



Cabinet Ministers

27 October 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Further to my letter of the 12 August I am writing to provide an update on the Residential Women's Centre (RWC). As you aware, we received the announcement from the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) in May this year that the first RWC will be located in Wales. The RWC is a core part of the Female Offender Blueprint, and will provide an alternative to custody, enabling Welsh women to stay closer to home, supporting the maintenance of ties with children and wider family members, which we know are key factors in the rehabilitation of women offenders.

Over recent weeks there has been ongoing engagement between MoJ officials and officials from across Welsh Government, including Health, Social Services and Housing, on this programme of work. On the 14 October I had a meeting with the Minister of State for Justice, Lucy Fraser, to discuss the latest position and some wider justice issues, including our ongoing engagement with HM Prison and Probation Service on the impact of COVID-19 across the Prison estate in Wales.

The MoJ has analysed the data and evidence around offender numbers and short term sentences which has resulted in a decision to site the RWC in South Wales. This will ensure that the centre will work at or near capacity, providing up to 48 residential spaces per year for women who might have otherwise received a short custodial sentence. The aim is to make the centre as easily accessible to as many women as possible to enable them to engage with the service. MOJ is planning to work with local services to explore potential sites within the South Wales and Gwent Police Force areas.

The plan is for the RWC to accommodate women, with resident dependent children where appropriate, and also be a resource for women across the community. The MoJ has indicated that they will be engaging with the Children's Commissioner for Wales with regards to these plans. In view of this broader scope it is unlikely that the RWC will operational by the end 2021 as originally intended. Minister Fraser confirmed the aim is to identify and secure a site as quickly as possible. The MoJ is reviewing the original timeline, and we will be working closely with them to establish specific timescales.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Minister Fraser also confirmed that the National Probation Service will have responsibility for managing the RWC day to day, including the commissioning of bespoke, trauma-informed, locally-led interventions. We are expecting to receive the draft design specification soon, and there will be further discussions between MoJ and the relevant officials across Welsh Government departments who will provide key information to inform the specification.

During the meeting I did stress the need for continued engagement to ensure decisions are informed by Welsh Government, and sensitively with the community and local stakeholders. HM Prison and Probation Service has advised that there is further stakeholder engagement planned this week, with updates being provided to Criminal Justice partners, including Local Authorities and Police and Crime Commissioners. There will also be a need for ongoing engagement with devolved partners in further development of these proposals.

I plan to provide an update on justice matters, including the RWC, to the Senedd and will be issuing a written statement over the coming weeks.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jane', with a horizontal line above it.

Jane Hutt AS/MS

Y Dirprwy Weinidog a'r Prif Chwip
Deputy Minister and Chief Whip