

WOMEN'S TREATMENT WORKING GROUP

A WOMANIFESTO

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Background and context

The **Women's Treatment Working Group** is a group of women in leadership roles, working together to improve support for women affected by drug and alcohol use. We come from both specialist and mainstream services and are united in challenging inequality and enhancing services for women. We are committed to learning from lived and living experience, and we aim to work alongside women to create real change.

We were formed in December 2021, when a small group of us met to think about how we could **improve outcomes for women in treatment**. We were concerned that the current system was failing to meet the needs of women, and that there were barriers preventing women from coming into treatment.

We have engaged with the sector in a number of ways, encouraging our colleagues to develop services to be more **responsive to women's treatment needs**.

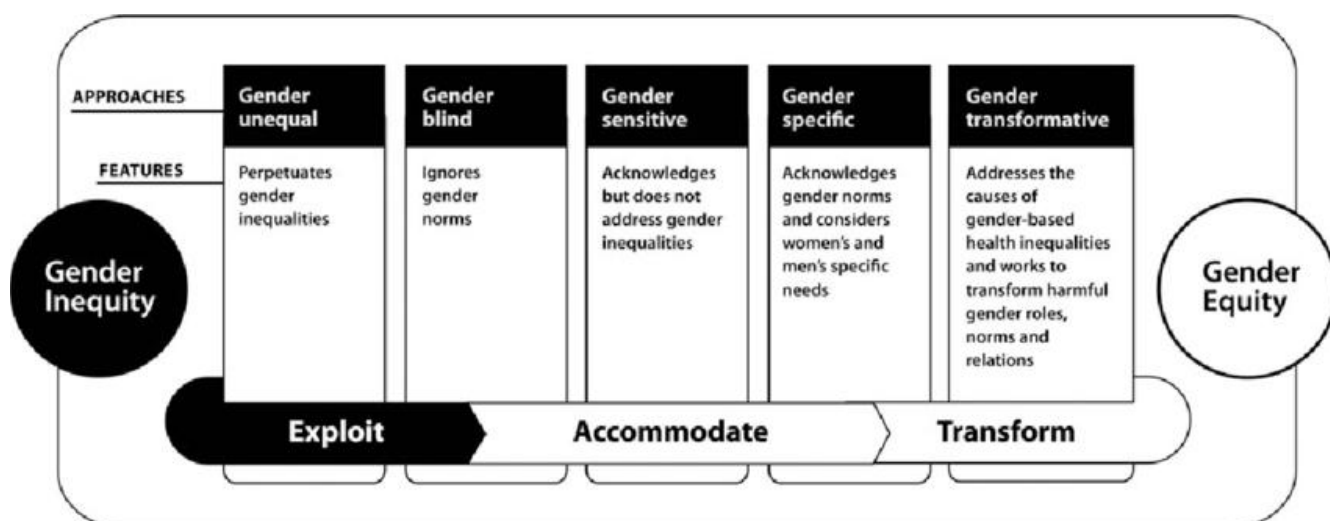
The National Context for thinking about women

There are good reasons to think about women's treatment as distinct to men's, and not as an 'add on' to a more generic offer.

- Women make up **52% of the population** but **only represent 33%** of our treatment services
- There is a consistent evidence base regarding the increased levels of **childhood trauma** and **interpersonal violence** experienced by women who use substances
- The patterns and behaviours of women's drug and alcohol use are different to men's
- Drug related deaths **continue to increase** for women
- Women using substances are **six times** more likely to have children removed than substance-using fathers
- Women who have substance use issues are significantly overrepresented in **maternal deaths** (domestic abuse features heavily as a concurrent issue)

A Gender Transformative approach

Gender transformation involves identifying the ways that gender-based discrimination, inequality, or oppression functions in a given context, and taking practical steps to change these conditions for the better.



It is our belief that the current treatment system vacillates between **gender blind** and **gender sensitive**.

We are ambitious for the sector and would encourage a drive towards **gender transformation**.

Emerging evidence within the sector

In July 2025, **Via** conducted a review of **25 recent research publications** related to women and substance use treatment.

The review emphatically demonstrated that the sector has established a **robust evidence base to draw upon regarding what works for women**.

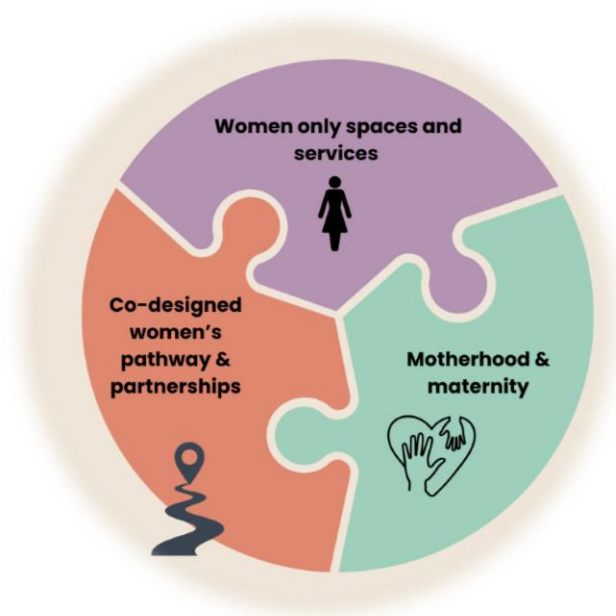
The **Women's Treatment Working Group** have engaged with this body of work in various ways; we have contributed to it, we have reflected upon it, we have shared the learning within our own organisations and our wider networks. It is now imperative that the wider sector acts upon this evidence.

