

MAYOR OF LONDON

Dr Onkar Sahota AM

Chair of the London Assembly

C/o Davena.Toyinbo@london.gov.uk

Our ref: MGLA090322-6383

Date: 24 June 2022

Dear Onkar,

I am writing further to Assembly Member Andrew Boff's letter of 8 March about the motions agreed at the London Assembly Plenary meeting on 3 March 2022. I am sorry for the delay in my response to motion 6, which is set out below.

Motion 6 – Safer Homes for Women Leaving Prison

This Assembly calls on the Mayor to:

- **Acknowledge that the circumstances, needs and risks of vulnerable women leaving prison are fundamentally different to those of men leaving prison and that these must be addressed by ensuring that such women are provided with safe homes on release;**

I acknowledge that the circumstances, needs and risks for vulnerable women are fundamentally different to those of men leaving prison. However, please note that it is local authorities that have responsibilities under the homelessness legislation to provide assistance when referrals are made to them under the Duty to Refer; as Mayor, I do not have the remit to act to address this issue directly.

Despite this, because I recognise the importance of safe housing in preventing women from reoffending, I secured resources from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) for a prison-based Housing Support/Advice Worker at HMP Bronzefield Women's Prison. I have also invested significant amounts in Wrap Around Women's Centre services, which not only provide tailored housing support to women exiting prison on licence and those participating in the Female Diversion Pilot, but also to women who deem themselves at risk of offending that self-refer. Women have access to practical one-to-one housing support, with tailored support that seeks to address other underlying factors that contribute to their offending behaviour. My investment in such services is now driving contributions from statutory partners for the next three years, as part of a new co-commissioned £10 million Pan-London Service.

- **Agree and implement a Women's Prison Release Protocol with co-signatories to the London Blueprint for Women in contact with the Criminal Justice System and encourage London Councils and the G15 Housing Associations to the same;**

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As noted above, there are limitations to my powers to act within this remit, with the statutory duty to provide housing ultimately sitting with local authorities. However, the Mayor's Office for Policing And Crime (MOPAC) hosted and facilitated a workshop on 26 May 2022 to consider the Women's Prison Release Protocol, which has been recently drafted by the Safe Homes for Women Leaving Prison Initiative. It was a very positive conversation. However, much of the implementation and operationalisation of the protocol will need delivery by key partners such as London Councils, G15 housing associations, and London Probation. Understandably, they wish to consider the contents of the document and whether it needs to be amended, before agreement to becoming a co-signatory.

My housing team is a regular attendee at the Blueprint for Women meetings and the MOPAC chairs the Blueprint Delivery Group.

I would also note the opportunity that the [Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 \(CAS3\)](#) MoJ-commissioned service presents, which is currently out to tender in London. This will provide temporary accommodation for up to 84 nights for homeless prison leavers and those moving on from Approved Premises (CAS1) or the Bail Accommodation and Support Service (CAS2), and assistance to help them move into settled accommodation. We are working closely with the MoJ and London Probation on this service and the MoJ recently attended the Life Off the Streets Executive board to update them on this service. I will raise the need for women-specific accommodation to be part of this service but the final decision on this resides with the MoJ. The current timetable is that this service should go live in April 2023.

- **Reaffirm his call to Government to develop and apply in all criminal justice settings a consistent and agreed definition of 'released homeless' or 'released to settled accommodation';**

I share the ongoing concerns about the number of women released from prison who have no secure housing to go to. These women are being released from prison vulnerable, homeless and without accommodation. Therefore, I reaffirm my call to the government to develop and apply in all criminal justice settings a consistent and agreed definition of 'released homeless' or 'released to settled accommodation'.

- **Explore ways in which much-needed funding for technical support – computers and phone calls – can be provided to enable women in prison to engage with local authorities concerning their circumstances and needs for safe accommodation on release;**

Whilst I support the use of technology for women offenders to access rehabilitative support, advice and information e.g. completing housing applications online or attending virtual housing and accommodation appointments, I also recognise the challenge, that in the short-term initial commissioning and implementation costs would require substantial investment and compete with other budgetary demands. Government investment in digital technology will, I suspect, continue to focus on court modernisation. Nevertheless, I will continue to lobby the MoJ/Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service on this. In the meantime, you should note that the Blueprint Delivery Action Plan on Women in Contact with the Criminal Justice System (CJS) contains specific action for the Department of Work and Pensions to explore piloting a project to process Universal Credit and other welfare applications, whilst the women are still in prison, in preparation for release. This is to ensure that payments to the woman are not delayed. Furthermore, I am keen that such a pilot will be flexible enough to allow a woman to have her rent paid directly to her housing provider, where she feels that this is appropriate for her.

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- **Continue to lobby for a review of sentencing for women, particularly around implementing alternatives to short-term sentences for non-violent offences;**

It is unacceptable that the 10-year trend in the number of women receiving a short-term sentence to imprisonment continues to be significantly high. 70% of sentences given to women in 2020 were for less than 12 months; with 72% of those sentenced having committed a non-violent offence such as theft. A series of inquiries and reports over the last 20 years have all concluded that prison is rarely a necessary, appropriate or proportionate response to women who get caught up in the CJS. Indeed, the government made a commitment in its 2018 Female Offender Strategy to reduce the women's offender prison population. Yet in 2021, it announced plans to build an additional 500 prison places in the women's estate.

