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Scottish Prisons Assessment and Review of Outcomes for Women (SPAROW) – Full report

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Full report

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Glossary of terms

ACR	Adverse Circumstances Report
CCU	Community Custodial Unit
FGTR	First Grant of Temporary Release
HDC	Home Detention Curfew
HL	Home Leave
ICM	Integrated Case Management
Lifer	Life sentence offender
LTP	Long-term Prisoner
MDT	Mandatory Drug Testing
NTE	National Top End
PO	Personal Officer
PRT2	SPS Prisoner Records System 2
RMT	Risk Management Team
SPAROW	Scottish Prison Assessment and Review of Outcomes for Women
SPS	Scottish Prison Service
STP	Short-term Prisoner
SEL	Special Escorted Leave
UDR	Unescorted Day Release
ToC	Theory of Change
WCMB	Women's Case Management Board

1. Introduction

This report presents findings from the Scottish Prison Service Assessment and Review of Outcomes for Women (SPAROW) evaluation, commissioned by the Scottish Government Justice Analytical Services. The primary purpose was to evaluate the early impact and emerging outcomes of the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) new custodial arrangements for women and the application of the SPS Strategy for Women in Custody 2021-2025. This was carried out in the context of the recently established Community Custody Units (CCUs) which heralded a new approach to the custody of women in Scotland.

It is intended that findings from the evaluation will contribute to:

- the ongoing improvement of gender-specific and trauma-informed care and support for women in custody and on their return to the community;
- the continual support and professional development for SPS prison staff;
- the ongoing improvement of partnership working with SPS delivery partners to design and deliver appropriate services that are gender-specific and trauma-informed.

The evaluation commenced in May 2023 and research fieldwork in the CCUs was ongoing until February 2025.

The report is divided into 11 chapters. Following this introductory chapter, in Chapter 2 we comment on the wider contextualisation of women's imprisonment in Scotland, noting, in particular, concern about the rate of female imprisonment and the impact of imprisonment on criminalised women in Scotland for over 30 years. We refer to the Scottish Prison Service Strategy for Women in Custody 2021-2025 and the evident commitment to women's distinctive needs and circumstances and the nine key gender-sensitive and gender-informed principles which emerged. We also outline the concepts of gender-specificity and trauma-informed practice.

In Chapter 3, we describe the research aims and objectives, the research design, data collection and data analysis. This chapter also includes ethical considerations and limitations of the research. Chapter 4 turns to the vision and aspirations for the CCUs in terms of policy development and the selection of both staff and women for the CCUs. It also presents our summary of the implicit CCU Theory of Change (ToC) which drew on key policy documents pertinent to the CCUs and interviews with senior SPS policy and operational management. Chapter 5 describes how gender-specificity and trauma-informed principles have been translated and operationalised in the design of the CCUs and outlines the staffing and delivery partner arrangements. Chapter 6 describes the processes through which women were identified, assessed and selected for transfer to the CCUs from closed conditions. Using SPS data, we also describe the population of the CCUs in HMP Lilias and HMP Bella over time. Chapter 7 draws on observation and prison officer interviews to focus on the backgrounds and experiences of SPS staff working in the CCUs, how they describe the work that they do, and the challenges which they identified. We also present findings from interviews with prison officers working in a

closed establishment focusing on whether and how gender-specific and trauma-informed principles have been implemented there.

Chapter 8 provides a detailed description of the views and experiences of the women residents living in the CCUs. Here we present their voices on daily life in the CCUs, and the ways in which they perceive their gendered needs and aspirations to be addressed. This reflects the data from fieldwork observation, interviews and arts-based workshops. This chapter also presents the views of women prisoners in a closed establishment.

Chapter 9 revolves around the aspirations and experiences of SPS delivery partners of providing services to women in the CCUs, and offering a direct link to the community. In Chapter 10, we draw together the research data generated across the separate phases of the study, reflect on whether and how the CCUs may be meeting their objectives, identify the obstacles that remain, and present a revised ToC. The concluding Chapter (11) summarises and reflects on good practices/successes and challenges/barriers to gender-sensitivity and trauma-informed practice in the women's estate. This chapter also includes concluding reflections and recommendations.

2. The wider context of women's imprisonment in Scotland

Women in custody in Scotland

Whilst the overwhelming majority of those convicted and imprisoned in Scotland are men – accounting for 83 per cent of all convictions in 2022-3, a similar proportion as each year in the past ten years (Scottish Government 2024), there has been concern about the rate of female imprisonment and the impact of imprisonment on criminalised women in Scotland for over 30 years. Scotland saw a steady rise throughout the 1990s in the average daily female sentenced and remand prison population and an increase in sentence length amongst sentenced prisoners. This was attributable largely to an increase in sentences from six months up to two years (McIvor & Burman 2011).

Despite most of women's convictions being for relatively minor offences, the average daily female prison population almost doubled between 1999/2000 and 2008/9, from 210 to 413 (Scottish Government 2010). Over this period the sentence length for women received into prison under direct sentence increased and, at the same time, there was an 83 per cent increase in the numbers of women received into prison on remand between 1997/8 and 2006/7 (McIvor & Burman 2011). There was no evidence of an increase in women's criminality during this period. Indeed, the number of women convicted per 100,000 population was identical in 1995/6 and 2004/5 (Scottish Executive 2006). Yet the increases in sentence length suggest that some women who were convicted were being treated more harshly by the courts (McIvor 2007).

While the size of the female prison population in Scotland continued to increase throughout the 2000s, it has seen fluctuation since then. Between 2012-13 and 2016-17 the average daily female prison population decreased to 368 but rose to around 403 in 2019-2020. During the Covid-19 period, the numbers dropped again to 300 in 2020-21 and to 283 in 2021-22 (Scottish Government 2024a)[1]. Overall, in 2023-2024 women represented 6.5 per cent of the prison population in Scotland with a daily prison population of 318. The daily population represents a 12.8 per cent increase over the previous year, but it is still lower than pre-pandemic levels. Whilst a number of these women were on remand or awaiting deportation, the statistics suggest an increase in non-sexual crimes of violence, this being the largest offence group, with crimes of dishonesty and crimes against society following (Scottish Government 2024b).

Women in custody face unique challenges compared to their male counterparts and risk factors associated with criminal offending are different. Their offences are

[1] Of particular relevance to the sentencing of women, Scotland introduced a statutory presumption against short-term sentences through the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010. This presumption was extended from three months or less to twelve months or less by the Presumption Against Short Periods of Imprisonment (Scotland) Order 2019.

generally less serious than men's; they are less likely to have a prior offence history, and they generally recidivate less often than men. International research documenting the characteristics of women in custody has revealed backgrounds of violent and sexual victimisation (Chesney-Lind & Pasko 2012), unmet needs and interrelated problems. These include poor physical health, presenting specific health issues from eating disorders to pregnancy (Plugge et al. 2006); addiction problems (Malloch 2000); backgrounds of poverty (Carlen 1988; Brown & Gelsthorpe 2022), and housing and employment difficulties (Sheehan et al. 2007).

Researchers studying women in custodial settings have highlighted the vulnerabilities related to the troubled and distinct characteristics, life histories, and circumstances that imprisoned women frequently report. These challenges are well documented in the international literature (Baldwin 2017; 2021; Corston 2007; Masson et al. 2021; Quinlan 2003; Quinlan et al. 2022; Wright 2017). In addition, levels of self-harm (Fitzpatrick et al 2022), suicidal ideation and suicide attempts for women in prison are significantly higher than for those outside prison (Ludlow et al. 2015). Women in custody also report a significantly greater incidence of mental health problems and higher rates of drug use than males do (Plugge et al. 2006).

The picture in Scotland is no different to the wider international profile. In their 2012 Report, the Commission on Women Offenders (CWO) highlighted that, compared to the general population, women in prison in Scotland have significantly greater levels of underlying health needs. They also have greater rates of poor mental health; higher lifetime instances of trauma, which includes greater physical and sexual victimisation, and rates of substance misuse which are higher than that of male prisoners (CWO 2012). One fifth of the 213 women surveyed as part of the 2017 SPS Prisoner Survey reported that they had used drugs in the last month whilst in prison, and one third were being prescribed methadone (SPS 2018). Over half (59 per cent) of the women felt that drug taking was a problem for them in the community, up from 38 per cent in 2015. Thirty-eight per cent reported being drunk at the time of their offence and 53 per cent were under the influence of drugs (SPS 2018).

For some women, structural factors, combined with gendered life experiences lead to extremely difficult lives. At the point of coming into prison, women may be dealing with multiple issues, such as homelessness, involvement in prostitution or sexual exploitation, mental health problems, domestic abuse, and addiction. A cross-sectional study of 109 women across four prisons in Scotland revealed high levels of poor mental health, in particular anxiety, depression, or both. Additionally, 78 per cent of women assessed reported a history of Significant Head Injury (SHI), of whom 40 per cent had an associated disability (McMillan et al. 2021). Literacy and numeracy levels can be low. Twenty-three per cent of the women who were assessed in the same study lacked functional literacy. Sixty-one per cent of women were assessed as requiring significant literacy support. The high levels of learning need and brain injury demonstrate a requirement for access to appropriate specialist supports to enable the women to have better life chances.

Housing, employment, addiction, ill-health, social relationships, motherhood and mothering are rendered more difficult, and, in some cases, impossible, by imprisonment. It is estimated that approximately 65 per cent of women in prison in Scotland are mothers; of those around 70 per cent had childcare responsibilities prior to imprisonment, and most intend to resume that care on release (Scottish Government 2022). Around a third of mothers in prison describe themselves as single parents (SPS 2016). However, this is likely to be an underestimate as many women are reluctant to disclose that they have children. Separation anxiety, coupled with concerns about their childrens' wellbeing, can raise already high stress levels of mothers in custody who are sole caretakers, particularly when the custodial facility is far from home (Sheehan & Flynn 2007).

While it is important that imprisoned women are not defined by these vulnerabilities these are, nonetheless, the fundamental realities for many. Even short periods of incarceration – a sentence of six months or less (Baldwin & Epstein 2017; Masson 2019) can significantly exacerbate women's already disadvantaged lives.

Gender-specificity

Until relatively recently gendered issues affecting women in prison have largely been ignored by penal institutions, primarily because prisons have been designed 'for men, by men' (Menis 2021; MoJ 2023). Contemporary gender-specific approaches acknowledge that women have distinct histories, pathways to offending, and gendered experiences at each stage of the criminal justice process that are different to men (Brown & Gelsthorpe 2022; Crowley 2021; Covington 2022; Petrillo 2016; 2021; Petrillo & Bradley 2022).

Gender-specific approaches aim to address issues that may contribute to women's involvement in the criminal justice system, such as domestic abuse, victimisation, family and relationships; marginalisation, trauma; and poverty, mental ill-health, and illicit substance use as well as abusive relationships with coercive or controlling men. Women also often require specific health, welfare and social care interventions that take account of their gender as well as their circumstances and their needs, not only whilst in prison but also on returning to the community. Addressing these needs call for a response which is gender-sensitive and takes account of women's distinctive gendered circumstances.

Trauma-informed practice

King (2017) describes trauma as an individual's experience of an event that considerably and negatively affects their ability to cope with or recover from it, evoking emotions such as fear, hopelessness and a sense of violation. The experience of trauma – whether from a one-off event or a cumulative and ongoing series of events – can have lasting implications on an individual's social, physical and emotional wellbeing (Felitti et al. 1998; Perry et al. 1995). Women in, or 'at risk' of contact with criminal justice systems are widely considered to have experienced high levels of victimisation and abuse, parental conflict or separation, bereavement and loss, all of which can result in traumatisation (Sharpe 2012; Prison Reform Trust 2017; Karatzias et al. 2018; Petrillo 2022; 2023; Brown & Gelsthorpe 2022; Burman et al. 2023; Kelman et al. 2024). There is an established evidence base

concerning both the immediate and long-term effect of trauma on individuals (McCann & Pearlman 1990; Perry et al. 1995; Van der Kolk et al. 1996; Breslau 2012).

Because of their past experiences, many women enter prison traumatised. Existing backgrounds of trauma can be deepened at each stage of the criminal justice process. The processes of arrest and awaiting trial amid a paucity of information can re-traumatise – leading to feelings of fear and helplessness (Levenson & Willis 2019). Prisons are not only trauma-inducing but can be a catalyst for previous trauma to re-emerge (Crewe et al. 2017; Thomas 2023).

There is now a strong recognition of the role played by practitioners, services, and institutions in exacerbating trauma (Bloom & Farragher 2010; Chard 2021; Agenda & Alliance for Youth Justice 2022). Almost 25 years ago, Harris & Fallot (2001) called for a 'paradigm shift within service delivery systems' (2001: 21). They argued that organisations should reconfigure their service systems, taking into account the past trauma in a way that would encourage the service user to engage with them (Harris & Fallot 2001).

Trauma-informed approaches have since developed and multiplied (Berliner & Kalko 2016; Hanson & Lang 2016; Johnson 2017). For justice-involved women in particular, such approaches are premised on the understanding that many of these women have experienced multiple or cumulative traumatic experiences throughout their lives. Therefore the approach to working with them needs to recognise this as a key consideration (Covington 2017, 2022; Petrillo & Bradley 2022). Trauma-informed practices are those that realise the impact of trauma and potential paths for recovery, recognise the signs and symptoms of trauma, respond by integrating knowledge about trauma into their approach, and resist retraumatisation (SAMHSA 2014). A main goal is to minimise the extent to which service users are re-traumatised or triggered by aspects of the way they experience the service (SAMHSA 2014; Kelman et al. 2024). Crucially service providers need to understand the impact and prevalence of trauma amongst those with whom they work. Essentially this involves ensuring that working with traumatised individuals and groups is sensitive to trauma and adopts, as a minimum standard, what Miller and Najavits (2012) describe as a 'do no harm' approach.

The development of trauma-informed work is based on considerable expertise and a strong commitment by professionals to transform this into practice (Auty et al. 2022). The influence of US psychologist Stephanie Covington, who introduced the trauma-informed practice approach into criminal justice settings and prisons in the UK, is marked in Scotland (2019; 2023). Indeed, she visited Scotland to advise SPS on the value of ensuring trauma-informed practice across the prison estate, and how to embed this way of working in the transformed female estate. Her influence can be seen in the SPS Strategy for Women in Custody. Additionally, in Scotland, trauma-informed practice is enshrined in the Transforming Psychological Trauma: A Knowledge and Skills Framework for the Scottish Workforce (NHS Education for Scotland 2017). This is designed to support and develop trauma-related knowledge and skills across the entire Scottish workforce, not just among

those practitioners with a direct remit to work with trauma. This framework aims to equip practitioners to identify the impact of trauma and adapt practice to minimise distress, maximise trust, and promote engagement and recovery (NHS Education for Scotland 2017).

While implementation of new and innovative approaches, such as trauma-informed approaches, may be challenging, it is of note that there is some oversight of impact by the Prisons Inspectorate for Scotland (HMIPS). Shortly after the opening of the two CCUs, HMIPS conducted full inspections: Lilias between 27 and 29 of February 2024 (HMIPS, 2024a) and Bella between 5 to 7 March 2024 (HMIPS, 2024b). These inspections took place during the fieldwork on which this report is based.