We have a section on [our webpage](#) dedicated to research, guidance and good practice related to women's treatment. The **Via** review will be added to the site this month.

Our ask to OHID

We would like to coproduce with the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) within the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), to help develop a **woman's lens** throughout our sector. We would like to see all aspects of a woman's treatment journey developed and reviewed from this perspective.

We have set out **three recommendations**



For each recommendation we have considered the following:

- Why is this important – **rationale**
- What does this recommendation look like in practice – **implementation**
- What work has been done so far – what examples of good practice can we share – **progress**
- What is missing – **gaps**
- What next?

Recommendation One - Women only spaces and services

Make women-only spaces and services a mandatory requirement for all drug and alcohol treatment providers.



Rationale

There is a growing body of evidence regarding the importance of women only spaces – women are frequently survivors of trauma / male violence. The provision of single sex spaces is the cornerstone of providing care that is safe – both physically and psychologically.

In addition to the **physical spaces**, women need **interventions** and **services** that are tailored towards their needs as women (including biological differences).



Implementation

- Women only groups
- Women only drop- in sessions
- Female key worker (by default, not only if requested)
- Staff trained on women's issues
- Women centric health assessments
- Women focused care plans
- Timely access to women only residential services – including detox
- Key policies to support effective practice – domestic abuse, menopause, pregnancy



Progress

- Development of specific guidance for working with women – includes guidance around pregnancy, menopause.
- Setting up of women drop-ins / sessions – both within core services and in partnership with other women's services.



Gaps

- Not all treatment services place strategic importance upon their offer for women – services are therefore delivered in a piecemeal / ad hoc way.
- The availability of specific women centred interventions varies according to area and local appetite for change.
- Access to ‘women only’ spaces is patchy – again it depends upon local area.



Next steps

- We would like to support a strategic approach to women’s service provision.
- We would like to work with OHID to develop a set of **minimum standards** – these would include dedicated women only support.
- We would suggest that compliance with **minimum standards** becomes a requirement for commissioning.

Recommendation Two - Motherhood and maternity

Improve responses for mothers, including those without children in their care.



Rationale

Parental substance use is consistently a feature in serious case reviews (approx. a third of all cases).

We know that engaging parents in treatment serves as a **protective factor** for children and unborn babies, however the fear of draconian social care involvement acts as a deterrent for mothers in accessing drug and alcohol treatment. ***Our recent WTWG sector engagement exercise confirmed that this is a genuine fear.***

One in five women will have another child after removal. In such cases, the second set of proceedings tend to start earlier (shortly after birth) and to conclude more quickly than the first set of proceedings – drug and alcohol treatment services have a small window of opportunity to mobilise support if a mother is to have any hope of keeping her child in her care.

Alongside fears around child removal, mothers and pregnant women who use substances experience stigma, from both professionals and other people within the drug using community.

In addition, treatment services are rarely seen as 'child friendly'. They can be intimidating / inappropriate environments for children, offering limited childcare support.



Implementation

- Develop a **strength-based** approach for mothers – supporting families to remain together
- Women able to access appropriate interventions in a timely way
- Specialist support for women who have had / are at risk of having children removed
- Trauma informed safeguarding – transparent, consistent and collaborative.



Progress

- Specialist residential family services and accommodation-based support services are effective in creating opportunity for the mother and child to remain together.
- Community based support - an **integrated approach** (joint working of treatment services / CYPS / midwifery) has benefits for the individual woman in terms of delivering support that is less fragmented. It also facilitates better understanding between services, enabling professionals to work together more cohesively.
- Areas have developed specialist roles / workers.



Gaps

- Provision for mothers is patchy. There is a post code lottery when it comes to intervention of offer, worker confidence and access to parenting support.
- Need for more training for staff to improve confidence and practice.
- Improve join up between social care and treatment services.
- Increase advocacy support for women – especially if they are involved in children social care services.
- Review of safeguarding practices to include harm reduction.



Next steps

- In June 2025, **Women's Treatment Working Group** carried out an engagement exercise to understand sector wide policies and approaches to safeguarding. The findings reflect a strong appetite to work effectively with children's social care, but also some of the areas of inconsistency.
- We would like to share the finding and explore the opportunities this work has highlighted for system wide improvement.

Recommendation Three - Co-designed women's pathway and partnerships

Redesign the treatment system from a woman's perspective, with strong partnerships across services.



Rationale

The research delivers a loud and clear message that women's treatment needs look different to men's. There are unique barriers that they need to overcome to access treatment, and they require a different response once they are in it.

