.

Profile of the cases

The majority of the 78 women who had previous or current contact were at least 30 years-old (64 per cent).

Table 1. Current age

Age group	Frequency	Valid Percent
18-24	14	18.2
25-29	14	18.2
30-39	28	36.4
40-49	13	16.9
50-59	8	10.4
Total	77	100.0

Base 77: 1 Missing

The largest groups were Black or Black British Caribbean and Black or Black British African (62 per cent combined). Another large grouping was formed of Mixed ethnic groups (21 per cent). There was a small White Other group; only one Asian individual was to be found in the caseload.

Table 2. Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Frequency	Valid Percent
Black or Black British Caribbean	30	39
Black or Black British African	18	23.4
Black or Black British Other	6	7.8
White Other	6	7.8
Mixed Other	2	2.6
Mixed White and Black Caribbean	12	15.6
Asian or Asian British Indian	1	1.3
Mixed White and Black African	2	2.6
Total	77	100

Base 77: 1 Missing

Support needs

Data records about the 52 closed cases indicated that the most frequent needs had been related to housing (48 instances) and drugs (22 instances) followed by education (16 instances) and employment (15 instances).

Table 3. Support needs of former service users

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
SUPPORT NEEDS EXCLIENTS[a]	Support needs: Housing	48	32.40%	94.10%
	Support needs: Drugs	22	14.90%	43.10%
	Support needs: Education	16	10.80%	31.40%
	Support needs: Employment	15	10.10%	29.40%
	Support needs: Alcohol	8	5.40%	15.70%
	Support needs: Mental health	8	5.40%	15.70%
	Support needs: Re-offending	8	5.40%	15.70%
	Support needs: Finance	5	3.40%	9.80%
	Support needs: Disability	4	2.70%	7.80%
	Support needs: Welfare benefits	4	2.70%	7.80%
	Support needs: Tenancy sustainment	3	2.00%	5.90%
	Support needs: Faith	1	0.70%	2.00%
	Support needs: Legal	1	0.70%	2.00%
	Support needs: Physical	1	0.70%	2.00%
	Support needs: Relationships	1	0.70%	2.00%
	Support needs: Other	3	2.00%	5.90%
Total		148	100.00%	290.20%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Most were recorded as having at least three needs and the maximum was six needs (in two cases). Further details on the cases are given in the Appended **Table 4. Support needs of cases ranked by number of needs.**

6 Outcomes and support

Housing

Firstly, we outline for the closed cases the relationship between the housing outcome and the previous housing situation.

Previously six users had been in supported housing; 10 of the users had held a tenancy while 20 had been living with family or friends. One had been in a refuge, one in a bed and breakfast, and three had been in other temporary accommodation. Three had been rough sleeping, and one stayed on buses.

The most frequent outcome was assistance with a homeless persons' service or unit (typically abbreviated to HPU) (19 cases) followed by temporary housing (13) or staying with family/friends (13 each). Ten tenancies were retained or obtained. Former supported housing clients were assisted with the HPU (3 cases), found themselves in hostels/semi-independent housing (3 cases), in temporary housing (2 cases) or with family/friends (1 case). The analysis reveals that the women who had been rough sleeping had disengaged.

The evidence indicates how challenging the tasks of retaining accommodation status were: assistance with the HPU was the most common outcome and the number in temporary housing after leaving prison was higher than in their previous situation. In this context, assistance meant a range of advocacy and support to women who faced a struggle to have their needs recognised.

See Appended **Table 5. Crosstabulation of accommodation outcomes and previous external accommodation**

Support

More figures provide an analysis of the support given and the housing outcomes for closed cases. The relationship is not a causal one; it shows what kind of support is associated with which outcome.

The most frequent support was in relation to welfare benefits (20 cases), most often in the case of users assisted with the HPU (9 cases) or in temporary housing (7 cases). Welfare benefit work was followed by: family support and support for substance misuse (8 cases each); finance and debt (7 cases); and legal advocacy (6 cases). Support for ETE, mental health needs, physical health and obtaining ID was recorded in less than five cases each.

See Appended **Table 6**. **Cross tabulation of accommodation outcome and support given**

Support was therefore focused on areas of urgent need, such as welfare benefits, finance and debt, as well as on sensitive issues such as family support.

Compared with the recorded needs detailed in the previous section, it was apparent that welfare benefits assumed great importance in the support given, compared with the recorded needs.

Users' perspectives on results

In the last analysis women expected the service to produce results. The stakes for women were sometimes very high. Failure to obtain a place after considerable efforts by the worker led to a woman undergoing a near-catastrophic period in a crack house, which only ended when new accommodation was eventually accessed.

