



Thames Valley Probation

Women Offenders' Strategy

November 2007

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SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

This document is designed to be read in conjunction with (and makes reference to) the following documents:

London and the SE Pan-Regional Women Offenders' Strategy which itself references:

The National Probation Service Good Practice Guide to Working with Women Offenders: 'Delivering Effective Services for Women Offenders in the Community'. This document provides guidance on work with women offenders at a national, regional and local level.

SE Region: 'Strategy to Reduce Re-offending in the South East'. This document sets out the South East Regional approach to implementing the Reducing Re-offending National Action Plan.

London Region: 'The London Resettlement Strategy' (phase 1 and 2). These documents set out the London approach to implementing the Reducing Re-offending National Action Plan.

London Probation Area: 'Women Offenders' Strategy'.

NOMS: 'Regional Commissioning Plan for the South East'

And

HMPS: 'Strategy and resource guide for the resettlement of women prisoners'.

This strategy focuses on identifying the needs of women offenders in Thames Valley and how these needs are met to ensure equality of outcomes for women supervised in the community by the Probation Service in Thames Valley Probation Area.

In 2006/07:

- 637 Pre sentence reports were requested on women offenders in Thames Valley.
- Whilst 17 received an immediate custodial sentence
- 112 received a suspended sentence
- 486 received a Community Sentence

The Probation Service nationally is committed to ensuring that all offenders are treated fairly and with respect. In Thames Valley Probation Area this will be demonstrated for women offenders by the implementation of this strategy. Whilst this strategy relates to the supervision of women offenders in the community, Probation Areas work closely with the Prison Service & other partners within NOMS and local communities in their work with offenders

Women prisoners make up around 6% of the prison population. Women prisoners are more likely to serve short-term sentences and typically pose lower levels of risk than their male counterparts. There are five female prison establishments in the South East but none in Thames Valley. All women in custody supervised by Thames Valley Probation will therefore be located many miles from home and their offender manager. HM Prison Service has issued (Spring 2006) their own 'Strategy and Resource Guide for the Resettlement of Women Offenders' and effective services for women offenders require a close and complementary working relationship between prison establishments and the probation service. This can be difficult to achieve given resource constraints without a pro-active approach to implementation of good practice.

Whilst there are more female staff than male working for Thames Valley Probation there are more men than women at Director level. This strategy does not presume that female staff are experts in working with women offenders. In order to address offending by women, practitioners (male and female) need to be aware of gender issues and there is therefore a training need.

Aims

The Aims of this strategy are:

- A strategic guide for managers and practice guidance to practitioners.
- To provide guidance to ensure that the needs of women offenders are recognised and indicate how equality of outcome¹ for women offenders will be obtained in line with the duty to demonstrate gender equality
- To help deliver a co-ordinated and integrated response, engaging partner organisations (NPS, HMPS other statutory, private and voluntary organisations) to effectively manage and meet the needs of women offenders in Thames Valley Probation Area, in the community, in custody and through the prison gate
- To contribute to the regional strategy to reduce re-offending by ensuring the needs of women offenders are represented in each of the reducing re-offending pathways.
- To contribute to the government's 'Women's Offending Reduction Programme' (WORP) (a governmental approach to working across departments and the voluntary sector to reduce offending by women).
- To develop services for women in the criminal justice system, which represent 'best value' whilst meeting diverse needs.

This document seeks to identify key issues and provide good practice guidance for work in TVPA in working with women offenders. It therefore broadly follows the seven pathways in the Strategic Framework outlined in the 'Reducing Re-offending National Action Plan' the 'Strategy to Reduce Re-offending in the South East.

¹ Equality of outcome presumes that equality of access may not be sufficient for the end results to be equivalent, and that priorities, access and inputs may need to be different, to respond to different needs, in order for the end results or outcomes to be equivalent.

Context

Thames Valley Probation recognises that smaller local voluntary agencies might be better placed to provide some services for some women offenders to address criminogenic need. Whilst women offenders represent a minority of offenders supervised by Thames Valley they are not a minority in the wider community, and appropriate specialised provision may be available in local areas to which women offenders can be referred. Clarity in outcomes both with and within voluntary sector organisations will be important to ensure that women's complex needs are appropriately addressed in relation to reducing re-offending.

Table One
Numbers of female offenders (compared to male) being supervised in the South East Probation Region (2006/07).