It is no longer acceptable to 'tweak' the generic offer and hope that it will meet the needs of women. Instead, we need to develop (redesign?) our treatment system from a woman's perspective.



Implementation

- Access to services in a way that is flexible, responsive and trauma informed – this includes role of outreach / relational approach.
- The barriers for women are proactively addressed – i.e. childcare provided.
- Services that are **co-designed with women**.
- Effective partnerships with local women's organisations – including women's centre / DASV services / women's sexual health.



Progress

- Satellite clinics set up within other women's services / local women's centre. This enables a holistic response to women's needs, a 'one stop shop' model.
- Co-location / partnership working with other services, such as midwifery or DA services.
- Outreach – especially for women involved in selling sex / homeless women is reaching women who may not otherwise access services.



Gaps

- There are budgetary restraints when it comes to delivering effective pathways for women (low caseloads / responsive / outreach).
- Developing partnerships takes time and investment.
- Lived and living experience is key – the current LERO movement would benefit from a more gender informed approach.



Next steps

- Each commissioning area invited to carry out a **mapping exercise** to understand a woman's journey through the treatment system from the woman's perspective – where are the missed opportunities and who are they key local partners?
- Partnerships to include women centres / other organisations supporting women.
- Women with lived / living experience to be central to mapping work.

What Now?

The **Women's Treatment Working Group** is committed to this work. We are doing what we can within our sphere of influence. We want to share our experience with government departments that are keen to achieve our ambitions to improve women's experience of treatment.

APPENDIX 1 - Good practice examples

The following are **not an exhaustive list**.

Moreover, they are some of the examples of good practice from within the **Women's Treatment Working Group** network.

Whilst many of the examples respond to more than one of the recommendations, they have only been included once in the list.

Recommendation One - Women only spaces and services

NATIONWIDE - Nelson Trust Residential Rehab - Provides a safe and supportive environment for women to achieve abstinence from substance use through trauma informed care and a strength-based approach. Our treatment model centralises around trauma-responsive interventions with specialised programmes for women with a history of selling sex, co-morbidities and multiple unmet needs. We provide a comprehensive, holistic suite of interventions from point of referral to long term recovery. We offer various modalities of therapy including EMDR, holistic therapies, DBT, art therapy, CBT and have twice-weekly visits from our resident therapy dog, Jess.

NATIONWIDE - Ophelia House - Developed to meet the needs of women who require abstinence-based residential substance use treatment in a safe and therapeutic environment. Residents stay in a newly redeveloped and refurbished property in the leafy suburbs of Oxford. A multi-disciplinary team provide personalised support through one-to-one counselling and key-working, groups and complementary therapies within a Therapeutic Community Approach. Gender-specific treatment features a bespoke group programme designed by their clinical interventions team. In addition, an accredited programme to support women who have experience domestic abuse is delivered on site.

NATIONWIDE - The Elms - Via have begun building works for The Elms, a women only residential detox centre, with focus groups underway to inform the develop the treatment model.

NATIONWIDE - Passmores - Women only group sessions and are reviewing options for incorporating a structured parenting intervention into the women's groupwork programme.

NATIONWIDE - Women's Core Programme - A Working with Women Manual is being developed. It will include advice for creating women only safe spaces, women specific tools and resources and best practice guidance for engaging and working with women, encouraging our teams to adapt a gender-specific approach.

NATIONWIDE - Women and Girls Self-Audit - Services are completing a Women and Girls Service Self-Audit, with the aim to measure and compare the offer for women across services and to inform local action plans. This feeds into organisational work plans to improve gender-responsive practice.

Barking and Dagenham - Provide a women only session at the service on Friday mornings to offer women a safe space to access groups, domestic abuse services, substance use support including prescribing and health assessments. This includes a partnership with Support When it Matters (SWIM) a charity offering support to Black and ethnic minorities, who facilitate a women's group, focusing on making positive choices building resilience and discovering strengths.

Brent - Dedicated Team Leader who leads an exiting sex work project that offers targeted interventions to improve access to services and long-term stability. Women's Outreach Recovery Worker who delivers an outward facing approach to reach out to women across the community to support engagement.

Brighton & Hove - All women accessing structured drug and alcohol treatment services are offered Oasis Project's specialist women's service. As part of a commissioned partnership, this is delivered from a city-centre, women-only premises 5-days per week. Services are gender and trauma informed and include a creche, and targeted provision for; women whose children have been permanently removed from their care, women who sex work, women in the criminal justice system, pregnant women, parents with local authority children's services involvement, and young women aged 18-25 years.

Cornwall's Fabulous Flamingos - The Fabulous Flamingos is a warm, welcoming group for women seeking support from other women across Cornwall. The group, which meet in Penzance and Truro each week, complete a number of different activities, including cooking, singing and sea glass collecting. Attendees gather to discuss various topics related to alcohol, self-care and mental health. The group also participates in fun activities and workshops to promote healing and self-discovery.