'Nowhere to go, nowhere to go, and then like you got, you want somewhere to sleep, you have to go buy someone a smoke and then you can stay at their house for the night and then you just get back into, just get back into the drug side of it …I mean Broadwater Farm is a bad area around here, and I was staying in the crack house on Broadwater Farm, in a cupboard.' (Service User F)

It was crucial that St Mungo's workers should know about all the options so that women were not left to cast around for solutions.

'They weren't that clued up about the places where I can get help from. Which there wasn't a lot of options for me, because the housing was refusing to house me because they said I was intentionally homeless, but when it came to like, I had to go to Social Services for help, but like St Mungo's didn't really, they didn't really know that I had that option. It was more like searching round to find that option sort of thing.' (Service User D)

Failure to produce a tangible result was given as an explanation for women disengaging. While women were not necessarily critical of the service, the consequences of not obtaining the housing needed were very apparent to them.

Custodial outcomes

For closed cases the average period since release was 434 days (mean: 434; median: 442; std. dev.: 180).

Since the day of release, at least one episode of return to custody at a prison in England and Wales was recorded for 14 cases (27 per cent). Only one of the 13 who initially did not engage returned to custody; however, six of the 11 with whom engagement was later lost returned to custody.

When the needs were examined, the only significant difference found between the group recorded as having returned to custody and the rest was that 're-offending' support needs were more frequently observed among the returners (chi-square $p < .01$). No significant difference in return frequency was found according to the length of time spent in prison prior to release.

Support given covered a range of needs; recorded support did not refer to housing. No significant difference in custodial outcome was found between the group that according to the records had received support and those for whom no support was recorded. The same was true

of the time that the cases had been open. When housing outcome was considered our attention focused on the most precarious, who had been put in touch with the Homeless Persons Unit, but there was no significant difference in custodial outcome found between those who were put in touch with the HPU and those who were not.

Return to custody is partly attributable to a range of factors that are out of the project's control. These include custodial history itself, which affects sentencing. Twenty two (46 per cent of valid cases) had had at least one previous episode of custody. Women with at least one previous episode were more likely to return to custody: 11 of the 22 women, or 50 per cent, with previous experience of custody returned to custody.

Data from the Government shows that the likelihood of women's reconviction after imprisonment episodes has been from 36 (one previous episode) to 75 per cent (11 or more episodes)(MOJ, 2012). The rate of custody return for women receiving the service (27 per cent) is therefore below the reconviction rate for women leaving prison, but this tells us little about the impact of the service on reconvictions because we do not have actual reconviction data.

Women will be at different points in their career within criminal justice as 'offenders' and there are a range of relevant outcomes to be measured, including convictions and self-reported incidents, all of which fall short of the custodial sanction. In the light of the small caseload, it is difficult to draw any conclusions about the impact of the service on criminal justice outcomes; however the indications from this limited analysis are not discouraging.

7　The housing environment

From evidence collated by St Mungo's, it appears that many women with housing service needs are being identified and staff confirmed in interviews that most women entering the prison have a service need even if it is solely to hold on to an existing tenancy. Housing needs are therefore very prevalent in the population.

Shortages and barriers

The project's users were perceived to confront a bleak housing environment with a growing shortage of available places. Particular rules about 'intentional homelessness' made provision more inaccessible while a user's local connection determined the potential number of places she could access.

The impact of the 'intentionally homeless' rule provoked negative comment from a user perspective.

'I don't think they should be allowed to say "Oh you got kicked out of somewhere before you were pregnant, so therefore we can't house you because you are intentionally." I don't think they should have that, intentionally homeless, that's ridiculous.' (Service User D)

'Well I think that they should be fair and that, it's not, I know that there's a system like first come first serve is there, but they should look at people's situation, yeah, and just help. Because the last time that we went to the Council, that was last week, my personal adviser over there, they too, they were having a very harsh discussion because of that she wanted them to give me a place and they said "No", I've got a place to lay my head, and she was telling them that in case that I was thrown to the streets, they would find me a place, you know, so they have to look at people's situation and just help. It's not what a person has done, because if I'm not being pregnant, I will not get into this housing business, I would just look for a job, have a room to rent and just move on with life, you know. So it is that the Council have to help for and just listening to them as well.' (Service User E)

'...I know there's a lack of provision, there's a lack of housing for the client group, there's so many cuts being made that a lot of hostels are closing. So it's really hard to get somebody into accommodation. It's not easy to get somebody into accommodation on the day of release; it could take a number of weeks until a place is available in a hostel. In terms of statutory housing, some women won't meet the criteria by the fact that they've come into prison because they're often seen as intentionally homeless and there's nothing until you've had another stable accommodation that will kind of get rid of the fact that you made yourself homeless.