Region		Male	Female	Total
South East	Community Order	17152	2666	19818
	Post Release Licence	2431	146	2577
	Custody (<12 months)	889	92	981
	Custody (>12 months)	7479	481	7960

Table Two

Breakdown of Women Offenders in the Thames Valley Probation 2006/07

Area	Order	Male	Female	Total
Thames Valley	Community Order	6028	739	6767
	Post Release Licence	645	40	685
	Custody (<12 months)	203	19	222
	Custody (>12 months)	2110	94	2204

Equality and Diversity

This document is focused primarily on meeting the needs of women and enables offender managers to consider the specific needs of women in relation to their ethnicity, disability, age, sexual orientation, race, faith and emotional well being. This document has been drafted with the specific needs of women in mind and makes reference to these needs at given points.

Women offenders are not a homogenous group. They may have different ethnic backgrounds, may be lesbian or heterosexual, have different cultural and religious beliefs, be of different ages, or have needs in relation to disability, or as carers. For some women one or more of these characteristics may be more important to how they experience service delivery than their gender. For others making equality of outcome a reality (as opposed to equality of access) may need additional support/intervention.

Political drivers of this strategy

Drivers:

- Despite the fact that few women offenders are likely to be assessed as posing high risk of harm and/or seriousness, and resources follow risk, this strategy seeks to ensure that sufficient resources are attracted to address the criminogenic needs of women offenders.
- Prison statistics suggest that women are significantly more likely than men to be primary carers of children² and the Children and Families Pathway is a key priority for the South East Region. This together with our duty under the Children's Act 2005 suggests that some priority should be given to our work with women offenders.
- The number of women dealt with by the courts has increased but those dealt with at Crown Court has remained stable suggesting that greater use of custody is not linked to an increase in serious offending³. Nevertheless, there has been a significant increase nationally in the number of women offenders sent to custody in recent years.
- The National Probation Service is a lead player in the government's 'Women's Offending Reduction Programme' (WORP). This initiative provides a strategy through which statutory and voluntary organisations work together to reduce women's re-offending.

² Social Exclusion Unit Report (July 2002) :Reducing Reoffending by Ex-prisoners

³ Home Office: 2001a Statistics on Women and the Criminal Justice System; 2001b Criminal Statistics England and Wales 2000

- This document seeks to emphasise the importance of equality of outcome of services for women offenders who themselves have a diverse range of characteristics and to comply with the positive duty for gender equality (Equality Act 2006).
- This document also complies with legal imperatives, report recommendations, including HMI Probation and National Probation Service Objectives.

Actions from Section One

- *Senior Managers will encourage the ROM to commission services for women offenders through the actions of each of the South East Region Reducing Re-Offending Pathway Boards*
- *TVP will have an action plan to promote gender equality in place by 31.12.2007*
- *Under the Gender Equality Duty TV Probation Board should implement the following specific duties:*
 - *Identify specific gender equality goals and draw up and publish an action plan showing how it will implement them.*
 - *Consult employees and stakeholders as appropriate in setting gender equality goals and action plans.*
 - *Develop and publish an equal pay policy statement.*
 - *Include gender impact assessments on new policies and practices and allow any negative effects to be mitigated.*
 - *Review gender equality goals and actions every three years.*

Senior Managers in TVP will implement audit arrangements for women offenders following implementation of this strategy. This should include a local needs analysis of women offenders using OASys to guide priorities.

- *A minimum requirement for all service delivery for women offenders is appropriate responsiveness of offender management and interventions to ensure a safe environment, compliance and minimise the likelihood of women feeling (and being) excluded, leading to poor outcomes.*
- *Director HR will ensure that a programme to deliver specialist gender awareness training for all front line staff is implemented. Those staff working directly with female offenders should be prioritised.*
- *TVP will ensure that all service delivery contracts include appropriate*

provision for female offenders.

- *TVP will ensure that diversity factors other than gender will be taken into account as they have important implications for access, participation and treatment outcomes. Interventions must demonstrate appropriate consideration to a full range of diversity issues.*
- *TVP will ensure that diversity impact assessments on policies and practise guidelines be undertaken to include gender.*
- *Director Interventions will under take to address gender and ethnicity in outcome targets and performance measures.*
- *TVP will consider specific targets/ commitments on improving provision for women in Business Plans and Diversity targets.*
- *When local area research is undertaken consideration should be given to over sampling for women to produce viable numbers to look at women offenders outcomes.*

SECTION TWO

Bail and remand

Two-thirds of women prisoners in England and Wales enter prison on remand and only 40% of women who are remanded in custody go on to receive a custodial sentence.(Home Office, Women's Offending Reduction Programme Action Plan) On 31st July 2005, there were 1,013 women on remand, 558 awaiting trial and 455 convicted but unsentenced. Bail and remand decision have been identified as a key area for impact on the number of women held in custody and the detrimental impact this can have on them and their families.

TVP, working through local agencies, will seek to ensure that the needs of women defendants are reflected in timely local service provision for drug and alcohol treatment; mental health and supported accommodation, and support prison based bail information schemes to target the needs of female defendants in line with PC19/2005, as there is evidence that they are at a disproportionate risk of custody.

