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# The Case for Sustainable Funding for Women's Centres

*A report from the UK Women's Budget Group*

**October 2020**

# Key findings summary

Women's Centres are specialist community support services for women facing multiple disadvantages, including women involved in (or at risk of involvement in) the criminal justice system. They are demonstrably the most effective specialist services available to women (as evidenced throughout this report and by, inter alia, the Corston Report, the UK Government Female Offender Strategy, and Why Women's Centres Work: An Evidence Briefing). This briefing argues that these services are at risk of closure for lack of secure funding and makes the case for investing in a sustainable funding model. We summarise the evidence of the cost of the current system and the savings that are already being realised through Women's Centres. We recommend a model of matched funding in which central and local government share the costs of delivering the objectives in the Government's Female Offender Strategy.

## KEY FINDINGS SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

CONTEXT

THE WOMEN'S CENTRE MODEL

COSTS AND BENEFITS OF THE MODEL

CURRENT FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

RETURN ON INVESTMENT - WHO BENEFITS?

CREATING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

- Women affected by the criminal justice system often have a range of multiple, complex gendered needs that are different from men's and require different responses.
- It is generally agreed, across government and the criminal justice system, that Women's Centres represent the most effective support as part of alternatives to custody.
- Despite recognition of the value of Women's Centres, funding for these services remains inadequate and precarious.
- Funding is often on a short-term basis leaving Women's Centres unable to plan for the future and staff at constant risk of redundancy.
- Commissioners' and funders' focus on 'innovative projects' can leave proven core services struggling to secure funding.
- Commissioners and funders are often unwilling to meet the full cost of services, including the necessary contribution to overheads and core costs.
- Women's Centres are managing multiple (up to 20) funding streams. This results in a massive duplication of management costs and is highly inefficient.
- The creation of a competitive market through the procurement process attracts large generic service providers who lack specialist knowledge. Women's Centres are often unable to compete for a range of reasons, including lack of resources to enter bureaucratic tendering processes and because their specialist skills are inadequately recognised in tender criteria.
- When large generic providers fail, Women's Centres who have been subcontracted to deliver services on their behalf are left bearing the cost.
- There is no central strategic overview of provision, meaning that many areas of the country are not covered by services.
- Charitable trusts and other voluntary funders are making up for the shortfall in statutory funding. One funder commented '*we are not in a position to provide long-term delivery of public services as philanthropic funders. At the moment we are providing a safety net to try and keep vital centres open – which is masking the failure of the state to secure essential services. That can't go on*'.
- We recommend that a significant amount of core funding be provided centrally and matched funding granted from a local consortium of commissioners. Charity funds should only be sourced for extra services above the core requirement.
- We recommend that the Government provide mandatory commissioning guidance to local commissioners (police and crime commissioners, local health commissioners, and local authorities) to ensure that a network of appropriate services is available nationwide.

*In collaboration with*



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