



DEBATE PACK

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Female Offender Strategy One Year On

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Summary

A Westminster Hall debate on Female Offender Strategy One Year On is scheduled for Wednesday 24 July 2019 at 2.30 pm. The Member leading the debate is Kate Green MP.

Contents

1.	Background	2
2.	Media	5
2.1	Press releases	5
2.2	Articles and blogs	6
3.	Parliamentary Business	7
3.1	Ministerial Statements	7
3.2	Debates	7
3.3	Parliamentary Questions	7
4.	Organisations and further reading	15

The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

1. Background

The Government's [Female Offender Strategy](#) was published in June 2018, having been promised in the 2016 [Prison Safety and Reform](#) white paper.

Launching the strategy, the Justice Secretary, David Gauke, said it set out the Government's commitment to a new programme of work for female offenders, shifting the focus from custody to the community. He said:

We are committing to working with partners to assess options for delivering a 'residential women's centres' pilot in at least five sites across England and Wales. We want to build the evidence base about what are effective, sustainable and scalable options in the community for diverting women from entering and re-entering custody on short custodial sentences. We will not be proceeding with plans to build five new Community Prisons for Women.¹

The strategy's introduction acknowledged the particular vulnerability of female offenders, noting that their vulnerabilities can "often contribute to their offending behaviours or how they engage and respond to interventions". It stated that "many experience chaotic lifestyles involving substance misuse, mental health problems, homelessness, and offending behaviour" and noted that these are often the product of a life of abuse and trauma.

The strategy set out three messages in its case for change:

- Criminalising vulnerable individuals has broader negative social impacts
- Short custodial sentences do not deliver the best results for female offenders
- Good community management works.

It listed three strategic priorities:

- Fewer women coming into the criminal justice system
- Fewer women in custody (especially on short-term sentences) and a greater proportion of women managed in the community successfully
- Better conditions for those in custody

In the strategy the Ministry of Justice made three immediate commitments as a "first step". It committed to:

- Invest £5 million of cross-Government funding over two years in community provision for women
- Work with local and national partners to develop a pilot for 'residential women's centres' in at least five sites across England and Wales.
- Reduce the number of women serving short custodial sentences

The Ministry of Justice also said it would:

¹ [Female Offender Strategy: Written statement - HCWS800](#), 27 June 2018

- Ask Lord Farmer to undertake a piece of work on the importance of family ties to improving outcomes for female offenders, continuing the work already done on this with regard to male offenders.
- Replace Prison Service Order (PSO) 4800 on Women Prisoners with a Women's Policy Framework.
- Work across Government and with other national and local partners to develop a National Concordat on Female Offenders.

The Justice Secretary said the Ministry of Justice would publish an annual update on the progress of the strategy and would reform [The Advisory Board on Female Offenders](#) to give it a greater role in monitoring the delivery of commitments in the strategy.

In a [written statement](#) on 27 June 2019 to mark the one year anniversary of the Strategy, the Minister, Edward Argar, listed the progress made in implementing the strategy:

- we published, last December, a new policy framework for prison and probation staff working with women. This sets out duties, rules and general guidance for staff, and includes accompanying guidance covering a range of issues, such as 'Caring for Perinatal Women in Prison'.
- Lord Farmer's Review for Women, commissioned by the strategy, was published on 18 June. I am immensely grateful to Lord Farmer for undertaking this review, which looks at how supporting female offenders in custody and community to engage with their families can lower recidivism, aid rehabilitation and assist in addressing the issues of intergenerational crime. We will look closely at how we can best give effect to Lord Farmer's findings and recommendations.
- We committed to develop a 'residential women's centre' pilot in at least five sites across England and Wales, offering a robust alternative to short custodial sentences. We have recently concluded our first phase of consultation with local voluntary and statutory agencies, partners and providers from a range of backgrounds and specialisms across England and Wales to inform the scoping of this project. We will continue to consult with partners as we refine the design and delivery of the pilot.
- Our strategy recognises the valuable role that sustainable community services, such as women's centres, can play in supporting vulnerable women to turn their lives around. We have invested £5m in community services for women in 2018/19 and 2019/20. This funding is helping to sustain and enhance existing services, as well as supporting the development of new services in areas without provision. I am looking at opportunities to further increase sustainability of this sector, and would like to see agencies coming together to provide much needed multi-year funding.
- Partnership working is a key theme of our strategy, and yesterday we held a major conference to promote multi-agency, Whole System Approaches (WSA) for local agencies including health, Police & Crime Commissioners and local authorities, to provide them with tools and