Policy and practice context

Scotland has seen a raft of policy reviews and reports highlighting the need to limit the use of female imprisonment and to make use of alternative and gender-appropriate community-based services (Social Work Services and Prisons Inspectorate for Scotland 1998; Scottish Executive 2002; Scottish Consortium on Crime and Criminal Justice 2006; Scottish Prisons Commission 2008). This was prompted initially by a series of suicides in the 1990s. At the same time there have been numerous political pledges to reduce the numbers of women in prison, with limited effect (Burman, Malloch & McIvor 2015; Armstrong & Malloch 2024).

Nevertheless, ongoing concerns about the size and composition of the female prison population have led to many attempts to identify different ways to respond to women who encounter the criminal justice system. The Scottish National Party (SNP) 2011 election manifesto committed to 'address the explosion in the female prison population' despite the number of females committing offences staying the same. They commissioned 'a review of female offending, including the rise in female incarceration' (SNP 2011: 18). That same year, the Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee emphasised the importance of recognising the distinctive needs of women and ensuring that criminal justice responses took gender differences into account. In June 2011, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) undertook a follow-up inspection of HMP & YOI (Young Offender Institution) Cornton Vale, once again pointing to serious overcrowding and the adverse consequences on women living there.

The Scottish Government subsequently announced the establishment of a Commission on Women Offenders (CWO) to find a more effective way of responding to women in the criminal justice system. The remit of the Commission was*:* 'to consider the evidence on how to improve outcomes for women in the criminal justice system; to make recommendations for practical measures in this Parliament to reduce their reoffending and reverse the recent increase in the female prisoner population'.

The resultant report (CWO 2012) pledged a strong desire to reduce the number of women in custody for minor offences and remand. It found that service provision for women in the community and upon leaving custody was 'highly variable and disjointed'; that interventions delivered in prison were rarely followed up in the

community and performance measures relating to women's outcomes were considered inappropriate. It also found that funding arrangements favoured activity over outcomes, making it difficult to measure the impact or effectiveness of programmes being undertaken (CWO 2012).

The CWO was particularly struck by the high levels of trauma, anxiety and mental health problems as well as underlying physical health issues experienced by women in the criminal justice system in Scotland, and made a strong case for the value of co-ordinated working to ensure a holistic approach to women's mental health and addiction needs. They proposed a set of 37 recommendations across seven broad areas for improving outcomes for women in the criminal justice system and reducing their reoffending. These were: service redesign, alternatives to prosecution, alternatives to remand, sentencing, prisons, community reintegration, and leadership structures and delivery (CWO 2012). These included recommendations proposing service redesign through an interconnected and collaborative framework of support and direction for women offenders. One of which was the establishment of Community Justice Centres, envisaged as 'one-stop' centres that would coordinate and deliver a consistent range of services to reduce reoffending. 'One-stop' centres were very much endorsed by the Corston Report (2007), following the Westminster Government's experiment with 'Women Together' in England and Wales (Hedderman et al. 2008).

The idea was that the Community Justice Centres in Scotland could include interventions for supervision and management. These would be suited to the needs of women; challenging women's offending behaviours and attitudes; addressing the root causes of reoffending; and, simultaneously providing practical advice and support on matters such as housing, benefits, employment, and childcare. The CWO was convinced of the importance of women-specific programmes and solutions to deal with the problems that women with convictions face. It was therefore considered important that the Community Justice Centres would be available and involved at every stage of the criminal justice system, and that services would be 'proactive and persistent' in engaging with women (CWO 2012).

Radical recommendations were made in the CWO Report regarding the existing prison estate. Primarily that HMP & YOI Cornton Vale (the only purpose-built women's prison in Scotland) should be demolished and replaced by a smaller national prison for women serving long-term sentences (i.e. 4 years and over) and who were considered to present a significant risk to the public. This specialist prison would have the capacity for what was described as 'meaningful and consistent work'. It would include an adequate medical centre, a young women's unit, a purpose-built mother and baby unit, an appropriate and family friendly visitor centre, and a Community Integration Unit to help women access community services and support networks prior to release.

The use of local prisons for remand and short-term prisoners was also recommended with the aim of improving reintegration to the community and with improved links to services following release as well as improved links with families

and children through the extension and expansion of video technology. Gender-specific training for all those working with women was also recommended.

The Scottish Government accepted 33 of the 37 recommendations, of which six were specifically for the SPS to implement. It announced its intention to close HMP & YOI Cornton Vale and develop HMP Inverclyde as a new 300 capacity national prison for women. However, in early 2015, the then Cabinet Secretary for Justice announced that the plans for the latter would not proceed; and that a 'bolder' and 'more radical and ambitious approach' was needed.

Following consultation to rethink the approach to the custody of women, and an international symposium to discuss 'best practice' (Scottish Government 2015), plans were announced for the future of the custodial estate for women in Scotland. It was confirmed that there would be a new national facility for women (HMP Stirling) to be built on the site of HMP & YOI Cornton Vale, for up to 80 women with higher security requirements or more complex needs, and up to five regional Community Custody Units (CCUs) to be located across Scotland. Along the way, the CWO recommendation for the Community Justice Centres was dropped in favour of custodial units, with a vision that these would support women's rehabilitation nearer their home, family and community.

The SPS took forward the development of the redesign of the custodial arrangements for women. The re-design was intended to ensure that the physical environment and services were gender-specific, trauma-informed and that conditions were based on safety, respect and dignity, incorporated within the specificities of the risks and needs of women in prison.

The building of the CCUs was undertaken in a phased approach, although as yet only two of the five that were proposed have been built. Interviews with senior SPS personnel indicated that views have changed as to whether more CCUs for women should be created. HMP Bella in Dundee eventually opened in August 2022 (with capacity for 16 women) and HMP Lilias in Glasgow opened in October 2022 (with capacity for 24 women). A key aim of the CCU model is that women can access activities and services that will assist them in the development of skills for reintegration into the community.

Following the demolition of HMP & YOI Cornton Vale, the new national women's prison HMP & YOI Stirling opened in October 2023; it has the capacity to hold a maximum of 117 women, along with a separate mother and baby unit. Women are housed in house-style accommodation and HMP & YOI Stirling receives admissions from court and has an assessment centre. The remit of the Governor extends to oversight and governance of the two CCUs, with overall responsibility for the progression/transfer of women to the CCUs.

Scottish Prison Service Strategy for Women in Custody

Alongside the redesign of custodial facilities, the SPS formulated a four-year Strategy for Women in Custody (2021-2025) (SPS 2021). The SPS Strategy sets out an overarching plan for all women in custody in Scotland. It outlines how SPS

intends to work with partners, stakeholders and the women themselves to ensure that ‘women’s time spent in custody will contribute to better outcomes for them, their families and their communities’.

Recognising that women and their needs are different to those of men, the SPS Strategy for Women is founded on the principles that all aspects of the care of women in custody should be designed for women (gender-specific) and take account of their likely experience of trauma and adversities (trauma-informed). Central to the approach are the health and wellbeing of the women, the quality of the relationships established within all the new custodial establishments, the skills and knowledge of staff, and the services, approaches and tools that will be available to help to address the individual needs and risks of the women. All aspects of the approach are therefore intended to be gender-specific and trauma-informed, recognising the effects of trauma on women’s lives.

The SPS Strategy for Women incorporates six core values:

1. Belief that women have the capacity to change.
2. Respect for individuals, their needs and rights.
3. Integrity, high ethical, moral and professional standards.
4. Openness to work with others and innovate to achieve best results.
5. Caring for people in distress, understanding that fear can result in behaviours that challenge.
6. Humility to be able to learn from others and from evidence.

Highlighting the commitment to women’s distinctive needs and circumstances, the SPS Strategy for Women and the new models of custody that it underpins are designed to be aligned with the United Nations (UN) standards for the treatment of women in prison. The UN Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Noncustodial Measures for Women Offenders (the ‘Bangkok Rules’) were adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2010. They provide standards which give guidance to policy makers, legislators, sentencing authorities and prison staff to reduce the imprisonment of women, and to meet the specific needs of women in prison.

The SPS Strategy for Women was also designed to align with recommendations made by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT). This group visited Scotland in 2019 and 2020 and raised serious concerns about the wellbeing of women with mental ill health in HMP & YOI Cornton Vale (Council of Europe 2020). Specifically, these were in terms of the provision of appropriate accommodation, access to activities, hygiene and health care, gender-sensitive prison management, staffing and training, and contact with the outside world. In addition, the SPS Strategy was designed to align with ‘Equally Safe’, Scotland’s strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls (Scottish Government 2023).

The SPS Strategy for Women was also tasked to take account of the requirements of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) for the

children of women in custody and, for female children aged 16 or 17 who are in SPS custody.[2] As such the accommodation, approaches and services provided to women in custody are required to be designed to acknowledge and reflect women's distinctive gendered needs and circumstances.

In its adoption of a trauma-informed approach embodying the principles of safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration and empowerment, the Strategy states that the design of the physical prison environment, staff approach and organisational policies and procedures need to take account of women's likely experience of trauma and the potential for re-traumatisation. Further, that the harmful effects of custody are minimised and that women's opportunities for growth and wellbeing are maximised.

Encapsulating all of this, the Strategy incorporates nine key gender-sensitive and trauma-informed principles. These focus on a recognition of:

- women's distinctive needs and circumstances;
- women's potential;
- the importance of positive relationships to support women's journeys through the penal system;
- the effects of trauma and the potential for re-traumatisation;
- the development of women's agency to encourage engagement and participation;
- the importance of an evidence-based approach to interventions known to promote desistance from crime and improve life chances;
- the wellbeing and rights of children with others in custody, and;
- a culture of continuous improvement based on evaluation, evidence and lived experience.

The principle and fundamentals of the approach are intended to be consistent across all of the SPS women's estate, although SPS acknowledges that there may be differences on how these are put into operation in different establishments.

Drawing on these concepts, the intention for the CCUs was that they embody an organisational shift to be more gender-specific and trauma-informed, in their physical design, their organisational ethos, and in the approach of staff and partners delivering services into them. The rest of this report discusses the evaluation of this Strategy as operationalised in the CCUs.

[2] There are no longer any under 18s in Scottish Young Offender Institutes; all have now been moved to suitable settings such as secure care. As part of wider work to embed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and to Keep the Promise, the 2024 Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act's provisions aim to improve children's experiences of the care and justice systems, whether victims, witnesses or children who have caused harm.

3. Research aims and objectives

The research that is the subject of this report is set against the important background of the fundamental re-visioning of the women's custodial estate and the core characteristics of women in prison in Scotland.

The primary objective of the SPAROW study is to evaluate the early impact and emerging outcomes of the new model of CCUs and the application of the SPS Strategy in the context of the CCUs. The research therefore aimed to provide an in-depth and focused assessment of the operation of the CCUs, the experiences of the women who live in them, the staff who work within them and the partners that deliver services into the CCUs. It also aimed to include the participation of SPS staff working in another prison establishment in Scotland and imprisoned women in that establishment who were not currently living in a CCU in order to gain understanding of their experiences of gender-sensitive and trauma-informed practice.

A set of pre-determined research questions were identified in the specification documents, although these were amended and added to by the research team during the research tender process. These additional questions drew on the existing research literature on women in prison and from our own experiences of working with this group. The additional questions were agreed by the research commissioners. A copy of the research questions can be found in Appendix 1 with the additions highlighted in blue.

The specification document for this work required that it comprise two phases. Phase 1 was to be an Interim Review which explores and captures emerging evidence on how the CCU model is operating in practice, and on how far gender-specific and trauma-informed principles and approaches have been implemented. It also specified that a Phase 2 on Emerging Outcomes should build on the findings from Phase 1, continuing to capture evidence, but also to capture women's experience of living in a CCU, and whether and how their journey in, through and out of a CCU, might improve outcomes for them. This second Phase also explored outcomes experienced by SPS staff and delivery partners. Both phases utilise interviews with women, prison officers and managers and SPS delivery partners and identify examples of success and good practice as well as challenges and barriers. In the event, Phase 2 involved two stages of fieldwork – as we describe below.

Research design

In designing this research, we have taken a critical feminist perspective, incorporating the principles of ethical care, reflexivity, inclusivity, flexibility, activism, and empowerment. In practice, this means that the ethics of conducting the research are carefully considered and that as researchers we examine our own values, judgements and beliefs throughout the research process. It also means that we endeavour to create an inclusive and accessible research culture which shifts the balance of power from the researcher to those with lived experience and

enables participants to shape the research process. This also means that the research design remains open and flexible to unexpected events such that it is able to accommodate new empirical materials which may benefit the research. This leads to research which embodies a commitment to transformative change in women's lives. These principles, together with the nine SPS gender-sensitive and trauma-informed principles outlined above inform the overall methodological approach.

We adopted a Theory of Change (ToC) approach which entailed, first, drawing on interviews with senior SPS personnel involved in developing the vision for the CCUs and the use of key policy documents to set out the intentions and aspirations behind the vision. Second, we employed the full suite of research data to determine the extent to which the ToC is being realised in practice and the key barriers to implementation as planned.

Given the sensitivity around the evaluation and the high levels of media interest, a set of FAQs were developed by the research team. Following approval by the research commissioners, these were posted on the project web-page and can be found on the Scottish Centre for Crime & Justice Research website.

Research phases and fieldwork

Before commencing the research fieldwork, 'getting to know you' visits were undertaken in HMP Bella and HMP Lilias in July 2023. This afforded opportunities to meet the women living there and some of the SPS officers working there, as well as learning more about the layout and operation of the CCUs including the custodial environments and regimes, and links with external partners. Posters and flyers outlining the research and what participation would entail were displayed throughout the duration of the study in the communal Hub areas of the CCUs.

Following the 'getting to know you' visits, further visits to both CCUs were undertaken to discuss and develop interview themes and questions with women and SPS staff. This is congruent with our commitment to the use of a feminist methodology which accentuates women's experiences and the use of participatory methods in the design of research materials. These visits were intended to engage women and staff in a process of thinking about and sharing their experiences, and an opportunity to shape the research materials.

Two visits were undertaken to HMP & YOI Stirling, the new national facility for women built on the site of the old HMP & YOI Cornton Vale. The visits helped in gaining an understanding of the relationship between HMP & YOI Stirling and the CCUs and the physical layout of the new prison. The visits were also helpful in gaining insights into the processes for identification and selection of women from across the women's estate who are considered suitable for transfer or progression to one of the CCUs.

As stated above, the specification for this study required that the research be structured in two separate but inter-linked phases. Phase 1 captures emerging evidence on how the CCU model is operating in practice, and on how far gender-

specific and trauma-informed principles and approaches have been implemented. Phase 2 captures women's experience of living in a CCU, and outcomes experienced by SPS staff and delivery partners. In practice, each phase provided data that allowed a longitudinal assessment of implementation and experiences.