I am committed to ensuring that the government is held to account for this. I have and will continue to lobby and make representation to the government for a review into the impact of short sentencing on women and the need for alternatives to custodial sentencing. A recent example of this is my written submission to the Justice Select Committee on Women in Prison, which emphasises the importance of a credible alternative to custodial sentences. You can access it [here](#).

Credible and robust alternatives to custodial sentencing are available, but we need to ensure that magistrates and judges are made aware of these and they must form part of a structured programme that magistrates and judges can refer women into. Crucially, these alternatives to custodial sentencing must provide the opportunity for women to be provided with the treatment they need to address the underlying causes of their offending behaviour in the community, where they can also access other support.

I have backed such an approach through my investment of £287,766 into the Community Sentence Treatment Requirement Pilot, where offenders are being diverted towards community sentences where they receive treatment for mental health, drug or alcohol issues; and through my contribution of £2,006,062 to the new Pan-London Women's Service which will see that women on remand or those serving their sentence in the community are provided with support by women's centres that address the underlying causes of their offending behaviour.

- **Support the London Blueprint delivery partners to develop a communications strategy to share good practice around housing women leaving prison;**

My office will help to facilitate London Blueprint Delivery partners to develop a communications strategy to share good practice around housing women leaving prison. This will be included in the London Blueprint Action Plan.

- **Reaffirm his call on the Government to reduce prison remands awaiting trial or sentence and to reduce the number of women recalled to prison for breaches of their license conditions;**

Not only will I continue to reaffirm my calls on these, but I, together with Blueprint Delivery partners, are lobbying the MoJ to obtain reliable data on the extent to which electronic monitoring is used for women in London, both on bail, remand and post sentence, as alternatives to prison.

I am supporting the rollout of the Women's Community Sentence Treatment Requirement (CSTR) pilot across London; so that not only will it provide alternatives to short custodial sentences, but also increase mental health, drug rehabilitation and alcohol treatment of women, and increase magistrates and judiciary awareness of these issues and associated vulnerabilities.

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I have been instrumental, together with MoJ and NHS partners, in expanding the current Pan-London Women Offender Service to include the provision of wraparound, holistic support services, not only to women on probation, but those awaiting remand and sentencing; and incorporation of the Female Diversion Pilot to ensure that there is no breakdown in service support.

Furthermore, in a bid to reduce prison remands and the number of women recalled to prison, London Blueprint partners have submitted an Expression of Interest to the government to pilot a London Women's Problem-Solving Court. This will target women that have offended and who have additional support needs e.g. addiction, mental health, sexual or domestic violence. The woman will be allocated a key worker from a women's centre and a tailored package of support will be provided. As part of their community sentence, the woman will regularly attend the court for review hearings to monitor progress so that magistrates build relationships to encourage the woman to comply with the order, take responsibility for her actions and engage with agencies that can help her move forward with her life.

• Support improvements to data collated on the reasons why short-term sentenced women are recalled to prison; and

I am in favour of this. However, it should be the government's responsibility to collect such data. If we are to see improvements to the data collected, then it must be broken down by women's protected characteristics, to understand and identify whether disparity and disproportionality are occurring in recall processes. Recall data must also be available at both national and local levels, for comparative purposes and needs to be published as part of a data metrics tool available, so that we can understand women's experiences.

However, whilst data on the reasons why short-term sentenced women are recalled to prison is important to monitor, of itself, this is not enough. Such evidential data must influence government policy decision-making and tailor work to enable positive outcomes to occur. It is not right that the government has failed to act on data that has, shockingly, revealed a 131% increase in the number of women recalled to prison.

This has disproportionately affected short-sentenced women and the major contributory factor is the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014. The data evidence is compelling: the government needs to review the impact that the extension of recall for short sentences has had on women, together with proposals to reduce short sentences, which trap many vulnerable and troubled women offenders in the criminal justice system.

• Continue to fund structured programmes and pilots as alternatives to custodial sentences

In an innovative Pan-London Women's Service that I have co-commissioned with the National Probation Service, NHS England and Lambeth, a total investment of nearly £10 million is being made. This much-needed additional resource, for women in or at risk of contact with the CJS, is geared towards the continued development and sustainability of women-specific, holistic service provision, offering tailored support to the individual needs of women. It will reduce the drivers of their offending, from the point of diversion, remand, community sentencing and on licence.

It will keep women out of prison, keep them with their families and assist them to make positive life choices. Wherever there are opportunities for structured programmes and pilots, and alternatives to custodial sentences that are evidence-based good practice, I will continue to explore

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with partners how we can adapt those to London through fully costed plans, considering value for money and evaluation evidence.

My response to the remaining motions will follow in due course.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sadiq Khan', with a small '2' written below the 'h'.

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London