Actions from Section Two:

TVP will maximise opportunities for female defendants to be released on bail by:

- *Director Offender Management will ensure that processes are in place so that any information that may assist prison based bail information schemes will be passed to the relevant prison authorities.*
- *TVP will work with local partners to encourage the development of access to timely local service provision for drug and alcohol treatment; mental health services and supported accommodation for female defendants to promote opportunities for remand on bail.*

SECTION THREE

Pre-Sentence Reports

TVP will ensure that women offenders can access the full range of community sentences.

PSR writers will ensure they are aware of the eligibility and suitability criteria for the full range of requirements available for women, especially if there is a difference for male and female offenders. For some women the sentence plan may include provision that addresses a specific range of need, not necessarily relating directly to their offence but to their ability to comply with a community sentence e.g. access to voluntary support services for child abuse or survivors of domestic violence, involvement with Sure Start to support parenting or other statutory services e.g. mental health services.

The PSR (FDR or SDR) prepared on female offenders should ensure that a positive proposal is included where appropriate. TVP will support arrangements to quality assure both FDRs and SDRs on female offenders. Consideration should also be given to the gender of the report writer.

Many women are likely to have fewer previous convictions than men and because of offending profiles (i.e. age of conviction) may appear suitable for a FDR, however there may be information available at the time to suggest an adjournment for a Standard Delivery Report and which would suggest that it would be more appropriate to allocate the report to a female worker if possible. Examples would include information regarding a history of abuse, or a history of manipulative relationships with men.

Actions from Section Three

- *TVP Directors of Offender Management and Interventions will ensure that there are local policies to ensure women offenders have access to the full range of Community Sentences and not be excluded from the use of restrictive requirements and the full range of sentencing options.*
- *TVP will support the use of a targeted quality assurance process for PSR (FDRs and SDRs) that operates to agreed quality criteria appropriate to women offenders. The form this takes can be agreed locally.*
- *Local SPOs will ensure that when information is available at the time of the of adjournment for a SDR that indicates that it may be appropriate to allocate the PSR to a female officer, every effort will be made to do so.*

SECTION FOUR

Women offenders and offender management.

Many women offenders are likely to be assessed as low risk of harm and low likelihood of re-offending, and, where a community sentence is imposed, will be allocated to tiers one or two level of offender management. A sentence plan for a woman offender may cover a range of issues including financial problems and health issues, education and employment issues, experience of victimisation as a child and adult, relationships and emotional well being. Analysis of OASys data has established that these are the particular domains that may be highlighted for women offenders. Some of these needs may be appropriately addressed through enabling access to community resources delivered specifically for women. Access may be encouraged through the use of Supervision Centres in which local voluntary organisations can participate. The Offender Manager is key to the co-ordination and management of female offenders across Areas, regions and between prisons and the community. Offender Managers must therefore ensure they are aware of services available to women locally.

National Standards will be applied as robustly to women as to male offenders, particularly in relation to compliance and breach of requirements or for example length of time before starting a general offending behaviour programme or unpaid work requirement. Decisions as to whether a missed appointment is acceptable or not may be influenced by factors which indirectly relate to gender, e.g. woman as primary carer, woman subjected to domestic abuse, but must be taken within National Standards to maintain credibility with sentencers in the use of community penalties for women and encourage compliance by the offender. Offender Managers may need to consider what additional support a female offender may need to enable her to comply e.g. access to appropriate child care, more home visits etc.

Whilst many women offenders will have low/ medium risk of harm some will be high risk offenders who have committed serious offences. Offender managers will be supported to appropriately work with the offending behaviour of all women offenders but may need to pay particular attention to work with high risk women.

Actions from Section Four

- *Director of Offender Management will consider implementing a 'women offender liaison officer' for each team to ensure up to date information and guidance is available about local community resources for women.*
- *TVP will develop a web page in the TVP Intranet to identify local resources for women offenders and their children*
- *Director HR will ensure that gender awareness training is available for staff*
- *Local SPOs will seek to ensure that there is provision for a female offender to be supervised by a female member of Offender Management teams.*
- *Women offenders will not usually be interviewed in the presence of their partners or children. Access to appropriate child care will be supported*
- *Should an interpreter be required, issues of gender should be considered in allocation.*
- *Director of Offender Management will ensure that the organisation of supervision centres considers the specific needs of women offenders when decisions are being made around suitability for supervision using this method. Teams may need to consider running 'women only' sessions.*

SECTION FIVE

Women and Accommodation

Appropriate and accessible accommodation is a foundation of successful rehabilitation and the management of risk of harm to others. It is crucial to sustaining employment, treatment, family support and finances and is a major resettlement need for many women leaving prison. Housing is identified as a "protective factor" against re-offending within criminal justice disciplines. It follows then that decent and affordable housing and

supported housing services targeted at women who are without the means to sustain themselves in housing are important elements for addressing crime reduction. In addition many women accessing supported accommodation are escaping from abusive relationships.