Whilst we were required to structure the research in two phases, the fieldwork was conducted at three different time points. The budget was insufficient to allow continuous fieldwork, so a decision was taken to segment it into three stages. This would allow us to immerse ourselves into the workings of the CCUs for three periods, rather than just two and to strengthen the longitudinal lens of the study. The first period of in-CCU fieldwork, which focused on Phase 1, commenced in August 2023 and ran until November 2023. The second period of fieldwork was delayed somewhat by the HMIPS inspections of the CCUs that were carried out in January/February 2024; it thus commenced in March 2024 and ran until July 2024. The third period of fieldwork ran from September 2024 to February 2025. As indicated above, the latter two periods of research fieldwork comprised Phase 2 of the study. However, it should be noted that, outside the research fieldwork periods, members of the research team attended events in each CCU, such as displays and exhibitions of art produced by the women, coffee fundraising mornings, a family day, and International Women's Day celebrations.

Most fieldwork visits to the CCUs were undertaken by two researchers working together, although on occasion three researchers were present. Researchers remained in the CCUs for between one and five hours each day during fieldwork periods. Some of the women living in the CCUs attended work placements during the week and so were frequently away when we visited. To ensure their inclusion, we often visited the CCUs at the weekend or stayed later in the evening. In total, across both CCUs, members of the research team visited the CCUs on a total of 42 occasions.

Ethics

Ethical considerations in this study are significant and determined the reflexive research design and implementation of the research. In addition to ensuring the informed consent of all participants, assuring anonymity/confidentiality, and the minimisation/avoidance of harm, other ethical issues related to the conduct of research in a custodial environment. These include the respective positions of the research participants (women in CCUs, prison staff and delivery partners) and likely barriers to their participation, safety and sensitivity to risk, and the power dynamics that exist between researchers and the researched.

All participants were provided with specific information about the research team, the aims of the research, why it was being done, and who the research commissioners were, in order to facilitate informed consent. Materials were also provided in Easy Read format. Participant recruitment required careful and ongoing consideration to avoid potential perceived pressure on participants. Researchers held frank discussions with participants about the research and their involvement, both before and after data collection and throughout the duration of the study. There was also

inclusion of space in interviews for participants to discuss any questions or concerns they may have had about participating in the study.

We were very careful to acknowledge and uphold the autonomy, privacy and dignity of participants throughout the research process, with attention paid to the likely toll taken by interview participation, including debriefing and 'warm-down'. Formal ethical approval for the research was obtained from the University of Glasgow College of Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee.

With the assistance of the University of Glasgow's Research Regulation & Compliance Manager, it was determined that an Integrated Research Application (IRAS) for NHS Research & Innovation/Research & Development management approval to include the views of the NHS workers in the CCUs was not required. This was because participants would not be recruited via the NHS.

Methods of data collection

A multi-method approach focused on capturing the experiences and views of women, SPS staff and delivery partners was adopted. Each method is described briefly below: (see Appendix 2 for a more detailed description of the research methods)

- **A review of SPS documentation** (Phase 1) to provide background information on the aims and aspirations of the CCUs and the risk and progression processes for women.

- **Fieldnotes** (Phases 1 and 2) were taken within CCUs either during or following each visit. Rather than deploying formal overt observation we gathered systematic field notes but agreed with women and SPS staff in advance the kinds of features we might note.

- **Online semi-structured qualitative interviews with SPS senior managers** (Phase 1) were conducted to gain insight into the policy perspective on the CCUs. These interviews explored both the strategic and operational aims of the CCUs, interviewees' reflections on the identification and selection of women for the CCUs and; the overall functioning of the CCUs. Four senior strategic managers (SSM) were interviewed; they are referred to in the report as SSM 1 - 4.

- **Face-to-face semi-structured qualitative interviews with women living in CCUs** (Phases 1 and 2) were undertaken to explore the key pre-determined research questions identified in the specification documents. These also allowed for a narrative approach to more fully elicit participants' views and experiences and any issues that were especially important to them. A total of 33 women were interviewed. Throughout the report, women residents are referred to by the CCU in which they reside, an 'R' to denote that they are a resident, the fieldwork stage in which they were interviewed, and a number (e.g. BR2 005). Where women were interviewed in pairs, then they are distinguished as BR2 004:1 and BR2 004:2).

In addition, four larger group discussions were conducted with women (two in each CCU) where images from the photo elicitation exercises were used to stimulate reflection and a range of views. Numbers of women in attendance in these larger discussion groups ranged from five to eleven.

Table 1. Number of interviews with women in CCUs by fieldwork phase and sentence type

Phase	Bella CCU	Lilias CCU	Sentence: STP	Sentence: LTP	Sentence: Life/Top-end	Total
Phase 1	7	7	9	3	2	**14**
Phase 2	7	12	9	7	3	**19**
Total	**14**	**19**	**18**	**10**	**5**	**33**

- **Photo-elicitation with women in CCUs** (Phase 2) was incorporated into group discussions as a means of evoking reflection and to enrich the interview experience. This method was chosen as a means of enabling women to articulate experiences that would, otherwise, have been difficult to articulate through talk-only interviews.

- **Arts-based workshops with women in CCUs** (Phase 2) were used as a participatory approach with groups of women living in CCUs in order to enable creative agency in articulating their unique experiences. Like photo-elicitation, this method was chosen as a means of facilitating reflection and dialogue, and also to access knowledge which is not easily expressed in words (Bagnoli, 2009; Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2009).

  Three arts-based workshops took place in each CCU around 3-4 weeks apart in Phase 2. Women attended in groups ranging from six to eleven in size. Data and findings from Phase 1 were used to stimulate further dialogue on life in the CCUs, and to explore how things might have changed in the time between the fieldwork stages. Workshops involved an illustrator working directly with women to 'visually minute' what women were saying in words, metaphors and drawings that evoked their experiences, and then incorporated into large poster-style drawings. The worked-up versions were taken to the CCUs in a subsequent visit for the women to check accuracy and make any final changes (see Chapter 8 for the produced images).

- **Face-to-face semi-structured qualitative interviews with SPS staff in CCUs** (Phases 1 and 2) were undertaken to explore staff experiences and views about working within the CCUs. Interviews also explored how the CCU model might enable different relational, behavioural and cultural dynamics; successes/good practices and challenges/barriers to implementing gender-specific and trauma-informed principles/approaches to care and support for women in custody.

- A total of 40 SPS officers were interviewed. In the Report, they are referred to by the CCU in which they work (i.e. an L or B) an 'S' to denote they are staff, the fieldwork stage in which they were interviewed, and a number (e.g. LS2 002).

Table 2. Number of interviews with SPS staff in Bella CCU by fieldwork phase and type of job role

Phase	Operational Officer	Residential Officer	First Line Manager	Unit Manager	Total
Phase 1	2	4	1	-	**7**
Phase 2	8	6	1	1	**16**
Total	**10**	**10**	**2**	**1**	**23**

Table 3. Number of interviews with SPS staff in Lilias CCU by fieldwork phase and type of job role

Phase	Operational Officer	Residential Officer	First Line Manager	Unit Manager	Total
Phase 1	3	1	3	1	**8**
Phase 2	4	3	1	1	**9**
Total	**7**	**4**	**4**	**2**	**17**

- **Face-to-face semi-structured qualitative interviews with women in closed conditions in another prison establishment** (Phase 2) were conducted in order to explore the key pre-determined research questions identified in the specification documents. The particular focus here was on women's experiences of gender-specific and trauma-informed approaches in mainstream prison.

  A total of six women were interviewed. They are referred to using the same protocol as women in the CCUs, that is, GR 001, GR 003.

- **Face–to-face semi-structured qualitative interviews with SPS staff working with women in closed conditions in another prison establishment** (Phase 2). Interviews addressed how the CCU model is challenging working practice in other prison establishment(s) where women are detained, and in particular, how gender-specific and trauma-informed care and support of women is working in those other establishments. A total of four SPS officers from the same prison as the six women interviewed; three were

operational officers and one was a Hall officer. They are referred to as GS 001 to GS 004.

- **Online survey with SPS delivery partners** (Phases 1 and 2). The views of delivery partners were sought with the aim of supporting the ongoing improvement of partnership working with delivery partners to design and deliver appropriate services that are gender-specific and trauma-informed. The first online survey was distributed to SPS delivery partners in November 2023 and generated 23 responses. The second was distributed in July/August 2024 and yielded just five responses. The findings assisted in identifying themes and issues to explore further in the study.

- **Online focus groups and semi-structured qualitative interviews with SPS delivery partners** (Phase 2). To elaborate on the survey results, all delivery partners who responded to the online survey were also invited to take part in an online focus group. This was to explore the factors that either facilitated/enhanced or limited their ability to engage directly with women, and to seek views on issues of community reintegration during sentence and support for transition at the end of sentences.

  Four focus groups took place with, respectively, two, four, five and six participants, and five 1:1 semi structured interviews took place with delivery partners.

Data analysis

Fieldnotes were taken throughout all stages of fieldwork. For the most part, these were descriptive notes recording sights, smells, sounds and impressions of the physical features and layout of the CCUs, and the ways in which the spaces were occupied and used by women and officers. Fieldnotes also included notes of interactions between women, between women and officers, and between officers. These included direct quotes, descriptions of interactions, and the researcher's impressions of what these meant. Fieldnotes were useful in understanding participant meaning and provided rich contextual detail which aided in the wider analysis; they assisted in the identification of themes and facilitated preliminary coding of interviews and focus groups.

All interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded, with permission from participants (with the exception of one interview where the woman did not wish to be recorded, and so notes were taken instead). Following transcription, interviews and focus groups were coded using NVivo 12. The coding framework included emergent themes emanating from the data (including from the fieldnotes) and codes identified through the literature on women's imprisonment and on gender-specific and trauma-informed practice.

Coding was undertaken by members of the research team to ensure consistency, sense-check ideas and explore different interpretations of the data. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2019) was undertaken. Data analysis was

iterative, with researchers reviewing each other's results and further coding/refinement for consistency. We attempted to ensure reflective and thoughtful engagement with the data and the analytic process whilst also acknowledging our own interpretations of patterns of meaning across the data.

Research fatigue and research hesitancy

As experienced prison researchers we were expecting some hesitancy from women and officers around engaging with the research and hence our materials and approach were prepared with this likelihood in mind. We set up the 'getting to know you' visits to introduce ourselves, to explain the research and what participation would involve and also as a means of circulating materials about the research. Participation in the research was entirely voluntary (and this was emphasised throughout) and our research materials were carefully constructed to be clear, transparent and informative.

Whilst we managed to interview all of the women residents in HMP Bella during the 1st stage of the research, the take up in HMP Lilias was lower. It emerged that the main reason for this was that women said they had already participated in SPAROW research and answered similar questions to what we were proposing. They were referring here to the SPAROW baseline study undertaken by the Scottish Government. They had heard nothing back from participating in that research and believed that 'nothing had changed' as a result of their participation. Whilst we did try to explain the differences between the two studies and that we were an independent team, it is clear that the proximity of both studies reduced women's participation.

It would have been helpful to have received a list of women who underwent the SPAROW baseline study which, we learnt, concluded in July 2023. We started fieldwork shortly after in August 2023; it is therefore unsurprising that both studies were conflated in women's minds. This is unfortunate and it would have been much more helpful to the evaluation if the baseline study had been concluded earlier (we understood at the inception meeting in May 2023 that the survey was closing imminently). Over time, as new residents arrived into the CCUs, this hesitancy became less pronounced.

We also encountered hesitancy from some officers in both CCUs. Initially we planned to hold focus groups with officers but, due to shift patterns, staff rotas and frequent high levels of staff absence due to ill health, the conduct of focus groups was rendered not feasible. In conducting this research, we tried to ensure built-in flexibility to take account of structural and organisational constraints in an evolving context. Whilst semi-structured interviews were suggested by several officers and agreed with us as a means of getting around the focus group practicalities, when it came to interview recruitment we encountered some resistance.

It transpired that this was due primarily to a general wariness about anonymity and confidentiality. It may be that the interview method is considered off-putting and exposing; whereas focus groups offer 'safety in numbers' and generate discussion between participants such that individual voices are less conspicuous. CCU officers

are highly conscious of the media and public and political interest in the CCUs, which had already been subject to adverse media attention in some Scottish media outlets. As one officer maintained, the *'high stakes'* media attention is a key reason for deterring officers to participate. Other officers spoke of *'tensions'* and *'opposing views'* within SPS about the viability of the CCUs and were wary of participating for fear of playing into these debates. In essence, this concerned officer perceptions of differing views about the need for CCUs and the new approach to women's custody that they embody.

We always made arrangements in advance with managers to visit the CCUs to undertake interviews with officers and the women. However, on several occasions we were denied access by front desk operational staff who informed us that officers were no longer available for the pre-arranged interviews. This may be partly explained by low staffing levels as a result of staff calling in sick, but it did feel as if we were being dismissed without checking with more senior colleagues. To help address the situation, a Unit Manager who had participated in an interview sent an email to all officers saying the interview was enjoyable, that confidentiality was assured and encouraging their participation. This did result in proactive contact by a small number wishing to participate. However, there is a limit to such encouragement as participation must be voluntary. Participant recruitment requires careful consideration. Whilst every attempt was made to ensure free and informed consent, avoiding potential pressure (real or imagined) on women and officers to take part in the study, or to appease potential gatekeepers, we encountered some degree of hesitancy that featured throughout the study.

It is important to note that, even when officers did agree to participate in an interview, some were reticent in their answers to some questions, particularly those around risk assessment processes and the support they receive from SPS. Officers were visibly more relaxed when interviewed in staff offices rather than the Hub or one of the small meeting rooms. We suspect that this was because of the surveillance cameras in the public areas. In future, it will be imperative to always interview officers in staff offices where there are no surveillance cameras and privacy can be assured.

Limitations of the research

The limitations of the study mainly revolved around organisational and operational access. In addition to the hesitancy described above, a key limitation related to the constraints that operate within a prison setting – with locked doors and restricted areas. There were continuing debates over whether we, as researchers, were required to undertake the SPS Personal Protection Training (PPT). We were initially informed by SPS that we did not need this. However, at various points during the study we were asked to present confirmation of PPT completion on arrival at the CCUs. This impacted upon our access to and movements within the CCUs, as different line managers held different views about whether or not we required it. During the final (third) fieldwork phase we were told that we had to complete the training, but it was several weeks before we could gain training places for members of the research team.

Whilst we always called ahead to the CCUs to agree dates for fieldwork visits, often the women were not informed of this, and so were unable or unprepared to participate in interviews. Once in the CCUs, we were often restricted to the Hub (the communal area within the CCUs) which was not conducive to conducting interviews as there were usually other women, visitors and/or activities taking place there. If there were no women in the Hub at the times of our visits, we were entirely reliant upon officers to ask the women whether they wished to participate in interviews or activities with us. This often did not give us the opportunity to explain exactly what it was we were doing each time we were there. We attempted to get round this by providing flyers for the women explaining particular elements or research-based activities. As these were passed on to the women, this occasionally led to misunderstandings, such as the women being asked by officers if they wanted to be interviewed, when we were actually conducting arts-based workshops.

