

**Chepstow House Community Project for Women Offenders,
Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire**

Process Evaluation

Final Report, February 2011



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Front cover: 'Phoenix Rising' mural created by Chepstow House Art Group.



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**Process Evaluation of Chepstow House Community Project for Women
Offenders, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire
Final report**

Executive summary

Background

Chepstow House, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, opened in February 2010 with the objective of providing individually-tailored and intensive services for women offenders or those at risk of offending in North Staffordshire. The lead agencies for the service are Brighter Futures, in partnership with Gingerbread and CAB. Chepstow House was set up in the national context of the Corston Report which had recommended that criminal justice policy should be directed towards reducing the number of women in prison who do not need to be there, instead diverting them to specialised, women-only, non-custodial programmes in the community.

Description of provision

The programme of services available at Chepstow House consists of:

1. Accredited programmes for enhancing life skills and personal planning
2. Accessing accommodation
3. Finance, benefits and debt advice
4. Help with children, families and relationships
5. Access to health services
6. Courses to help attitudes, thinking and behaviour
7. Support for women who have experienced abuse, rape or domestic violence
8. Support for women involved in sex work

In addition to its in-house provision, management and trustees also commission external providers to provide specialised services in family support, financial advice, mental health, alcohol and drugs treatment, counselling, complementary therapies and employment and skills support.

Profile of service users

Chepstow House received referrals for 244 women in its first 9 months of operation. Of these, the highest percentage of referrals (42% or 103 referrals) came from statutory criminal justice agencies (Police, Probation Service, Prison Service). Nine out of ten identified themselves as being of White British heritage (94%). The majority of service users at Chepstow House were based in the Stoke-on-Trent area with much smaller numbers being drawn from other centres in North Staffordshire. Of the 142 customers who gave their ages, 83 women were between 26 and 50 years of age, 50 were between 18 and 25 years, with 9 between 51 and 64 years. They identified needs for housing support (73), primary and mental health care (106), drugs and alcohol services (88), financial advice (108), support with behavioural change (63) and help with offending related needs (112).

Compliance, completion and exit

59 women passed through the programme between May 21 2010 and January 24 2011. Of these, 20 completed the programme and experienced planned exits from it. A further 20 had been in irregular contact with the project and continued to experience „floating support’. 16 of the women left the project in an unplanned way and their whereabouts were unknown. The remaining 3 women were sentenced to custody.

General conclusions

1. The Chepstow House project is contributing positively to supporting vulnerable women offenders or those at risk of offending.

The one-stop-shop project at Chepstow House is accessing marginalised and vulnerable women at risk of offending. The evidence collected from the project shows that women who participate in the Chepstow House programme report very positively on the service and support they receive.

2. The Chepstow House project is earning the confidence and support of professionals in statutory and stakeholder agencies.

The evidence from professionals working in stakeholder agencies which have engaged with the Chepstow House project shows widespread support for its overall aims and recognises the need for the service. Staff involved in criminal justice have given their expert view that it is providing some observable benefits to women offenders.

3. Chepstow House is addressing positively the complex needs of women offenders and those at risk of offending.

Chepstow House is providing services in line with the 9 key pathways for supporting women offenders. It is providing a joined-up service for women in a safe environment. Women are supported through intensive personal intervention. Staff provide core services which develop personal skills, as well as specialist advisory services. Staff also refer women service users (or „customers’) to other providers where appropriate. Chepstow House provides facilities for counselling, health and substance dependency professionals.

4. The Chepstow House programme is addressing the gender gap in service provision for women offenders and those at risk of offending in North Staffordshire.

Evidence from stakeholders indicates that Chepstow House is making provision for women that is not available elsewhere in the locality. In particular, it has been successful in engaging „hard to reach’ women. This has been made possible, at least in part, by the project’s embeddedness in the wider network of Brighter Futures provision.

5. Staff at Chepstow House and other stakeholding agencies are working towards the wider objectives of partnership between statutory and other stakeholder agencies to reduce (re)offending or the risk of (re)offending.

Staff at Chepstow House have successfully established various strands of work across participating stakeholders in a number of areas. This now includes formal statutory work through the courts and the Probation Service.

6. Implications for pertinent programme development

There are positive implications for the development of programmes in other localities and for other client groups, informed by the achievements of the Chepstow House one-stop-shop. For example, the completion of the programme by the first cohort of women from Chepstow House has enabled further investigation into aftercare and the transferability of the programme or parts of the programme.

Specific findings

- The Chepstow House programme continues to receive very positive feedback from participants on the service and support they receive.
- Chepstow House is supporting the conditions that facilitate reduced (re)offending by promoting positive personal and lifestyle changes among customers.
- Chepstow House is working effectively with the courts and the Probation Service to accommodate Specified Activity requirements in community orders.
- Chepstow House employs a number of positive practices for encouraging compliance with the programme.
- Chepstow House has designed an exit strategy for customers, including an exit survey and systems for monitoring aftercare and „floating support’.
- The work at Chepstow House contributes to wider social benefits by working to reduce the social exclusion and personal isolation of customers, and supporting positive family and peer relationships.
- Chepstow House provides a safe women-only environment.

Recommendations

1. To monitor the criteria for referral of women as being 'at risk of offending' across the different referral agencies.
2. That Chepstow House and statutory criminal justice agencies continue to work to monitor/improve the rate of referrals where appropriate.
3. To support women earlier in their sentence or prior to their release from prison/custody where appropriate.
4. To support additional training (where necessary and appropriate) to staff at Chepstow House or other participating agencies in skill areas which are relevant to dealing with the complex needs of women offenders.
5. To establish data gathering practices that satisfy not only internal and Ministry of Justice accountability but are also accessible to and useable for independent external scrutiny.
6. To devise a code of confidentiality and information exchange among the participating agencies, especially in supporting work among case workers or key workers in different stakeholding agencies.
7. To develop processes for monitoring outcomes more consistently.
8. To review targets for retention and completion in the light of the complex challenges involved in keeping women engaged with the service and in supporting women to complete their programme.
9. To explore the transferability of the Chepstow House model of provision for other service users, in particular for young women.

Introduction

Chepstow House, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, opened in February 2010 with the objective of providing individually-tailored and intensive services for women offenders or those at risk of offending in North Staffordshire. The lead agencies for the service are Brighter Futures, in partnership with Gingerbread and CAB. Brighter Futures provides a range of services to women and men in housing and multiple social needs in North Staffordshire. For a full outline of the 15 projects which are part of Brighter Futures see Appendix 1.

Chepstow House was set up in the national context of the Corston Report¹. That review had recommended that criminal justice policy should be directed towards reducing the number of women in prison who do not need to be there, as most women are not serious or violent offenders who pose a risk to the public. Women at risk of offending ought to be diverted to specialised, women-only, non-custodial programmes in the community, Corston concluded. Additionally, the report recommended the setting up of centres on a nationwide basis for delivering services which meet the multiple and complex needs of women offenders and those at risk of offending. This form of provision is also intended to support women in reducing their (re)offending by addressing their specific circumstances and needs.

In response to Corston, government instituted the „the Diversion Programme’, which is funding a number of partnerships to deliver holistic services to women offenders and those at risk of offending. In December 2009, the decision was taken to invest £9m (out of a total of £15.6m) in grant capacity funding to third sector providers to deliver Women’s Community Projects (WCPs) („one-stop-shops’). The funding has been primarily used to build the capacity of one-stop-shop services in different regions.

Chepstow House is one of the second ‚generation’ of women’s community projects („one-stop-shops’) which have been funded as part of the *Strategy on Diverting Women away from Crime* („The Diversion Strategy’)². These projects were established as a result of research and evidence which showed that the risk of reoffending by women is linked to the unsuitability of custodial sentences and the difficulty that many women have in engaging with mainstream community supervision programmes. Research suggests, instead, that women are more likely to engage with, and benefit from, more structured supports which are tailored to their individual circumstances. The development of such community projects for women is supported by the 2010 Ministry of Justice consultation paper on the sentencing of offenders³

¹ Baroness J Corston. (2007) *A Review of women with particular vulnerabilities in the criminal justice system*. Home Office, London.

² Ministry of Justice (2009) *A Report on the Government's Strategy for Diverting Women away from Crime* HMSO London

³ Ministry of Justice (2010) *Breaking the Cycle: effective punishment, rehabilitation and sentencing of offenders*, Cm 7972, London, The Stationery Office

The aims and objectives of Chepstow House are to:

- Provide a women-only programme of services geared specifically to the needs of women offenders and those at risk of (re)offending. The target group includes women who experience, or are at risk of experiencing, forms of social exclusion which are linked to women's engagement in crime. They include ex-offenders, women released from prison or on probation supervision, women who are homeless or sleeping rough, women experiencing drug or alcohol dependency, domestic violence or abuse, and women engaging in prostitution or sex work;
- Address the multiple needs and disorganised („chaotic’) lifestyles of the target groups. Brighter Futures and its partners anticipated that many of its service users (referred to as „customers’) would be women trapped in poverty, who are likely to engage in risky behaviours linked with addiction-based lifestyles, or who are vulnerable to abuse or exploitation by others;
- Facilitate access to social and support services and an easy transition from one service to another. Many women in the target group had failed to gain access to essential social services, such as social benefits, registration with a GP or dental services, safe housing or secure accommodation. As the programme developed, it became evident that many women accessing Chepstow House had previously fallen out of reach of statutory or social providers, or had histories of disengaging from criminal justice agencies;
- Support women to take the first steps into different life-choices and options by using a user-led approach. The Chepstow House programme aims to address the specific losses experienced by women who have gone through the criminal justice system, including loss of family contacts, and aims to assist them with reconstructing positive personal and social networks and supports which are necessary for successful resettlement;
- Ensure the long term aim of reducing women's engagement in offending and their resettlement through multi-agency partnerships working to achieve a coordinated approach.

The service programme

The Chepstow House project contributes to these aims by providing a package of tailored, intensive supports to women at risk of offending, those „on the cusp’ of receiving short custodial sentences, and women referred to the project. These services are consistent with the seven National Framework „pathways’, together with the additional gender-specific provision for women experiencing sexual, emotional or other forms of abuse, and those involved in sex work.⁴ For a full outline of services and providers working at Chepstow House, see Appendix No 2

⁴ Home Office (2004) *Reducing Re-offending: National Action Plan*. Home Office, London.

The evaluation

As Chepstow House was a new service, the Trustees commissioned an evaluation of the *process* of programme implementation and to provide evidence of how or whether implementation *contributes* to outcomes (in meeting set targets). Our findings are informed by research covering the period April 1, 2010 to January 31, 2011.

The aims of the evaluation were to:

- Examine the data on the number of women using the service during the first year of operation of Chepstow House;
- Identify the specific and complex needs of women accessing the services, and how these were met;
- Identify the role of other service providers and what actions are needed to facilitate further multi-agency working;
- Assess the effectiveness of the service in enabling the target group to engage in services and achieve positive outcomes;
- Consider the wider impact of Chepstow House on other statutory and voluntary sector stakeholders;
- Consider the possible contribution of Chepstow House to supporting resettlement and reducing the risk of offending by women users;
- Identify options for future provision and the future commissioning of services.

The evaluation team

The evaluation team consists of three experienced researchers from the Centre for Criminological Research at Keele University. All have experience of undertaking evaluations in the criminal justice sector, and have wide experience in researching women in the criminal justice system, as well as those experiencing trauma and difficult life situations.

Methodology

The evaluation utilised complementary methods of data gathering. The evaluation comprised a review of the documentation and statistical data documenting outputs and outcomes; regular observations and fieldwork at Chepstow House; interviews with Chepstow House staff, Trustees, staff from key partners and stakeholder agencies, women service users (‘customers’), and analysis of quantitative data.

Documentary and literature review

This entailed a review and analysis of relevant research and policy reports. In addition, the research team analysed information provided by Brighter Futures including their organisational map, referral map, as well as background information to the Tender. We reviewed referral and monitoring material, as well as the assessment toolkits, which are in use at Chepstow House,⁵ with a view to determining:

- The referral, selection and retention of service users;
- Service uptake and usage by customers;
- The use of information systems for monitoring take-up, completion, part- or non-completion;
- The role and value of progress reviews, with particular focus on the „outcomes star’ and „motivational ladder’ methods as the leading tools.

Case analysis

This process involved an examination of randomly selected customer files, with a view to obtaining profiles of the kinds of cases which staff at Chepstow House dealt with in the period between February and July, 2010. This exercise created 20 narratives, which, suitably anonymised, illustrate the kind of work done on the programme. This exercise allowed evaluators to:

- Capture the complex situations and needs of women accessing Chepstow House;
- Show the various interventions and inter-agency referrals that took place at and from Chepstow House;
- Trace women’s journeys through, in and out of the Chepstow House Programme;
- Identify any issues for further reflection or action.

Fieldwork and interviews

The fieldwork and interviews were conducted on the basis of an action research approach, which is „a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowledge in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview’⁶. This approach is intended to empower participants (Chepstow House staff, customers and stakeholders) to take part in formulating approaches rather than having ready-made solutions imposed from outside. By using these diverse sources of information, the evaluators were able to consider the ability of Chepstow House and associated providers to meet the requirements of service users, stakeholders, staff and funders.

The research team made frequent visits to Chepstow House to meet staff and customers, to explain the nature of the research, and to recruit potential participants. Researchers observed a number of activities at Chepstow House. Observation only took place where appropriate and with the informed consent of all participants. Researchers observed:

⁵ Homeless Link (2006) *The Outcome Star User Guide: Supporting Change in Homelessness and Related Services*. Homeless Link: London.

⁶ Reason, P. & H. Bradbury (2001) *Handbook of Action Research*. Sage, London. p1.

1. The Life Skills classes provided at Chepstow House;
2. The Art classes conducted at Chepstow House;
3. Assessment interviews with customers' permission, including observation of the Outcomes Star assessment tool;
4. Formal and informal observation of work conducted at Chepstow House.

Interviews

A total of 46 interviews were conducted with individuals or using focus group interview methods. The researchers conducted face-to-face interviews with 18 women service users (‘customers’), 5 stakeholder staff based at Chepstow House but seconded from stakeholder agencies or commissioned to provide specialist services, 13 personnel from statutory and criminal justice services, and 10 interviews with Chepstow House staff (operational and management).

All interviewees were recruited by the research team. Potential respondents from stakeholder agencies were approached in writing and asked if they would like to take part in the research. Customers were informed that the researchers would be present at Chepstow House if they wished to participate in the research. The research consisted of a semi-structured interview which included completing a short survey as a starting point.

Participants were provided in advance with information sheets advising them that the research data would be anonymous and confidential and that they could withdraw from the research at any point. Participants who took part in interviews were asked to sign a consent form, and where permission was given, the interviews were digitally recorded. Where permission for recording was not given, researchers took notes during the interview.

Participating agencies

Chepstow House provides an holistic response by providing core services such as life skills, art and creative classes, and through working closely with a range of other agencies such as drug support schemes, programmes for sex-workers, accommodation, skills and employment training. It does not duplicate existing specialist services but links them up and makes them easily accessible for service users. The following agencies participated in this evaluation

- Brighter Futures
- Chepstow House
- Staffordshire Probation, including Women’s Safety Unit
- Voluntary Action Stoke-on-Trent (VAST)
- Gingerbread
- Citizen’s Advice Bureau (CAB)
- Staffordshire Police, including Stoke Neighbourhood Policing Unit (Hanley), Prolific and Priority Offenders Unit, and Victim Liaison Unit
- Stoke-on-Trent Safer City Partnership
- National Offender Management Service (NOMS) West Midlands
- HMP Styal

Ethical clearance

Prior to the commencement of fieldwork, the project underwent ethical review by the Research Ethics Committee for the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Keele University. This committee adheres to the standards outlined by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the British Society of Criminology. The evaluation and the wider mapping study received ethical approval in April 2010.