information to enable them to develop a WSA in their local areas. We are working with other Government departments, stakeholders and local justice, statutory and voluntary agencies, to develop and publish a national concordat on female offenders by Autumn 2019. This will facilitate better joined up working and collaboration at both national and local level to improve outcomes for female offenders.²

The Secretary of State for Justice was asked in a PQ [in June 2019](#) what assessment he had made of progress in reducing the women's prison population since the publication of the Female Offender Strategy. The Minister, Edward Argar, replied:

We are committed to monitoring progress over time and taking action to deliver the outcomes we set out to achieve. The latest published statistics show that the total female prison population increased slightly (by 1%) between March 2018 and 2019, but that female first receptions have decreased by 10% over the past year, (from 2,036 between October and December 2017 to 1,840 over the same period in 2018).³

² [Female Offender Strategy- First Anniversary: Written statement - HCWS1662](#), 27 June 2019

³ [PO 260621](#), 28 June 2019

2. Media

2.1 Press releases

Women in Prison

[Women in Prison Response to the Farmer Review for Women](#)

21 June 2019

Ministry of Justice

[Review finds family ties 'utterly indispensable' to rehabilitation of female offenders](#)

18 June 2019

Women in Prison

[Prison Population 2022](#)

3 April 2019

Ministry of Justice

[Justice Secretary announces new female offender funding at Women's Aid speech](#)

24 January 2019

Prison Reform Trust

[Growing numbers of women returning to prison due to lack of support on release](#)

21 December 2018

Ministry of Justice

[Funding boost for vulnerable female offenders in the community](#)

9 November 2018

2.2 Articles and blogs

Probation Quarterly

[Re-launch of the British Journal of Community Justice: Women in the criminal justice system](#)

March 2019

British Journal of Community Justice

[Women and Criminal Justice: Where are we Now?](#)

23 January 2019

Russell Webster

[The rising numbers of women recalled to prison](#)

2 January 2019

Probation Journal

[Promises, promises: Can the female offender strategy deliver?](#)

30 October 2018

3. Parliamentary Business

3.1 Ministerial Statements

[Female Offender Strategy- First Anniversary](#)

Edward Argar (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Justice)

27 June 2019

[Female Offenders](#)

Edward Argar (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Justice)

18 June 2019

3.2 Debates

[Recall of Women to Prisons](#)

HC Deb 20 February 2019 cc577-600WH

[Justice: Women's Centres](#)

HL Deb 12 September 2018 cc2354-2369

[Ministry of Justice](#)

HC Deb 2 July 2018 cc76-102

3.3 Parliamentary Questions

[Prisoners: Females](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment he has made of progress in reducing the women's prison population since June 2018 publication of the Female Offender Strategy; and if he will make a statement.

28 Jun 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 260621

Asked by: Green, Kate | **Answered by:** Edward Argar | **Department:** Ministry of Justice

[Residential Women's Centres](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to his Department's press release of 27 June 2018 entitled Secretary of State launches dedicated strategy to break the cycle of female offending, how many residential women's centres have been opened in England and Wales for females convicted of offences since June 2018; and what the locations are of those centres.

27 Jun 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 267241

Asked by: Saville Roberts, Liz | **Answered by:** Edward Argar | **Department:** Ministry of Justice

[Women's Centres: Finance](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what plans he has to allocate funding to the network of specialist women's centres offering holistic support to women affected by the criminal justice system.

14 Jun 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 260622

Asked by: Green, Kate | **Answered by:** Edward Argar | **Department:** Ministry of Justice

[Holloway Prison: Sales](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if he will allocate the proceeds of the sale of HMP Holloway to support the female offender strategy.