During Women's History Month, we highlighted the experiences of women within this group through a series of videos

Derby - Women specific care planning - completed on an individual basis. The Women's Practitioner who works with the street sex workers and low intensity domestic abuse victims does complete a safety plan with those that require it (e.g. if they do not feel they are in a position to complete a care plan) and reviews the safety plan in her key work sessions.

Derby - Women's drop in's - At The Hub (a secondary premises we provide a Recovery Hub service from) we offer a women's only space once weekly where women can drop in for support or access group work, including women's only Intuitive Thinking Skills course. Women can drop in at the community base at Rebecca House on a Wednesday also which is for women only, and includes a women only group.

Peterborough - Women Only Wednesday WOW - Weekly pamper days which are facilitated by CGL at an external venue. For women experiencing homelessness, poor mental and/or physical health, domestic abuse, involved in the criminal justice system.

Women are offered coffee and cake and access to yoga, dance, exercise, bingo, health support, hairdressing, hair braiding, beauty make overs and pampering.

- Family safeguarding team hold women only groups
- Co-location and partnerships with Women's Aid, Outside Links, Social Care, GP surgeries, Probation, sexual health services, Dual Diagnosis and mental health services and The Garden House (rough sleepers project)

Redbridge - Weekly women-only afternoon with development workshops, peer-led lunches, sexual health support and a menopause clinic, improving female engagement and visibility across the service. Redbridge also offer women only sessions of our Nova group to encourage attendance, which is well attended.

Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead - WISE project (Women in a Safe Environments) - Women's lead and women's key worker develop and deliver a dedicated women's only service in a women's only space away from the treatment building one day per week. This is a co-production approach with the women who use or may use the service. Also includes IDVA trained substance use worker.

Sandwell - WISE project (Women in a Safe Environments) Women's lead and women's key worker develop and deliver a dedicated women's only service in a women's only space away from the treatment building one day per week. This is a co-production approach with the women who use or may use the service. Also includes IDVA trained substance use worker.

Scunthorpe - Menopause Group - The group aims to prevent harm, as many of the women attending have experienced an impact on their physical and emotional health and have used drugs or alcohol as a way of managing their symptoms. Each month a key theme is chosen by the group, such as Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT). Women from all walks of life come along, including those who have been through the journey and want to support others who want to understand more for the future.

Southampton - Specific Women's groups held at women only partner agency HOPE Street (working with justice involved women and their children - residential and social enterprise). Ladies' night- self-care and harm reduction group held weekly in the evening in community setting.

Sutton - WISE project (Women in a Safe Environments) Women's lead and women's key worker develop and deliver a dedicated women's only service in a women's only space away from the treatment building one day per week. This is a co-production approach with the women who use or may use the service. Also includes IDVA trained substance use worker.

St Helens - Provision of a domestic abuse group and co-location of Red Umbrella, a service to support women who sell sex. Access to sexual violence support.

Tower Hamlets - Provision of a women's group providing psychosocial interventions and acupuncture.

Waltham Forest - Women only groups, with visible lived and living experience with female peer mentors. Also provide a women only drop-in at a satellite venue, sexual health drop in within service and partnership with NHS maternity team.

Warrington - Women's group available providing PSI and social activities. Every year on International Women's Day the service is handed over to women to run and it is women only access with no men on site

West Berkshire - At assessment - female Health is explored, including menopause, smear test history, sexual health, pregnancy and family history and contraception. Information and signposting is offered, for example information provided on the 'Balance' app, a menopause support tool.

Wirral - Women can access community agencies (Spider and Tomorrow's Women). There are a variety of different sessions/workshops that help women with an array of different support needs and recreational activities.

Wokingham - WISE project (Women in a Safe Environments) Women's lead and women's key worker develop and deliver a dedicated women's only service in a women's only space away from the treatment building one day per week. This is a co-production approach with the women who use or may use the service. Also includes IDVA trained substance use worker.

Worcestershire - WISE project (Women in a Safe Environments) Women's lead and women's key worker develop and deliver a dedicated women's only service in a women's only space away from the treatment building one day per week. This is a co-production approach with the women who use or may use the service. Also includes IDVA trained substance use worker.

York - we are launching a Women's only accommodation service in York due to the lack of gender specific accommodation options across the country. We are using this opportunity as a pilot to provide accommodation for women from any number of referral routes including any woman who may be at risk of or who may be experiencing homelessness. We are offering 9 beds and aim to offer individualised support alongside our Women's Wellness Centre to provide women with everything they need to move on and successfully manage their own tenancies whilst accessing the support they may need in the community.

Recommendation Two - Motherhood and maternity

INFO & ADVOCACY

NATIONWIDE - Pregnancy pack that clearly highlights organisational practices and approaches to working with pregnant women which states harm reduction and safety practices for workers to advise to the pregnant woman. This is used throughout our substance use services.

NATIONWIDE – Formulary approved to start prescribing folic acid to pregnant women. Folic acid has the greatest impact if prescribed in the first trimester, so offering a 28-day script to get this started as soon as the woman discloses that she is pregnant. If they're already linked in with their GP and/or maternity services then this won't necessarily be required but if not, it'll give a month to support the individual to access these services. They can then pick up the prescription as well ensuring the woman is linked in with vital services.

