

**UNDER STRICT EMBARGO UNTIL: 00:01am, Friday 7th October 2022**

**Government spending almost 10 times more on new prison spaces for women than services to help them stay out of jail - campaigners call for rethink**

* *Recent £24m injection welcome but won’t meet need, campaigners warn*
* *Women in Prison calls on Government to stop creating new prison spaces and support cross department funding for struggling support services*
* *New research shows investment in Women’s Centres brings threefold return on taxpayer funds and should be prioritised under new government to save money and protect those struggling most*

New funds announced last month for women’s services in the criminal justice system won’t meet need because they fall short of the system-wide investment needed, new research from Women in Prison suggests. The £24m committed during the final week of Boris Johnson’s premiership to support women in contact with the criminal justice system is welcome, but pales in comparison to the £200m set aside for creating 500 new spaces in women’s prisons, warns the charity.

The report, *The Value of Women’s Centres*, shows that Women’s Centres – safe spaces which provide support on housing, domestic abuse, mental and physical health, and other issues – deliver a nearly threefold return on taxpayer investment by keeping women out of prison and easing demand for other services.

“We should be investing much more in supporting women to stay out of prison than in locking more of them up,” said **Sonya Ruparel, Chief Executive at Women In Prison**. “Our research shows that Women’s Centres not only bring huge benefits to those struggling the most, they save taxpayer money too.”

The research shows that a typical Women’s Centre receiving £1m in a given year can support over 650 women and generate £2.75m in public sector savings, while providing a lifeline for vital services and significantly improving wellbeing for women and their children. The savings would go to local authorities (47%), the Ministry of Justice (17%), the NHS (15%), the Police (10%), the Department for Work and Pensions (9%) and HM Revenue and Customs (2%). Nearly half of Women’s Centres surveyed said they are concerned about their survival.

**Joy Doal, Chief Executive of Anawim Women’s Centre said:** “We are struggling. The needs of the women we work with are becoming more complex. We are witnessing the fallout from Covid-19 – which is driving mental health problems – and an alarming number of women driven into poverty due to rising bills. On top of that our own costs are skyrocketing due to inflation and the rise in living costs. Now more than ever, we need sustainable, long-term funding to ensure we can continue meeting the ever growing needs of the women we work with.”

**Ruparel added**: “While the £24m announced last month is a welcome step in the right direction, it doesn’t go nearly far enough. Chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng should use the opportunity of the new government to look again, and redirect funding across government to these vital support services – it would be much better for women and for society as a whole.”

“The Women’s Centre offered me support in areas I didn't know were available, like debt, housing and accessing clothes for job interviews. I have been able to confide in my Women’s Centre and they’ve provided me with a reference so I can secure employment. I think every woman should be able to access support from a Women’s Centre if she needs to,” said **Liz, from the Women4Change campaign group.**

**ENDS**

**Notes to editors**

* To arrange an interview with one of the authors or to see the full report, please contact jon.date@digacommunications.com / 07533 011983.
* The full report, *The Value of Women’s Centres*, including the new economic modelling and survey, will be published here once the embargo has lifted: [Women in Prison — Campaigns & Policy](https://womeninprison.org.uk/news/campaigns-policy)
* More information about the government’s announcement of £24 million in new funding can be found [here](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/millions-invested-to-support-female-offenders).
* Women account for just 4% of the total prison population.
* The average annual cost of a women’s prison place in 2019-20 was £52,000.
* Most women in the criminal justice system have experienced severe trauma. At least two thirds of women in prison have experienced domestic abuse and one third of women were in the care system at some point during their childhood.
* Women are more likely than men to go to prison for a non-violent minor offence. Around two thirds of all women’s custodial sentences are less than one year, but these short sentences are enough to lose your job, your home and your family. 95% of all children have to leave home when their mother goes to prison.
* These challenges contribute to high levels of self-harm, where the rate of women in prison inflicting self-harm is seven times higher than men’s.
* Women in poverty will be disproportionately affected by the cost of living crisis, according to a recent report from the Women’s Budget Group: <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/The-gendered-impact-of-the-cost-of-living-crisis.pdf>