At a strategic level TVP will seek to influence local Supporting People Boards to include the particular needs of women offenders in their strategies, ensuring that the housing assessment accurately highlights the support needs of the woman offender and more generally gather data that can inform Local Authority Homelessness and Supporting People Strategies. Some women offenders may wish to leave abusive relationships that continue to involve them in offending. Pregnant women and women with children are already a priority group for housing but it is important that referral processes are effective for them.

For women going into custody, housing advice workers available in all women's prisons are the best people to help women address what are often very difficult and distressing housing issues. Some women on release from custody may have unrealistic expectations of accommodation provision due to their desire to have children returned to their care. Offender Managers and prison establishments should work together to encourage more realistic expectations.

Approved Premises

Thames Valley is fortunate to have Elizabeth Fry House (voluntary managed), providing female only approved premises. TVP is committed to this facility. The regime will focus on public protection, providing a range of purposeful activities to support rehabilitation and appropriate to female offenders.

The focus of approved premises is providing supervision and monitoring for those offenders who poses a high/very high risk of harm to the public and from whom the public need to be protected. OASys data from 2004/2005 suggests that proportionately fewer women offenders meet these criteria. Whilst some women offenders present complex needs, including significant issues around self-harm, approved premises may not be the most appropriate way of meeting those needs for women offenders in many cases.

The first and most vital condition for female residents is the provision of a safe environment in which they can express themselves without fear and without undue concerns surrounding their physical and mental well-being. In addition TVP is investigating how to support the regime in Elizabeth Fry to enable access to gender sensitive provision of accredited programmes and education training and employment to residents and to women offenders who live in the local area.

Actions from Section Five:

- *Director of Interventions will seek to maximise accommodation outcomes for Women offenders through local Homelessness and Supporting People Strategies.*
- *A full housing needs and risk assessment should be undertaken for women who do not have safe sustainable accommodation. Offender manager will seek to influence housing outcomes by ensuring that the assessment accurately highlights the specific support needs of the female offender.*
- *Director of Interventions will support the development of access to gender sensitive provision of accredited programmes and education training and employment for residents of Elizabeth Fry and women offenders living in the local area.*

SECTION SIX

Education Training and Employment for women offenders

Many women have few or no qualifications to assist their employability but may however wish to focus on increasing employability in the short term rather than straight into employment. In Thames Valley they are almost twice as likely to want to work on their employability through skills for life qualifications, than men. Enhancing literacy and numeracy skills, and 'skills for life' are key, both to improving the employment prospects of women offenders and to their engagement with a range of services, and for many their route out of poverty.

The Director of Interventions will seek to influence the Learning Skills Council to ensure that the different needs of female offenders are reflected in Service Level Agreements in OLASS contracts and this will be monitored and evaluated by the Bridge to Employment (B2E) team within TVP. The LSC research report 'Maximising the benefits of OLASS for female offenders: and evaluation of the issues' is a useful reference point. The report emphasises the experiences, needs and characteristics of female offenders that have implications for their capacity, motivation and responsiveness as learners. It highlights the need to maintain integrated and multi-disciplinary provision.

The Offender Manager is responsible for ensuring through the sentence plan that women in custody enjoy end-to-end management that includes education and employment preparation. Thames Valley B2E team will work with the OM to ensure that they are working effectively with women's prisons nationally to provide continuous service provision for women in relation to employment, basic skills and education.

To ensure equality of outcome for women offenders, the B2E team will ensure that appointments with B2E and OLASS are available in the morning, afternoon and evening to account for childcare and other dependant commitments.

Action points from Section Six

- *Assistant Director Interventions will ensure that arrangements for service delivery through contacts developed with OLASS local Strategic Board should specifically address the needs of female offenders and have specific targets relating to outcomes for women.*

The Director Interventions will seek to influence the contract between LSC and OLASS to specifically address the needs of women offenders.

SECTION SEVEN

Mental and Physical Health of Women Offenders

Offenders sometimes experience difficulty in registering and maintaining contact with Primary Health Care provision. For women offenders this may be compounded by often complex health needs, with their role as a carer, putting their needs after those of other family members, and the fact they are often from socially excluded groups. The implementation of the Department of Health Women's Mental Health Strategy provides Probation Areas with the opportunity to influence provision for Women Offenders.