Evaluating Women's Community Programmes

One of the key considerations for researchers concerns the design and use of research methods which can capture the needs and experiences of the particular groups who are the focus of research. Primarily, this evaluation needed to utilise appropriate tools and concepts which were responsive to the specific problems faced by women in the criminal justice system. We understood this to refer to two aspects; firstly, it entailed referring to the body of research relating to the differing nature and motivations behind women's offending, and secondly, integrating relevant research findings and methodologies into the evaluation design. We have addressed these questions accordingly:

Factoring in gender-appropriate criteria

Although there have been previous initiatives for promoting evidence-based practice and „what works' agendas to achieve greater impact on offenders through interventions, these practices are not necessarily responsive to women and their needs.⁷ Programmes accredited by the Corrections Services Accreditation Panel (CSAP) have failed in the past, in both design and delivery, to provide appropriate opportunities for women offenders or take account of gender-specific needs and risks.⁸ It is now recognised that the comparative lack of understanding of women's relationships to offending and risks of offending arises because women are likely to have different „criminogenic needs', and because their routes into offending and reasons for offending are often different from those of men.⁹

This clearly has implications for the focus and content of the evaluative design and methodologies for investigating how programmes such as that at Chepstow House (a) respond to the needs of women and their relationship to risk of (re)offending and (b) take account of the differing nature and motivations behind women's offending.

This research found, in common with other research, that women customers frequently responded positively to receiving support in women-only environments¹⁰. This is partly

⁷ Worrall, A. & L. Gelsthorpe (2009) „What works' with women offenders: the past 30 years, *The Probation Journal*, 56 (4), 329-345.

⁸ Worrall, A. (2002) Rendering women punishable: the making of a penal crisis, Carlen (ed) *Women and Punishment: The Struggle for Justice*. Willan: Cullompton.

⁹ Gelsthorpe, L., G. Sharpe & J. Roberts (2007) *Provision for Women Offenders in the Community*, Fawcett Society, London.

¹⁰ Worrall, A. & M. Gough (2008) *Giving them back their dignity: A review of Adelaide House Outreach project*. Butler Trust, London.

Maruna, S. & R. Immarigeon (eds) (2004) *After crime and punishment: pathways to offender reintegration*, Willan: Cullompton.

because women-only environments facilitate growth and development in non-authoritarian, cooperative settings, in which women are empowered to engage in social and personal change.¹¹ Women also respond well to Intensive Alternatives to Custody programmes, although their impact on reoffending is not yet conclusively known¹². Additionally, programmes tend to be more successful if they provide interventions which are continuous (‘joined up’) and committed (consistent and accessible).

Reducing offending – measuring change and outcomes.

After some years of commissioning by NOMS of various support services for offenders, it is now widely understood that normative or quantitative forms of measuring impact have limitations. The evaluation of the national demonstration project for women’s community projects in Hull and Humberside concluded that mapping a project’s impact against official data on reoffending tells us little about any possible impact on participants in available programmes. ‘This is because there is no counterfactual which can be measured for any of the women without criminal records (i.e. it is not possible to predict how many would have gone on to offend in the absence of [a programme]).’¹³

At the time of writing, governmental and statutory funders have moved towards a position that the evidence base should capture both summative data (a reduction in the severity or frequency of offending, or a complete abstinence in drug or alcohol usage) alongside processual evidence of the ‘distance offenders have travelled’ as a consequence of participating in programmes. The latter seeks to establish whether and to what extent service users might be managing ‘criminogenic’ behaviours, such as stabilising their housing, reduced alcohol consumption, switching the type of street drug used. This type of approach places ‘hard’ evidence on retention or completion rates, or the attainment of set targets, into contexts which are directly relevant to accounting for what women participating in the programme have achieved as well as addressing some gaps in the evidence which might otherwise be seen as ‘apparent failure’ on their part.

A note on desistance

A criterion of the evaluation is that we considered the possible contribution of Chepstow House to constructively supporting possible reductions in the risk of offending by women users. Crime statistics and data on compliance with supervision programmes, for example, can usefully identify a probable relationship (correlation) between reoffending and participation on programmes. This evaluation has also drawn on the range of available data for identifying changes in customers’ attitude or risk-taking behaviour which may be significant indicators of more stable and constructive lifestyles and choices.

¹¹ Pollack, S. (2004) ‘Anti-oppressive Social Work Practice with Women in Prison, Discursive reconstructions and alternative practices’, *British Journal of Social Work*, 34: 693-707.

J. Roberts (2002) ‘Women-centred: the West Mercia Community-based programme for Women Offenders’, in P. Carlen, (ed) *Women and Punishment: The Struggle for Justice*.

¹² Ministry of Justice (2009) *A report on the government’s strategy for diverting women away from crime*, p5.

¹³ Hedderman, C. et al (2008) *Implementing services for women offenders and those ‘at risk’ of offending: action research with Together Women*. Ministry of Justice, London., 21.

We have linked these findings with wider research on desistance among offenders.¹⁴ The term „desistance’ is generally used to describe the process by which offenders change their behaviour and decrease their offending activities over a period of time prior to reducing or even ceasing their lawbreaking. It is recognised that most offenders tend to „zig-zag’ their way out of offending rather than exit in a linear fashion. Intensive projects can create or buttress „primary’ desistance (a lull or crime-free gap) and can prepare an offender for „secondary’ desistance (a more permanent change of identity from offender to non-offender)¹⁵. It must be noted that the opportunity for desistance is clearly constrained by a wide range of criminogenic factors which are beyond the control of any one project; for example, social exclusion.¹⁶ Crucially with respect to women, secondary desistance will only happen when other personal, social and economic factors are favourable.

¹⁴ Farrall, S., R. Mawby & A. Worrall (2007) „Prolific/persistent offenders and desistance’ in L. Gelsthorpe & R. Morgan (eds) *Handbook of Probation*, Willan: Cullompton.

¹⁵ Burnett, R. (2004) „To reoffend or not to reoffend? The ambivalence of convicted property offenders’ in S. Maruna and R. Immergeon (eds) *After Crime and Punishment: Pathways to Offender Reintegration*, Cullompton, Willan

¹⁶ National Equality Panel (2010) *An Anatomy of Economic Inequality in the UK - A Summary*. Government Equalities Office, London.

Chepstow House: the service

Chepstow House opened in February 2010. It is located in a central part of Hanley, near to existing retail and social services in order to be convenient for public transport users and accessible to pedestrians. It is open from 9am until 5.30pm from Mondays to Fridays.

The ground floor of the building contains a lobby for receiving callers. The first floor of the building is used as the main area for all activities. This area contains offices, two teaching/meeting rooms, two interview rooms, additional rooms for use by staff seconded from external agencies, toilets, and a small kitchen facility. The building is airy, clean and very pleasant. Basic refreshments are available through the day. There is no wheelchair access. Chepstow House is a drug- and alcohol-free space. Smoking is not permitted. Staff, customers, volunteers and visitors are expected to respect others using the premises and to refrain from disruptive or abusive behaviour. These requirements were clearly understood by participants in this research. Many commented that this contributed to a positive and safe environment at Chepstow House.

Women access the service by being referred, self-referring, calling by the premises or telephoning it. Staff work with women at the centre and through outreach activities. At least two members of staff are available throughout the day both for pre-arranged appointments with customers and to deal with women self-referring and calling the centre. The operations manager is located at Chepstow House.

On initial contact with Chepstow House, an appointment is made with women to carry out an initial assessment. This forms the basis of a needs assessment and Action Plan. Customers are encouraged to participate in the full programme which normally lasts for 12 weeks. This programme normally includes participation in weekly sessions on enhancing life skills and personal planning, alongside a tailored programme of services which may include family support, health, housing financial advice and the other services. Service users are also referred to statutory services as appropriate.

There is no bar to the number of times a woman can contact the service. This is considered to be essential if workers are to build up trust and enable women to take steps towards engaging with the programme. However, customers using the premises are encouraged to have a specific purpose for being there. Customers are either there because they are being seen by a member of staff, or have a class or appointment, rather than just „dropping by’ or „staying around’.

Participation and service usage

The information presented below covers the period between April 1 and December 31 2010 (unless otherwise indicated), drawing on the available data at the point of completing this evaluation. The following analysis covers the relevant inputs including referral patterns, profiles of women accessing the service, service usage and participation, and needs assessment and monitoring. It also expresses key outputs relating to progress on activity orders and preliminary data on reoffending.

The journey into, through and out of Chepstow House

- **Initial contact:** Women can self-refer to Chepstow House, but are more often referred to by external agencies, including statutory criminal justice services, voluntary sector, social services, GPs, employment and educational agencies (see „Routes of referral’ data).
- **Referral form:** A woman’s first contact entails filling out a referral form which includes personal details and includes sections on each of the 7 plus 2 pathways, which the referrer and client can use to assess need. This is passed on by the referrer to Chepstow House.
- **Personal information form:** On receiving the initial referral form, a Chepstow House staff member will make contact with the woman to organise an assessment meeting and opportunity to do a needs assessment. This normally occurs within a few days of receiving the referral. There may be problems with contacting some women. Staff follow up referrals diligently until they can establish whether the woman wishes to proceed or not with the referral. The Personal Information Form is completed face to face with one member of staff, who will also conduct the Outcome Star assessment (tool for assessing needs). A consent form is signed with the customer. Our observations showed that this can be an extremely time-intensive and sensitive process.
- **Action plan:** Having established with the client what her „needs’ are, the key worker draws up a general support timetable which includes an agreed set of objectives – what she wants to achieve, courses which she might take on the programme, external training and other external agencies. The key worker will then sign the customer onto Chepstow House courses and make contact with other agencies as appropriate.
- **A Timetable** is then sent out to the customer, which also serves as a „reminder’ to her and to ensure that contact with Chepstow House is followed through.
- **The customer attends the Chepstow House programme.** Meanwhile, her key worker will liaise with other agencies on her behalf, set up meetings and appointments, and arrange for further courses or services outside. The keyworker will support the customer in managing appointments and meetings with external agencies.
- **Review of action plan:** Normally this takes place at an appropriate juncture during the customer’s engagement at Chepstow House. This allows the Action Plan and Outcome star to be reviewed and new goals to be drawn up.
- **Exit process:** This occurs after the woman has completed the programme over a 12 week period.

1. Routes into Chepstow House: referral pathways

Chepstow House received referrals for 244 women in its first 9 months of operation. Of these, the highest percentage of referrals (42%), i.e. 103 referrals, came from statutory criminal justice agencies (Police, Probation service, prison service) (**Fig 1**) and this category is broken down by service below (**Fig 1a**). The second largest share of referrals came from organisations which were categorised as CAW (the name assigned in the database). This category represents the number of referrals which came from within the provider partnership, that is, from Brighter Futures, CAB, Gingerbread or from affiliate organisations which are outlined in Appendix 2. Of the remaining referrals, 13% were self-referrals, with other referrals coming from emergency accommodation and social housing providers, health providers and social services.

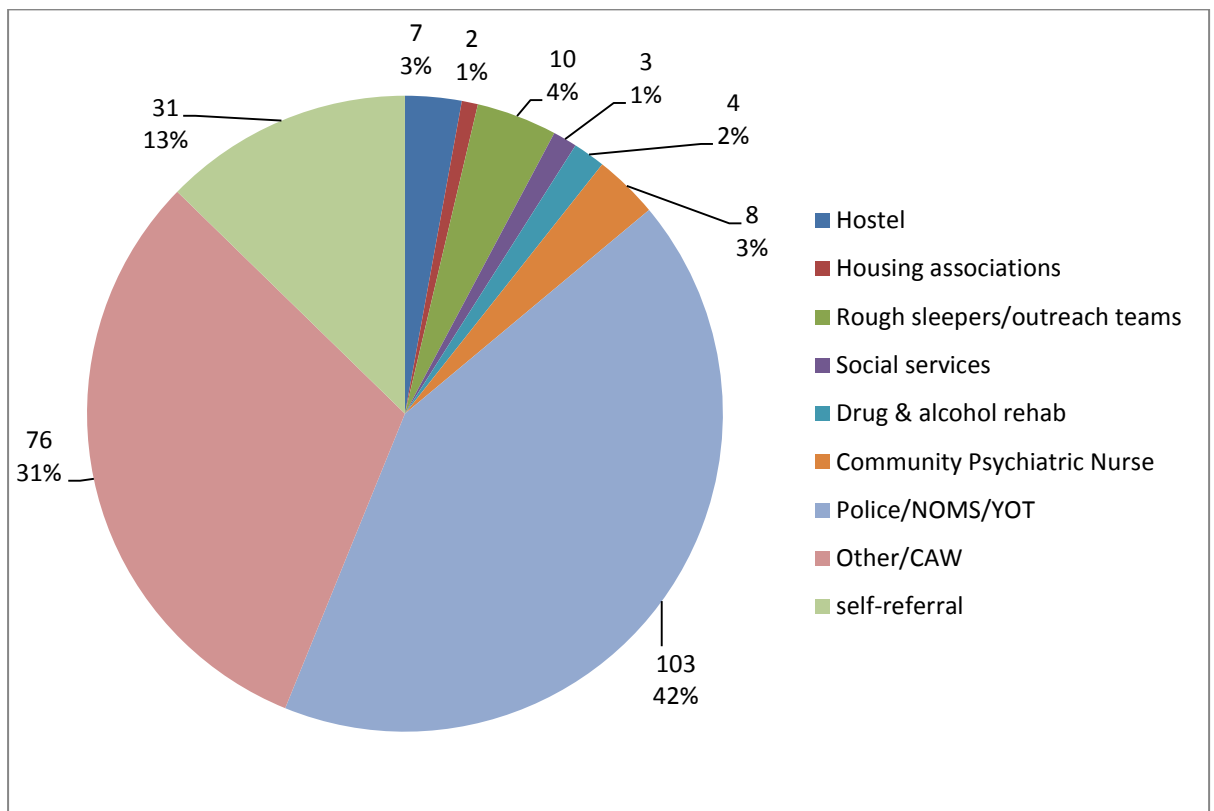


Figure 1: Sources of referrals to Chepstow House from 1 April – 31 December 2010 (figs. and %)

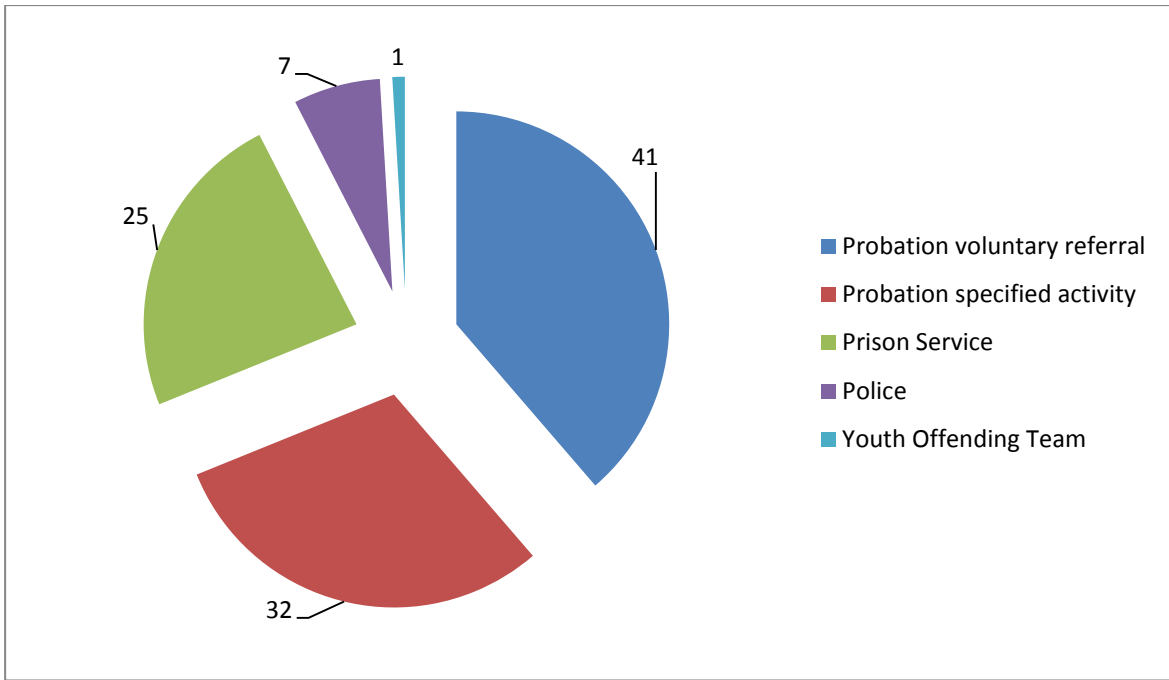


Figure 1a: Number of referrals by statutory criminal justice body (figs).