Sometimes we were allowed to sit in the Hub without supervision from officers and talk to any of the women who came in or could observe activities taking place. However, on a couple of occasions, due to the PPT issue, an officer had to remain whilst we spoke with women. This had an inhibiting effect. Where PPT was not raised as an issue, we were permitted to interview women one-to-one in an unoccupied side room, sometimes with an officer in the corridor. Women were always aware that they were under surveillance via CCTV cameras wherever they were in the CCU, and so this also tended to have an inhibiting effect.

Significant delays were experienced regarding which other prison establishments SPS would allow us to access to conduct interviews with SPS staff and women not working/residing in CCUs. Eventually we were given access to one closed establishment. The delays in being given clarity and access limited the number of interviews we were able to conduct, but nonetheless this was a valuable part of the research.

In addition to the delays outlined above, we were, for some considerable time, unable to obtain relevant data concerning women's journeys in, through and out of the CCU for HMP Bella residents from SPS that was comparable to that received for HMP Lilias. Although we finally received this data in June 2025, it differs somewhat to that obtained from HMP Lilias and contains less detail. As such, we are unable to offer a detailed comparative analysis of women's journeys in the two CCUs. Following the completion of fieldwork, we received data from Scottish Government Justice Analytical Services which provided a partial picture of the journeys of the women in HMP Bella.

There were two additional areas of exploration that may have provided useful insight and information into the women's lives and the impact of the CCUs, namely following the women up in the community, and conducting research with their families. However, we believe both areas to be very sensitive, and to present significant ethical concerns. With women who have been released, seeking to conduct further research with them once back in the community presents a risk of continuing surveillance and disruption to their lives. Not all women have family

visits, and for those who do not, this is experienced as difficult. We also know from other research that this can be a source of sadness and tension (e.g. Umeh 2025). Recruiting participants from those families who do visit will generate limited information about the role of the CCUs in enhancing family relations. Recruiting participants from families who do not visit presents a range of practical and ethical problems, even if women do give their permission to involve their families.

4. Vision and aspirations for the CCUs: a policy Theory of Change (ToC)

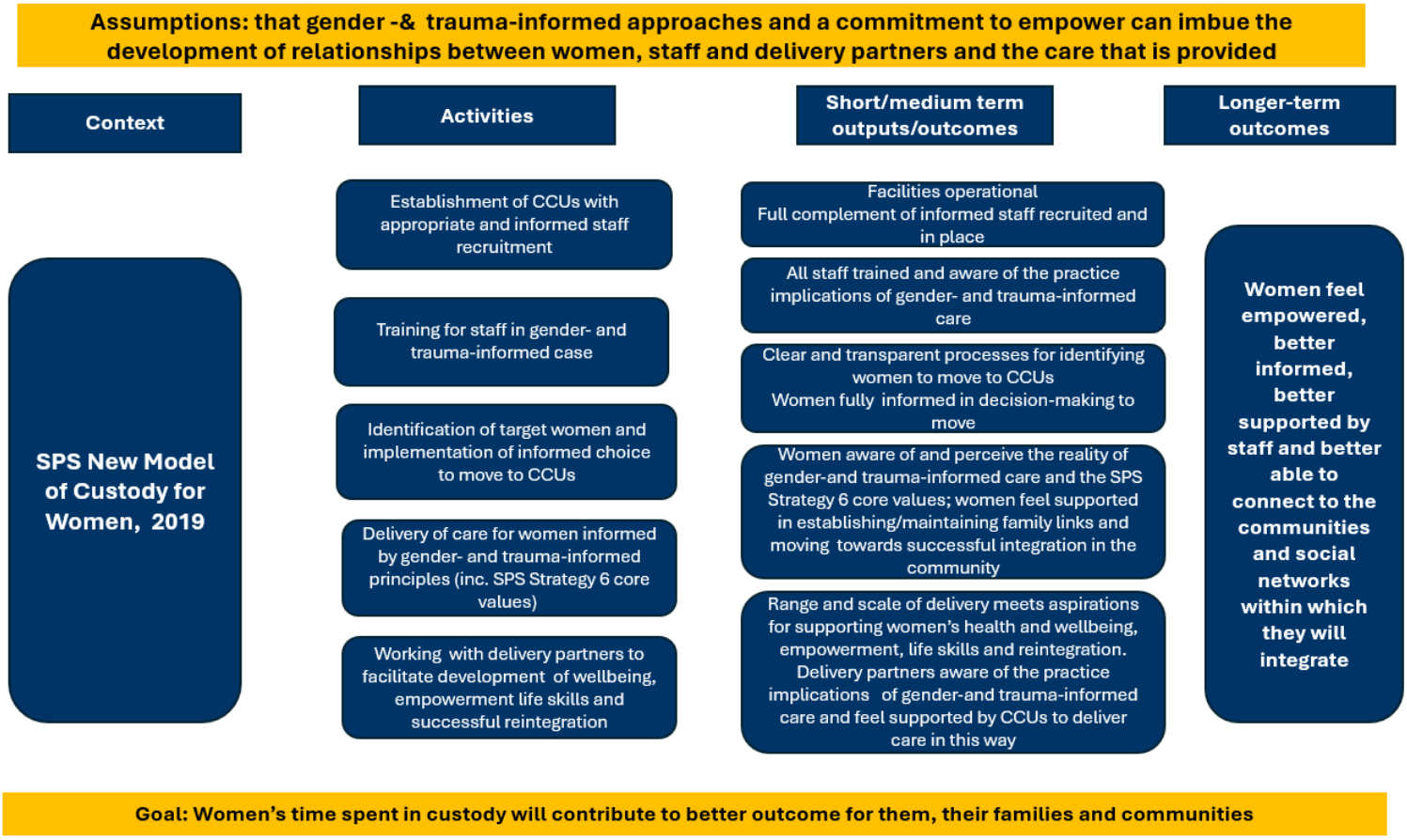
Background

As set out earlier in the report, a Theory of Change (ToC) is a description of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. It outlines the stated goals of a desired change, the interventions or activities that are intended to effect change, and the conditions or circumstances that need to be in place (and how these relate to each other) to allow change to happen. This allows for the link between the intervention and the successful achievement of goals to be more fully understood and can help to highlight where the original programme theory is flawed in its conception or in its implementation.

This chapter presents our summary of the implicit CCU ToC. To develop this, we used the key policy documents pertinent to the CCUs (detailed earlier). This was discussed with our project Advisory Board in June 2024 and, it shaped our study design and data collection tools.

In addition, this chapter provides a policy perspective on some of the main strands (or 'activities') of the ToC in light of interviews conducted with four senior officials occupying strategic and/or operational roles within SPS. All were involved in development of the CCUs and provided detailed information on the conception of the CCUs, and their early stages of operation. Three of those interviewed contributed to the SPS Women's Strategy 2021-2025 which encapsulates the vision for gender-sensitive and trauma-informed working. Their insights provide important context for understanding the vision and ToC for the CCUs. Because the interviews were undertaken one year into the process of implementation, some of the data refer to perceptions of implementation as well as to aspirations of how the CCUs had been anticipated to operate. Figure 1 (overleaf) shows the SPAROW initial ToC.

Figure 1. SPAROW Initial Theory of Change



Establishment of CCUs

It was generally agreed that the genesis of the CCUs lies in the Report of the Commission for Women Offenders (2012) and ideas about 'one stop' justice centres. These have their origins in the Corston Report (2007) published in England and Wales, and which were originally imagined as replacements for HMP & YOI Cornton Vale which was due to be closed when the ideas for CCUs were first discussed. The since-closed 218 Service was based in Glasgow and offered a comprehensive programme of support for women, as an alternative to a custodial sentence. It aimed to address the root causes of women's offending, by offering a therapeutic, trauma-informed programme for women to actively engage in their own personal recovery journey and was mentioned by interviewees as a source of inspiration for the CCUs.

As stated, five CCUs were originally envisaged, but the interviews with senior managers indicate a broad consensus that it was right to reduce this to two such Units. This was based on apparent need, to be pragmatic in terms of resources, and to reflect a wish to see how they worked out before making further commitment: 'Start with two and test them out and then see where that takes us. We'll review later' (SSM 2). There were also concerns about 'community fit' – needing to be confident that each CCU would not provoke undue resistance from local residents and the wider community wherein they were located. They also

needed to be close to amenities and services with knowledge and experience of working with women. Inverclyde had been considered as a possible site for a new large-scale women's prison, for instance, but the location was considered to be without a good community fit. The importance of community fit was highlighted in the two chosen CCU sites of Glasgow and Dundee – as one interviewee stated:

> "Things were easier in Glasgow – partly because of 218, partly because of the Scottish Working Group on Women. There wasn't a model in Dundee and people there were less familiar with the debates and concerns for women." (SSM 1).

Broader reservations largely revolved around community 'pushback', particularly in Dundee, but, through the local authorities in Dundee and Glasgow much effort was put into communications and reassuring the local communities that people would be safe in the community. Other complexities (availability/ownership of land and the Covid-19 pandemic) crept in, and delayed the building of the two CCUs. However, the aesthetic vision remained clear: "We wanted vision: light, garden, colour, connections between buildings." (SSM2).

There was certainly agreement that bespoke design for the two CCUs was important. The architectural brief included the need for a trauma-informed design. As one strategic manager indicated:

> "Much effort was put into the design of the centres to reflect women's mental health needs, to promote independent living skills, to be trauma-informed. They were designed to look and feel like homes." (SSM2).

In addition, it was clear that the vision for the CCUs was rooted in a clear recognition of women's needs based on general research findings regarding women caught up in the criminal justice system. The vision was also based on what was known about women in the Scottish penal system in particular with a specific recognition of the role played by trauma. SSM 4, for example, commented:

> "Ninety per cent of women in custody have mental health difficulties, anxiety, depression, and have also experienced childhood trauma, a third of our women meet the diagnostic criteria for PTSD."

Linked to this evidence-based approach was a recognition of the importance of consultation with women who had lived experience of imprisonment, as well as research evidence on best practice.

> "There was immense effort to consult with women about their experiences of the estate, what would help. And we looked for evidence regarding best practice and what works." (SSM3).

Selection, training and support for staff

Interviewees commented on the recognition from the outset that staff for the CCUs would have to be carefully recruited and trained so that aspirations around gender-specificity and trauma-informed care delivery could be met. As one commented:

> "We had values-based interviews with those who wanted to work in the CCUs; we wanted the right attitudes. All operational staff; we wanted those who knew about risk management but who were capable of a 'lighter touch'." (SSM1).

The recruitment process involved:

> "Open competition and encouragement to apply. It was important to attract the right staff, those who would be able to adapt and respond… work in a different culture. It's not just the facilities, it is the way the CCUs are run, what they 'feel like' that matters." (SSM3).

Interviewees noted, however, that delays in opening the CCUs resulted in some recruited staff having lost interest or moved on. Thus, there was a shared sense that it was hard to maintain the momentum around a freshly trained and strategically selected workforce.

This said, it was clear from the interviews with the strategic managers that training was seen as an important way of setting out the expectations of working in a CCU. Training was to include content on operational matters, new processes, trauma, desistance, caring for women in custody, and working in a CCU. One mentioned 'pain-free control' training, as opposed to the regular 'control and restraints' training provided by the Scottish Prison Service (SSM 4). This was supported by other strategic managers:

> "There's a new restraint process, piloted in Stirling, and elsewhere. A UNCRC [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child] non-pain inducing approach. So training in the new control and restraint process is important. We need more emphasis on violence reduction management generally, CCUs included." (SSM 3).

Ongoing training and supervisory support was recognised to be important in maintaining new ways of working.

> "We can't do things properly without appropriate supervisory practice. Staff need CPD [continuing professional development] and reflection space to reinforce ideas… think differently." (SSM 3).

One particular example of required training was in regard to professional boundary setting. As one manager put it, "Staff might disclose personal things to be helpful – in this more relaxed setting – without fully realising the dangers in this. It is a question of balance in the power relationship. So work on boundary setting is important." (SSM 3).

Identification of target women and implementation of informed choice in move to CCUs

Through the developmental phases, strong consideration was given to which women might be suitable for transfer to a CCU and, in particular, the level of risk posed and whether moving to a CCU could be seen as part of prisoner progression. However, in terms of vision, there was also a strong sense amongst the strategic managers that equality legislation shaped what was realistic:

> "One of the internal challenges was about equalities – you couldn't have criteria that would be different from those relating to men – there had to be the same level of access to support, even if in a different format." (SSM 3).

> "There was lots of discussion on the selection criteria for the CCUs, especially on the issue of whether a move to a CCU should be seen as part of a progression model. We had to look at offence specific risks – specific risks before the CCUs could be opened up to a wider group." (SSM 3).

Choice was also viewed as paramount with a recognition that some women may not want to leave a closed environment where they felt safe, and where they had established friendships and relationships:

> "It's a big step probably to go somewhere when you are settled and even though the opportunity is there to have home leaves or a work placement, a lot of the women feel comfortable in [the prison]; they feel quite safe." (SSM 4).

When asked about criteria for admission to the CCUs since their inception it was clear that progression criteria had been reviewed, alongside escorted leave and temporary leave. However, there were challenging issues to do with comparisons and equality in treatment. Thus, the issue is conceived as how to give women access to the community without changing the SPS Prison Rules. Some women were thought to meet the criteria for being in a CCU, 'but not the criteria for community access' (SSM 4). At the time of the senior strategic manager interviews (January – March 2024), less than one third of the women had access to the community or home leave.

Summary

In this chapter we have identified the early aspirations for the CCUs at a strategic level – these fit with our depiction of the SPS Strategy for Women in Custody in Chapter 2. We have also identified that in the early stages of implementation, strategic stakeholders were aware of key barriers to be negotiated. These included identifying suitable locations for CCUs with appropriate community buy-in; the logistics of recruiting, training and retaining staff fitting the ethos of the model; and, the tensions between aspirations for CCUs and what is allowable under current equality legislation.

5. Gender-specificity and trauma-informed practice in a prison environment

The SPS Strategy for Women in Custody 2021-2025 emphasised the centrality of a gender-specific and trauma-informed approach within the CCUs:

> "The strategy is founded on the principle that all aspects of the care of women in custody should be designed for women and take account of their likely experience of trauma and adversities. All aspects of the approach will therefore be both gender-specific and trauma-informed." (SPS 2021)

The SPS Strategy for Women intended that these principles should underpin and inform a number of things. These include the skills and knowledge of SPS staff, the quality of the relationships between staff and women, the women's health and wellbeing and the services, approaches and tools available to help to address the individual needs and risks of the women.

As previously stated, the strategy incorporates nine key gender-sensitive and trauma-informed principles. These, variously, focus on a recognition of:

- women's distinctive needs and circumstances;
- women's potential;
- the importance of positive relationships to support women's journeys through the penal system;
- the effects of trauma and the potential for re-traumatisation;
- the development of women's agency to encourage engagement and participation;
- the importance of an evidence-based approach to interventions known to promote desistance from crime and improve life chances;
- the wellbeing and rights of children with others in custody, and;
- a culture of continuous improvement based on evaluation, evidence and lived experience.