Actions from Section Seven

- *Director of Interventions will take forward the NOMS Health Support Strategy as it is developed and support the Department of Health Women's Mental Health Strategy.*
- *Under this umbrella the Assistant Director Interventions will work with local PCTs in order to achieve improved access and provision for women offenders with mental health problems to community health provision including day services, low and medium secure units.*
- *Director of Interventions will work through Criminal Justice Liaison Schemes to ensure women offenders who have a mental health problem are identified as early as possible and have access to community based mental health services that meet particular needs. TV Probation will support the development of community based mental health schemes which women offenders can access.*

SECTION EIGHT

Women and Drugs and Alcohol

TVPA should ensure that the work it does in working with women who misuse drugs and alcohol meets their needs. Much of the treatment provision is external to TVPA and so we also have a role in doing what we can both to inform DAATS about the number and needs of women offenders and assisting them to design appropriate services. We also need to maximise our influence in the provision of wraparound services such as housing which will impact on the likely success of drug treatment. Women Offenders should also be assisted to access other treatment provisions through alcohol treatment providers (e.g. AA project; support groups) and accredited programmes such as OSAP.

Actions from Section Eight

Actions:

- *The work of the Substance Misuse Teams across TV in relation to DRRs should be analysed on at least an annual basis to show what the referral, assessment, proposal, commencement and successful completion rate for women is. This information is to be used to assess how successful the work with women is and to develop an action plan if needed. This action is the responsibility of the AD with the Substance Misuse Strategic Lead*
- *Opportunities should be taken at JCGs, at DIP steering groups and in Supporting People fora to feed in information about the needs of women offenders, and to ensure that appropriate services are commissioned. This action is the responsibility of those representing TVP at the various groupings with the AD with the Strategic Lead following this up to see that it has happened*
- *The TVP AA initiative should be monitored to ensure that it is being used appropriately for women and if not, arrangements made to rectify this. This action is the responsibility of the AD with the Substance Misuse Strategic Lead*
- *Implementation and delivery of OSAP should be reviewed to ascertain how well it meets the needs of women. This action is the joint responsibility of the AD for Programmes and the AD with the strategic lead for Substance Misuse.*

SECTION NINE

Finance, Benefit and Debt

Debt, disrupted access to benefits, insufficient funds on release from prison and low incomes all contribute to financial difficulties that can be a barrier to rehabilitation. From National OASys data 28% of women supervised by Probation identified finance as an issue contributing to their offending (compared to 21% of men) and more women than men justify their offending behaviour as a response to lack of money and debt. These national trends are reflected in the Thames Valley.

Thames Valley Probation will make use of existing resources in the community or through local partnership arrangements such as with OLASS to seek to advise, teach and support women offenders with low incomes and debt. The provision should include one to one advice on personal financial circumstances along with a budgeting course where appropriate. The provision used should be sensitive to the issues around working with women one to one and in group settings and should have policies in place to deal with these issues.

Actions from Section Nine

Action Points:

- *Thames Valley Probation will follow guidance and advice as suggested in circular 68 / 2005 Finance Benefit and Debt.*
- *Thames Valley Probation should seek opportunities to develop links with other organisations to encourage the development of services for women offenders in relation to finance and debt*

SECTION TEN

Children and Families

Guidance on Local Safeguarding Children's Boards (LSCBs) is contained in 'Working Together to Safeguard Children'.

The prevalence of women as primary child carers has implications in the implementation of Probation Areas' responsibilities under The Children Act 2004 which provides the legislative framework for the Government's 'Every Child Matters' agenda, to both safeguard and promote the welfare of children in the context of Children's Trusts. Section 11 of the Act, (implemented from 1 October 2005) places a duty on the probation service to make arrangements to ensure that in discharging their functions, they have regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Under section 10 of the Act, each Probation Board has become a relevant partner to the local

authority (s) in their Area, with a duty to cooperate and make arrangements to improve children's well being.

More than half of all women in prison have a child under 16 and over one-third have a child under five, although not all will have been living with their mother. Women in prison are however more likely than men to have been primary carers before imprisonment, providing the main source of care and support for children or other family members. For some women offenders, unrealistic expectations of having children returned to their care quickly (or in some cases at all) have to be managed by the offender manager and staff in prisons (Through the Gate) to avoid a lack of motivation for change and return to substance misuse or mental health issues when these expectations are not met.

Women also often act as 'carers' of male partners with their decisions being influenced by the partner's needs rather than their own. Women are also often the carer for their own parents and those of a partner.

TVP will ensure that no woman (or man) is denied access to any service delivery on the basis of lack of provision for childcare or other dependant responsibilities. Access to childcare is important to ensure that women receive supervision unhindered by the presence of her children and avoiding potential Health and Safety considerations for children on the premises. Current guidance that children are not allowed on probation premises at any time will be reviewed to ensure that this does not operate unfairly against women.