Note: the discrepancy between the total for this category in figure 1 (103 referrals) and figure1a (106 referrals) arises where a small number of initial referrals came from one source and were subsequently replaced with a specified activity order.

1. Profile of service users

Ethnic heritage

Of the 142 women who became designated customers in the 9 months under evaluation, 9 out of 10 identified themselves as being of White British heritage (94%). The other women service users identified themselves as African or African Caribbean and of dual heritage. This may be seen as consistent with the demography of the North Staffordshire area, although no customer accessing the service identified as being of Asian heritage (**Fig 2**). However, there is a more widespread risk nationally that Black and minority ethnic women (BME) might not be accessing support services. BME women are disproportionately overrepresented in the criminal justice system, and BME and overseas national women constitute the fastest growing prison population. Services for women offenders thus need to be geared towards addressing this demographic influence on service provision.

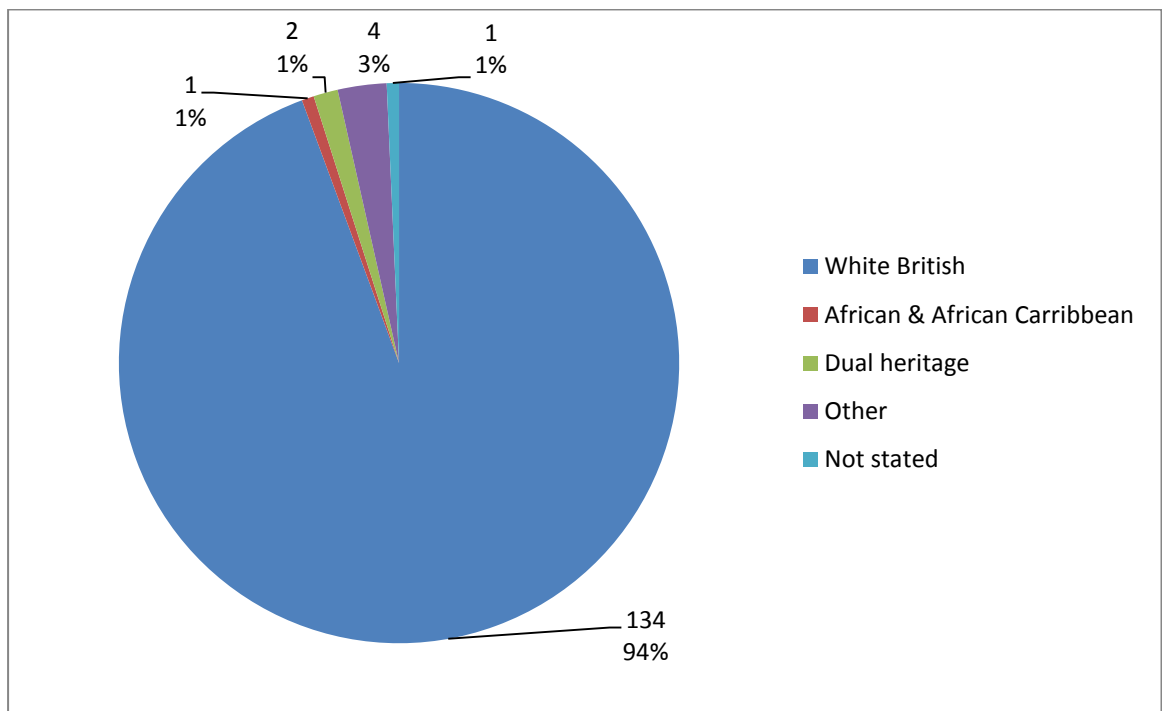


Figure 2: Service Users by Ethnicity from 1 April – 31 December 2010 (figs. and %)

Domicile of customers

The majority of service users at Chepstow House were based in the Stoke-on-Trent area with much smaller numbers being drawn from other centres in North Staffordshire (**Fig 3**). Of the 142 women who became designated „customers’, 116 had addresses in Stoke, with 14 in Newcastle, 6 in Moorlands and 6 in other areas. Chepstow House management are addressing this concentration with extensive outreach work and by providing „surgery-style’ services in facilities in satellite areas, although the latter are not well used. Nevertheless, this issue reflects wider unmet needs arising from barriers to accessibility. Chepstow House and Brighter Futures have already identified the cost of transport for women as a barrier, especially those travelling from outside of the city. Interviews with customers also raised additional reasons for preferring to access services in a recognisable, single-site centre. The first relates to the transitory lifestyles of many women offenders which leads them to move in and out of contact with criminal justice and statutory systems. The second relates to the geographical dispersal of women in the prison system, with women being returned to the Stoke area from prisons outside of the county or even region. These issues are highly relevant to future discussions about any extension of services to address unmet needs across Staffordshire.

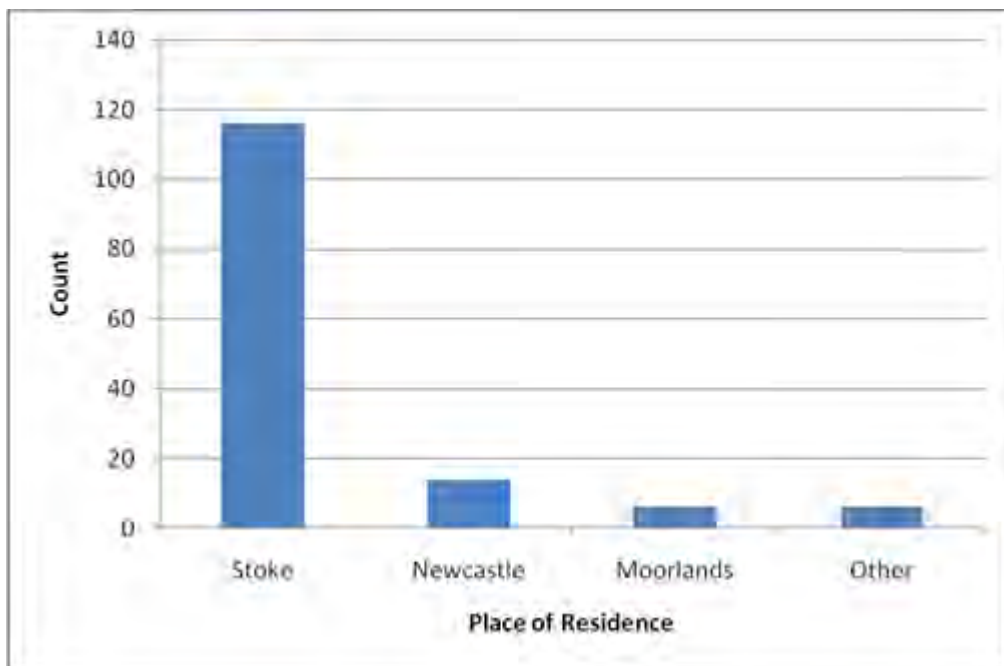


Figure 3: Geographic Origin of Service Users from 1 April – 31 December 2010

Age range of customers

Chepstow House (like all women's community projects) are only available to adult women at risk of offending, and therefore all customers are 18 years and older. The age distribution of customers accessing the service is very clearly clustered around two life stages. Of the 142 customers who gave their ages, 83 women were between 26 and 50 years of age, 50 were between 18 and 25 years, with 9 between 51 and 64 years (**Fig 4**). This age profile is consistent with research on desistance which suggests that developmental maturation plays a significant part in an offender's motivation or 'readiness' to engage with programmes designed to reduce reoffending.¹⁷

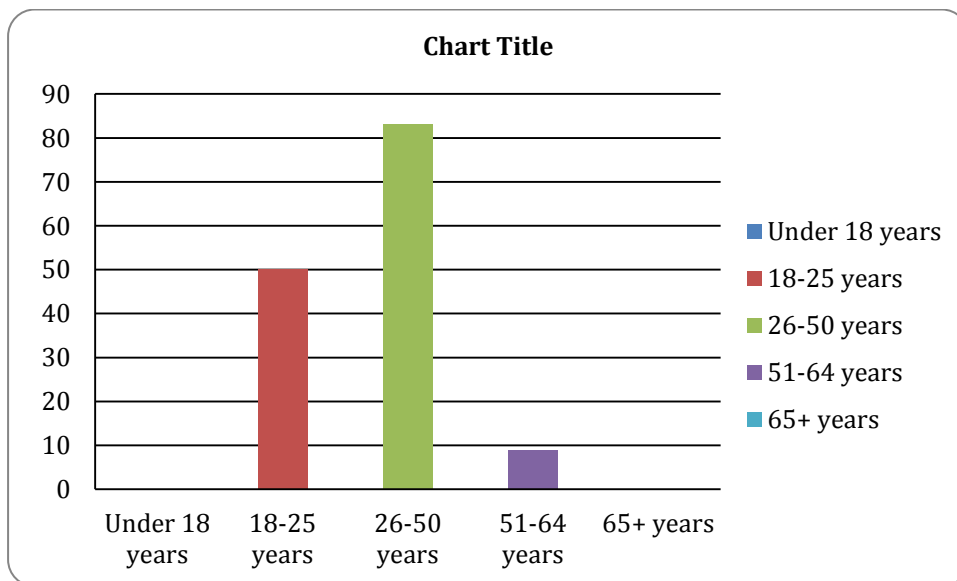


Figure 4: Service Users by Age from 1 April – 31 December 2010

¹⁷ Worrall, A. & M. Gough (2008) *Giving them back their dignity*

2. Women users' needs

The following data (**Fig 5**) represents the needs presented by women at their initial assessment. It must be noted that these figures relate to services that were accessed in response to an assessment of needs, as distinct from the number of women accessing services overall. The latter data is presented in the following sections in accordance with the requirement that only one outcome is recorded per customer. Nevertheless, an analysis of the services accessed in relation to stated need is useful because these figures record interventions in response to self-reported needs made at the point of initial assessment and review, and are therefore indicative of what women regarded as their immediate priorities. It should also be noted that:

- a) Not all women engaged in every service and some women accessed more than one service. Therefore the figures for services accessed will differ from the figure for outcomes for individual customers.
- b) The database for recording services accessed does not readily indicate whether an individual woman accessed new or different services as her needs changed. However, this function in responding to new/changed needs is intended to be taken up via assessment review.

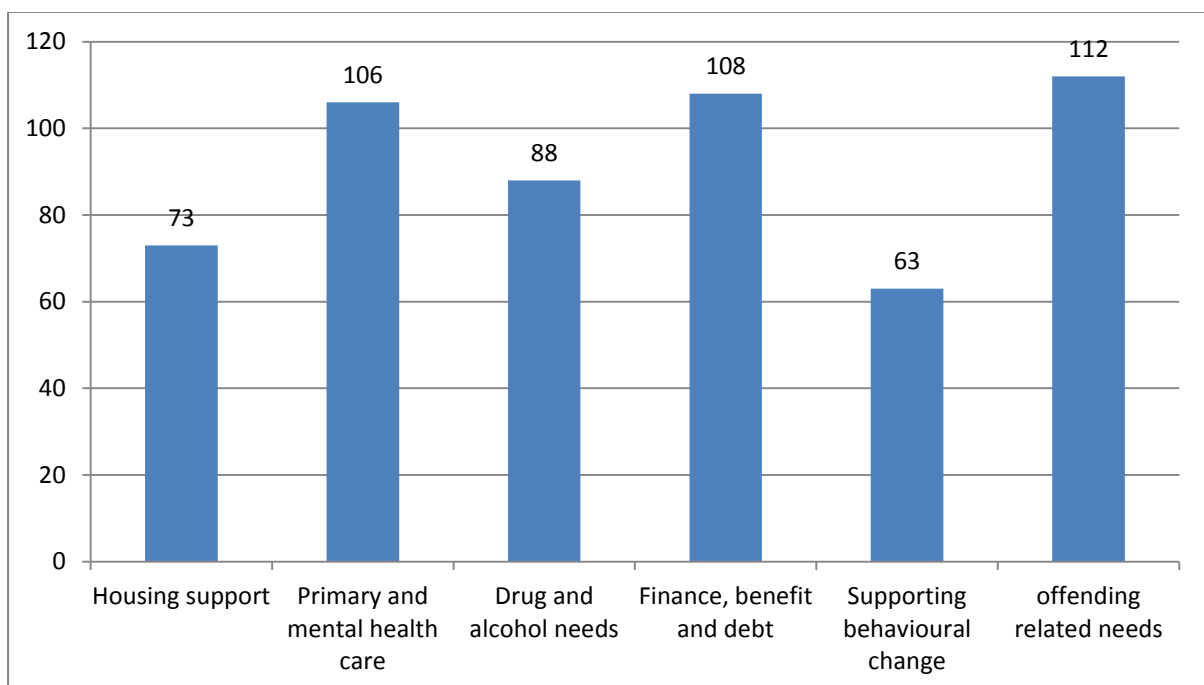


Figure 5: Needs of women customers (figs)

Identifying needs: case studies

The following case studies were taken from our random sample of 20 customer files with a view to offering a „snapshot’ of the complex personal and social situations of women offenders as well as showing the varied interventions required by service users. Although it was not our initial objective, reviewing the cases cast light on factors which are likely to facilitate or inhibit women’s motivations for staying on the programme. The narratives below also illustrate some of the triggers which prompt some women to disengage, as well as the labour- intensive work involved in supporting continued participation..