In this chapter we describe how, and the extent to which, gender-specificity and trauma-informed practice have been operationalised in the design intentions of the CCU environments. We also briefly outline the prison staffing arrangements and the statutory and non-statutory partner presence in the CCUs. Before doing so, we briefly highlight some of the recognised challenges of implementing these principles and practices in prison environments.

Challenges of implementation

Prisons are considered very challenging places to introduce and embed trauma-informed practice (Miller & Najavits 2012; Auty et al. 2022; Vaswani & Paul 2019; Thomas 2023). Research on trauma-informed practice within prisons highlights several obstacles preventing its operationalisation and delivery. For example, prison architecture and design with harsh, unnatural lighting, sterile spaces, loud

unexpected noises and showers that lack privacy are physical features that can be re-triggering for those with histories of trauma.

Kelman et al. (2024) note that creating trauma-informed settings is a dynamic process which is somewhat complicated by prisons being inherently triggering environments for women. Pat-downs, strip searches and other unwanted physical contact can be extremely distressing for survivors of abuse (Elliot et al. 2005). A physical environment that is designed in such a way that embodies and reflects the care required to deliver and sustain trauma-informed practice is essential.

Trauma-informed and gender-specific work also require organisational support and strong and demonstrable buy-in from prison leadership. The knowledge and approach of prison staff is crucial. There is very limited work on the role, implementation, and impact of trauma-informed practice approaches within prison contexts in Scotland. A notable exception is Vaswani and Paul's (2019) research undertaken with 200 prison officers in a Scottish Young Offender Institution (YOI); they concluded that whilst prison staff may support and endorse the role of a trauma-informed approach in prisons, this is significantly constrained by their organisational purpose, which is fundamentally to punish.

Against the known challenges of meaningful implementation, the vision for the CCUs to both embody and deliver trauma-informed and gender-specific work is indeed ambitious. In what follows we describe how the CCUs attempt to meet this ambition.

Reflecting the SPS Strategy for Women: a gender-specific and trauma-informed approach?

The intention for the CCUs was that they embody an organisational shift to be more gender-specific and trauma-informed, in their physical design, their organisational ethos, and in the approach of staff and partners delivering services into them.

Physical design of the CCUs

Particular attention has been paid to the physical design and layout of the CCUs, to promote feelings of safety and afford an element of privacy for women. Each CCU consists of two storey 'shared houses' of which there are three in HMP Bella and four in HMP Lilias. Each house has individual bedrooms, each with an en-suite shower room and toilet, to accommodate individual women. Each shared house also has a large communal kitchen with cooking and food storage facilities, a living/dining room area, and a shared bathroom. The houses incorporate trauma-informed design principles, with simple but comfortable furniture, and with large, un-barred windows letting in lots of natural light. The aim is to create a 'residential feel' and women are provided with good quality bedding and bedroom fittings, hairdryers and toiletries.

The shared houses are situated a short walk away from another larger single-storey building. These contain the CCU reception area, staff/administrative offices, small rooms used by educational providers and nursing staff and a very small gym with

some items of strength conditioning equipment. They also contain a large ‘Hub’ which can be used by women, their visiting families and delivery partners providing services into the CCUs.

The ‘Hub’ is a large communal area with comfortable couch seating, several tables and upright chairs which can be used as dining areas and for various activities. There is also a large open-plan kitchen area intended for women to use. It has doors leading out into a garden adjacent to a small children’s play area, for use by the women’s children and other family members when visiting.

CCU house-style accommodation and community ‘Hub’ area

The SPS Strategy for Women in Custody states that it seeks to reduce the damaging impact of a mother’s imprisonment on her children. This includes ‘using best practice in design, facilities and provision that relate to children while they are in custodial settings – family rooms, mother and child facilities, and CCUs’. Both HMP Lilias and HMP Bella have accommodation which could be used to house a mother with her baby. During the course of the research, however these spaces were not in use.

All buildings are situated in landscaped garden grounds with attractive herbaceous planting, short paths for walking and places to sit. The CCU buildings reflect trauma-informed design principles (Jewkes et al. 2019). For example, the buildings are of a clear design and offer a simple lay-out; there are a range of spaces that can be used by the women. The Hub is a flexible and easily adaptable space with lightweight furniture that can be re-configured in different ways and used for a range of purposes. For example, it can be used for learning events and drop-in sessions organised by service providers. A key intended use of the Hub was for family visits. Once through the reception area, there is a child and family-friendly environment, with a garden space and the ability to move around freely. This differs markedly from traditional prison visits that take place in a very controlled environment.

The wide internal corridors and smaller rooms used by the women in the larger building are also of simple design, uncrowded by furniture or other obstacles, and avoiding any sensory overload. The use of colours – mainly pastel shades throughout – seek to alleviate any negative emotions associated with trauma. All of the areas used by the women were designed to create a sense of normality.

From the outset, the CCUs and the staff working within them were expected to operate in a trauma-informed way which also took into account women's gender-specific needs. So, for example, as a means of supporting agency and responsibility women were expected to maintain their personal and communal living spaces. They are given a weekly shopping allowance of £38.50 and are expected to budget, shop, and prepare their own meals. Personal Officers (POs) sit with the women as they work through shopping lists to ensure that they have enough planned food for three meals a day across the week. The POs and the women work together to develop a weekly meal plan. The plan is then uploaded to a shopping order sheet (created by SPS), the food is then ordered and delivered weekly.

The women all carry a key card that enables access to their bedroom, their house, and other areas of the CCU, such as the Hub and the gym space, depending on their regime. Unless they are on a cleaning work party, women cannot access the CCU reception areas or the staff offices. They must stay in their house at night, and houses are locked each evening at 8pm. However, women do not have to go into their bedrooms at that time and are free to associate with the other women who live there.

Another key intention of the SPS Strategy for Women is to encourage the women to contribute to their individualised case management plan, developed in conjunction with their PO. Through this collaborative process, women are encouraged to identify their specific needs, as well as their skills and assets and the types of support services and interventions that may be helpful to them.

There are minimal overt signs of security in the CCUs; however all staff carry radios which also act as an alarm.

SPS officers in the CCUs

In each CCU there are a combination of residential and operational officers, along with up to six line managers. Officers in the CCUs have different remits and responsibilities according to their job role. Residential officers work closely with the women residents on a day-to-day basis to provide support and care and longer-term case management. Key skills sought by SPS in a residential officer are the ability to offer and provide support in a non-judgmental and encouraging way. Residential officers are also dedicated POs who work directly with individual women.

Operational officers are responsible for the overall security and functioning of the CCUs. They are the first point of contact for visitors and have responsibility for screening, searching and facilitating entry and exit. Operational officers monitor security systems (CCTV, alarm and communication) and are responsible for ensuring the safety of staff and the women residents and any visitors to the CCU. They are also a key point of contact for family support and are responsible for observing and supervising family visits. They manage the entry and release of the women and also accompany them to, for example, hospitals, dentists, court hearings, as required.

First Line Managers (FLMs) are responsible for monitoring and auditing of risk management of the women, and the scrutiny of case management activities. They also provide oversight and support to staff. Each CCU has a Unit Manager who has overall responsibility for the day-to-day running of the CCU and reports to the Governor of HMP Stirling under whose remit the CCUs lie.

Each CCU has a staff contingent of between 30 and 36. However, staff work a shift pattern in line with a set roster so are not all in the CCU at the same time. Shifts cover a variety of working patterns: early shift, day shift, back shift and night shift. Given the variety of shifts, officers tend only to see those who share the same shift patterns; as such they see their other colleagues very infrequently, if at all.

As discussed in more detail in Chapter 8, there is variability in the level of experience of officers working in the CCUs. Most have past experience of working for the prison service, either in Scotland or in England, before transferring into a CCU. At the time of the research interviews, officers' length of service ranged from almost three decades to three weeks. Most had experience of working in men's prisons before transferring to a CCU. For others, the CCU was their only experience of working in a prison.

Although it was originally intended that around 70-75 per cent of prison officers working in the CCUs would be female, at the time of the research this had not yet been fully achieved. Nevertheless female officers are currently in the majority and their proportion increased over the fieldwork period. Most of the residential officers who were interviewed had only ever worked in the male prison estate. All but one had only ever worked in closed conditions. Just a small number of those interviewed had experience of working in the women's prison estate.

Training for SPS Officers

In order for the SPS to meet their vision and goals for the CCUs, it is crucial that the training delivered to officers who are deployed within them is comprehensive and ensures that they feel equipped to do the job expected of them.

New SPS prison officers undergo an 8-week Officer Foundation Programme, which incorporates a mix of classroom instruction, practical skills training, and learning assessments. This is delivered at the Scottish Prison Service College (SPSC), Polmont. In addition to this basic training, which includes a module on working with women, CCU staff are expected to undergo trauma-informed training sessions. These were developed by National Health Service (NHS) Education Scotland for use by NHS employees, social workers, criminal justice employees and other sectors (NHS Education for Scotland 2017).

Health and social care services for women within the CCUs

There is an NHS presence in each CCU. In terms of medical staff, there are one or two nurses in the CCUs each week from Monday to Friday and an occupational therapist once or twice a week. A doctor visits once a week. There is a dedicated medical room in each CCU where the NHS staff are based. They conduct examinations, prescribe and dispense medication and make referrals to other NHS

services where necessary. Women can self-refer to the NHS nursing team and are not dependent on officers doing it for them, as may be the case in closed conditions.

There is also a clinical psychologist in each of the CCUs, who will typically spend one to two days a week there. The psychologists are part of the NHS Clinical Psychology Intervention Service who work across other Scottish prisons. They conduct assessments, deliver therapy and treat mental health problems of the women in an equivalent way to that provided by clinical psychologists in the community. The psychologists do not accept self-referrals direct from the women, but receive them from SPS officers or the NHS medical staff in the CCUs. The psychologists also work with the CCU officers. They offer a weekly staff forum for them to understand the women's presentations, and to provide the staff with informal support.

Social workers are frequent visitors to the CCUs, providing one-on-one support for the women throughout their sentences, assessing their risks and needs and, where feasible, connecting them with other resources. They also participate in Integrated Case Management Case Conferences, and provide reports for Parole Boards in relation to individual women. Social workers in the CCUs also play a role in supporting family contact for the women.

A housing officer works with women to plan for sustainable accommodation and support as part of a case management approach. Housing officers facilitate advice and planning regarding accommodation including financial or debt issues such as arrears payments.

Multi-disciplinary working across the health and social care partners is strongly encouraged in the CCUs, to ensure a holistic approach to working with the women there.

SPS delivery partners

Delivery partners provide a service to prison establishments/prisoners and are an important feature of all Scottish prisons. They provide a range of services across the prison estate and have a significant role in the CCUs, representing as they do, a direct link between prisons and the community.

Statutory services (such as social work and health services) work in partnership with SPS and are funded to do so. Other services (notably third sector and voluntary groups or individuals) do not receive SPS funding to deliver their services. Hence they need to generate their own funding through trusts and/or charitable bodies. Third sector, voluntary groups and individuals delivering services into the CCUs variously include addiction support, arts and craft groups, jewellery making, and reading groups. Such groups (those that are funded independently from SPS) are required first to complete a Partnership Agreement. This aims to support collaborative working between SPS and organisations delivering independently funded services in Scottish prisons.

They are also required to complete and submit a lengthy Partnership Pack detailing key information about the partner, their services and delivery details. This involves completing a lengthy and detailed application form which requires sign off by various SPS personnel at different stages in the process. An outline proposal is completed initially which is sent to the Head of Offender Outcomes (HOO) at the relevant prison. A Service Demand and Due Diligence section is then completed by the HOO within one month, indicating if the service/intervention is of interest to the prison. If there is a need for, or interest in, the service, then a meeting or series of meetings will take place between the third sector organisation and the prison. This will involve discussion of operational details and any potential challenges or practicalities that may need to be addressed.

If, at this point, there is agreement between SPS and the third sector organisation, a Partnership Agreement will be signed off by both organisations. The service will subsequently be reviewed by the SPS based on this agreement and the proposed plans and outcomes.

If a service is going to be delivered in several prisons, then this will require a separate Partnership Agreement to be signed for each prison, to ensure that any specific arrangements can be put in place as appropriate. The experiences of CCU Delivery Partners are discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.

6. Who are the women in the CCUs?

This chapter describes the processes through which women are identified, assessed and selected for transfer from closed conditions elsewhere in the female prison estate to the CCUs. It describes the risk assessment processes and offers the views of CCU staff and women residents on the transfer processes. The chapter also provides an overview of who the women are that are coming into, and transitioning out of, the CCUs. This is done using data provided by the CCUs during the fieldwork period.

Processes for transferring from closed conditions to a CCU

Identification/selection of women

As a first step in identifying women considered suitable for transfer to a CCU, the Governor of HMP Stirling, along with one or both of the CCU managers, scrutinise the SPS prisoner database. This identifies women who could potentially 'fit the CCU criteria' (LM 002). All women who fit the criteria will be reviewed.

Interviews with Strategic Managers and First Line Managers provided information on the processes regarding the identification of women for the CCUs. Women may be put forward for consideration for transfer on the recommendation of their POs. They may also be put forward by CCU staff who visit the women's facilities at HMP Greenock, HMP & YOI Grampian and HMP & YOI Polmont to identify women they consider meet the criteria and/or who wish to move to a CCU.

A woman may be eligible for transfer to a CCU if she satisfies the following:

- is assigned low supervision status;
- has no misconduct reports;
- has no outstanding criminal charges;
- has no positive and at least one negative mandatory drug test, and;
- has served appropriate period of sentence in closed conditions (SPS Community Access Policy 2018: 50).

There are specific categories of prisoner that are exempt from selection to transfer to a CCU. This includes women on remand and those that present a high or medium risk (due to, for example, breached bail conditions, those convicted of sexual offences, or those with license conditions). Where women have an outstanding court appearance or a misconduct report (and are therefore ineligible at that time) they are marked so that they may be considered for review again at a later stage (LM 002 Manager).

There are very few factors that fully disqualify women from being eligible. For example, women with substance abuse issues are eligible and may receive support inside CCUs from both NHS and various third-party providers, and/or outside of the facility, and may continue to receive support upon release.
As ownership of the transfer and progress process lies with HMP & YOI Stirling, the Governor can (and has) used her discretion to accept a woman who falls outside

the criteria. Equally, the Governor retains the ability to refuse anyone who is put forward by a CCU manager or a woman's PO if she deems them unsuitable.

Assessment and admission

The SPS Community Access Policy (SPS, 2018) states that the manager of the Assessment Centre in HMP Stirling alongside the Governor (and with input from CCU managers) share the responsibility for overseeing the process of assessment and admission to the CCUs. A woman's sentence/progression status dictates the assessment and admission route she must go through.