When implementing requirements which involve significant hours of attendance e.g. unpaid work or accredited programmes, TVP will take into account the particular needs of female offenders, including childcare and other carer responsibilities, in the hours of attendance so that these do not adversely impact on the women's ability to access interventions. In addition Offender Managers will support carers to access appropriate registered childcare. This may take the form of working with local authorities to provide up to date information on registered childcare minders, nursery and pre-school provision, Family Centres including Sure Start and other government initiatives. Interventions managers should be approached in good time to agree appropriate childcare arrangements and suitable funding.

Offender Managers will often be presented with the woman's dilemma in prioritising the needs of her dependants over those of her requirements to comply with court orders. The approach must of course be to problem solve and be prepared for flexible working practices but without colluding and minimising the importance of compliance with court orders. E.g. childcare responsibilities in general are not a reason for non attendance at an accredited programme or unpaid work; however an unforeseeable breakdown in otherwise robust care arrangements in a particular instance may be a reason why an absence is deemed acceptable.

Actions from Section Ten:

- *TVP Board should ensure they are complying with section 10 of the Children Act 2004 as a relevant partner to the local authority(s) in their Area, with a duty to cooperate*
- *TVP Board should ensure that under Section 11 of the Act, they are making arrangements to ensure that in discharging their functions, they have regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*
- *Lack of childcare provision should not be a barrier to compliance with an order of the court. TVP will ensure that women offenders who are carers have access to childcare provision that enables them to comply with the requirements of their supervision.*
- *Report writers will advise sentencers of the likely impact of the sentences that they are considering on all concerned, including dependents.*
- *Report writers and Offender Managers will ensure that childcare issues are addressed as problems to be solved rather than a barrier to accessing the full range of sentencing options or complying with a sentence of the court.*

SECTION ELEVEN

The needs of Women Offenders who are survivors of domestic and/or sexual abuse

The British Crime survey identified that at some point in their life almost half of women have experienced domestic abuse, sexual assault or stalking (HO research study 276). Therefore it is unsurprising that OASys identifies half of our female offender caseload are or have been the victim of domestic abuse and based on international evidence this may be under reported. Offending behaviour or a perceived lack of self-efficacy for change may be linked to abusive relationships and should be identified as an issue where relevant.

The needs of women offenders in minority ethnic groups must be carefully assessed, as staff may feel under-confident in tackling issues of power and control in a non-discriminatory way. The government's definition of domestic abuse includes abuse by other family members e.g. forced marriage and female genital mutilation. Probation staff should be aware of resources to support women when such abuse is the issue.

Probation staff need to be aware of resources available in the community to support women who are survivors of abuse and be able to encourage women to access these resources, both specialist domestic violence support services or for survivors of sexual abuse and those based more on ethnicity/geography which some women may prefer.

Women's Safety Workers from the local accredited domestic violence programme will have this knowledge and can be a point of reference for offender managers.

Few women we supervise are perpetrators of domestic abuse (7%) and half of those are also victims, suggesting different pathway to offending. Due to the small numbers, there are currently no accredited programmes for female perpetrators of domestic abuse and work with these women will need to be undertaken through structured individual work as part of a supervision requirement.

Action Points from Section Eleven

- *Director of HR will ensure that a programme to deliver specialist domestic abuse awareness training for all front line staff is implemented. Those staff working directly with female offenders should be prioritised together with those knowingly working with perpetrators of domestic*
- *Wherever possible domestic abuse training will be delivered in a multi-agency environment*
- *TVP will ensure that staff are aware of resources to support women who fear or are the victims of other forms of domestic abuse. Details of national resources can be found as an appendix to the National Domestic Abuse Strategy PC54/2005. Further Guidance can be found on EPIC under Domestic Abuse Practice Guidance.*

SECTION TWELVE

Attitudes, Thinking and Behaviour: Accredited Programmes for Female Offenders

Since 2003 the prison service and NPD have been working together on a shared commitment "to enable female offenders to participate in a range of accredited programmes in custody or the community or a combination of both settings". (Joint HMPS and NPD Strategy Paper 2003).

Whilst understanding gender difference is important in reducing women's offending there are a number of tensions in programme development for women which require careful decisions to be made in order to offer the best programme provision to women offenders. All programmes accredited for delivery in the community delivered in Thames Valley are available for women offenders except Sex Offender Treatment Programmes (SOTP) Internet Sex Offender Treatment Programme (iSOTP), Domestic Violence (CDVP) programmes. Aggression Replacement Training (ART) is provisionally accredited for women and the Drink Impaired Drivers (DID) programme has undergone a comprehensive review to ensure suitability for women offenders. The Correctional Services Accreditation Panel will not accredit programmes that do not "demonstrate in relation to the full range of the accreditation criteria that appropriate consideration has been given to diversity issues".