Customer K: planned exit

K was referred to Chepstow House by community addiction services. She was 30 years old and married with a three year old daughter. She had a history of chronic heroin dependency but had been stable on methadone for a year. Although she was not currently involved with the criminal justice system, K had previous convictions for soliciting and failing to attend court. She had current debts and problems with child and family wellbeing.

K wanted support with improving her skills and employability. She had already enrolled on a college course and had some recognised qualifications. Staff at Chepstow House offered a significant amount of advice and research on her behalf. They also made several enquiries to help K secure a voluntary placement. This could help K gain entry on to the more advanced level of her college course, which K also felt would help prevent future offending. Staff also helped K to find placements and courses and completing application forms. When K’s college discontinued her course due to a lack of funding, Chepstow House staff made enquiries about alternative courses.

Two months after being referred to Chepstow House, K began voluntary work. She also started a maths and English course and was accepted at another college. K also came off her methadone programme and began training with CRI (drugs and alcohol programme) to become a peer mentor.

She later passed all of her exams was offered a voluntary placement. K was therefore exited from the service as a customer so that she could begin as a volunteer, around four and a half months after her initial referral.

Customer W: exit and re-engagement

At the time of her original referral, 18 year old W was awaiting trial for assault with intent to rob. Although W had not been formally included on Chepstow House’s caseload because she had not completed the „outcome stars’, she did report multiple problems that she was seeking help for. W informed staff that she was using heroin and alcohol. She also had a history of prostitution, domestic violence and self-harming. Staff were also informed that W had previously been barred from a hostel for „bullying’ other customers and due to her „aggressive and threatening’ behaviour, W was regarded as a threat to both staff and other customers. W also had problems with her housing situation and had debt problems.

Engagement with Chepstow House was not possible after she was sentenced to six years in prison and she was exited from the programme.

Approximately 6-7 weeks later, W was referred back to Chepstow House. Her prison sentence had been significantly reduced after a successful appeal and W was now due for release within six months. Chepstow House were continuing to work with prison staff to gain contact with W despite difficulties in locating where W was (following a prison transfer), getting in contact with W and getting her to attend meetings with her key worker.

Customer F: unplanned exit

F, 36, was referred to Chepstow House by a contact at Drake Hall prison. F's engagement with Chepstow House typically involved long periods of no contact before returning to use the service. Although F initially intended to move in with her partner upon release, she fell into housing need after discovering that her partner was still using drugs and alcohol, which F was noted to be „at risk of returning to on release'. F had a history of prostitution and was considered to be at risk of returning. F wanted to use Chepstow House for general support, life skills as well as accessing other services, specifically drugs and alcohol programmes.

During the time F engaged with Chepstow House, staff repeatedly arranged accommodation for F, but she subsequently lost the bed space. F also received family support. She was contacted via letter two months after her referral about her patchy attendance and missed appointments. Shortly after this, F contacted Chepstow House „in distress' as she was unable to collect her prescription and „tempted to use'. Staff agreed that on that occasion they would provide transport for F to collect her methadone prescription. Staff explained to F that she must attend appointments as she could not use the service solely to collect her prescription. F agreed to attend both CRI (drugs and alcohol programme) and CAB. F was also warned that she must use her accommodation or lose the bed space again.

F failed to attend an arranged appointment but showed up to collect her prescription from CRI. Staff reiterated their warning that F must attend her appointments otherwise she would not be able to collect her prescription. F did not engage with the programme. Staff also discovered that F had received warnings from her GP for non-attendance at appointments (necessary in order to get her prescription). When collecting her last prescription, F was informed that it would be her final one unless she engaged with the service, but subsequent appointments were not attended and a few weeks later, F was exited from the service.

3. Services accessed

Support with economic wellbeing

Of 117 women who accessed support with finance and money management, 69 secured help with welfare claims and appeals, 45 with debt, and 3 women were placed in paid work (**Fig 6**).

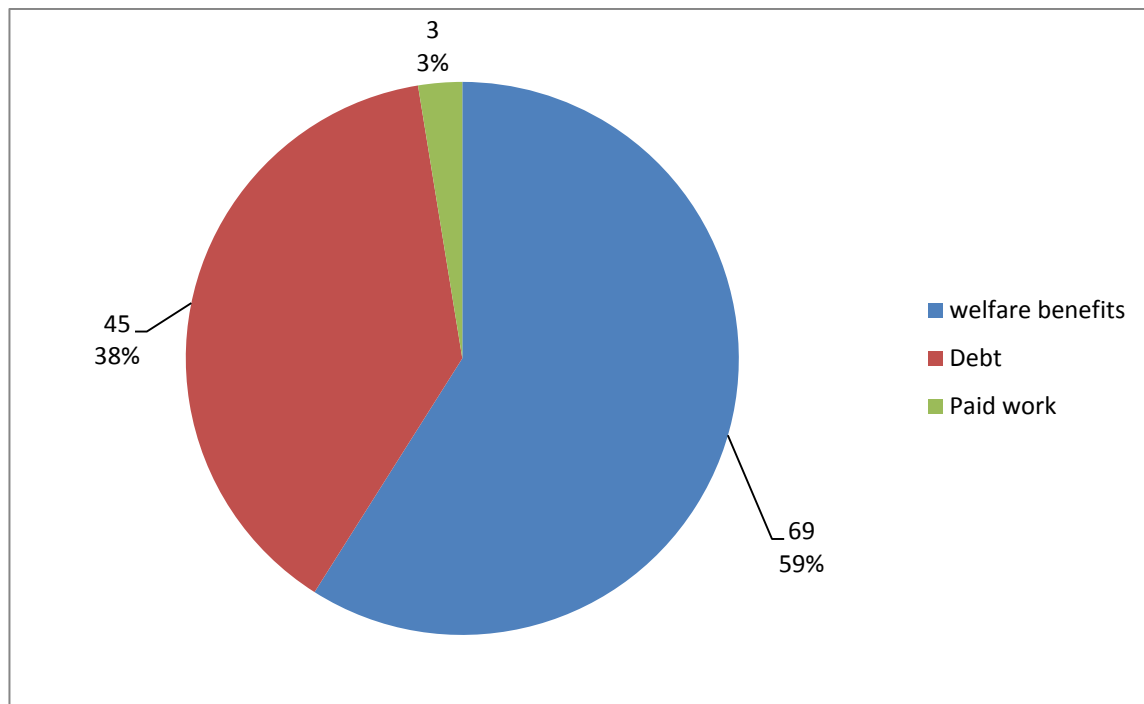


Figure 6: Support with economic wellbeing from 1 April – 31 December 2010 (figs. and %)

Health care and support with addiction

Many women in prison and under supervision have complex poly-drug and substance abuse problems that have played a major influence in their offending.¹⁸ Women offenders admit to drinking high levels of alcohol although not all acknowledge that their drinking is problematic.¹⁹ Over two-thirds of women offenders have reported illegal drug use in the year prior to custody, with almost half of respondents reporting usage of substances such as opiates or crack-cocaine. Two-thirds of women who present with a drugs dependency problem in prison receive some type of support. However, intensive drug treatment interventions, which have the highest rates of success, are generally only available to longer-term prisoners, and are thus unavailable to most women offenders who tend to serve serial, short sentences. Moreover, surveys have consistently found that continued engagement with drug treatment is crucial if positive impact is to continue. The Social Exclusion Unit²⁰ noted that follow-on care, especially for women, is inadequate. Similarly, about half of women offenders express concern that they will have difficulty staying off drugs following release from prison or probation supervision.²¹

These needs are reflected in the take up of health services at Chepstow House (**Fig 7**). Of the 129 who reported accessing health care services, 34 accessed primary health services such as the Community Nurse, with 43 and 52 women accessing mental health and drug and alcohol services respectively. Almost all of the women accessing Chepstow House had extensive histories of drugs or alcohol abuse. A large number experienced other significant physical and mental health problems with a number experiencing problems such as depression and anxiety.

Chepstow House acted as a point of access to health services. This ranged from registering customers with GP, optical and dental practices to using the initial assessments to signpost women to specialist health providers. The project also commissions drugs and alcohol, counselling complementary therapy and similar providers to work from Chepstow House on a drop-in and appointment basis. Health providers operating at Chepstow House include a Community Nurse provided by the Primary Health Care Trust; drug and alcohol advisory services are provided by ADSIS and Addaction; the Women's Service provides sexual health and personal safety advice; ARCH provides support with domestic violence. It took a number of months for customers to take up the drugs support at Chepstow House. The increased take up arose in response to feedback from customers that they would be more inclined to use the service if they could also renew their prescriptions (such as methadone treatment, for example) at Chepstow House.

¹⁸ Gelsthorpe, L., Sharpe, G. & Roberts (2007) *Provision for Women Offenders in the Community*. London: Fawcett Society.

¹⁹ Borrill, J., Maden, A., Martin, A. et al (2003) *Differential substance misuse treatment needs of women, ethnic minorities and young offenders in prison: prevalence of substance misuse and treatment needs*. London: Home Office.

²⁰ Social Exclusion Unit (2002) *Reducing Reoffending by Ex-prisoners*. London: Home Office.

²¹ Ramsey, M. Bullock, T. & S. Niven (2005) 'The Prison Service Drug Strategy: The extent to which prisoners need and receive treatment', *Howard Journal*, 44(3): 269-285.

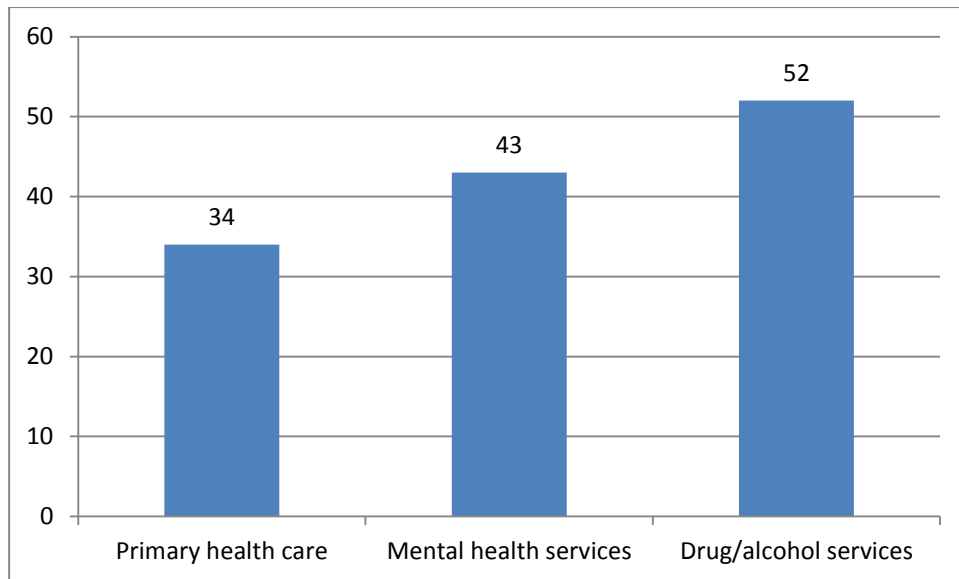


Figure 7: Health services accessed by customers 1 April – 31 December 2010 (figs).

Housing

The struggle to secure satisfactory housing is the most consistently cited reason by women offenders as barrier to resettlement, and major reviews indicate that at least a third of women in prison lose their home on imprisonment, and are likely to lose all their possessions as a result. The lack of safe and independent housing has gender-specific effects²². Not having a fixed address militates against women accessing social services, welfare or jobs, and makes it difficult to re-establish an independent relationship with their children. Many women offenders who are officially counted as being housed are in fact dependent on friends or family for temporary accommodation²³. They may be returning to abusive relationships or an environment in which drug or alcohol misuse occurs. Offenders seeking local authority housing might not meet the four main tests necessary to be housed: that they are homeless (excluding those who have a temporary address); are unintentionally homeless; are in priority need; and have a local connection. Other practical barriers include the fact that local authorities often consider prisoners (especially short term prisoners) to have made themselves intentionally homeless. Offenders may also have accrued substantial rent arrears, may have been previously evicted from their accommodation, or may be subject to a ban by social housing providers for anti-social or drug-related offences under local authority legislation.

Chepstow House supported 55 women with housing between April and December 2010. Additionally, as research indicates, it is just as important for a woman to be supported in her tenancy. Support includes helping women to secure accommodation, mediation with landlords, supporting women to move from unsafe to safe housing, or enabling women to access housing-related services. Of the 55 housing interventions, there was no report of a customer having left her accommodation without explanation, nor being excluded or asked to leave. Interviews with customers also identified the importance of support with independent living to stabilising their lifestyles.

²² Baroness J Corston. (2007) *A Review of women with particular vulnerabilities in the criminal justice system*. Home Office, London.

²³ Worrall, A. & M. Gough (2008) *Giving them back their dignity*.

Employment and skills support

The route to re-employment and participation in paid work is a gradual process requiring intensive supports. Whilst employment and occupational training offer significant opportunities for enhancing resettlement and reducing the risk of offending, it may not always be a realistic to fast-track offenders directly into employment or training as many have had no work history or are likely to lack qualifications. Most of our respondents, for example, had chequered work histories or their education had been disrupted. Very few had completed their secondary education up to the statutory minimum age applicable at the time of their schooling and most had left school with minimal or no qualifications.

Similarly, at the life skills and the employment sessions, women identified a number of barriers to re-entering the labour force. These were the lack of jobs, lack of confidence and self-esteem, the lack of skills and a perception that their skills were obsolete, especially with electronic technology and computing; health problems; lack of childcare support; poor wages; discrimination against offenders and discrimination on the grounds of age or mental health; a fear of bullying and being „found out; and being scared to go back into the workplace. The Corston Report (2007) acknowledged that that emotional literacy and life skills are lacking in the lives of many women who come into contact with the criminal justice system. That report argued that respect, developing self-confidence and personal and social relationships should form the foundation for literacy, numeracy and employability skills. For this reason, the programme at Chepstow House offers a continuum of supports from personal development to preparation for further training, education or employment.

Of the 215 participants in life skills and training activities, almost half (100) were involved in cultural, faith, leisure and informal learning activities alongside participation in the art classes (66). Of these women, 36 graduated to direct education and skills training and 13 engaged in volunteering („work like activities’) (**Fig 6**).