Coventry - Team worked closely with a specialist midwife and the MDT and local partnership. Advocated for a pregnant woman to go to detox then into a mother and baby placement to avoid removal of the baby and help mum leave an abusive relationship and sexual exploitation

SPECIALIST RESIDENTIAL SUPPORT

Harper House - Harper House supports mums to be admitted together with their children, offer a nursery, and a Local School Pathway to ensure children's education and developmental outcomes can be prioritised while mums engage in the recovery program – this is unique to HH as any other mother and baby unit in Scotland are only able to support children up to nursery age, and don't offer a nursery on site.

Harper House benefits from a Local Health Visitor Pathway to ensure children's developmental outcomes can also be prioritised while mum engages in the recovery program. HH benefits from a Local Midwifery Team Pathway to allow pregnant women from all local authorities to access the service.

Jasmine Mother & Child – Formerly Jasmine Mother's Recovery (Trevi House), Jasmine Mother & Child is a unique residential family centre in Plymouth, Devon. Offer specialist parenting assessments for mothers with substance abuse issues. Program offers treatment for mothers to address substance use while enhancing parenting skills, allowing them to remain primary caregivers for their children.

Jasmine Mother & Child recognises that for many women, the use of substances has been a mechanism for coping with traumatic life events, including childhood trauma/abuse.

Ophelia House - Developing a 're-unification pathway'; helping women who want to gain access to their children but also address their substance use at the same time

Ridley Villas - 7 self-contained flats or houses for women with children or for women who are currently pregnant and are working towards having custody of their child. The women have (or have had) drug or alcohol issues and we work extremely closely with Children's Services to advocate for the children being kept within their mother's custody wherever possible. We have recently started a pilot scheme with Newcastle Council and Your Homes Newcastle to identify move on accommodation options from void stock within the council. We have received some funding to fully refurbish and redecorate each property so that once ready the women can move into their own long-term tenancy with

their children. We work with the council and the women to identify appropriate properties in areas they have positive connections and once accepted onto this pathway can turn this around in 6-8 weeks providing excellent long-term solutions to the families we work with.

Sheffield Family Centre - Good established links with Sheffield peri-natal care including service visits which gives them a good understanding of the service and environment the mother will be in. Bonding sessions offered in service for mother's accessing support to enable a safe and supportive environment to explore their attachment to their child. If mother is reunified with her child in the service and had a period of separation after giving birth, post-natal care will be reviewed ensuring appropriate checks have been completed with health professionals as this can be missed when child is not in their care. This includes review of post-natal depression. This is enabled due to strong links with maternity care in Sheffield, assigned health visitor and GP surgery.

DEDICATED OFFER FOR PREGANT WOMEN / MOTHERS

Brighton and Hove - *Looking Forward* supports women across who have previously had a child or children permanently removed from their care. We are an outreach service offering non-judgemental client-centred support to women.

Brighton & Hove: Oasis Project parenting support and childcare enables mothers to engage in treatment and recovery services. Young Oasis provides therapeutic offer for children and young people affected by drug and alcohol issues within the family.

Brighton & Hove: Oasis Project's POCAR (Parenting Our Children and Accessing Recovery) is an evidenced based, 16-week intervention programme for parents with drug and alcohol issues whose children are open to social services. The programme integrates structured treatment and recovery, with focused support around parenting and child safeguarding, via weekly group sessions and one-to-one keywork.

Brighton and Hove: Oasis Project's Looking Forward supports women who have previously had a child or children permanently removed from their care. Groupwork and keywork supports women to access treatment, recovery and other services to meet their complex and compound needs. One of the team is IDVA qualified.

Brighton & Hove: Partners in Change (PiC) Social Work qualified Specialist Substance Misuse Recovery Workers are employed by Oasis Project and co-located within Brighton & Hove City Council Children's Social Work team. The team supports parents to access treatment and recovery, directly supports assessments to promote positive change for families, and provides training and support for social workers working with families affected by substance use.

Brighton & Hove and East Sussex: One Stop Clinic is a multidisciplinary multi-agency clinic for women with substance use issues in pregnancy. Two specialist midwives, a neonatal consultant and an advanced neonatal nurse practitioner provide specialist advice to clinicians and other professionals alongside direct support to women.

Derby - Parenting groups - We offer a pregnancy group at a community base to try and engage women in treatment who are pregnant and may not want to be seen at St Andrews House (the main D&A Service building).

Derby - Women's health assessments re prescribing

At assessment stage if identified a woman is pregnant, she is prioritised, appointments offered for assessment and prescribing within 24 hours of her attending the service.

Derby - Support for women who have had children removed - if pregnant while in treatment the women are allocated to the specialist pregnancy key worker and are supported throughout the pregnancy and at least 6 months post-natal by the specialist key worker. If the women have the child removed during this time and score 4 or more in the ACE's (alongside other arears on the Matrix) they can be referred to the Women at Risk specialist key worker. The WAR worker caseload is capped in order to give capacity for intensive working. The role involves a mixture of practical support and emotional regulation support. The worker will ensure end-to-end care co-ordination and effectively manage the risks presented by the cohort by working in partnership with key stakeholders. The role is flexible in the approach to working with the cohort of women, including where support can occur, be that home visits or supporting to a community group. There is an emphasis on supporting women to access residential rehabilitation.