In addition there are “environmental factors” which impact on the delivery of women only programmes. Outside large urban areas there are limited numbers of female offenders for women only groups. This impacts on provision of women-only programmes: extended waiting time to start a gender specific programme leading to potential loss of motivation or extended travelling time or new offences. Pragmatically this suggests that, due to problems of scale, it may not always be practical to run groupwork programmes developed specifically for women everywhere or even to deliver programmes in women only groups.

In TVP a recent programmes audit established that outcomes for women offenders was generally favourable comparable to those of male offenders. A recent Best Value Review in the SE Region of general offending behaviour programmes for women offenders demonstrated that TVP provision of General Offending Behaviour Programmes for women offenders represented good value compared with provision across London and the South-East. Currently no groups for women only are delivered but there are plans for a pilot based in Elizabeth Fry Approved Premise. The over-riding criteria must be equality of outcome.

Some decisions whilst intended to be in the offender’s interest may have unintended negative impact. There is some evidence that women offenders are not being encouraged to problem solve obstacles to attendance on accredited programmes but are withdrawn by their offender manager. It is not acceptable to deny women access to accredited programmes, or to disadvantage them (e.g. de-motivating by delivery in an unresponsive manner, longer wait to start or failing to prepare them appropriately to start a programme, collude in non-compliance) Programmes must be implemented thoughtfully to reflect the needs of women.

- Whilst some women would prefer and benefit from female only provision others, for a diverse range of reasons, would prefer the opportunity to attend mixed groups. In some probation areas the flexibility provided by use of the One to One programme to provide access to an accredited programme, responsive to a range of diverse needs has been very valuable where it may not be possible to provide a single gender group. TVP has decided not to implement the One to One programme when a woman offender might otherwise be in a small minority in a group work setting. This is in response to the decision for TVP to pilot the ‘New Generation OBP’ which will include a one-to-one option. Further investigation of the suitability of this programme for women offenders is ongoing.

Actions Points from Section Twelve

- *TVP will ensure that the South East Region NOMS ATB Pathway Board includes a focus on the needs of women offenders.*
- *Assistant Director Interventions will investigate the possibility that, where numbers permit, women offenders should be given the opportunity to attend women only programmes where appropriate, however waiting times to start “women-only” programmes should not be such that there is higher attrition from date of sentence to start of programme for women than for men.*

- *Assistant Director Interventions will ensure that programme completion rates for male and female offenders are carefully monitored to identify any difference and action taken to offer additional support if required.*
- *Assistant Director Interventions will investigate the possibility of delivery in a women friendly environment e.g. women's resource centre to link in with other local resources, or specific days for gender specific interventions etc.*
- *Director Interventions should ensure that analysis of management information And evaluation measures should be done by gender on a routine basis to ensure equity of outcome.*
- *Programme staff will prioritise seeing women offenders prior to the start of a group to ensure obstacles to attendance have been addressed.*
- *Offender Managers and Programme tutor s will work closely together to ensure the needs of women offenders are met and enable appropriate engagement and completion of the programme.*
- *Transport of female offenders to and from programme delivery sites will take into account their needs and ensure that actions are taken to prioritise their safety.*

SECTION THIRTEEN

Women who are sex offenders

Whilst most women offenders are lower risk some have committed serious offences. This is sometimes difficult for Offender Managers who recognise that there are limited resources available for working with seriously risky female offenders. This is especially true of women that are sex offenders.

The Programmes team – TVU, working with sex offenders will offer consultancy to offender managers and have some experience of working with female sex offenders. A treatment manager with particular knowledge and interest in this area can offer support and advice. Offender Managers that have such cases should refer to the Programme Manager or Treatment manager for advice on working with female sex offenders

SECTION FOURTEEN

Unpaid Work

Women offenders make up a relatively small percentage of those on Unpaid Work nationally. In order to enable more women to access Unpaid Work Requirements, thereby ensuring that the full range of sentencing options are available to sentencers, TVP have employed the following strategies to ensure that this group are not disadvantaged:

- Developed a range of projects and placements to reflect the diversity of offender profiles. The majority of women on Unpaid Work are allocated to Individual Placements but, where risk factors dictate, women are allocated to groups with at least one other female offender and/or female supervisor.
- Placement allocation discussed with the offender, and concerns and potential difficulties are taken into consideration.
- A flexible approach to working hours adopted to accommodate those who care for dependants, and work instructions will reflect this. For women with child care issues a child minder can be arranged by the Offender Manager, payment is made by prior agreement with the Unpaid Work Manager directly to the registered childminder on receipt of an invoice.