So it's normally hostels which is the route that {the worker} will try to get women housed, and as I say because it depends on which borough the lady's from as to whether there are hostels in that area, and then it's just waiting for somebody to move on, and move on options from hostels

aren't huge either, it's mainly into the private rent sector, and some people aren't ready to move into such independent accommodation. So I think if there was more accommodation available, obviously the outcomes would be a lot higher' (Manager).

The local connection rule means that councils have an obligation to house people who have resided in a particular borough for six months out of the last 12 or three years out of the last five. Some councils with a greater range of provision are better able to meet the needs of women than others and therefore residents in the areas with less provision are more difficult to place. One function of a support worker with housing expertise is to advocate for women in areas with less plentiful provision and to persuade the authorities that they have priority needs.

We were told by staff that a change in the rule would make a difference to outcomes for women, enabling more to access accommodation.

Women who have had children taken into local authority care do not qualify as parents within the system of housing allocation.

'…this is the first three years that I've been without, living with my family, from when I came out of prison, and it is really, really hard. Because unless you've got children, you know, they don't give you anywhere. And because my children were taken into care when I went to prison, so yeah, that's why. And if you haven't got children it's really hard to get somewhere.' (Service User F)

Staff indicated that the prevalence and duration of need beyond the gate mean that there is a case for outreach services for women in general; at the moment there are several 'at the gate' services and one is provided by Women in Prison, an organisation with women's interests at its heart.

Social punishment

We have seen how the work done inside the prison is a preparation for assiduous post-release work. The energy, persistence and organisational ability of the worker are not luxuries; they have been developed and nurtured to meet the tough challenges in an unforgiving environment for women in need who face high barriers to accessing services.

The recycling of convicted women through prison and consequent housing instability is a predictable consequence of sentencing and it is repeated every time a woman receives a short sentence. It amounts to an additional social punishment for which sentencers appear to take no responsibility. The costs are borne by the women, their families, the funders of housing services (including NOMS), and the housing economy which is disrupted. Many of these issues have been understood and widely accepted since the landmark Corston report on women prisoners (Corston, 2007).

8   Recommendations

These are based on our assessment of the information given by staff and users, as well as studies and reports about the field of women's imprisonment.

Principal aims

The paramount aim of the service should continue to be to prevent homelessness which is especially damaging for vulnerable women and their families.

Support for women's family commitments should be a major goal.

Reducing reconvictions should be a limited and qualified aim set in the context of the disruptive impact of imprisonment.

Service coordination

The service appears well-established in the prison and should be capable of further service development with prisoners and those released.

The service should clarify in conjunction with the Prison Service whether there is any duplication or undue delay in the assessment of needs and how best the statutory and voluntary sector can work together to provide a service for women.

Because this is a service for women St Mungo's should consider how to develop work with other organisations committed to women's interests such as Women in Prison.

The service focuses primarily upon urgent housing need while offering support for multiple other needs. The service should consider further how to manage the balance between providing support to meet housing needs and effective continuing support to meet other needs. A clear definition of the support and linking roles of the project could emerge from discussions with partner agencies in health and social services which are primarily set up to meet needs other than housing. The discussions should clarify how women can access services through the support of the project worker and therefore help the worker to present options to women who make contact with the service.

Medium term

St Mungo's should continue to provide a range of housing advice and support to women which is both preventive and problem-solving.

St Mungo's should maintain its outreach work with BME women and explore in conjunction with partners how this work could be expanded to meet the needs of a broader range of women. The outcome data were presented in terms of support given, rather than as indications of how far women have progressed. The service should collate more 'soft outcome' data based on assessment of progress during casework (Dewson et al., 2000; Hayes, 2010). This would be an opportunity to obtain more feedback on the suitability of the accommodation and on the

service's impact. Other sources of data such as the client survey and the homeless persons' services should be explored in order to increase understanding of impact and to establish how stable the outcomes are.

As 'rough sleepers' were found to have disengaged from the service it should consider how to develop an effective service for women who have been 'rough sleepers'.

Long term

St Mungo's should disseminate information about housing need in HMP Holloway as part of its campaigning and fund-raising activities.

St Mungo's should point out the adverse effects of policies and legislation which deny women and their families access to housing when in need.

St Mungo's should support campaigns for the abolition of repetitive prison sentences, which are costly, wasteful and unaccountable.

In view of the data gaps identified by the research, St Mungo's should explore with NOMS how a cohort study of women's needs, housing careers, custody, and convictions can be conducted.

With partners it should look to raise large-scale funding for suitable and stable provision which the public sector will no longer fund.