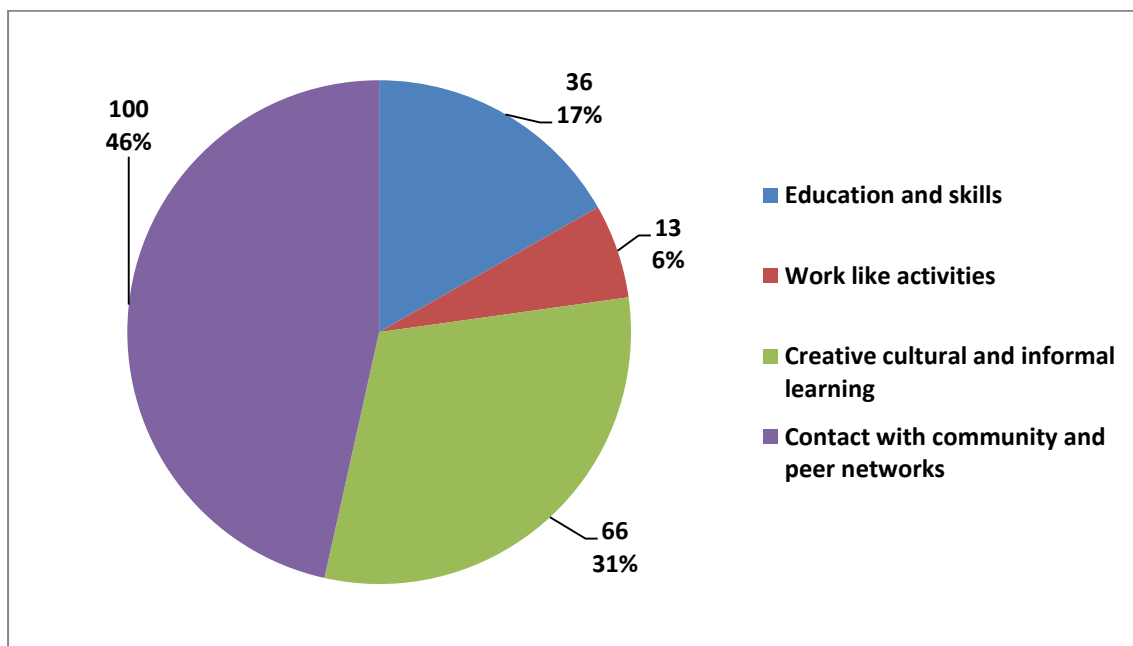


Figure 6: Life Skills and Training from 1 April – 31 December 2010 (figs. and %)

Note: The figure 215 refers to the total number of activities undertaken.

4. Exit and destinations of Chepstow House customers

The following presents data on the destinations of 59 women who passed through the programme between May 21, 2010 and January 24, 2011.

For the purposes of analysis, the journeys are recorded of women who completed the programme as well as those whose contact with the programme lapsed or became less consistent after a period. Completion applies to women who stayed the course for 12 weeks or who completed their Action Plan within that time period. This section does not analyse those women who *joined* the programme after November 2010 as they were still undertaking the programme at the time of completing the evaluation. The challenges associated with mapping attendance or engagement with groups with disorganised and chaotic lives is widely acknowledged²⁴. Therefore, providers need a frame of reference to account for „completers’, „part completers’ and „non completers’ in order to offer a fuller picture of the inputs that they have put in place to support and monitor service users.²⁵ Accordingly, we have used the exit data on women to create four categories:

- ❖ *Completion/planned exit* refers to women who regularly attended the programme at Chepstow House. This category counts those women who undertook an exit review and those who completed the programme without undertaking a formal exit review but who negotiated their next destination with staff. It also counts women who are still in regular contact with Chepstow House after exiting. There are 20 women in this category.
- ❖ *Floating support* refers to the 20 women whose contact with Chepstow House has become irregular or has stopped for the time being but whose destination is known to staff. „Floating support’ is provided for customers who no longer need or want one to one support but require ad hoc support on a regular basis. In this category, staff will have also signposted the customer to another agency if appropriate.
- ❖ *Joiners/unplanned exit* refers to women who accessed the service in a given month but who have discontinued contact with Chepstow House and whose onward destination is unknown to staff. This describes the experience with 16 women.
- ❖ *Sentenced* refers to women who have been returned to custody or received a community or custodial sentence. Three women of the 59 were sentenced to custody.

²⁴Martin, J. *et al.* (2009) „What works for women? A comparison of community-based general offending programme completion’, *British Journal of Criminology*, 49, 879-899.

²⁵ Hedderman et al (2008) *Implementing services for women offenders*, pp 18-21.

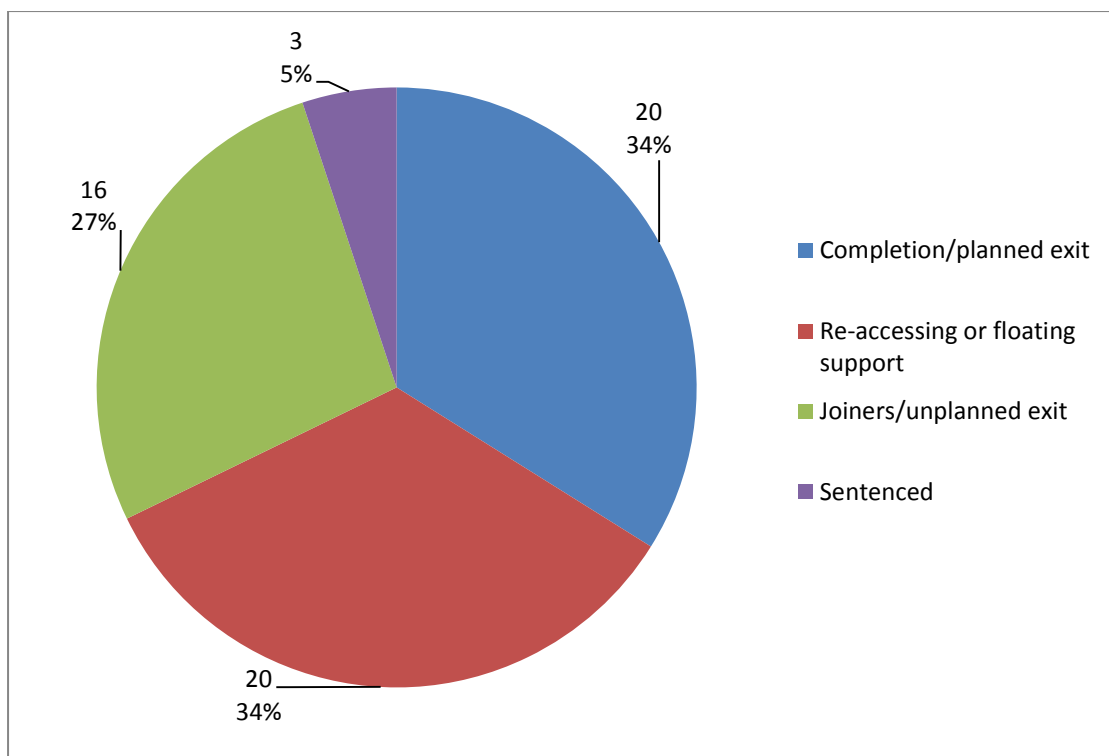


Figure 8: Exits and completions of customers May 21 2010-January 24 2011 (figs. and %)

These figures indicate that that completion rates between April-December 2010 were good (applying to one third or 20 customers). Similarly, a further one third or 20 women on „floating support’) maintained contact with the programme, but have not completed. Attrition levels (i.e. the number of women who fell away from the project) were comparatively stable (16) and 3 women were sentenced to custody.

Management at Chepstow House have identified a problem with clearing a backlog of cases which tend to cluster in the category for receiving „floating support’ only. This group tends to engage intermittently with Chepstow House. That is, they engage frequently enough to be considered to be maintaining a regular relationship with the project, but the gaps between one contact and the next means that women are not completing their Action Plan within the agreed period. It has been difficult to achieve a throughput of these customers over the desired 12 week period. Towards the end of the evaluation, staff were devising a strategy for „sustainably reducing’ this group.

The challenge of clearing backlogs or „bottlenecks’ presents Chepstow House with several options: Firstly, the project may need to review the action plans of women who have „overrun’ the 3 months engagement with a view to identifying/negotiating an exit strategy and floating support strategy with customers.

Secondly, management and staff will be able to use their data to identify an appropriate point at which an exit strategy might be explicitly raised with this group of customers. These data are quantitative records of the length of time a woman is „on the books’ alongside a review of customer assessment and case files. The statistical data for monitoring engagement and exit provide a useful tool for identifying possible points of „congestion’ in the system which will

inform further action. Additionally, there is qualitative information which would support the „on the ground’ judgment of staff in determining the appropriate timing and supports required for individual customers.

Balancing the needs of vulnerable women with supporting women in, through *and* out of the programme requires sensitive and informed judgment. The trustees and staff have articulated clear reasons as to why they do not wish to „cut off’ customers prematurely as well as why, in their view, indeterminate periods of engagement are not constructive for women in the longer term.

Similarly, the prospect of becoming more directive or prescriptive in this regard presents many voluntary sector organisations with difficult choices. There are complex challenges associated with balancing clients’ voluntary participation with engaging them in more structured requirements.²⁶ With Chepstow House, these practices are also being shaped by the nature of partnership work. The growing number of referrals with statutory requirements from probation and social services, for example, are providing statutory frameworks for engagement and compliance. It can be reasonably expected that the issues of engagement and compliance will continue to be shaped by multi-agency work given the increased number of statutory referrals to Chepstow House. It is equally legitimate to anticipate that in the process, these concerns will become areas of shared responsibility among relevant stakeholders.

Finally, it must be noted that the objectives of clarifying points of exit and engaging customers towards completion are not mutually conflicting goals. Moreover, there are valid grounds for proposing that sustaining engagement with seriously socially excluded groups, even over a prolonged period of time, might legitimately be viewed as a positive input. This discussion is taken up in the sections on supporting change and compliance (below),

6. Relationship between Chepstow House and reducing re-offending

Data on women’s reoffending in the Stoke-on-Trent during the evaluation period were examined. One source consulted was the reoffending data which is compiled quarterly by the Probation Service. At the end of each quarter, Staffordshire Probation Trust takes a "snapshot" of its probation caseload. The offenders on the probation caseload at this time are then matched to the Ministry of Justice copy of the Police National Computer. Offenders are tracked over a three-month period to determine whether they have committed any further offences, with a further three months allowed for convictions to be secured. The rates of reoffending for each area are then compared with the headline national measure (frequency of reoffending) which counts the number of offences (per 100 offenders)

The reportable data from the Ministry of Justice shows that the rate of re-offending for females from April to July 2010 had very much improved. Whereas the preceding quarter had seen an increase in reported offending by women by a figure above the headline national measure, this decreased to a figure firmly below the headline national measure. It is too early to draw firm inferences as to any positive effects of Chepstow House, as this period measured

²⁶ Gibbs, A. (1996) „Probation Service Users as Volunteers in Partnership Projects’, *Probation Journal*, 43, 142-146.

coincides with the first quarter of the programme. Moreover, Specified Activity orders only came into effect in August, although voluntary referrals were made before August. However, discussions with Probation Service stakeholders indicate that they are of the view that Chepstow House is exerting a positive effect. Moreover, no other major initiative for women offenders was introduced during the period which might account for any changes in offending.

As authorisation to publish the local statistics has not been secured from the Ministry of Justice, we can only discuss reoffending rates by reference to existing, publicly available data. Accordingly, the local figures have been cross-referenced with the Local Adult reoffending statistics which are publicly available on the Ministry of Justice website.²⁷

Probation referrals, Specified Activity Requirements and compliance

Since August 2010, it has been possible for local magistrates to impose Specified Activity Requirements at Chepstow House to run in tandem with a Supervision Requirement as part of a Community Order. This facility was developed by Staffordshire Probation Area together with the Justices' Clerks at Fenton Magistrates' Court. The Requirement consists of 16 sessions:

- 2 introductory/ assessment sessions
- 10 sessions once per week engaged in the Life Skills programme at Chepstow House
- 2 sessions for other appointments such as with CAB and community nurse
- 2 sessions of choice

By 31 December 2010, Staffordshire Probation Area made a total of approx. 70 referrals to Chepstow House, of which 32 were specified activities and the remainder voluntary. Staffordshire Probation Area tracked the progress of all women referred by them to Chepstow House. The following data shows the type of intervention offered by Chepstow House. The probation data also record findings on possible relationships between compliance/engagement with Chepstow House and reoffending. These data show a positive relationship between compliance and engagement and reduced reoffending. (It is important to note that these categories are not mutually exclusive, so the numbers do not „add up’ and only tentative conclusions can be drawn. See the concluding discussion on the problems of data collection).

Probation referrals April-December 2010	referred	reoffended
Total probation referrals	70	19
Refused service	18	7
One to one & floating support	31	4
Compliant and engaged	39	5
Disengaged/non compliant	18	7

Table 1: Probation referrals to Chepstow House, April-December 2010.

²⁷ Ministry of Justice (2011) *Local Adult Reoffending 1st July 2009 - 30th June 2010 England and Wales*, published on the Ministry of Justice website in November 2010. <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/local-adult-reoffending.htm>. Accessed February 14 2011

Staffordshire and West Midlands Probation Trust is one of the best performing Trusts in the country in respect of reducing re-offending (Senior Probation Manager). Nevertheless, it recognises that some of the highest re-offending rates are among women serving short (under 12 month) prison sentences, who are not currently reached by Probation. The development of Chepstow House has stimulated discussion within the Trust about provision for this group:

We are looking in the Trust at maybe providing something now [for this group]. We are talking about it because we recognise that the re-offending rate is very high. But we don't get any financial contribution to do that work, but we are looking to see if we can provide something, like a sign-posting service, which Chepstow House is ideal for females (Senior Probation Manager).

Outcomes: Impact of Chepstow House

1. Accessibility of Chepstow House programme

Outreach work

It was evident from talking to women, workers and stakeholders that those accessing services at Chepstow House were frequently from the hard-to-reach groups of women that the project was intended to target. An outstanding feature of Chepstow House is the depth of the outreach activities by staff, which enabled them to access „hard-to-reach’ women who may have fallen through gaps in existing social services. One example was the work with the Rough Sleepers team to reach homeless women. Staff routinely used simple but effective techniques for encouraging customers to keep in contact, such as sending text messages as „reminders’ prior to appointments. This helped to establish trust and engagement with the programme. Another important development was the reputation that Chepstow House developed through word of mouth „on the street’ among potential service users. This was one customer’s experience:

I asked somebody else about it, and another one turned round and said to me, ‘it’s a women’s project. They help women with criminal problems, drug addiction, alcohol addiction and things like that’ ... And so about two or three months ago, I came to Chepstow House because I was wondering if there was any possibility they could give me any help or support. So I knocked on the door and asked them and they invited me in and sat me down with one of the workers, and they went through all the paperwork and had a chat to me...I’ve been here since (Customer „A’).

Sustaining support via the one-stop-shop model at Chepstow House

In addition to optimising women’s *access* to the service, women’s community projects are designed to facilitate an easy transition from one service to another. This objective is consistent with the requirements of the *Reducing Reoffending: National Action Plan* (2004) which emphasises the need for „holistic’ and „joined’ up services that address the substantial and interlinked problems in offenders’ lives. At Chepstow House, many of the women customers were struggling with multiple and complex problems including drug and alcohol dependencies, mental health difficulties, exposure to personal risks, and a range of self-harming behaviours. They reported having had little in the way of support networks. Because of the complexity of their problems, it seemed that agencies had tended to shift women from one to another, resulting in feelings of frustration and isolation.

Customers commented very positively on the comprehensiveness of services and advantages of providing one route through a myriad of social agencies. Single site provision enables more inclusive access to social services because of the convenience of reaching one site, and because women access information on a range of services about which they did not previously have knowledge. Women exiting from prison found the „one-stop-shop’ model particularly helpful. This ex-prisoner also captured the view of customers more generally that the flexibility and responsiveness she received at Chepstow House is of a different quality than help from statutory agencies:

They really settled me, really, „cos I've never had nothing like that when I've got out of prison before. Everywhere I've tried - they support but not like this. It's somewhere you can phone up, like yesterday, I just dropped on [my case worker]. I was moaning „cos I'd got nowhere go, and she sorted it. Whereas the other places I've worked with, it would be like, “come in two weeks and we'll phone here and ...” I've had to wait three days, that's all. That's not much is it when you drop in on somebody saying you've got nowhere to go? (Customer B).