SPS Progression Pathways define the criteria for progression and minimum period of sentence that each prisoner type is expected to serve in a secure establishment before being eligible for consideration to progress to less secure conditions (HMIP 2024). The recommended timescales differ for each category of offender:

- life sentenced are eligible to transfer no earlier than four years prior to the expiry of the punishment part of their sentence;
- long-term prisoners (LTPs, with sentences of over four years) must have served six months in custody and be within two years of their parole qualifying date;
- short-term prisoners (STPs, with sentences of less than four years) must have served three months in custody and must be serving a minimum of 12 months.

Once a prisoner has met their predefined timeframe in a closed prison, they will be seen as being eligible to progress, subject to meeting certain standard criteria. In terms of risk of reoffending, they must demonstrate that they have taken steps to reduce their risk. There must be sufficient evidence that the risk presented can be managed in the community.

Risk Management Team (RMT)

LTPs are managed through a Risk Management Team (RMT) progression process which is used by all closed establishments. In 2018, the SPS introduced the Risk Management, Progression and Temporary Release Guidance and the Supplementary Guidance for Risk Management Teams (SPS 2018). FLM interviews gave insight into the operation of the RMT, which is a component of the Integrated Case Management (ICM) process that operates in all prisons. ICM is a process whereby other agencies work closely with SPS to give prisoners help and support to deal with any social or personal difficulties, so that they are less likely to re-offend on release. ICM is based on a case-conference model which plots a prisoner's progress and assesses and manages risk. Information from case conferences relating to individual prisoners are recorded on Prison Records 2 (PR2), which is a database on which details of all prisoners are recorded. Officers (and prison-based social work staff) are able to input data directly into the PR2 system.

The RMT is a multi-disciplinary team comprising professionals from agencies involved in the care and management of all prisoners. Its primary purpose is to consider the assessment, intervention and management needs of prisoners referred via the ICM process (or where local management have a particular concern about an offender's behaviour or ongoing management that requires immediate intervention). It is also the decision-making body that considers progression to less secure conditions and/or community access.

It is the latter consideration that is most relevant in relation to women's transfer from closed conditions to a CCU. In making a decision the RMT considers three key areas: the time served in a closed prison, individual levels of risk, and the individual's behaviour in custody. The RMT's key role here is to assess the risk that the woman may abscond, pose a danger or cause harm to the public (SPS 2018).

RMTs will also consider the extent to which the prisoner has positively engaged with the prison regime. This will include the prisoner's supervision level, PO reports, behavioural updates, information held by the intelligence management unit, attendance at purposeful activity (work, education, etc.), Offending Behaviour Programme completions and engagement with ICM processes.

Upon a woman being approved for progression via the RMT, the CCU will review any proposed management plan prior to granting the woman community access. A further condition which applies to LTPs is that they cannot progress to a CCU without a satisfactory Home Leave Report (HLR). This is conducted by a social worker and can take several weeks to complete.

Once a woman is residing in a CCU any subsequent progression, such as community access, is also managed by the RMT. LTPs, and 'top-enders' can only be granted community access once they are located within a CCU.

Women's Case Management Board (WCMB)

STPs are identified and selected through a Women's Case Management Board (WCMB). This is also a part of the ICM process, bringing together representatives from different agencies to discuss and plan for individual women in the prison estate. Membership of the WCMB includes the CCU Unit Manager and officers familiar with the individual's case management, as well as other agencies, such as social work. The WCMB conducts an initial assessment to ensure a woman meets the assessment criteria, followed by a determination of whether any risks can be managed safely in the community, and their needs can be met in a CCU.

As part of the admission process, STPs are interviewed by a CCU officer to further assess suitability. They are also subject to a drug test which can be carried out either before, or in some cases, after they transfer to a CCU. STPs can transfer to a CCU without an HLR, however, they must undergo one as soon as they arrive.

It is important to note that the WCMB does not make any decisions in relation to community access as this is the role of the RMT:

> "The WCMB will only determine a woman's suitability for transfer to CCU and in no way contribute to any decisions in relation to community access. Every woman who transfers to CCU will be subject to a period of induction to the facility and a period of supervised community access prior to being assessed for temporary release. This will be decided by RMT within the CCU." (SPS Community Access Policy 2018).

STPs will only be referred to an RMT if they are on staged access to the community. This is usually done once they are living in a CCU. If a woman chooses to move to the CCU she must sign a residency contract adhering to the rules of the CCU.

The CCUs therefore accommodate women prisoners of mixed custodial sentence lengths: STPs, LTPs, and 'top-end' prisoners (i.e. life sentence or long-term prisoners approaching a potential release date). For this latter group, the CCUs aim to function in a similar way to the 'top-end' facilities in the male prison estate, which enables a period of 'testing' in less secure conditions before accessing the community.

For women approaching the end of a long-term sentence, CCUs are intended to prepare them for transition back into society. For those serving short sentences, CCUs focus more on maintaining ties with the local community.

Views of CCU staff on risk assessment and admission processes

The majority of FLMs and many residential officers had worked in more than one prison establishment. They spoke about the different approaches taken between management teams and the different cultures around risk assessment and progression that had developed. The general feeling was that the priority status given to ICM could be quite different depending on the senior management team in place at that time.

Many officers also found the RMT processes confusing and reported that they were given no formal training or guidance on how it works in practice. As one said: 'it's a black box' (BS 002). Not fully understanding the process had an impact on staff confidence and ability to carry out their role; they also highlighted it as a notable frustration among the women. Officers explained that there were differences as to how an RMT runs in other open establishments in comparison to the CCUs and that this should not be the case where women are assessed low risk category. As one said:

> "it's stuff that managers here should be picking up on…But the problem I had was [male establishment] do them completely differently from us." (BS2 005 residential).

There was a perception that the RMT process for women ran differently depending on who was chairing it and could be very subjective in terms of risk. It was believed that this could lead to inconsistency in decision making. It could also (inadvertently) lead to tensions between the women who were often keenly aware of how other

women were progressing in the CCU, particularly in terms of gaining community access. There was also frustration voiced that despite the CCU officers having greater knowledge of the women than the deputy Governor, that it is the deputy Governor who has the final say in the RMT process.

> "When I say inconsistency, that goes like, all, in my opinion, all the way to the top. So, whoever chairs the RMT, whether it be the Governor or Deputy Governor, again, from what I've seen, have different opinions. Which then leaves it open to, so one woman will have an RMT that was run by the Governor and she will get X, Y and Z. The next lady will go up and it will be run by the Deputy Governor and she's maybe a bit more risk adverse and not too familiar with the process." (BS 007 residential).

Staff saw this as having strong potential to cause tensions if women were denied community access or were experiencing delays in having their First Grant for Temporary Release (women referred to this as their "First Grant") signed off.

> "And that creates an environment where it's like, 'why are you picking on me? Why am I not getting this?' And I can totally understand that." (LS 003 First line manager).

With regard to the WCMB which oversees STP transfers to a CCU, staff viewed this as a population management tool, with less consideration paid to risk. There were mixed views amongst staff about this:

> "I think every female coming here should go through the RMT process… It makes me uncomfortable that they don't consider risk prior to transferring short-termers here." (BS2 007 residential).

> "...I suppose for me as well I seek much more assurance from my first line managers that everybody has been assessed appropriately or has been considered appropriate." (LS3 001 Manager).

Other staff were less concerned, reporting that they sought information about STPs from the SPS prisoner record management system (PR2). Their concern was primarily whether the individual woman's needs could be met within the CCU.

Initially, following the establishment of the CCUs, face-to-face interviews were conducted with women identified as suitable for transferring to a CCU. Two CCU staff went out to the prisons where women were based. This process was viewed very positively by officers who found these meetings useful for explaining the CCUs to women, gauging their interest and answering any questions they might have.

This process changed over time however. Interviews conducted in the 3rd stage of fieldwork reported that CCU officers were going out to meet women in other establishments far less frequently in advance of women moving to a CCU. As an alternative, staff had begun interviewing them over the telephone instead: "because

of staffing, and cost, we've not been interviewing them face -to-face, but over the phone." (BS3 001 (1) residential).

Officers voiced a lot of concerns about this change. They explained that it was not always possible to assess women and their needs properly during a short phone call. This could result in women who were not suitable being transferred into the CCU (BS3 002: 2). Whilst this does not happen often, one officer relayed a case where a woman with psychosis had been assessed as suitable for transfer to a CCU. An STP who had been in custody for just a short time, she had not been seen at all by CCU staff before her arrival, highlighting the importance of the face-to-face interview process.

Views of women on processes of admission

For the most part, LTPs and those at the 'top-end' of their sentence viewed the process to progress out of closed conditions from another prison establishment into a CCU to be more protracted and onerous than the process for STPs. They felt that they were subject to more stringent conditions before they could be considered suitable for progression. Some STPs were transferred to a CCU in the early stages of their sentence after having spent relatively little time in closed conditions (i.e. weeks). In contrast, LTPs and 'top-enders' had spent a considerable number of years in prison and had progressed through various stages, and were required to complete specific programmes within other prison establishments, before arriving in a CCU. As one said:

> "Short-termers get a five-minute interview, a drug test and then on you come. Us, on the other hand, whoa! Psychology, social work, intel, medical, drugs tests, programme work." (BR2 002).

For the most part, LTPs and 'top-enders' considered moving to a CCU as a 'privilege' that they had earned after spending years in closed conditions, as well as seeing the move to a CCU as one step closer to release. Tensions arising between LTPs and STPs about the time the former spent in closed conditions before being transferred to a CCU was a recurrent theme throughout the research. There was a wide perception among LTPs that the process for STPs was an 'easier' or 'quicker' route. This was also the case in relation to their perceptions about the rapidity with which STPs gained community access for unescorted day release (UDR) and eligibility for work placements.

Some LTPs and 'top-enders' were particularly vocal about other women who had got UDR after just a few weeks. As one said: "I done years in Cornton Vale, done all my programmes – but she gets out and about before me – why?" (Bella, field notes). Another was upset that she would not be eligible for a work party for some months but others "came straight in and got jobs in the CCU" (Lilias field notes). Often these perceptions were due to a lack of information provision to women of how SPS processes differed for STPs and LTPs. This led, rather inevitably, to tensions between women which flared up when community access was allowed for STPs.

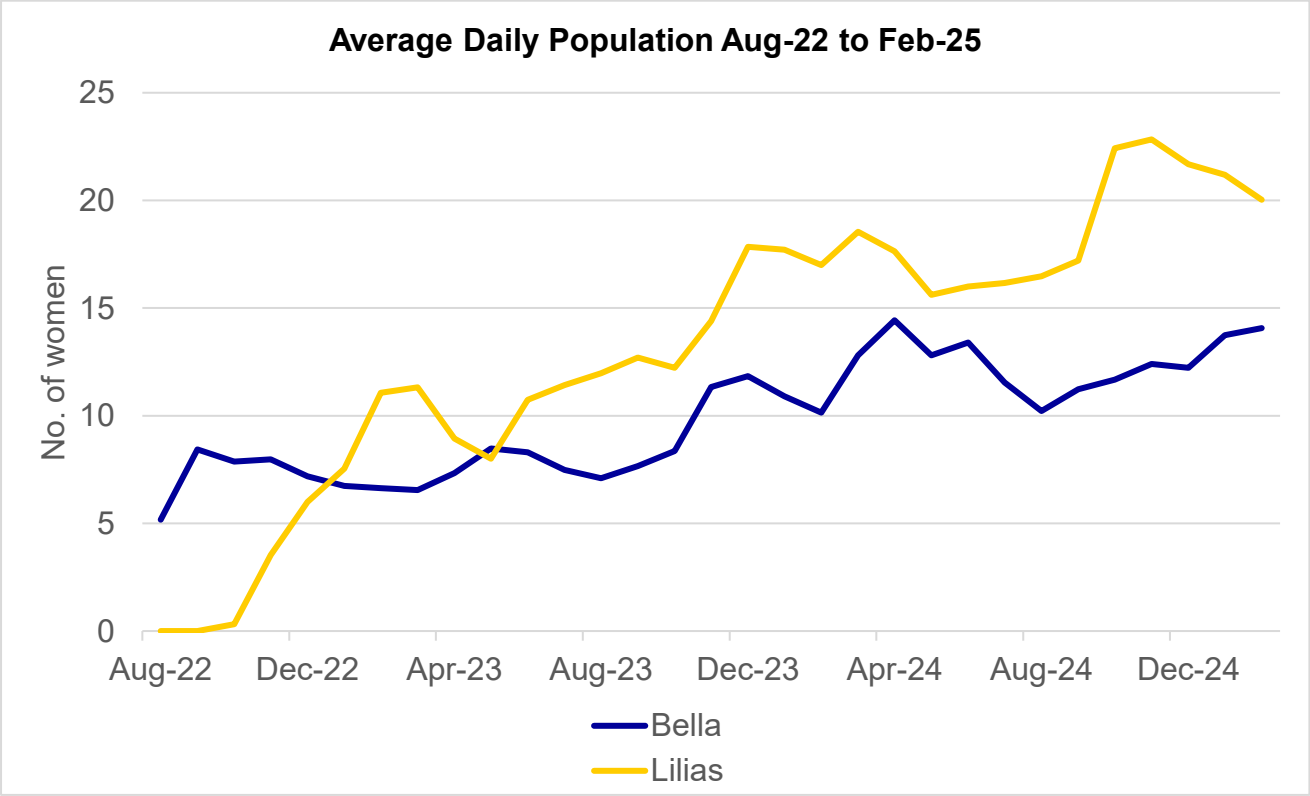
The significance of these categorisations of STP, LTP and 'top-end' women and the progression stages they denote, should not be underestimated. As several women told us, they play a key determining role in the ways in which living in a CCU is experienced. There are stark differences in what women consider 'privileges' that are based on a woman's categorisation – and these can also be a key site of resentment between women who are learning to live together in new surroundings. The implications of this mix of residents and, in particular, the tensions that this can give rise to are returned to throughout this report.

Populating the CCUs

The population of the CCUs changed considerably over the duration of the research. Chart 1 below shows changes in the populations of both HMP Lilias and HMP Bella from the point at which they became operational to February 2025. HMP Bella opened first, in August 2022, with HMP Lilias opening in October 2022. Women inevitably reside for different periods of time; some of those with longer prison sentences were living in the CCUs throughout the duration of the research, with others entering, and leaving at different points.

