



Evidence from the Police and Crime Commissioner for North Yorkshire

North Yorkshire

North Yorkshire is the most rural county in England. Women from North Yorkshire face a number of challenges specific to their rural environment when engaging with the criminal justice system including limited access to, and far fewer, specialist support services when compared with urban counterparts.

Delivering services in rural areas comes at a higher cost than urban areas. That higher cost affects the management of community sentences and resettlement supervision for women as providers deliver services to a small cohort over a large geographical area. The women they work with also face accessibility issues involving local transport, mobile transmission and access to the internet.

The Impact of probation reforms on the use of community sentences

In North Yorkshire, there have been a number of impacts to the services provided to female offenders, the reach of those services and the ability of local partners to hold the CRC and NPS to account.

Contract Level Areas

The vastness of contract package areas for CRCs means MoJ data for CRCs cannot be analysed at a local level. The CRC data for North Yorkshire covers three force areas and the data released by MoJ for the CRC is at contract package level. There is therefore no local level data on North Yorkshire offenders because existing CRC level data cannot currently be filtered to obtain North Yorkshire specific details on female offenders. As a result, magistrates and partners in the LCJB have a very limited impression of the impact of the work that the CRC do with females who are sentenced to community orders, the impact of which has seen a decline in confidence in the outcomes of community orders and the relationship they have with (re)offending rates.

Post-Transforming Rehabilitation Funding

The Howard League note that the probation service was never particularly well-funded and specialist services were, by and large, underfunded prior to the Transforming Rehabilitation (TR) reforms (2016). Providers in the area have confirmed that the funding for women's services across North Yorkshire has reduced as a result of TR. Given the challenges around geography outlined above, this only exacerbates the problem.

Scarborough women's centre closed in 2016 following the collapse of funding and TR reforms. The impact of this closure has been exacerbated by the reduction in funds, post TR, awarded to deliver

women's services across North Yorkshire. The county therefore has no dedicated women's service centre and creches are also not provided to any women engaged in community orders or probation services.

Service Delivery

- (1) A positive outcome of the reforms has been the contractual obligation for CRCs to meet with female service users away from probation offices. However, The Public Accounts Committee remained concerned in 2016 about the future quality of women's services in practice.

In North Yorkshire, the changes seen to the model of service delivery contrast with national expectations of reductions in one-to-one service.

HMIP describe a national delivery pattern in which offender management services are moving away from one-to-one work to group work; the shift is associated with the high cost of delivering one-to-one provision when compared to group work (HMIP, 2016). In North Yorkshire, the delivery model contrasts with these national trends because service providers deliver a high proportion of one-to-one services and limited group work. North Yorkshire providers take this approach to combat the small and dispersed cohort of female offenders in the county.

- (2) The contracts held by the CRC do not address the complex and multiple underlying reasons for offending such as substance misuse, hate and drug abuse. Long term rehabilitation which addresses the underlying issues connected to offending must be encouraged and measured, and be developed as the centre of CRC and NPS supervision going forward.

Poorer links with Prison Services

In North Yorkshire, the CRC contract area poses a significant challenge to the continuity of service experienced by North Yorkshire's female offenders because they serve custodial sentences in Low Newton (Durham) or New Hall (Wakefield) – both prisons out of the CRC area.

As well as changing the supervision of people classed as low or medium risk to private companies, TR gave CRCs responsibility for providing through-the-gate services. As part of the reforms, a network of existing prisons was identified as 'resettlement prisons' meaning that prisoners would spend their last months in their local prison where the same CRC that would supervise them in the community could work with them prior to release. In 2014, 70 prisons were termed resettlement prisons, Askham Grange in North Yorkshire being one of those. However, little aside from the name has changed: Askham Grange is a resettlement prison for those serving longer sentences meaning women from North Yorkshire serving short sentences or on remand are released out of area.