2. User-led services

Chepstow House put the principle of user-led services into operation in several ways. User-led approaches can be broadly defined as moving away from provider-led, identical services towards „personalised' services. This entails providing a mix of core services with specialist services based on women's needs. Secondly, support workers worked together with customers to devise an Action Plan, in the belief that service users were more likely to engage if they were encouraged to exercise ownership and responsibility over their choices. Initial assessments were also intended to be periodically reviewed with service users in order to identify changed or new needs and to tailor services accordingly. Thirdly, additional services were added to the programme in response to demand from customers, and in recognition of the fact that their needs changed as women progressed through the programme.

Confidence building

Chepstow House places the building up of personal skills, self-esteem and confidence at the centre of its strategy for supporting women. Most women access the life skills and creative arts courses, which provide core self-developmental skills. This provides a route to other services as women gain in confidence and skills and seek out help with training or employment, for example. Confidence building seems to be an important step towards achieving further goals. One customer explained her decision to return to further education:

Just the thought of going back into a schooling environment scares me, and coming here has given me the confidence I need and it's given me all the stuff I needed to know, back in my head, so that I can go out and do what I want to do with my life (Customer A).

Motivational interviewing

Confidence building is supported by actively involving customers in assessing their needs and setting goals. The support worker uses motivational interview techniques to guide customers towards making realistic assessments of their choices and supporting positive plans for themselves. Each woman assessed at Chepstow House has an individually agreed support plan based on an Outcomes Star assessment model. The Outcomes Star model assesses individual's needs against 10 areas,²⁸ assessing each area against a ten-point scale, with each point of the scale coinciding with a particular level of behaviour or attitude. The method is meant to allow customers to reflect on their progress and to come to an agreed „contract' with staff as to what goes into their action plan:

²⁸ The 10 areas of need are: motivation and responsibility; self-care and living skills; managing money; personal administration; social networks and relationships; drug and alcohol misuse; physical, emotional and mental health; meaningful use of time; managing tenancy & accommodation; offending.

The Outcome Star - which is our action plan - purposely asks the ladies what do they want to do, how do they want to go about it, when do they want this action completed by, and things like that? The thinking behind that is, if you decide what your own needs are, and you decide your own action plan, you're much more likely to engage with it. There's no point coming to a service where we say "You need this, this and this", that may not be their priority at that time (Chepstow House support worker).

Assessment and progress reviews which rely extensively on user self-reports have notable limitations. Clients may not engage with it, may not understand the instrument or may resist the invitation to decide their own level of confidence or progress for the different categories for various reasons. Our observations and interviews found that in some cases, women did not appear to fully understand the outcome star. Others found the process to be overly long and/or repetitive and the questions and paperwork were perceived as daunting. This was particularly apparent in cases where customers appeared to have a learning disability or were unable to read the information provided on the outcome star.

Role of Staff

Staff at Chepstow House comprised employees of Brighter Futures and those seconded from Gingerbread and CAB. Most employees had previously worked with Brighter Futures affiliate organisations, and this was considered to have facilitated strong cohesion among the team and their ability to get the project up and running quickly. Brighter Futures has a conscious policy of employing former „customers' as employees and volunteers within their organisations. None of the staff had previous experience of working with criminal justice agencies, although many had worked with client groups who had engaged with the courts, prison and probation systems. Staff had received training in domestic violence, mental health awareness, cultural diversity and so forth, but were interested in pursuing more criminal justice specific training. Staff said that they could approach their employer for further training if they identified a need.

3. Family Support

Family and other close relationships are frequently noted as an area of concern for women offenders and the process of imprisonment can have a severe and damaging effect on existing relationships²⁹. But relationships are damaged not only whilst women are in prison. Many women received into custody arrive with fractured and fragile social and emotional relationships and studies have highlighted that experiences in past relationships can be identified as a significant factor in their pathway to offending³⁰. So it cannot be assumed that keeping women out of prison will of itself ensure healthy family relationships. Many women in the community need help in re-building close relationships. At Chepstow House this entails working with women at two levels. Firstly, women can work with the family support case worker on issues such as family intervention or custody applications. Secondly, they can participate on the *parenting* support programme which addresses intergenerational problems with addiction, crime, violence and other harmful patterns. The initial programme,

²⁹ Baroness J Corston. (2007) *A Review of women with particular vulnerabilities in the criminal justice system*. Social Exclusion Unit (2002) *Reducing Reoffending by Ex-prisoners*, London, Home Office

³⁰ Worrall, A. & M. Gough (2008) *Giving them back their dignity*.

Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities was adopted until January 2011, when a new programme was introduced by the same providers. Supporting families programmes are:

„based on how you were brought up, what your values and principles were that you’ve brought from your family life, and then [asking] „Is this what you want to take in to your family life? Or do you want to change that? Do you want to start your own culture?’ We work through behaviours, how they were chastised as children, and how they are chastising their children and then giving them tips and hints of how to do alternatives of actually bringing up children, to be positive role models and that to their children’ (Parenting support provider, Chepstow House).

Chepstow House is recognized by social services as a valid support mechanism where Child Protection Plans or care requirements have been put in place for mothers seeking to regain custody of children. CHINs (Child in Need Plan) have also been put in place which allow mothers to have custody of their children as long as they engage with Chepstow House.

Family Support	Details
Number of families	81
Lone parent families	70
Children under 5 years	61
Children 5-11 years	71
Children 12+ years	58
Total children supported	190

Table 2: Families and children supported by Chepstow House from 1 April – 31 December 2010

4. How is the Chepstow House programme addressing the gender gap in service provision for women offenders and those at risk of (re)offending?

Chepstow House is the only one-stop service for women at risk of offending in North Staffordshire, facilitating gender-specific and women-centred service provision as required in by the *Equalities Act 2006* and the *National Service Framework for Improving Services to Women Offenders 2008*. Moreover, the existence of Chepstow House can be partly attributed to a widely held recognition among stakeholder agencies that there is a lack of facilities for women offenders in North Staffordshire. One senior local government commissioner noted that policy initiatives such as reducing offending did not adequately address women initially:

Re-offending was a priority in Stoke-on-Trent as we were deemed as one of the worst authorities in the country for dealing with re-offending. So it was deemed that we would need to invest money in to that area ... I did actually say, „So what happens to provision for women in the City?’, and then that was when I was actually given some information about the work that had gone into Chepstow House. I then made it my point to go up to Chepstow House (Stakeholder A).

A stakeholder from the police services noted that Stoke-on-Trent has been historically disadvantaged by a lack of facilities which have been available to women in other parts of the country:

I think it’s a great resource that has been long overdue in this City. There’s much more resources for females in Manchester... It was happening in Manchester fifteen years ago (Stakeholder B).

Staff working directly with women offenders commented that mainstream services fail to address women’s distinctive and different needs as offenders and as victims:

We’ve been aware for some time of a need for specialist provision for women offenders. Acting singly as a service we’ve never been able, in terms of our direct provision based on the level of need we were aware of, to justify taking a specialist approach to work with women offenders. But we were aware of some opportunities in the resettlement arena, through working with other agencies and when this proposal came along, we were very happy to support it (Stakeholder C).

5. How is the work at Chepstow House supporting personal change among women offenders?

In response to the question, „Has Chepstow House made any difference to your life?’, one woman described a turning point in coping with an abusive partner:

A few weeks ago, one of our life skills classes was about positive relationships, and they were saying all the things that make a bad relationship and all the things that make a positive relationship. Then I started the Freedom Project as well, the stuff we’ve looked at in that work. I look at it and I think, “You know, a lot of that is him, and it’s not right” (Customer A).

Another spoke about having developed sufficient skills and confidence to move on to education and training:

I'd rather help myself, so to speak, and this place is supporting me with that. It's supporting me with my higher education, helping me to find college courses. It's got the groups that I'm going to be certificated for, once I complete them, which also helps. I'd like to come into either this kind of work or drug awareness work, and I'll be able to volunteer here, if it's still here in a year and I keep myself on the straight and narrow (Customer F).

At present, only a few women have completed the programme, but already women have reflected on lessons learned or on the fact that some have left difficult chapters of their lives behind.

One customer, who is working to reunite her family, commented:

I want to better myself. I want to have that chance to have a decent life so that when they come back, I've got something to be proud of, something to show them what I've done with my life since they were taken away (Customer A).

Another woman identified the importance of the structured routine at Chepstow House for providing opportunities to change her lifestyle and find alternative friendship networks:

Well it is important for me because, what it is with me, it's my time. If I've got nothing to do I'll go and see my old friends again and I've got to change all that. I've got to, I've got to (Customer J).

6. How is Chepstow House supporting compliance with the programme?

The problems connected with ensuring compliance with programmes, especially community-based programmes for offenders, are widely acknowledged. Participants may stop attending programmes or attend irregularly. They may fail to engage positively with programmes. These problems apply both to programmes where participants are voluntary as well as compulsory, e.g. as part of a sentence provision.³¹

Chepstow House staff use a number of practices for supporting attendance and engagement. These can be summarised as; (a) recognising that many women's lifestyles are disordered; (b) maintaining contact with women between appointments; (c) flexibly accommodating 'gaps' or 'absences' by resuming continuity in their work with women where possible.

In order to optimise contact with women, it is standard practice at Chepstow House for staff to follow up sessions with letters outlining what took place or reminding women of referrals with other agencies. Similarly, staff routinely send messages such as texts or mobile phone calls as reminders/prompts to customers if they are due for a class or an appointment. Staff

³¹ Delaney, M. & C. Milne (2002) „Mentoring for Young Offenders - results from an Evaluation of a Pilot Program', Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, Sydney.

Gibbs, A. (1996) „Probation Service Users as Volunteers in Partnership Projects', *Probation Journal*, 43, 142-146.

Martin, J. *et al.* (2009) „What works for women? A comparison of community-based general offending programme completion', *British Journal of Criminology*, 49, 879-899

exchange information on „no-showers’ with relevant key workers in other agencies, for example, at their accommodation, with their probation officer or drugs or alcohol advisor, where appropriate:

You’ve got to consider the chaotic lifestyle of a lot of the women who come through the project. A lot of them have got other things going on. I usually phone everybody the day before. I’ll send them a text message and everybody’s texting me back now instead of everybody ignoring me! I’m getting loads of messages saying „I’m really sorry I can’t come, I’ve got a cold’, or, „I’m really sorry this has happened’, or, „I promise I’ll come next week’, and that seems really positive (Staff, Chepstow House).

Women may also seem to „break off’ contact with Chepstow House even when staff are working with them on difficult legal or appeal systems. Staff sometimes accompany customers to referrals at their request, especially if they involve difficult meetings with family intervention panels, housing authorities or benefits appeals. One advisor explained how women can be put off pursuing appeals even with specialist help, and how she tries to encourage customers to resume appointments:

For example, the most common thing that happens here is somebody’s Employment Support Allowance has been turned down, and they have a month in which to put in an appeal, and currently appeals are taking up to a year to be heard! Sometimes I do [advice sessions] in two one-hour slots. I had a girl the other week ... and she had a slot but didn’t turn up. So it’s difficult for them to get a bit of extra money which the government says they’re entitled to. And obviously, if they can’t be bothered or it’s all too difficult, they’re going to find money by other means, aren’t they? (Seconded staff member, Chepstow House).

Staff have been praised for the way in which they provide speedy feedback to other agencies:

I think a lot of outside agencies struggle with how speedily we want feedback and the nature of that feedback [but Chepstow House] got the hang of how quickly we’re working and why we need that feedback almost instantaneously (Stakeholder D).

Whilst lapses in attendance might be negatively measured as a lack of engagement with a programme, our research has revealed more complex factors underlying women’s attendance. Apparently „patchy’ attendance might be seen in a more positive light as evidence of women’s determination to turn up despite obstacles. Customers report having „pushed themselves’ to turn up for appointments or classes even if they are feeling emotionally fragile, or experiencing after-effects of medication. Some women report that they have to get outside the home to attend Chepstow House against the wishes of controlling or manipulative partners or family members. Therefore, practices which flexibly support customers to „cross the threshold’ seem to contribute to their positively engaging with the programme.

7. How is the work at Chepstow House creating a wider impact on the community?

Addressing social exclusion

Partnerships such as those supporting Chepstow House contribute to the wider social good at a number of levels.³² Firstly, the programme addresses social exclusion in a direct and practical way by enabling women to access social resources and services such as health services (mental or physical); programmes to support addiction/dependency; housing; debt; and coping with violent/coercive intimates.

Addressing social isolation

Secondly, programmes can be important sources of help with personal or social isolation. Social isolation is brought about by loss of family contact; addiction; crime; ill-health and experience of violence/coercion. Customer M reported on the steady building up of her social confidence and skills:

Chepstow helps me through interacting in little groups, socialising... it helps me in a lot of ways, like with self-esteem, talking about how we feel. Those papers, questionnaires (in the life skills programme), it was hard for me to do, but I've done it.

Paid and voluntary work.

The work at Chepstow House encourages community engagement and participation. In turn, this contributes to a wider „social dividend’ by increasing community understanding of, or participation in, supporting offenders. For example, Chepstow House offers customers opportunities to work in the project as volunteers after completing the programme. While on the programme, women are encouraged to become involved in community projects. This is producing numerous personal and well as social advantages:

I join in with the projects that they're doing, if I can. We're doing one at Northwood Park at the moment, and I joined what is called Barefoot Doctors, which is an art workshop in Newcastle that is doing this project. It's in conjunction with the Observatory and Barefoot Doctors. [I] got involved with what's going on with that because it's great! Because I'm meeting people, I'm socialising, I don't isolate, you know, „cos that's a big trigger for me, to isolate (Customer N).

Volunteering offers many intrinsic benefits as well as providing initial preparation for future training and employment. Research findings indicate that volunteering for former prisoners and offenders can generate both primary and secondary benefits. Taylor's³³ study of women offenders in volunteering found that all of her respondents had gained self-confidence and a more positive outlook on their future life-chances. Volunteering had helped them gain a sense of identity and, in some cases, forge a newest of aspirations for themselves.

³² Boydell, L, Hoggett, P., Rugkasa, J., Cummins, A. (2008) „Intersectoral Partnerships, the Knowledge Economy and Intangible Assets’. *Policy and Politics*, 36 (2) 209-224.

³³ Taylor, C. (2008) *Volunteering for All? A Qualitative Study of Women Ex-offenders' Experiences of Volunteering*, Griffins Society: London.

Almost all customers attending the programme expressed aspirations to become economically independent and financially more secure. The Jobs and Enterprises Training Scheme (JETS) sessions delivered at Chepstow House were very well subscribed to. Some were using volunteering to gain experience and increase their chances of gaining employment in the future.

Organisations that engage offenders as volunteers must provide appropriate supports. Specifically, they should have experience with working with offenders; implement clear policies for addressing potential discrimination against persons with criminal convictions; and hold regular support and supervision sessions with volunteers.³⁴ The evaluators noted positively that Brighter Futures fulfils some of these criteria. It also has a policy of employing former „customers’ as paid workers and volunteers within their organisation (reflecting its user-led ethos). For example some paid staff and volunteers at Chepstow House had applied for their posts from affiliate agencies within the Brighter Futures organisation.

Providing peer support and new support networks.

