

Meeting	Trustee Board meeting
Date	21 March 2024
Title	Prison Reform Trust strategic grant
Agenda item	9
Paper by	Victoria Southwell

1.0 Purpose of paper

To provide Trustees with information to enable them to approve the proposed strategic grant application from Prison Reform Trust (Appendix 1).

2.0 Background information

Trustees will recall as part of the grant strategy that up to 20% of our annual grant allocation of £1m can be spent on projects that we describe as strategic. These are pieces of work that don't fit our wider open grant criteria but help us to contribute to change at a systemic level. This is not a pot of funding that can be applied for, but rather one that organisations are invited to submit proposals to, based on a recognition that the work they do aligns with our wider strategy aims.

With Trustees agreeing in October 2023 that young women and girls will be our funding focus for 2024/25, we have been looking at the opportunities that exist within the women and girls and criminal justice sectors, to support work that links to our theory of change and overall strategy.

In 2022 we were invited to join the Corston Independent Funders Coalition, a group of funders who are interested in supporting work that improves the outcomes for women and girls in the criminal justice system. This group was set up as a result of the Corston Report, a review of vulnerable women in the criminal justice system carried out in 2006, at the request of the Home Office, by Baroness Jean Corston. This followed the tragic suicides of six women at HMP Styal. The review made 43 recommendations about the treatment of women in the criminal justice system, and argued "the need for a distinct radically different, visibility-led, strategic, proportionate, holistic, woman-centred, integrated approach".

The report that was produced painted a vivid picture of women's prisons filled with women who had been the victims of childhood trauma, had poor levels of education

and employment, and who had experienced domestic violence, substance misuse and mental ill-health. Over half of women in prison were mothers and their imprisonment had a hugely detrimental effect on their children, many of whom were taken into care.

One of the main issues that was identified as being urgent reform was around sentencing and the fact that high numbers of women received short prison sentences that were long enough to derail their lives but too brief to provide any proper rehabilitative support.

3.0 Suggested way forward

The paper below sets out a proposal of support from Prison Reform Trust.

The Prison Reform Trust (PRT) is a small, well-respected UK charity with a high public profile, founded in 1981. Their overall aim is to create a just, humane and effective penal system. They seek to achieve this by influencing decision makers, opinion formers and the public to reduce the use of prison, improve conditions for prisoners, and promote equality and human rights in the criminal justice system.

PRT works collaboratively, critically and in a solution-oriented way with the system it seeks to influence. It uses evidence generated from diverse sources to provide independent, reliable, and accessible information to both the people working within the justice system and those impacted by it. PRT's work can be divided into two categories, **foundation** - their core policy advocacy work informed by people in prison, and **innovation** – making a difference to operational policy and practice on the front line.

PRT would like to carry out a solution-focussed evaluation programme of work to explore why the imprisonment of women remains stubbornly high 18 years after the [Corston Report](#) was published. This will help them to better understand why so many women are sent to prison so they can work with practitioners and other key stakeholders towards reducing the number of women imprisoned.

The work will be collaborative, include data gathering with practitioners and other key stakeholders and use case study material to highlight good practice. Ultimately to suggest a blueprint for change. PRT will;

- Look into what has worked. A key part of this will be examining the methodology of the Youth Custody Service (YCS), how they achieved a drastic reduction in youth custody, and the learnings that can be taken to the women's custodial estate. They will do this through discussions with key stakeholders and experts in this field (both at policy and operational levels), data gathering and by completing a literature review.
- Use a collaborative cross-sector approach (including through meetings, roundtables and consultations) to investigate what is needed to increase confidence in alternatives to custody such as referrals to Women's Centres. They will look at various stages of the criminal justice process to complete a needs assessment to identify barriers to both ground level and systematic change and consider solutions.
- They will draw on already well established PRT contacts and networks to consult with women with lived experience of the criminal justice system both in prison and the community.

This work will be solutions based and so will look for examples of good practice and solutions. Many of the issues women in the criminal justice system face are related to women's health and social care and so the work will have a wellbeing lens. They will consult with experts in health and social care and women with lived experience. PRT will look at a stepped approach to reduce numbers of women in prison e.g.

- Women on remand.
- Women serving short sentences for non-violent offences.
- Women serving sentences for offences which are directly related to their mental ill-health, for example an assault on an emergency worker offence which has taken place because the woman is in crisis.
- Women with neurodivergent and psychosocial disabilities.
- Women whose offending is linked to trauma and trauma related substance misuse, including those where their experience of domestic abuse was a driver to their offending.

Women from minority ethnic backgrounds face a double disadvantage within the criminal justice system, being discriminated against based on their gender and their race. Black, Asian and minority ethnic women are over-represented in the criminal justice system, are more likely to be committed for trial at the Crown Court and are more likely to receive a custodial sentence at the Crown Court than white women. PRT are keen to collaborate with specialist organisation to apply this lens to all the above groups with the aim of generating bespoke solutions for women from ethnic minority backgrounds.

The project will:

- Provide a policy brief and practitioner's guide with solution-based resources, to provide a blueprint for change.
- Work towards a reduction in imprisonment of women, in particular, for those on short sentences.
- Increase the awareness of and confidence in the use of diversion (including Liaison & Diversion services) and community alternatives (including Women's Centre provision) to imprisonment.

PRT will disseminate the policy brief and practitioners guide online, through their newsletter, Twitter and PRT website and through our extensive network. They will convene an event with key collaborators, stakeholders and women with lived experience who contributed to the project to discuss lessons learnt throughout the project. A clear outcome from this will be to produce an implementation plan which will sequence their recommendations on the basis of quick fixes, medium term solutions and long-term desirable outcomes.

They will measure the impact of the programme by embedding an outcomes harvesting approach from the beginning of the project. This will help enable them to track changes as they occur. They will work with practitioners to inform and gather feedback on their resources and monitor changes made and outcomes. The number of women in prison is trackable by Ministry of Justice sentencing data.

PRT anticipates the project starting in Spring 2024 and taking 12-18 months to complete. The full cost of the project is £60,150 and funding of £40,000 (£20,000 from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and £20,000 from the Jabbs Foundation) has already been secured. PRT is seeking the remaining £20,150 from Triangle Trust.

4.0 Recommendation

This issue is a good fit for our first strategic grant focusing on young women and girls. Whilst the overall project has a wider remit than just the age range that we are going to be supporting, the impact it will have on them is still going to be significant. PRT are the ideal organisation to carry out this piece of work as they are well respected and have good links across all elements of the criminal justice system and the criminal justice sector. They don't work in isolation and so the buy in for the research and subsequent resources will likely be strong. Pia, who has been CEO of PRT for the past 18 months has come from the Prison Service herself, she was a Governor, and so she holds both deep understanding of the processes and systems that need to be impacted, alongside holding significant relationships with influential change makers.

This project is much needed. Despite there being a Female Offenders Strategy, little progress has been made to make any great impact on the main aims of this which are; earlier intervention and improved community sentences, reducing the number of women going to prison and making custody more effective.

The fact that we are part of a wider funding collaboration adds good value to grant that we are making. It is a relatively modest request, but one that will potentially have a significant impact and one that will also benefit from the high profile of the other funders involved. It will also hopefully lay the foundations for the possibility of funding other projects with funding partners in a similar way.

Awarding a grant of £20,150 is recommended as per the request in the full proposal in Appendix A.