Post TR, NPS-Prison links did not transfer to those delivering services for the CRC in North Yorkshire and York. As a result, providers commissioned by the CRC have struggled to manage links with through-the-gate and resettlement partners in the prisons where women from North Yorkshire are most often held on remand or are serving short sentences (Low Newton and New Hall).

Because the women they work with (whether on remand or serving a custodial sentence) are held out of county, and because CRC links with through-the-gate services are poor, The CRC is not in control of, or sighted on, in-custody resettlement journeys for females due to return to North Yorkshire. It is therefore difficult for the North Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and Humberside CRC to support North Yorkshire's offenders before their release date.

In the event of a female offender spending time out of county on remand before being sentenced to a community sentence, there is therefore a risk that poor CRC links with female prisons out of county could negatively affect the delivery and eventual success/failure of a community sentence.

Working with prisons out of area has also meant that providers in North Yorkshire have struggled to (a) achieve the KPIs set out in delivery contracts, and, more importantly, (b) reach and develop relationships with the women they aim to work with prior to their release. It has taken providers three years to build strong enough links with the prisons which hold North Yorkshire women to receive notifications of women being released into area from Low Newton and New Hall.

Practical changes that would enable more community sentencing of women

Increasing sentence confidence in the delivery and effectiveness of community sentences is vital to ensuring there is an increase in use.

At present, magistrates are not involved in overseeing community sentencing, and CRC and NPS services cannot be scrutinised at a local level.

Magistrates deliver but do not oversee community sentencing. Increasing the role of magistrates to give them oversight on sentencing carried out by offenders would result in greater connection between courts and probation services, and give local magistrates insight into the positive and negative impacts of different sentences, and increase their confidence in services provided.

Probation provider data is delivered by MoJ at contract area level. While the contract area data for CRCs demonstrates the extent to which the contract is being fulfilled, the Police and Crime Commissioner for North Yorkshire, North Yorkshire Police and the Local Criminal Justice Partnership cannot assess the impact the contract has had on confidence in community sentence options when NPS develop pre-sentence reports, nor can that data indicate magistrates' belief in the results from community sentences.

We therefore recommend the following:

- (1) The government should prioritise ensuring the accountability of the pre-sentence services provided by NPS, and the community resources provided by CRCs to fulfil community sentences. This should be done locally through LCJBs and Police and Crime Commissioners.
- (2) Sentencing and offender data must also be made relevant to force areas if LCJBs are to be able to use meaningful results data to hold local partners to account and to develop local solutions alongside the CRC and NPS.

We also recommend the development of:

- (a) Female specific pre-sentence reports which include details of children, their work situation, and their family situation in order to ensure that the impacts of a custodial sentence is fully understood for each individual
- (b) A Female Offender Panel modelled on Youth Outcome Panels

The North Yorkshire Youth Outcomes Panel is a partnership between North Yorkshire Police, North Yorkshire Youth Justice and York Youth Offending Team.

The panel considers the most appropriate police disposal for young people who have committed a criminal offence, diverting them from the criminal justice system where

appropriate. The panel ensure police disposals are (1) proportionate to the crime committed; (2) effective in reducing first time entrants to the criminal justice system; and (3) effective in reducing the likelihood of further offending.

The panel encourage a restorative approach with victims, look to address the causes of the young person's offending and aim to ensure appropriate outcomes for disadvantaged young people, such as looked after children or young people with social, emotional or mental health needs.

A Female Offender Panel would be attended by magistrates, CRC staff and police for decision making, and would support the supervision and development of community sentencing as a preferred outcome for female offenders.

A wide range of interventions may be drawn into a package of interventions. These may include positive activities, and voluntary rather than enforceable activities to ensure the sentence is tailored to the individual case, taking into account the level and type of offending as part of a community sentence contract. For example, welfare needs may be identified which are beyond the scope of the community sentence, either because the period of the sentence is too short to address all those needs, or to do so would be disproportionate in relation to the offence.

The panel would monitor the female offender's compliance with the contract of the community sentence. If, at the end of the contract, the conditions have been successfully completed, the conviction will be spent.