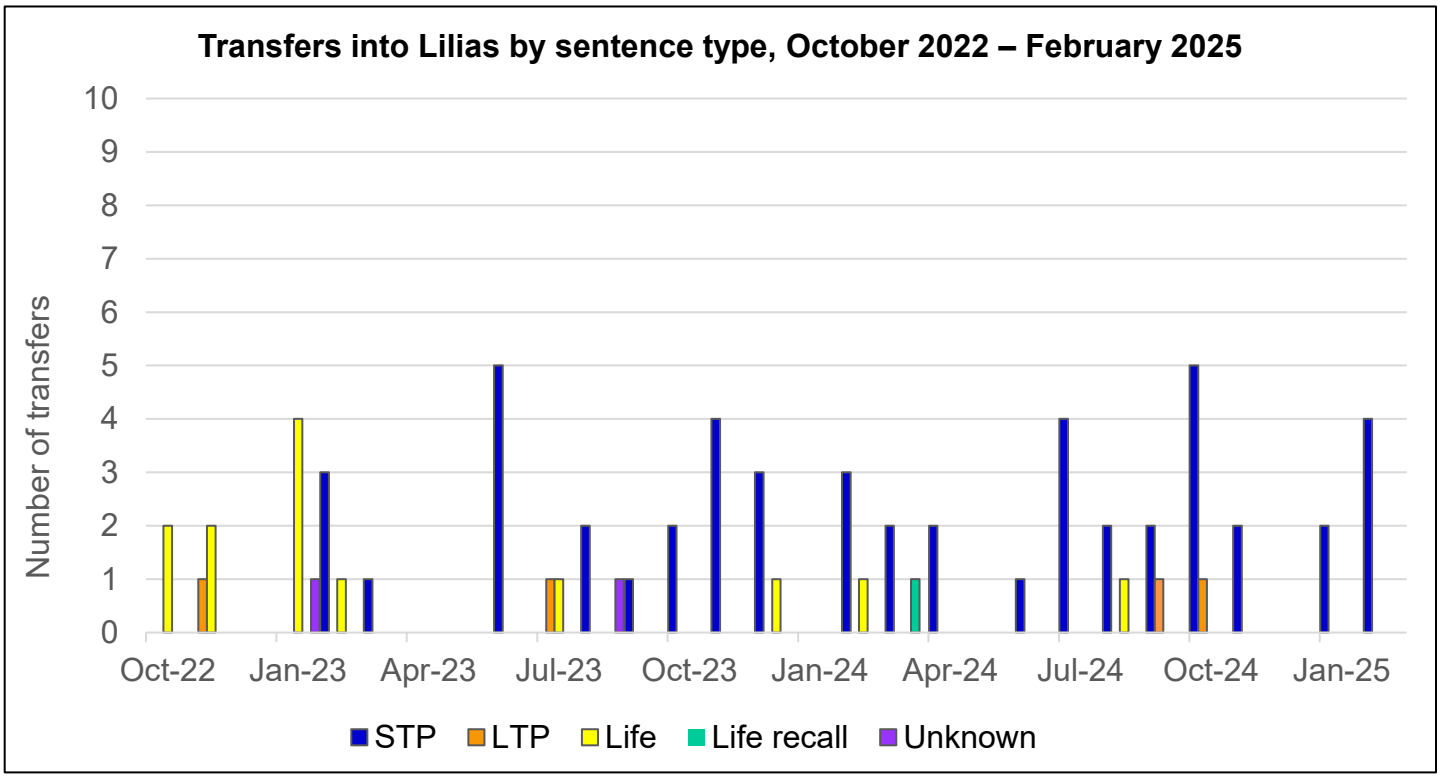
When the first stage of research fieldwork commenced in August 2023, the numbers of women living in the CCUs were low, with 12 women living in HMP Lilias and seven women living in HMP Bella. By the close of the third stage of fieldwork, this had grown to 20 women in HMP Lilias (which has capacity for 24 women) and 14 in HMP Bella (which has capacity for 16 women). Neither CCU reached capacity during the period of the research although numbers in late 2024 and early 2025 neared this.

Chart 1. Average daily populations each month by CCU Aug 2022 – Feb 2025



By the end of 2024, numbers of women living in the CCUs had risen with a significantly higher percentage of STPs in relation to LTPs. This can be seen clearly in Charts 2 and 3, which provide an overview of transfers into the CCUs. The first chart, which shows transfers into HMP Lilias from its inception in October 2022 up to the end of February 2025, shows the very slow increases in numbers of women being transferred in during the earlier months following the opening of the CCUs. It also shows the changing profile, with many more STPs than LTP and 'top-end' prisoners being moved there as the months went on.

Chart 2. Transfers into HMP Lilias – October 2022 to February 2025

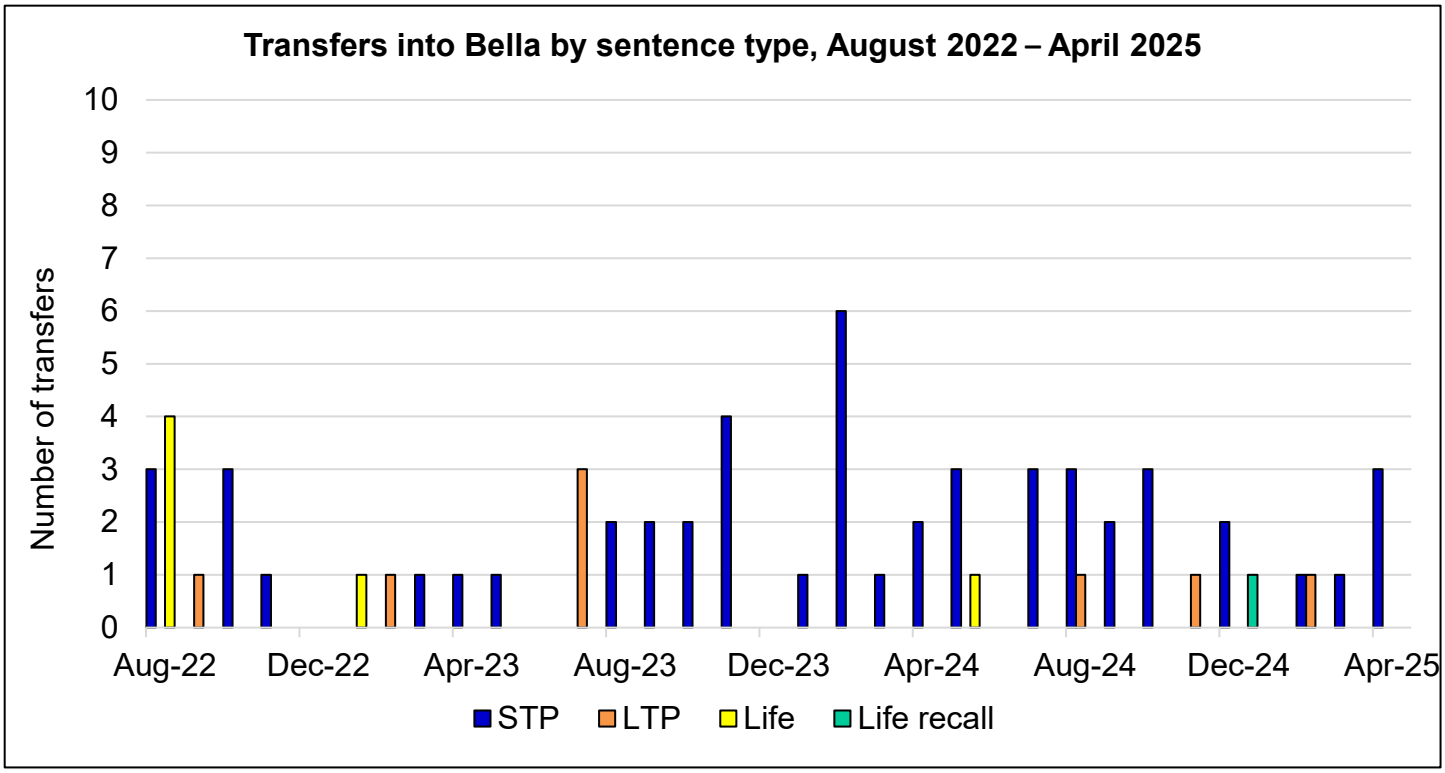


Taken from: SPS data on women in HMP Lilias, March 2025.

The sentencing profiles of women differ between HMP Lilias and HMP Bella. There is a higher number of life-sentenced women entering HMP Lilias and both CCUs show the increased numbers of STPs transferred in since inception.

Initially STPs would have to spend a period of at least three months in closed conditions before they could be considered eligible for transfer to a CCU. However, CCU staff interviews revealed that, within a relatively short time after opening, this no longer held, and there were instances where STPs were transferred shortly after arriving in a closed establishment. It was suggested that the reason behind this change in approach was due to the low numbers of women coming into the CCUs and a need to increase numbers.

Chart 3. Transfers into HMP Bella, August 2022 – April 2025



Taken from: SPS data on women in HMP Bella, April 2025.

Moreover, whilst the formal criteria for admission via the WCMB process had not changed since inception, some important changes were made in terms of the selection of women for transfer. For example, whereas at first, women with any outstanding charges were automatically excluded for selection, CCU staff were subsequently told to consider them. The WCMB was tasked with assessing whether women's needs/risks could be managed within the CCUs.

Women's journeys into, through, and out of the CCUs

This section describes how women were informed about a prospective move to a CCU and their journeys through it. To do so, it draws on interview data from the women and from 'raw' data provided by the CCUs on women's entry into, and progression through the CCUs.

The data provides information on the numbers of women in each CCU over the period since inception to the end of February 2025 (HMP Lilias) and mid-April 2025 (HMP Bella) and their sentence type. It also specifies the prison establishments from which the women came. Tracing the women's journeys in and through the CCUs using this data also yields information about the numbers of women who were returned from a CCU back into closed conditions and those who were liberated. The data also reveals the numbers of women who were given community access, work placements and UDR.

Entering a CCU

Women had widely differing journeys into, and through a CCU. In addition to their prisoner status, there were marked differences in the amount of information

provided to women in advance of, or at the point of moving. There were also differences in the ways in which that information was conveyed and the amount of time between being informed and actually moving to a CCU.

Prior to moving, particularly in the months following the establishment of the CCUs, women's levels of awareness about either the existence of the CCUs or their intended purposes were low. Most women interviewed in Phase 1 said they had not heard of the CCUs until they were approached to go there. A small number had heard about the CCUs through INSIDENEWS, a prison radio station. Some heard about the CCUs from other women in prison, others from social workers, or their POs.

One LTP said that it had taken her 'weeks and weeks and weeks' to find out anything – all she knew was that 'women lived in houses and could see their family' (BR 001: 1). At the same time an STP said that she got a visit from a CCU officer who 'interviewed' her and said afterwards 'see you in Bella' and she transferred four weeks later (BR 001: 2).

Some women were asked (by their PO in closed conditions or a visiting CCU officer) if they would transfer/progress into a CCU. Others, mainly STPs, were unaware that they were being considered for relocation until informed they were moving by their PO. Some spoke of being provided with 'the CCU leaflet' whilst in closed conditions. A small number reported that they were visited by a CCU officer, before moving, who explained more about life in the CCUs.

Theoretically, women were offered familiarisation visits before moving to a CCU so that they could look around the facilities, meet other women, and determine whether they wanted to move there, but this was not always the case.

STPs tended not to be given much warning of when they would be moving. Interviews with this group, in all fieldwork stages, suggested that they were not all given the opportunity to visit the CCU prior to transfer. Once informed they were going, the move happened very quickly. As one woman told us: "I think I came for my visit on the Monday and I got told I was going to be coming here on the Friday" (BR2 002).

For LTPs and life prisoners who had been in a closed establishment for a long time, the move to a CCU was a big adjustment due to the sudden change in regime. Many were overwhelmed by the whole process. This seemed to be the reason why LTP and 'top-end' women were offered several visits to familiarise themselves with the new surroundings before the move.

As the CCUs became more established, women became more aware of their existence. Some women were keen and motivated to move and had asked their POs how the process worked and how and when they might be considered for a move. A small number mentioned that the sending establishment could sometimes be slow to complete the paperwork needed to transfer to the CCU, which was experienced as frustrating.

The different routes that LTP and STP residents follow (progression and transfer respectively) and the amount and type of information that women were provided with about the CCUs played an important role in shaping their experience of moving there. Yet this information was not consistently conveyed and was often dependent on individual officers. As such, prior to moving, many women were left with more questions about the CCUs and their purposes than they had answers.

It is well-established that many women in the prison estate have experience of marginalisation and of being ignored or overlooked in decisions that affect them (see, for example: Corston 2007; Prison Reform Trust 2021). The preparation that women underwent in advance of moving to a CCU seems crucial for informing their understandings and expectations of what life might be like in a CCU. It is also important for how it might support their progression towards release. Moreover, such preparation shapes women's ideas and preconceptions and is therefore vital in managing expectations and setting the framework for future work. Yet the variability of preparedness afforded to women seems at odds with the values and principles of the SPS Strategy for Women.

Women in the CCUs

The following table draws on the 'raw' data provided to us by SPS on women in the CCUs. It summarises the total number of women in each CCU by sentence type from the month they became operational in 2022 until February 2025 (HMP Lilias). and mid-April 2025 (HMP Bella).

As Table 4 shows, of the overall total number of women received into HMP Lilias over the period October 2022 to February 2025 (N=70). The majority (N=50 or seventy one per cent) were serving a short-term sentence; N=13 or nineteen per cent were serving life sentences, with one woman on life recall (that is they were recalled to prison following release on licence for breaching the terms of their licence). Four women (or six per cent) were long-term prisoners. The sentence type of two women was not stated.

The picture in HMP Bella was broadly similar. The total number of women received into HMP Bella over the slightly longer period of August 2022 to April 2025 was (N=66). Again the vast majority (N=51 or seventy seven per cent) were serving a short-term sentence; six women (or 9 per cent) were serving life sentences. Eight women (or 12 per cent) were long-term prisoners. Of the 51 women there on short-term sentences, most were serving sentences of up to four years, that is, at the higher end of short-term. Of the long-term (not life) prisoners, just two were serving sentences of longer than 10 years.

Table 4. Women in HMP Lilias and HMP Bella by sentence type

Sentence type	HMP Lilias	HMP Bella
STP	50	51
LTP	4	8
Life/Top-end	13	6
Life recall	1	1
Unknown	2	0
Total	**70**	**66**

The period of time that women resided in the CCUs varied considerably, according to sentence length. Whereas some longer-term sentenced women had been there since the CCU opened, most short-term sentenced women were much more transient, residing for shorter periods of time. For example, in HMP Bella, twenty one per cent of the women there had a maximum sentence of a year. Although we did not specifically ask women to tell us their age, many divulged it, either in interviews or when we were in the CCUs, indicating an age range from early 20s to late 70s. Most were mothers and many had dependent children. Women came from all over Scotland.

Transfers into the CCUs

Most women in both HMP Lilias and HMP Bella were transferred in from HMP & YOI Polmont, a significant number arrived from HMP Stirling and smaller numbers came from the women's hall in HMP Greenock. In the earlier months of the CCUs opening, smaller numbers of women moved in from the women's halls in HMP Edinburgh[3] and HMP Grampian, as well as from HMP & YOI Cornton Vale (before it closed in April 2023).

Community access

The CCUs were intended to support the needs of women who would benefit from closer community contact and access to local services. This was a key reason why women agreed to move to a CCU and reflected the initial understanding of CCU staff. Yet, in reality, community access was permitted for just a small proportion of women in the CCUs. The implications of this and the impact this had on women's experiences of living in a CCU are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

[3] Women are no longer accommodated in HMP Edinburgh

SPS national policy sets out risk management and progression guidance for levels of community access. This is best conceived of as a stratified process where women must essentially work their way up, for example, from escorted to unescorted leave varying in both frequency and duration.