13 Jun 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 260626

Asked by: Green, Kate | **Answered by:** Robert Buckland | **Department:** Ministry of Justice

[Prison Sentences: Females](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many women the Metropolitan police force area received an immediate custodial sentence of (a) less than and (b) more than six months for each category of offence from the (i) crown courts and (ii) magistrates courts in 2018-19.

15 May 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 251958

Asked by: Rosindell, Andrew | **Answered by:** Edward Argar |
Department: Ministry of Justice

[Women's Centres](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what the timescale is for opening additional women's centres in the UK.

13 May 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 249971

Asked by: Elmore, Chris | **Answered by:** Edward Argar | **Department:** Ministry of Justice

[Women's Centres](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what criteria his Department plans to use to decide the locations of additional women's centres.

13 May 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 249970

Asked by: Elmore, Chris | **Answered by:** Edward Argar | **Department:** Ministry of Justice

[Offenders: Females](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps the Government is taking to improve the management of female offenders in the criminal justice system.

18 Apr 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 243451

Asked by: Shannon, Jim | **Answered by:** Edward Argar | **Department:** Ministry of Justice

[Administration of Justice: Females](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps he is taking to ensure the adequacy of funding for a national network of support services for women in the criminal justice system.

03 Apr 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 237018

Asked by: Field, Frank | **Answered by:** Edward Argar | **Department:** Ministry of Justice

[Business of the House](#)

on the *female offender strategy*

07 Mar 2019 | Business questions | House of Commons | 655 c1143

Member: Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab)

[Prison Sentences: Females](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps he is taking to reduce the use of short prison sentences for women.

25 Jan 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 209383

Asked by: Prentis, Victoria | **Answered by:** Lucy Frazer | **Department:** Ministry of Justice

[Sentencing: Females](#)

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure that, when convicting women, sentencers consider using community sentences and residential requirements rather than custodial sentences.

17 Dec 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL11972

Asked by: Lord Judd | **Answered by:** Lord Keen of Elie | **Department:** Ministry of Justice

[Topical Questions](#)

Asked by: Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con)

I welcome the Lord Chancellor's confirmation that the *female offender strategy* signals a shift

Answered by: Mr Gauke | **Department:** Justice

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his persistence on this topic, and I am pleased to say that I understand that the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), will be visiting the Nelson Trust very shortly.

13 Nov 2018 | Topical questions - Supplementary | Answered | House of Commons | 649 c178

[Female Offender Strategy](#)

Asked by: Chris Elmore

Today's Guardian reports research by Dr Laura Abbott, a specialist midwife and senior lecturer at the University of Hertfordshire, who found that some female offenders give birth in prison cells and do not have access to midwives, even when babies are born prematurely or breech. I am sure the Minister ...

Answered by: Edward Argar | **Department:** Justice

The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the report by Dr Abbott referred to in The Guardian, which I read about this morning. I reassure him that our key focus is ensuring that all prisoners, female and other, have access to the medical services they need.

13 Nov 2018 | Oral questions - 1st Supplementary | Answered | House of Commons | 649 c175

[Female Offender Strategy](#)

Asked by: Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab)

What recent steps he has taken to implement the *Female Offender Strategy*.

Answered by: The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar) | **Department:** Justice

Our female offender strategy, which was published in June, is clear that, while custody should always be an option when the severity of the crime justifies it, we wish to see fewer women sentenced to prison for short periods, and we set out a plan to deliver robust and effective alternatives to custody. Last week, the Secretary of State and I announced the allocation of the first tranche of funding, totalling £3.3 million, to organisations around the country doing great work to further drive forward the implementation of the strategy .

13 Nov 2018 | Oral questions - Lead | Answered | House of Commons | 907521 | 649 c175

[Women's Centres](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what estimate his Department has made of the number places in residential women's centres that were funded by the Government in each year since 2010.