Lancashire Breathing Space - Specialist support for women who have had children removed.

Staffordshire – specialist team - Work with families where children are subject to child protection / public law outline as result of parental substance use. Focus is to reduce number of children being removed into local authority care. Attendance at child protection panel meetings.

Lower threshold offer - working with families where children are made subject to CIN plans as result of parental substance use. Focus is to reduce number of children escalating to child protection planning. Attendance at child in need meetings.

Staffordshire - Specialist role within the YP team - Intensive Prevention and Breathing Space Teams working with whole families to bring children home from care placements.

Telford - Cygnet team and specialist midwives.

Worcestershire - Family Safeguarding model - Specialist drug and alcohol workers – clinically supervised. This model was very impactful in creating a joint up system with family teams, substance use and domestic abuse workers. Effective at understanding risk and harm as well as creating trusting relationships with all service providers for the people that use this service – ***SERVICE ENDED IN MARCH DUE TO FUNDING***

JOINT WORKING / CO-LOCATION

Coventry - Partnership with specialist midwifery services. Women are offered;

- A women only complex case keyworker

- Access to weekly midwifery clinics based in CGL building where they are also access support and/or prescribing around substance use
- Outreach by keyworker and/or midwife
- Ongoing support following birth
- Safety and risk planning in event of child removal
- Specialised support after child removal including continuing support from midwife
- Access to specialist health visitors after baby is born
- Post birth contraception

There are bi-weekly multi-disciplinary team meetings including keyworker, complex team leader, complex clinic prescriber and midwife to discuss women's needs, risks and support plan. Since the inception of the service gestation at booking has improved from average 22-26 weeks to 12-18 weeks. There has also been a 40% increase in attendance at scans and consultant clinics, enabling correct pathways of care and timely management.

Derby City - Specialist pregnant keyworker working alongside Specialist Midwife. The role involves multi agency working with specialist midwifery, community midwifery, the Royal Derby Hospital, Health Visitors and Social Care. Since 2007 midwives have worked in/with the service. Monthly Pregnancy MDT meeting with Phoenix, Health Visitors, Specialist Midwives, Social Care and Aquarius (hold a tier 2 Drug and alcohol family support service). Support anyone who is pregnant plus up to 6 months post-natal.

Hull - Think Family Model - Working in partnership with local authority and health, delivering a Specialist pregnancy pathway under the Think Family Model. All women are offered services at the family centre after feedback from expectant women that they did not want to access core treatment services. Women have access to treatment provision and support, midwifery, health visiting, accredited parenting programmes, baby yoga, sensory rooms and mums' groups in a safe environment.

Sit on the Vulnerable Pregnancy Group and attend meetings to support joined up care and work alongside the local authority, specialist midwives and specialist healthy visitors.

Lancashire - Family Safeguarding Team - Originally commissioned to reduce child removal. CGL specialist practitioners work within the local authority as do practitioners from WithYou which is a great example of providers working together.

Sandwell - Monthly joint clinics with the midwife where the midwife and clinical lead see the person together so they can create an open and transparent conversation reducing fear and stigma with the person.

St Helens - Extensive family / parenting service that operates on a home visit model and is integrated into local Family Hubs.

Telford - Family safeguarding co-located in the service and social care, since start of service 30% less children on child protection plans. From 104 successful completions from this service in the last 3 years only 8 have represented back into treatment service.

West Berkshire - keyworkers able to attend their local Family Centre, where women can work with their keyworker while their children are cared for in the same building.

Recommendation Three - Co-designed women's pathway and partnerships

Brighton & Hove - Strategic and operational partnerships and pathways in place to reduce barriers and improve women's access to specialist trauma and gender responsive drug and alcohol treatment and recovery. This includes multi-agency partnerships to address violence against women and girls (VAWG), pathways for women with mental health & substance use co-occurring conditions, and for women who are homeless or insecurely housed. Partnerships also between Oasis Project and sexual health service providers for women involved in the sex trade; NHS midwives and neonatal clinicians at One Stop for pregnant women; Children's Services for families open to Child Protection/Child in Need; Probation for women involved in criminal justice system (including delivery of DDR).

Cheshire East - Co-location and/or partnerships and collaboration with housing, midwifery, Cheshire Without Abuse, Probation, social care and sexual health.

Coventry - Partnership with Kairos - Local service partners with Kairos, a specialist organisation run by women for women to provide outreach in areas known for women involved in on street prostitution, to engage women who may be using drugs or alcohol but not accessing services.

Derby - Drop-in clinic at Women's Work (local women's service) was trialled for 6 months where 2 members of our women's team lead the service, 1 to be able to assess any women who wanted to access treatment and 1 member of staff to key work should the women want to be seen for support at Women's Work. Following feedback from the women, they explained they didn't want the cross over with our service and Women's Work at the same time, so we now offer an ad hoc drop in where a member of the women's team will attend Women's Work to assess the women if they want.