Women attending Chepstow House spoke about the importance of peer support and recognition of sharing similar past experiences. One woman spoke of the isolation she experienced because of mental ill health and the reassurance she received from being able to meet and talk about her circumstances with women with similar experiences:

I know what they’re (other women) saying, and they know what I’m saying. We know what mental (ill) health is. Because when you talk to people who haven’t got it, they think we’re off our heads. I was talking to a woman who came to a class last week ... and everything what she was saying happened to her happened to me, and whatever I said happened to her. So, we both knew it. (Customer M).

Providing an appropriate environment

Numerous stakeholders have commented very positively on the high standard of the facilities for women which are provided at Chepstow House, and its positive impact in providing a secure environment for women with numerous and complex needs.

A police officer commented that providing a good physical environment for vulnerable and offending women sets the right tone for working with them with sensitivity and respect:

I think Chepstow is a lovely environment, and the environment, you know, sets a standard to say what you’re going to give to the women. You know, “we value you enough to offer you ... the opportunity to work with us, but actually the environment in which we work, and we want you to be part of, is of a high standard”. I think that gives people value and worth to say, “Actually, this is a lovely place to come”. It sends out the message to women: “I may be at risk of offending, I may misuse drugs or I may have offended before, but actually what this environment is saying to me is that I’m

³⁴ Taylor, C. (2008) *Volunteering for All?* pp57-58.

still valued as a person and worth somewhere”, because I think sometimes that can be missed.

Customers and stakeholders were also positive about the physical environment of Chepstow House, which they found to be „pleasant’, „homely’, „inviting’, „comfortable’ and „not prison-like at all’. In return, the women appeared to respect their surroundings and made the effort to maintain this by clearing away dirty cups and plates and other mess after various sessions. They also valued the security of Chepstow and the fact that it is a women-only space, as well as the fact that it is a drug and alcohol-free environment:

I know that there won’t be any triggers here for me, „cos that’s what I’ve got to be careful of, you know... So I just really enjoy coming, it’s so comfortable, you know and it’s very safe for me (Customer N).

Chepstow House is less intimidating to get to. One customer had previously visited some of the addiction services at other locations and had to walk past or close to areas frequented by drug dealers and where alcohol was being openly consumed. She also reported that these services were disrupted by male service users who had become drunk and aggressive. Chepstow House offered much calmer and secure surroundings.

I’ve just come out of prison [...] it’s like out into the big wide world [...] and it’s just like having that security knowing that I can come somewhere safe (Customer P)

8. What contribution is the Chepstow House project making to reducing offending/risk of offending

The research has used the concept of „desistance’ to observe whether the availability of services such as Chepstow House can contribute to reducing offending in its wider sense through supporting women at risk of offending. Desistance is most likely to occur where offenders are supported in stabilising family and peer relationships; improving economic and social opportunities, and increasing their human and social capital.³⁵ By using these criteria and tracking the social and personal *distance women have travelled* while attending Chepstow House, there is emerging evidence that the support the women receive is contributing towards a reduced likelihood of (re)offending. For example, it is possible to track the social and personal distance a customer has travelled with regards to changing behaviour, such as gaining greater awareness of their health needs or reducing their drug or alcohol use:

They have helped me with my drinking. I drink now, but not a lot, I used to drink really a lot. I’m not as bad now (Customer D)

Other women observed how the positive changes they have made have been validated by supportive peer group/family networks:

³⁵ Farrall, S. (2004) „Social capital and offender reintegration: making probation desistance focused’ in S. Maruna and R Immarigeon (eds) *After Crime and Punishment: Pathways to Offender Reintegration*. Willan: Cullompton.
McNeill, F. (2005) „Towards a Desistance Paradigm for Probation Practice’ *Criminal Justice Special Issue*.

Other people have noticed changes. They've said how much I've changed, how different I am since coming here, that I seem to have more confidence and more direction in life now to before. I mean, I can see a change in myself to a degree, but seeing it from somebody else's perspective... It's just like everything I've done is so much more satisfying and it stays in my head more because I know that they can see a difference, not just me (Customer A).

Attendance at Chepstow House also supported women to move away from harmful relationships and peer influences. As one customer commented:

Chepstow House did have me somewhere sorted, but my partner has kept on and on and on [saying] "I'm clean, I'm clean, I'm clean". I gets there yesterday, she was totally off her head. I walked in [my] flat, the flat was full of them so I just walked out! I would have stayed there but it was obvious what was going to happen. I was just going to go straight down that road again and I don't want it this time. But I think if I didn't know I'd got the support of [my case worker at CH], then I think I would have stayed (Customer J).

9. Supporting change: stakeholders' perspectives

On the whole, stakeholders from statutory agencies saw numerous opportunities for embedding a multi-agency partnership approach. Staffordshire Probation Area has demonstrated a clear commitment to Chepstow House in a number of ways and has confirmed its importance within the Stoke-on-Trent Safer Cities Reducing Re-offending Action Plan:

Chepstow House, why I think it's very important, is because I see this as contributing to that [the Safer Cities Reducing Re-offending Action Plan], particularly. We've been aware for some time of a need for specialist provision for women offenders. Acting singly as a service we've never been, in terms of our direct provision [and] based on the level of need we were aware of, to justify taking a specialist approach to work with women offenders. But, we were very happy to support [Chepstow House] in terms of ensuring that the sorts of services that we were commissioning were appropriately sensitive to the needs of women offenders, and delivering better services at the end of the day (Senior Probation Manager).

Chepstow House is regarded as a valuable resource for stakeholders working with prolific and other priority offenders

Chepstow House is obviously a key intervention that links into what they call the seven pathways of offending...Well actually the 8 pathways (sic) that Chepstow House has, because obviously they have the working girl element (Police).

Additionally, working with Chepstow House offers opportunities to develop conjoined approaches to working with prolific and challenging offenders which combines persuasion and enforcement. One stakeholder who works with prolific offenders noted:

We want to challenge these individuals ... to go to them and say, 'Look, what's the problem? Why haven't you gone? How can we assist that? How can we get you there?'. It's not just beating them with the enforcement stick, it's also jumping on an opportunity really. Chepstow House got the hang of how quickly we're working and why we need that feedback almost instantaneously (Prolific and priority offenders stakeholder)

Stakeholders generally took the view that reducing offending entails distinct processes which comprise shorter-term and longer-term trajectories. In the shorter term, change should be observable in individuals as a consequence of community supervision or engagement in programmes. However, stakeholders emphasised the longer-term commitment needed to exert a sustained impact on offenders:

Actually the rewards you could be seeing in 10, 15 or 20 years time. With offenders, it's not a short, quick hit. We can't put a couple of weeks work with them and turn that person's life around. We're talking about long-term commitment to get them sustained, support in place, and OK, we might be working with them for however many years, it could be 12 months, 18 months, but that's in order to prepare them for when we're not there behind them (Stakeholder, police).

10. How is Chepstow House contributing to the wider objective of the partnership between statutory and other stakeholder agencies to reduce (re) offending or the risk of (re)offending?

It is evident from its first year of operation that Chepstow House has the potential to fulfil certain wider policy objectives. Specifically, these are its appropriateness for diverting from custody and reducing reoffending. Additionally, there is the potential for appropriately transferring the one-stop-shop model/good practice with women to other offender groups. Chepstow House demonstrates the relevance of partnerships that are capable of responding to particular local and regional social landscapes.

Transferability

This evaluation found a number of the potentially positive outcomes of meeting the specific needs of service users, in this case, women offenders. The gender equality duty is based on the principle of 'treating diversity equally' as distinct from 'treating diverse groups in the same way'. Thus it provides a clear obligation on public service providers to address *both* a lack of services for particular groups *and* to ensure that 'mainstream' provision does not exclude certain groups (by not addressing particular needs, for example). This need to balance general with specific provision is relevant to the issue of the transferability of programmes such as Chepstow House to other groups (young offenders, drug offenders, male offenders, offenders with mental health needs, etc).

Chepstow House shares a number of important characteristics with programmes that support desistance more generally among other offender groups. On the basis of this evaluation, we can make the tentative observation that there are no evident reasons, from the perspective of policy or from a criminological analysis of desistance, why the one-stop-shop model could not be adapted for use with other appropriate offender or 'at risk' groups. Equally, the one-stop-shop model ought not to assume a 'one-size-fits-all' shape, but projects could be

designed with appropriately-tailored services which address the identified needs of their target client group.

In addition, the potential transferability of the „one-stop shop’ model is facilitated at Chepstow House where the programme:

(a) Adapted best practice with regards to identifying needs from successful programmes elsewhere and with other groups. For example, Chepstow House has selected the motivational interviewing and Outcome Star assessment and monitoring tools which have been successfully deployed with various client groups, including marginalised youths, offenders and homeless persons. Organisations utilising these tools include housing providers (Homelessness Link, St Mungo’s); local authorities (Rochdale Council Supporting People Team) and the Mental Health Providers Forum.³⁶ However, our findings also noted some specific challenges in applying these tools to women customers.

(b) The appropriateness of one-stop-shop models for optimising service delivery to other marginalised groups. Clearly, any evidence supporting the transference of the model to other groups would have to derive from comparative studies of other programmes. What is evident is that Chepstow House has adapted to local conditions the model for supporting women offenders that was initiated in the first „generation’ of Women’s Community Projects, especially the *Together Women* Project in Hull and Humberside, with some success.³⁷

Localism

Localism is a key policy of the current government, and is a continuation of policy from the previous administration. Its intentions are three fold: to confront public alienation from the criminal justice system and offer communities opportunities to contribute to policy on crime and community safety. Additionally, localism entails decentralizing the criminal justice system in favour of democratically accountable local government agencies working in partnership with statutory, voluntary and private sector bodies. Thirdly, it involves shifting resources towards community based services by deploying funding that would otherwise be spent on custody into community based initiatives which tackle the underlying causes of much crime (also known as „justice reinvestment’).³⁸

The emerging data shows that Chepstow House supports the development of local solutions to local needs. Chepstow House has benefited from two positive developments in the local and regional policy environment. The first relates to the active support for starting up the project from statutory and local governmental agencies with responsibilities for reducing offending and for addressing previously fragmented provision for particular offender and „at risk’ groups, in this case women.

Chepstow House benefits from a commitment to partnership and collaborative work among stakeholders, including but not exhaustively, Brighter Futures, CAB, Gingerbread, the

³⁶ MacKeith, J. et al (2006) *The Outcomes Star*, foreword.

³⁷ Hedderman, C. et al (2008) *Implementing services for women offenders*.

³⁸ Audit Commission (2010) *Managing Offenders on Short Custodial Sentences: Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General*. The Stationery Office, London.

Local Government Information Unit (2009) *Primary Justice: An Inquiry into Justice in the Communities*, Local Government Information Unit: London

Staffordshire & West Midlands Probation Trust, Staffordshire Police, NHS Stoke, Stoke-on-Trent City Council. As noted in recommendation 1, the work to establish and sustain seamless multi-agency partnerships is an ongoing challenge, with evidence showing that referral and collaborative case work could be more consistent in certain key areas.

Additionally, the trustee organisations for Chepstow House (CAB and Brighter Futures) have already created a long-term presence in Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire, bringing with them established reputations and histories of partnership locally and regionally. For example, Brighter Futures operates 15 relevant projects which provide services including training and employment opportunities, temporary and long-term social housing, community living, street services, mental health partnerships, and specialist supports for youth, older people, women and those with mental health needs (Appendix 1).³⁹ This legacy of support and service provision means that Chepstow House can respond comparatively quickly to customers' needs (for example, in providing accommodation or referring them to other agencies). Additionally, customers can access alternative social facilities in the evenings and at weekends such as a 'Breakfast Club' and 'Hillcrest' which they value as an important support outside of the opening hours of most social providers. This 'embeddedness' in the Brighter Futures network of provision adds value and sustainability to the Chepstow House project.

³⁹ Brighter Futures organisational map.

Developmental issues

The time factor

It is well understood that new projects can take as much as 18 months to overcome initial developmental issues. It is therefore important to take into consideration the fact that this evaluation began in the second quarter of Chepstow House's operation, and was designed to evaluate the *process* of building the programme and identifying gaps and shortfalls. Previous evaluations of one-stop-shops, notably the *Together Women* evaluation in 2008, identified a number of challenges which arose in programmes, especially during the early stages of development.⁴⁰ These involve (a) monitoring patterns of, and triggers to, referral by different agencies; (b) data-sharing and coordination of information; (c) monitoring outcomes. As already discussed in this report, projects commonly experience challenges in accounting for „completers' and „non-completers' of programmes, as well as gradations between these categories. While it might be noted that this reflects the need to flexibly tailor the level of engagement to customers' lifestyles, it also means that „completion' can be an elastic measure.

The timescale of 12 weeks or 3 months' engagement with programmes appears to be widely seen as an optimal time to achieve the foundations of supporting individuals to change. However, some practitioners are sceptical of what seems to be a formula:

I think most services tend to put on a limit. „Well we'll work for them for 12 weeks, we'll work for them for 3 months', and it's like, „Hang on a minute!' Their life didn't materialise into this over 6 months, you know. This is their life! This is 18 years, 20 years, 21 years of their life that they've actually come to this point, and I don't think we support them enough. I think we need longer support. I don't think a time limit should be put on people changing their lives (Service provider/stakeholder W)

Monitoring change

Following from the previous concern, previous evaluations of one-stop-shops have highlighted the importance of monitoring interventions and change, as evidenced by the use of reports by staff, service users and stakeholders, as well as systems for monitoring the „distance women have travelled' on programmes. As already discussed in this report, Chepstow House has systems in place for tracking how a woman is referred to the project, is assigned a key worker, had her needs assessed, her support plan managed, is referred to external agencies. Additionally, the paperwork monitors in-house services provided, courses and other activities attended, reviews of support plans and some follow-up information.

A key issue relates to the gathering of data for evidencing the „distance women have travelled' over the course of contact with the project with a view to being able to report on positive outcomes such as abstinence or reduction in the use of illegal drugs or alcohol. Management at Chepstow House will have to consider the future use to which their assessment data can evidence how the changing needs of women are tracked as they progress through the programme. Needs are initially identified at the first assessment, when an Outcomes Star is drawn up and the key worker encourages the service user to rate what she

⁴⁰ Hedderman, C. et al (2008) *Implementing services for women offenders*.

perceives to be her level of need for various issues. Progress is charted on an Action Plan which allows for up to four opportunities for workers and service users to review the initial plan. In practice, reviews tended to take place less formally, because of the difficulties with securing commitment from customers to attend formal reviews. Additionally, observations of needs assessments using this tool raised problems where some customers could not contribute to the assessment. This underlines some of the difficulties of capturing „needs’ and progress which rely on self-report mechanisms.

Newly disclosed needs

It is not clear from the database or case files where a newly disclosed need might be recorded. A woman may not initially disclose some of her experiences at her initial assessment, but may disclose them at a later stage. While reviews of the Action Plan potentially offer an opportunity to discuss a „newly disclosed need’, we have already noted that a minority of women engage in formal reviews. It may be useful to have a mechanism for recording and reviewing new and emerging customer needs.