12 Nov 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 187366

Asked by: Burgon, Richard | **Answered by:** Edward Argar | **Department:** Ministry of Justice

[Sentences: Reoffending Reduction](#)

Asked by: Chris Elmore

-prosecuted and sent back to prison. There is now a real need to implement the *female offender strategy* and ensure

Answered by: Mr Gauke | **Department:** Justice

I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. He referred to the female offender strategy; as he will be aware, its focus is on alternatives to custody, particularly for minor offences. There are particular issues for females offenders in respect of the nature of the offences and the issues that female offenders face, so it is right that we implement the new strategy.

09 Oct 2018 | Oral questions - 1st Supplementary | Answered | House of Commons | 647 c8

[Offenders: Females](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what the timescale is for implementation of the Female Offender Strategy which was published in June 2018; and how the success of that strategy is planned to be measured.

25 Oct 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 182157

Asked by: Berger, Luciana | **Answered by:** Edward Argar |
Department: Ministry of Justice

[Offenders: Females](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how much funding his Department planned to allocate to the Community Prisons for Women; how much savings have been accrued as a result of the cancellation of those prisons; to which programmes those savings have been allocated; and how much of those savings have been allocated to the rehabilitation and support of female offenders.

07 Sep 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 167334

Asked by: Tomlinson, Michael | **Answered by:** Edward Argar |
Department: Ministry of Justice

[Women's Centres: Finance](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how much his Department plans to spend on each women's centre in each of the next four years.

31 Aug 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 159012

Asked by: Hussain, Imran | **Answered by:** Edward Argar |
Department: Ministry of Justice

Attachment: Table

[Offenders: Females](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the Female Offender Strategy, published by his Department on 28 June 2018, how much funding has been allocated for the five women's residential centre pilots announced in that strategy.

29 Aug 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 159010

Asked by: Hussain, Imran | **Answered by:** Edward Argar |
Department: Ministry of Justice

[Offenders: Females](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the Female Offender Strategy, published by his Department on 28 June 2018, how his Department plans to fund the five women's residential centre pilots announced in that strategy.

29 Aug 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 159009

Asked by: Hussain, Imran | **Answered by:** Edward Argar |
Department: Ministry of Justice

[Female Offenders](#)

Asked by: Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con)

What steps the Government is taking to improve the management of *female offenders*

Answered by: The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar) | **Department:** Justice

10 Jul 2018 | Oral questions - Lead | Answered | House of Commons | 906355 | 644 cc843-5

[Offenders: Females](#)

14 Number CDP-2019-0204, 23 July 2019

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what plans he has for the funding of the Female Offender Strategy after 2021.

09 Jul 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 159006

Asked by: Hussain, Imran | **Answered by:** Edward Argar |

Department: Ministry of Justice

4. Organisations and further reading

Ministry of Justice, [The Importance of Strengthening Female Offenders' Family and other Relationships to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime](#), by Lord Farmer, June 2019

Prison Reform Trust, [Why focus on reducing women's imprisonment? : England and Wales Fact Sheet](#), April 2019

Justice Select Committee, [Prison Population 2022: Planning for the future](#), HC483 2017-19, 3 April 2019

Local Government Association, [Female Offender Strategy](#), 18 March 2019

All-Party Group on Penal Affairs, [Minutes of the meeting](#), 26 February 2019.

Guest speaker, Edward Argar MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice.

HM Prison & Probation Service/Ministry of Justice, [Women's Policy Framework](#), 21 December 2018

Prison Reform Trust, [Broken Trust The rising numbers of women recalled to prison](#), December 2018

Ministry of Justice, [Women and the criminal justice system 2017 statistics](#), 29 November 2018

Prison Reform Trust, [Prison Reform Trust response to the follow-on Farmer Review call for evidence](#), 14 November 2018

Justice Committee, Prison Population 2022: Planning for the Future, HC 483. [Oral evidence](#) from Juliet Lyon, Chair, Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody; Dr Kate Paradine, CEO, Women in Prison; and Jessica Southgate, Policy Manager, Agenda, 30 October 2018

Clinks, [Briefing on the Ministry of Justice Female Offender Strategy](#),
September 2018

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