We also have access to counselling for the women in treatment through Women's Work and the women within Drug and Alcohol Treatment are prioritised regarding accessing the counselling service without having to access other groups through Women's Work first.

Derby - Assertive outreach - especially with 'hard to reach' women - The Women's Practitioner has become the lead key worker in trying to engage street sex workers in treatment. The key worker goes on outreach with the police and speaks to the women regarding the support they can access through Drug and Alcohol Treatment, she has also been blood borne virus Dried Blood Spot Testing trained so she can offer this to the women while on outreach also. The key worker also offers a drop in for the women on

the 2nd and 4th Thursday of the month during our late-night opening so they can attend for advice, support, information and assessments.

Derby - Women's health (including sexual health / menopause) - key worker within the women's team who works as the health practitioner. When an appointment has been booked with the GP, key worker will have an appointment prior to help them prepare for the appointment about making a list of concerns to help enable them to not get off topic or sidetracked, offers emotional support also at the time of diagnosis. Hospital visits, dental appointments, smear tests, sexual health, HIV clinic appointments, breast screening, the key worker makes notes at appointments and reminds about future appointments and the treatment plan. Will meet them before the appointments and support them to the appointment to try and help reduce fear and anxiety.

Sexual Health Nurse who runs a clinic once a month to offer testing, advice and information to clients. We have signed up to the Condom Scheme and to have self sexually transmitted infection testing kits at St Andrews House.

Ealing - Women's Wellness Zone – a one-stop shop for women aged 18+ with multiple, complex needs. Services include Health, wellbeing, recovery support, and access to specialist services.

Essex - The Liaison and Diversion service have developed a resource for women who have been arrested and find themselves in custody (perhaps for the first time). It was co-produced with women who had been in custody before, based on their experiences and the information they wished they had at the time. The workbook contains information on women's rights, frequently asked questions, how to access drug, alcohol and mental health support, a real-life case study, some grounding techniques and a space for women to journal their own thoughts / questions.

Gloucestershire - Via subcontract The Nelson Trust to deliver women-only provision, this includes delivery from their women's centre where women are able to access a wider range of support and interventions including childcare.

Greater Manchester – Working in collaboration with Multi agency safeguarding hub to advocate for women and provide specific groups for women involved in the criminal justice system

Greenwich - weekly presence at the local Women's Hub, hosted by the Women in Prison service, where women can be seen in a safe place, and be supported by multiple professionals in one place.

Kirklees - Community Connector works with local mosques to deliver wellbeing and health sessions to Muslim women. Includes working with local partners to take a liver screening van to local mosques and delivery of an online women only group.

Lambeth - Provision of tailored care plan specific to women's needs, including partnership and collaboration with organisations which are run by women for women (Clean Break and Dress for Success).

Lancashire - Co-located with probation providing a one stop women only space and with Lancashire Women to establish pathways for women leaving prison and providing prison in-reach to the women's estate. Key partner in the Lancashire Female Justice Partnership, a strategic forum to improve services and pathways for women in the criminal justice system.

Newcastle - Women's only Treatment Space - we provide a women's only treatment space working alongside the commissioned treatment services, Ridley Villas and Health professionals across the city to host a space for women which is designed to be a 'one stop shop' for women's health needs and recovery. The space offers therapeutic activities whilst also bringing in external agencies such as midwifery, dental hygiene, sexual health and links closely with the treatment service so women can address their needs without necessarily needing to access the mixed space hubs of the treatment services.

Northampton - Part of a newly formed Women's Consortium with local women's centres, VAWG organisations, probation, a housing charity and Rape Crisis. The consortium recently met with the MP for North Northamptonshire to talk about women's rights and the barriers women experience.

Peterborough - Working in partnership with police, primary care, housing and mental health services, supporting women at risk of sexual exploitation and aimed at reducing the harms associated exploitation and abuse.

Provides outreach to women who sell sex, providing condoms, food and drink, help with personal safety, support to register with a GP, rapid access prescribing and support to attend sexual health clinics.

Peterborough Wildflowers Clinic - Wildflowers is a safe, non-judgmental space for the women to meet with a GP and her team to access a range of services to support with their sexual, physical and mental health. It incorporates:

- GP registration/seen as temporary patient
- Drug and alcohol harm reduction and treatment – women can be fast-tracked into treatment through the services rapid prescribing clinic as well as accessing Naloxone
- Cervical screening
- Sexual health testing
- Health promotion (particularly around contraception)
- Breast self-examination
- Help and advice with smoking

In December 2023 a specialist Colposcopy Clinic was set up at Stamford Hospital. This clinic receives smear test results directly from the Wildflowers clinic and women are supported to attend by their CGL worker. Cervical screening rates amongst women attending the clinic have increased from 19% to 94%. Women attending the clinic were overdue screening by 8 – 16 years.