Operationalizing ‘at risk’ referrals

The original aim of Chepstow House was to provide services for women deemed by referrers to be „at risk’ of offending or reoffending. Chepstow House staff are guided by the project’s definition of women „at risk’ as those who are⁴¹:

- Released following custodial conditions
- On community orders and/or at risk of breaching their order
- On bail
- At risk of receiving a custodial sentence
- Prolific and priority offenders
- Involved in or at risk of prostitution
- Substance misuse offenders from the drug Intervention programme identified as at risk of re-offending
- Vulnerable and excluded women at risk of offending

Although the statutory criminal justice services grew to be the most frequent sources of referrals, the project received referrals from a number of other statutory and third sector agencies. Because referrals to Chepstow House came from voluntary, statutory and private agencies, the 20 case studies which were sampled from the referral records were also analysed for patterns of, or variations in, referral practices. This showed that women had directly contacted Chepstow House, or were referred by Connexions, social housing providers, Family Intervention Project officers, women’s projects, the prison service, probation service, social services and a Community Psychiatric Nurse.

Keyworkers from stakeholder agencies can fill out an initial referral form, which is then passed on to Chepstow House staff who organise an assessment and action plan meeting with the customer. Our examination of the sample case studies revealed that referrers deployed a

⁴¹ Brighter Futures (2009 *Tender for one stop shop services for vulnerable women in the criminal justice System*, Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire. p 5.

broad definition of women „at risk’, reflecting variations in how the concept was understood and operationalized. Some referrals made no mention of previous contact with the criminal justice system or „risk’ of offending. In another file, the only reference to a prior offending history was in the covering letter from mental health professional. This was despite the fact that the referral form clearly and explicitly asks for such information. Similarly, the section of the form asking why a woman is being referred to Chepstow House tended to be answered with a description of the women’s immediate needs such as „housing’, risk of domestic violence’, and so forth, rather than addressing specific „risks’.

There are several explanations for this. Firstly, the initial sampling took place between April and June, which coincided with the first and second quarters of the project’s existence. Chepstow House staff were still engaged in outreach work with new potential stakeholder agencies, and were thus at the initial stages of developing and clarifying the projects’ requirements and protocols. Secondly, referrers from statutory criminal justice agencies were more likely to be working within defined paradigms of risk and need, informed by frameworks such as OASyS. Thirdly, some variation is to be expected in multi-agency work across different sectors. Hedderman and colleagues noted in their evaluation of the *Together Women* projects that „while the broad definition of “at risk” women was welcomed by practitioners as it ensures that [projects] works with anyone assessed as needing help, the possibility that this might direct resources towards women *not at risk of offending* needs to be recognised’.⁴² The concern that different participating agencies might vary widely in interpreting what constitutes „risk’ does not appear to have continued as an ongoing issue at Chepstow House. Nevertheless, the exercise points to the utility of monitoring how „risk’ is being recorded from the initial point of referral as well as the value of working with existing and new stakeholder partners to establish agreed protocols on risk assessments.

⁴² Hedderman, C. et al (2008) *Implementing services for women offenders* , p28.

CONCLUSIONS

1 The Chepstow House project is contributing positively to supporting vulnerable women offenders or those at risk of offending.

The one-stop-shop project at Chepstow House is accessing marginalised and vulnerable women at risk of offending. The evidence collected from the project shows that women who participate in the Chepstow House programme report very positively on the service and support they receive.

2. The Chepstow House project is earning the confidence and support of professionals in statutory and stakeholder agencies.

The evidence from professionals working in stakeholder agencies which have engaged with the Chepstow House project shows widespread support for its overall aims and recognises the need for the service. Staff involved in criminal justice have given their expert view that it is providing some observable benefits to women offenders.

3. Chepstow House is addressing positively the complex needs of women offenders and those at risk of offending.

Chepstow House is providing services in line with the 9 key pathways for supporting women offenders. It is providing a joined-up service for women in a safe environment. Women are supported through intensive personal intervention. Staff provide core services which develop personal skills, as well as specialist advisory services. Staff also refer women service users (or „customers’) to other providers where appropriate. Chepstow House provides facilities for counselling, health and substance dependency professionals.

4. The Chepstow House programme is addressing the gender gap in service provision for women offenders and those at risk of offending in North Staffordshire.

Evidence from stakeholders indicates that Chepstow House is making provision for women that is not available elsewhere in the locality. In particular, it has been successful in engaging „hard to reach’ women. This has been made possible, at least in part, by the project’s embeddedness in the wider network of Brighter Futures provision.

5. Staff at Chepstow House and other stakeholding agencies are working towards the wider objectives of partnership between statutory and other stakeholder agencies to reduce (re)offending or the risk of (re)offending.

Staff at Chepstow House have successfully established various strands of work across participating stakeholders in a number of areas. This now includes formal statutory work through the courts and the Probation Service.

6. Implications for pertinent programme development.

There are positive implications for the development of programmes in other localities and for other client groups, informed by the achievements of the Chepstow House one-stop-shop. For example, the completion of the programme by the first cohort of women from Chepstow

House has enabled further investigation into aftercare and the transferability of the programme or parts of the programme.

Recommendations

1. To monitor the criteria for referral of women as being 'at risk of offending' across the different referral agencies.

The question arose in this evaluation as to whether the one-stop-shops are not 'casting the net too widely' by sweeping up women who present as having multiple needs, but do not have direct involvement in crime. Drawing clear distinctions between women's 'criminogenic' and 'non-criminogenic' needs is a complex task which has not been resolved in policy or research. On the one hand, participating stakeholders were reluctant to delay intervention until a woman had reoffended, lest any delay undermine the preventive intentions of the Diversion Programme. On the other hand, narrowing down criteria of 'risk' only to women who have had past or current engagement with criminal justice services creates significant possibilities for excluding women who benefit from programmes such as Chepstow House and for whom there is no alternative access to support services. The weight of three decades of research indicates that it would be counterproductive to be too prescriptive in defining what constitutes a woman 'at risk' only or primarily on the basis of her having a past or current criminal record.

There is evidence of variation in referral practice between different stakeholding agencies. From the sample of 20 case notes which we examined, and from interview data, we found different criteria were applied in some cases. Moreover, statutory service staff (police, probation) may be more practised in making referrals than participating agencies which are 'new' to this kind of work. Referral agencies may consider working together to create an agreed code of practice which contains inclusive, non-prescriptive criteria for referring women to diversion programmes. This will underline consistency in practice across different partners. It will also underpin a robust rationale for shared and agreed referral practice among different agencies. Stakeholder agencies may also wish to consider training personnel who conduct referrals in the code.

2. That Chepstow House and statutory criminal justice agencies continue to work to monitor/improve the rate of referrals where appropriate.

Referrals from the statutory criminal justice agencies such as the Probation service, HM Prison Service and the police service were slow to build up, but these now amount to 42 per cent of referrals. Statutory referrals are likely to continue to grow in importance for Chepstow House. The work with the probation service in putting in place a Specified Activity Requirement has contributed greatly to this. The Specified Activity Requirement enables probation officers to include a referral to the Chepstow House as an approved programme of Specified Activity. It is noted that the probation service's Specified Activity Requirement is aimed at the majority of women offenders but does 'not include those regarded as chaotic drug users (i.e. usually referred to as DRR), chaotic sex workers or those at a low risk of offending. However, this target group will be reviewed in the light of

experience'.⁴³ There remains capacity to work further with statutory criminal justice agencies to further increase referrals.

3. To support women earlier in their sentence or prior to their release from prison/custody where appropriate

To date, the number of women who have been referred to Chepstow House from prison is comparatively low though improving. The Ministry of Justice has identified the need to provide enhanced support to women following release from custodial sentences as a key target. It is recommended that Chepstow House staff and management and key liaison officers located in the region's prisons (Styal, Drake Hall, Foston Hall) continue to develop outreach, liaison and referral systems. Chepstow House staff have commented that it would be preferable if they were able to work with women in prison while they are still serving their sentence. Additionally, the nature of the women's estate means that women from the Staffordshire/West Midlands areas may have to serve their sentences as far away as HMP Eastwood Park (near Bristol) which has implications for promoting outreach and information/referral systems to other regions.

4. To support additional training (where necessary and appropriate) to staff at Chepstow House or other participating agencies in skill areas which are relevant to dealing with the complex needs of women offenders.

Staff training in working with criminal justice processes, responsibilities and criminal justice services, training in supporting women with disabilities or special needs is an ongoing process. This may also include training at the appropriate level in working with women with mental health needs, learning needs and substance dependency needs.

5. To establish data gathering practices that satisfy not only internal and Ministry of Justice accountability but are also accessible to and useable for independent external scrutiny.

Throughout its existence Chepstow House has been required to collect statistical data to monitor its own performance and in order to be accountable to both Brighter Futures and the Ministry of Justice. It has also had to rely to some extent on data collected by other agencies (e.g. Probation Service). Making sense of this data is not a straightforward task nor has it always been easy for the evaluation team to access and interpret the data. This is an inevitable part of the process of setting up systems which the programme needs to continue to focus on.

6. To devise a code of confidentiality and information exchange among the participating agencies, especially in supporting work among case workers or key workers in different stakeholding agencies.

The programme has been very successful in working in a multi-agency environment. Nevertheless, issues of confidentiality and information exchange need to be regularly reviewed. It may be appropriate to devise formal protocols or codes of practice so that staff and customers can feel confident about data protection.

⁴³ Staffordshire and West Midlands Probation Trust (2010) „Specified Activity Requirement re: Chepstow House’ August 9 2010: 1 (emphasis added).

7. To develop processes for monitoring outcomes more consistently.

The programme has made excellent progress in establishing its complex provision. It now needs to focus more explicitly on devising measures for outcomes that capture this complexity while at the same time presenting a clear and comprehensible picture to the outside world.

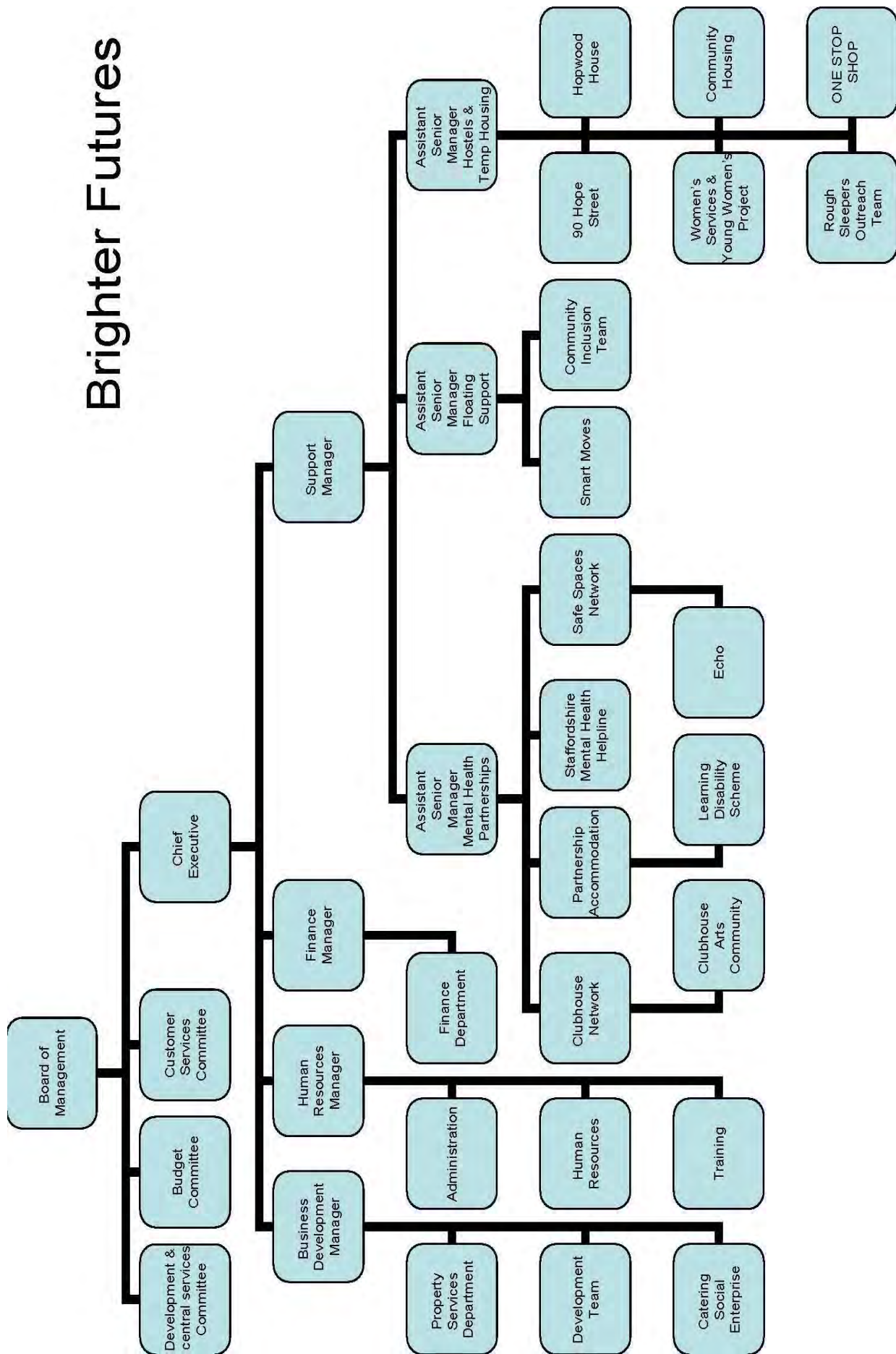
8. To review targets for retention and completion in the light of the complex challenges involved in keeping women engaged with the service and in supporting women to complete their programme.

The programme set itself ambitious targets from the outset and has been successful in meeting many of them. Some initial targets have been exceeded. However, targets will require to be reviewed in the light of lessons learned in the course of the programme's first year of operation. In particular, the programme will need to provide appropriate support for women who need to continue to engage with the project, but without creating a backlog of unfinished cases.

9. To explore the transferability of the Chepstow House model of provision for other service users, in particular for young women.

Brighter Futures and its partner agencies may now wish to consider the extent to which the model of Chepstow House might be replicated in other geographical areas and/or with other customer groups.

Brighter Futures



Appendix 1 (previous page): Brighter Futures organisational map showing affiliated services

Appendix 2 (this page): Courses and services provided by Chepstow House and their relationship to the 9 pathways for supporting reduced offending

Pathway	Service provided & provider
Accommodation	90 Hope Street (temporary accommodation) Brighter Futures. ARCH
Skills & employment	Education, employment and training support with JET and with Connexions Life skills (Chepstow House)
Health	Community nurse (NHS) Therapies & counselling services (contracted in). Yoga (contracted in) Walking group (Chepstow House)
Drugs & Alcohol dependency services	CRI, Addaction, ADSIS
Children, families relationships	Gingerbread family support and advice, Parenting classes (VAST with Gingerbread).
Attitudes, thinking, behaviour	Life Skills, Art group, Craft group, (all I Chepstow House) Emotional Wellbeing Advice by MH Services. Anger Management Self Defence
Finance, benefit & debt	CAB
Supporting women who have been abused, raped or experienced domestic violence	ARCH Freedom project, 12 weeks course ARCH Victim Survivor Workshop ARCH Perpetrators Workshop Women's Project sexual health and personal safety.
Supporting women who have jobs in or have been involved in prostitution	ARCH Freedom Project, 12 weeks course ARCH Victim Survivor Workshop ARCH Perpetrators Workshop Women's Project sexual health and personal safety.