In view of the multiple needs identified by the service, St Mungo's should look to raise more funding for partnership and support work with relevant agencies which can assist women to live in safe and stable accommodation. Reform proposals by agencies working in the sector have suggested that Health and Wellbeing Boards have a major role to play in meeting women's needs. Women's community centres are also put forward by reformers as an alternative to the futility of imprisonment (Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group (RR3) , 2012).

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Table 4. Support needs of cases, ranked by number of needs

Needs	
Alcohol; Education; Employment; Finance; Housing; Re-offending	6 needs
Alcohol; Drugs; Education; Employment; Housing; Mental health	
Alcohol; Disability; Housing; Mental health; Re-offending	5 needs
Alcohol; Drugs; Education; Employment; Housing	
Benefits; Drugs; Education; Employment; Housing	
Benefits; Drugs; Education; Employment; Housing	
Benefits; Education; Employment; Housing; Legal	
Drugs; Education; Employment; Finance; Housing	
Drugs; Housing; Mental health; Relationships; Re-offending	
Drugs; Education; Employment; Housing	4 needs
Drugs; Education; Employment; Housing	
Drugs; Education; Housing; Mental health	
Drugs; Education; Housing; Mental health	
Drugs; Employment; Housing; Physical health	
Drugs; Finance; Housing; Re-offending	
Education; Employment; Finance; Housing	
Education; Mental health; Other; Tenancy sustainment	
Employment; Finance; Housing; Re-offending	
Alcohol; Disability; Housing	3 needs
Alcohol; Drugs; Housing	
Alcohol; Drugs; Housing	
Alcohol; Drugs; Housing	
Benefits; Education; Housing	
Drugs; Faith; Housing	
Drugs; Housing; Mental health	
Drugs; Housing; Other	
Education; Employment; Housing	
Education; Housing; Re-offending	
Employment; Housing; Other	
Disability; Housing	2 needs
Disability; Housing	
Drugs; Housing	
Drugs; Housing	
Drugs; Housing	
Drugs; Tenancy sustainment	
Education; Tenancy sustainment	
Employment; Housing	
Housing; Mental health	
Housing; Re-offending	
Housing; Re-offending	
Housing	1 need
Housing	
Housing	
Housing	
Housing	
Housing	
Housing	
Housing	
Housing	
Housing	
Housing	

Table 5. Crosstabulation of accommodation outcomes and previous external accommodation

		Housing Situation - external accommodation														
		Any other temp accom.	Living with friends	Living with family	HA general needs tenancy	Supported housing	Private sector tenancy	LA general needs tenancy	Rough sleeping	Bed and breakfast	Tied housing or rented with job	Women's refuge	Staying on buses	Unknown	Other	Total
Accommodation outcomes[a]	Outcome: Family/Friends	1	2	6	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	13
	Outcome: Assist with HPU	2	3	3	0	3	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	3	1	19
	Outcome: Unknown due to disengagement	0	5	0	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
	Outcome: LA/HA tenancy	0	0	0	2	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
	Outcome: Temporary	2	2	2	0	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	13
	Outcome: Hostel/Semi ind	0	1	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	7
	Outcome: Private	0	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	5
Total		3	10	10	2	6	4	4	3	1	1	1	1	4	1	51

Percentages and totals are based on respondents.

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Table 6. Cross tabulation of accommodation outcome and support given

		BME Support Given[a]											
		Welfare benefits	Legal advocacy	Family support	Finance/debt	Mental health	ETE	Life skills	Substance misuse	Physical health	Obtain ID	No data	Total
BME Accommodation Outcomes[a]	Outcome: Family/Friends	3	3	2	3	0	1	1	1	0	1	6	13
	Outcome: Assist with HPU	9	2	5	2	2	1	1	6	1	0	6	19
	Outcome: Unknown due to disengagement	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	9
	Outcome: LA/HA tenancy	3	0	1	1	1	2	1	0	0	0	2	5
	Outcome: Temporary	7	2	3	2	2	1	1	4	1	0	5	13
	Outcome: Hostel/Semi ind	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	3	7
	Outcome: Private	5	0	2	3	0	1	2	0	1	0	0	5
Total		20	6	8	7	3	4	3	8	1	1	24	51

Percentages and totals are based on respondents.

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

At the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies we advance public understanding of crime, criminal justice and social harm. We are independent and non-partisan, though motivated by our values. We stand with those most vulnerable to social harm. We believe that the United Kingdom's over reliance on policing, prosecution and punishment is socially harmful, economically wasteful, and prevents us from tackling the complex problems our society faces in a sustainable, socially just manner.