Southampton - Staff trained in carrying out DASH risk assessment (Domestic Abuse, Stalking, Harassment and Honour Based Violence). Strong partnerships with Stop Domestic Abuse, Yellow Door, IDVA (independent domestic abuse advocate) and MARAC (multi-agency risk assessment conference). Maternity lead in service and pathway for Hospital Maternity and Sexual Health Clinics held in service.

The Rough Sleeper enhanced outreach service was highlighted as best practice in Camurus - Fixing a Gendered System part 2.

St Helens - Local service partnered with a specialist women's centre, Chrysalis Centre

Stockton on Tees - Specialist Vulnerable Women's Worker providing outreach support to women with complex or unmet needs to engage them in services

Sunderland - Co-located and /or partnered with Children's Services, Domestic Abuse Services, Police, Probation, Sexual health, Housing.

Surrey - Women Leaving Prison Pathway - A best practice guide has been created in collaboration with service CJ leads, to support women leaving prison, with a particular focus on Bronzefield Prison. The best practice guide aims to improve continuity of care and access to gender-responsive alternatives to custody.

Tameside - Partnered with the local women's centre and have sessions there for women to make referrals, attend 1-1 appointments and groups in a safe 'women only' space.

Warwickshire - Sexual Health clinics in the service monthly.

Wigan and Leigh's Women's Prehab Group - At our Wigan and Leigh service we work in partnership with BAC O'Connor, who opened the Women's Prehab Group in September 2023. After finding that a large number of women were reluctant to access mainstream treatment options, the group was set up to address the unmet needs of these clients who were looking to make a positive change in their alcohol use.

Taking place at a local equestrian centre, it creates a safe space for women to begin and maintain their recovery journey by speaking about past trauma in a community setting. The group can also take part in activities and volunteering days at the centre.

Wirral - Residential rehab - if staff felt that (from a therapeutic perspective) a woman would benefit from a women's-only, trauma responsive environment, we would then suggest Ophelia House. Another example, there is a woman transferring from New Oakwood Lodge to Ophelia House, as she is overwhelmed with the amount of community members who are in treatment there (Oakwood can take up to 37 residents, so is larger than the specialist Ophelia). Tailored / person-centred care planning is critical, and each woman must be involved in this process from the outset.

Wirral - A late-night onsite clinic designed to provide vital support to sex workers, those at risk of selling sex and/or individuals impacted by sexual violence as well as any other women who would like to attend.

Embedded Maternity pathways, Female only keyworker working with vulnerable women with multiple unmet need and women only session at Wirral's Nightingale's café.

West Kent - Completed a large piece of work on Improving Treatment for Women collaborating with other local agencies, Probation Services, women who use the service as well as women who do not but may need to and women who do not need services. All recommendations in the report were co-produced with service users.

York - Criminal justice worker based at the local Women's Wellness Centre (WWC) weekly to deliver ATR/DRR and criminal justice appointments, who can also offer appointments therefore all women. The Services Manager sits on the 'Whole System Approach' steering group, joining up women specific services in York. Criminal justice workers co-located with probation on their women only presentation days.

Home Office / Netreach - We have developed our support for victims of online abuse to better support victims of adult sexual exploitation and those who are being targeted by Organised Crime Gangs. We utilise specialist online tools to identify and risk assess individuals who are potentially at risk of exploitation online and have worked with the police in some examples to jointly target organised crime groups and trafficking rings so that we are on hand to offer support to the victims once arrests have been made and it is deemed safe to do so. This has been effective on a number of occasions whereby we have been able to support women who have been held against their will to escape to refuge and/or return to their own country.

APPENDIX 2 - Women's Treatment working group membership (as of September 2025)

Organisations

| | | |
|----------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Adfam | Druglink | Turning Point |
| Adferiad | Emerging Futures | Trevi |
| BAC O'Connor | Forward Trust | Via |
| Bristol Drug Project | MPFT | Waythrough |
| CGL | Nelson Trust | Withyou |
| Changing Lives | Oasis | Working With Everyone |
| Cranstoun | Phoenix | |

Independent members

Hannah Shead & Vicki Beere

APPENDIX 3 – References & Further Reading

Kendall-Tackett, K. (2005). Introduction: Women's experiences of stress and trauma.
Covington, S (2002) Helping Women Recover: Creating Gender- Responsive Treatment.
Mary Ryan & Dr Charlotte Edney (May 2025) Recurrent care proceedings: five key areas for reflection from the research (update)

Recent reports (within last four years) relating to women and drug and alcohol treatment:

- **A system designed for women?** Understanding the barriers women face in accessing drug treatment and support services (2021) With You
- **Exploring women's experience of drug and alcohol treatment in the West Midlands,** (2023)
- Centre for Justice Innovation
- **Fixing a gendered system I:** Addressing women's needs to tackle drug-related harm, (2023) Camurus Ltd
- **Fixing a gendered system II:** Rethinking women in drug treatment (2024) Camurus Ltd
- **"To be listened to... and actually heard"** Women's perspectives on effective substance use treatment and support, (2025) Centre for Justice Innovation