Actions Points from Section Thirteen:

- *TVP will continue to expand the range and diversity of suitable placements for available for women offenders*
- *TVP will continue to ensure that women's needs are met with regard to accessing appropriate childcare where necessary and hours instructed will reflect these responsibilities.*
- *Individual background, culture, and gender will be taken into consideration when discussing placement options with female offenders.*
- *TVP will ensure that all female offenders complete an Exit Questionnaire on completion of their hours and information monitored to ensure that their needs have not adversely impacted on their experience.*
- *Unpaid Work Managers will pay particular attention to monitoring cases of women offenders when a case needs to be taken back to court to ensure best practice has been complied with*

SECTION FIFTEEN

Developing Effective Partnerships

Whilst women are a minority amongst offenders this is not a reflection of the general community. Addressing the needs of women offenders is therefore more likely to be effective if strategies are closely tied into wider social strategies, e.g. child care, poverty, housing, education, employment, drugs, mental health etc.

TVP recognises the importance of strong inter-agency working to meet the needs of women offenders. Whilst unable to offer dedicated Women's Centres at this point, TVP will seek to ensure that front line staff are made aware of organisations in the community that are available to support women offenders. TVP seeks to develop strong links with external agencies in order to facilitate signposting of offenders to partners who can offer support in rape crisis, DV issues, substance and alcohol misuse, debt counselling, housing etc.

Action Points from Section Fifteen :

- *To continue to develop strategic partnerships with external agencies to maximise the quality of service offered to meet the needs of women offenders.*
- *To ensure that effective inter-agency referral processes are in place.*
- *To seek ways of enabling frontline staff have adequate information to facilitate prompt and effective signposting.*
- *To develop effective feedback and monitoring systems to continually improve the level of support available for working with women offenders.*

SECTION SIXTEEN

Staff training and resources

An awareness of gender issues is crucial to the achievement of good practice in relation to women offenders. Such awareness raising needs to be an integral part of diversity awareness training for TPOs and staff undertaking NVQ level 3. This training should also be included in the training given to tutors of accredited programme training and the supporting infrastructure training. Diversity awareness training provided by Thames Valley Probation should include issues of gender and, as domestic abuse is an issue for many women offenders, all frontline practitioners should also receive domestic abuse awareness training.

Offender Managers and those providing interventions for women offenders need to be aware of the range of resources available for women in their local area. Whilst Women's Safety Workers can assist with this, they are unlikely to be aware of the full range of resources available. TVP will consider how this can best be achieved. Some Probation Areas have found that having a designated team "Women Offender Liaison" has proved beneficial. That person would have the responsibility to gather relevant information about available local resources and also can talk knowledgeably about women's experience on the range of community sentence requirements. The advent of the TVP Intranet provides other opportunities for disseminating information.

Actions from Section Sixteen:

- *Director HR will ensure that a programme to deliver gender awareness training for staff is implemented. Those staff working with female offenders should be prioritised. Newly recruited PSOs should receive this training as part of their Induction process and their practice further developed through undertaking NVQ Level 3.*
- *All PDAs and mentors will ensure that each TPO works with a wide range of women offenders during their training. Trainees Probation Officers in Thames Valley will be given every opportunity to learn about issues pertaining to working with Women Offenders. After attending the University Workshop on Gender Issues they should attend follow-up training and Practice Learning Sets where they will be required to discuss and reflect on the issues. TPOs will also be required to attend specific training on Domestic Abuse to have a wide understanding of how this is an issue for many Women Offenders.*
- *Thames Valley Probation should ensure that accredited programme training for tutors and Treatment Managers should include responsibility issues in the delivery of accredited programmes to women.*
- *Thames Valley Probation will seek to ensure that staff are aware of the range of agencies in their local area that provide appropriate services to women and how to encourage and enable access.*

SECTION SEVENTEEN

Framework for action

Whilst this document provides a framework of guidance for working effectively with Women Offenders in Thames Valley achievement of the action points will be best met when actions become embedded in Area and team Business planning. London and the South East Probation Region has a Women Offenders Strategy on which this document is based but Thames Valley retains the responsibility to develop local action plans to reflect best practise for work with this group of offenders. Time scales for

implementation will vary as some action points have more infrastructure already present than others. It is anticipated that this document have an official launch in March 2008 when International Women's Day (8th March) provides an opportunity for individual teams to celebrate their good practice examples of working with women offenders

The template below will act as a guide to implementation.

	ACTION	DATE/NAME
1	Impact Assessment	22.11.07
2	Board Approval	
3	Area Lead	Sue Pearce
4	Area Action Plan	
5	Launch	February/March 2008
5	Incorporated in Business Plan	
6	Date of Review	