As previously stated, the decision-making process for community access sits with the RMT, with input from social work, psychology, health, and other relevant professionals. The RMT determines and regularly reviews the level of community access permitted. The women and their POs can attend the RMT meeting where community access is decided.

LTPs and life-sentenced prisoners can only be granted community access if they are located within less secure conditions. STPs must be serving 12 months (and less than 4 years) to be considered for community access. The following tables present the data on community access decisions in relation to different sentence types. As Table 5 below shows, only 20 women, or twenty eight per cent, gained community access whilst in HMP Lilias.

Table 5. Community access by sentence type in HMP Lilias, October 2022 – February 2025)

Sentence type	Community access	No community access	Unknown
STP	5	44	1
LTP	3	1	0
Life/Top-end	10	3	0
Life recall	1	0	0
Unknown	1	1	0
Total	**20**	**49**	**1**

According to CCU officers and women interviewed, community access was predominantly granted for STPs whose risk level was considered to be low. Yet, the data from HMP Lilias reveals that a higher number of life-sentenced and top-end women were granted community access. In terms of specific types of community access: eight women in HMP Lilias were given UDR together with temporary release for work, known as Work Placement (WP).

As Table 6 shows, of those, six were ‘top-enders’ and two were LTPs. Another five women were given WP and Home Leave (HL), of which three were LTP and two were STP. Two women were given just HL, both STPs. Four women were given special escorted leave (SEL), all of whom were top-enders. Information on the type of community access was not provided for one woman.

Table 6. Types of community access in HMP Lilias, October 2022 – February 2025

Sentence type	Community access					Total
	UDR & WP	WP & HL	HL	SEL	Unknown	
Short-term	-	2	2	-	1	**5**
Long-term	2	3	-	-	-	**5**
Life/Top-end	6	-	-	4	4	**14**
Total	**8**	**5**	**2**	**4**	**5**	**24**

The data from HMP Bella is more limited in terms of information about community access. It shows that just 11 of the 66 women in the CCU since inception were given community access (16 per cent), although it does not specify what kind of access. These were five STP, three LTP and three life-sentenced women. It suggests that the remaining 55 women had no community access, although we cannot be confident that is an accurate picture.

Return to closed conditions from a CCU

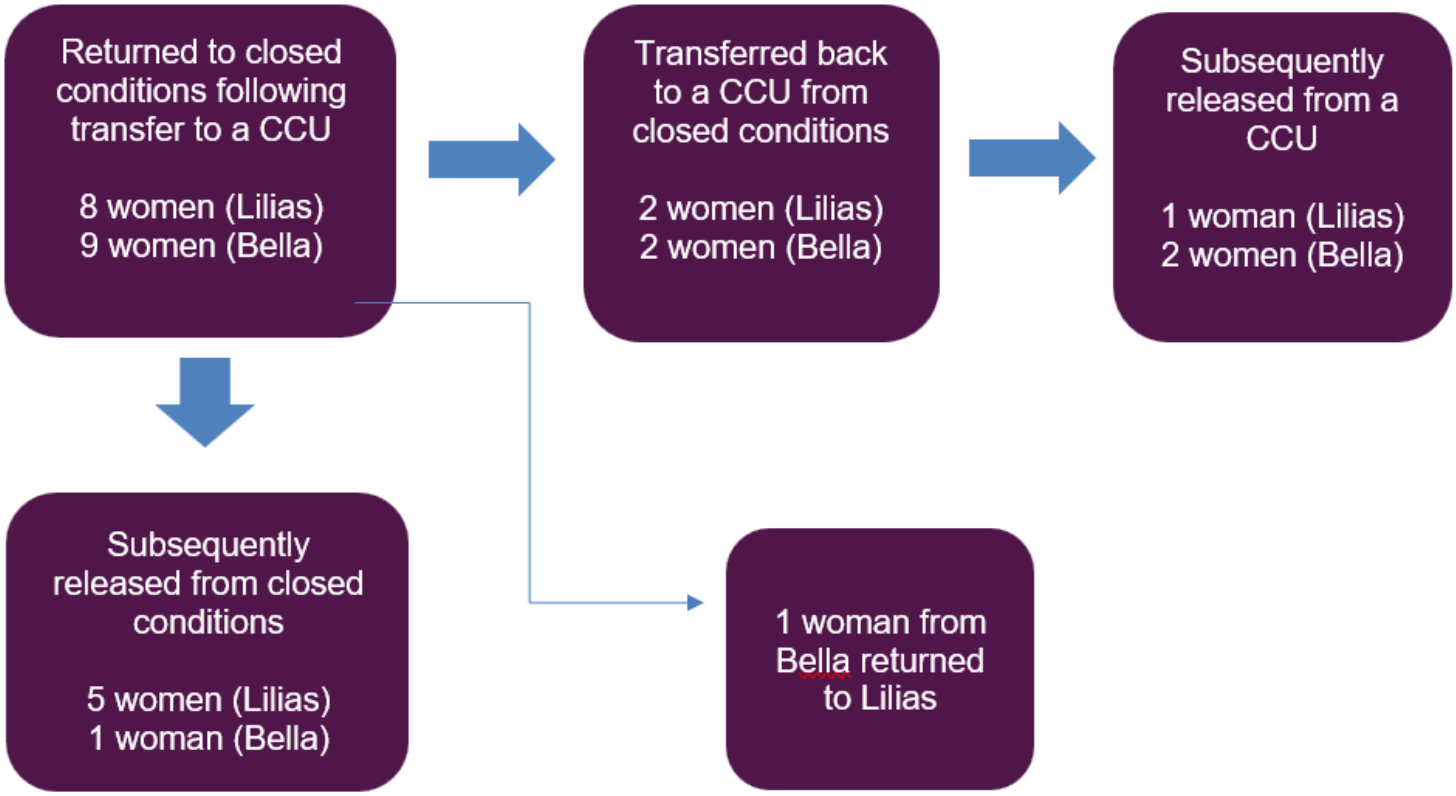
Eight of the 70 women (11 per cent) in HMP Lilias were returned to closed conditions from the CCU. Four of these women were serving life-sentences and three were serving short-term sentences. Sentence status for one woman was not provided in the SPS data.

All of the women that were returned to closed conditions were sent back within two to three months of arriving in HMP Lilias. Of those serving life sentences sent back to closed, two were subsequently transferred back into HMP Lilias after six months and one year, respectively.

In HMP Bella, the data suggests that nine of the 66 women (13 per cent) were transferred back to closed conditions. Most (i.e. six) were transferred back within one month of arriving in HMP Bella. Two of these women were later transferred back into HMP Bella again and one was transferred to HMP Lilias. One of the women serving a long-term sentence who was transferred back to closed conditions returned to HMP Bella after almost seven and a half months.

The main reason that women were sent back to closed conditions was because they were given an Adverse Circumstances Report (ACR) made by a member of CCU staff, usually the woman's PO. The decision on whether to return a woman to closed conditions rests with the duty manager of the CCU. Once the decision is taken, women are moved quite quickly as there is no safe space in the CCUs to hold women who are perceived as a risk. Women's view on the risk and implications of being 'papped back' are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

Figure 2. Women's pre-release journeys, HMP Lilias and HMP Bella



Release from the CCUs

The SPS data, presented in Table 7 below, reveals women's journeys out of the CCUs. In total, between March 2023 and February 2025, almost two thirds (N=45 or sixty four per cent) of the 70 women imprisoned in HMP Lilias over that period were liberated. Table 7 highlights that 16 (35 per cent) were liberated at their earliest date of release (EDR). Another seventeen (37 per cent) were released under home detention curfew (HDC), allowing them to serve the remaining part of their sentence in the community, whilst subject to curfew conditions and electronic monitoring ('tagging'). Five women were released following the recommendation of the Parole Board. Four were released under the Scottish Government's early release scheme, which allows changes to the release point for those serving short-term sentences. The data for three women were not provided.

In HMP Bella, between August 2022 and mid-April 2025, 44 women (66 per cent) of the 66 women were liberated. As shown in Table 7 below, one third (15 or 34 per cent) were liberated at their EDR. Twenty women (45 per cent) were released under HDC; three women were released on parole, three on appeal, and one was released on bail. Two women were released under the Government's early release scheme.

Table 7. Numbers of women and release types, HMP Lilias March 2023 – February 2025, and HMP Bella August 2022 – April 2025

Type of release	HMP Lilias	HMP Bella
Early release	4	2
Earliest date of liberation (EDR)	16	15
Home detention curfew (HDC)/bail conditions	17	21
Parole	5	3
On appeal	-	3
Unspecified	3	-
Total	**45**	**44**

Overall then, around two thirds of the women detained in the CCUs were liberated from there, via a variety of means, albeit mainly at their EDL or under HDC.

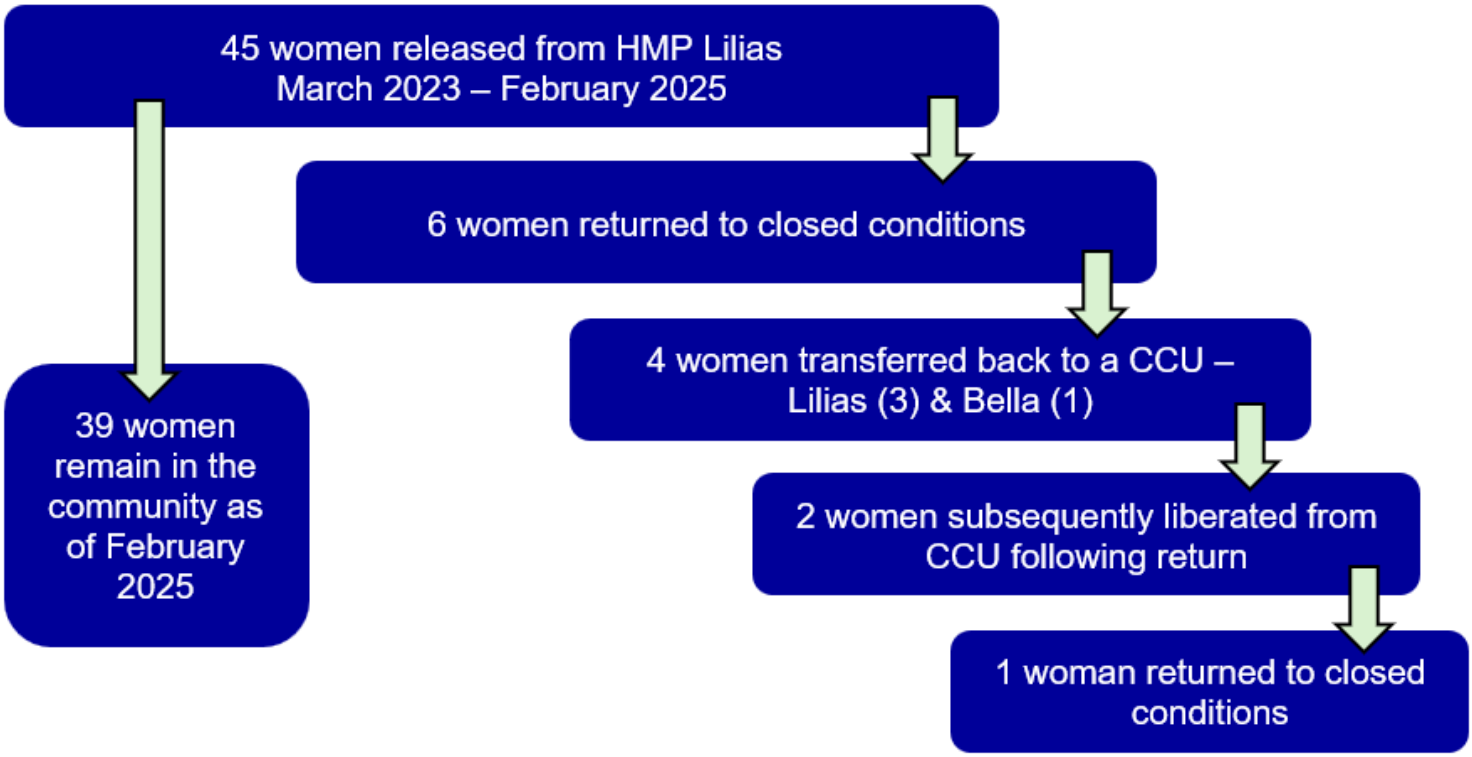
Women's post-release journeys

Figure 3 below shows the post-release journeys of the 45 women who were released from HMP Lilias during the period March 2023 – February 2025. Of the 45 released at different points over that period, the majority, 39 women (or 86 per cent), remained in the community as at the end of February 2025.

Six women that were liberated were returned to closed conditions within months post-release, and Figure 3 also shows what happened to them thereafter. Four were transferred back into a CCU for a second time (three were sent back to HMP Lilias and one sent to HMP Bella). Two of those women sent back to HMP Lilias were then subsequently liberated from there on their EDR; one of whom was re-arrested shortly thereafter and sent to closed conditions.

The HMP Bella data suggests that, of the 44 women released into the community, just two were re-arrested thereafter and returned to closed conditions. However, there is a caveat that this data is not comprehensive and that the circumstances of released women were not explored as this was beyond the scope of the research.

Figure 3. HMP Lilias post-release journeys, March 2023 – February 2025



Summary

This chapter highlights the different transfer/progression stages and assessment and admission processes for women moving into the CCU and the roles played by the RMT and WCMB. It also provides the views of women and staff about these processes and their experiences of entering a CCU. It is evident that there remains some uncertainty and confusion amongst women about the mix of women in the CCUs which colours their expectations about the value of the CCUs for each group. The chapter also presents some analyses of the SPS data from HMP Lilias and HMP Bella; this shows the growth in numbers coming into the CCUs over time, and the changing profile of women residing there. The data also shows the numbers of women gaining community access, the numbers liberated from a CCU and those returned to closed conditions.

7. Lived experiences of women in the CCUs

This chapter reports on the views and experiences of women residents in the CCUs. It draws on interviews and group discussions undertaken across all three stages of the research fieldwork. It also draws on observations, photo-elicitation interviews and the arts-based workshops, the latter of which were undertaken in Phase 2 of the research.

As previously stated, during the 'get to know you' visits a small number of women were recruited from each CCU to participate in a steering group. The purpose of this approach was to ensure women were included in the research process and more specifically in shaping the direction of the creative research methods. Participative feminist methodologies highlight the importance of inclusivity in the research process and in finding meaningful ways to prioritise and convey women's experiences (Harding, 2020). Adopting a participative approach allows women to be fully engaged in the research process rather than perceived solely as research 'subjects.' A failure to share research findings with participants can also impact on future research as individuals may be reluctant to share their experiences (George et al. 2023).

Interviews, group discussions with the use of photo-elicitation and the arts-based workshops incorporated questions exploring women's every-day lives in the CCUs. This included their views about the physical and social environments of the CCU; whether and how they thought that their particular needs were being addressed by living in the CCUs and if and how their aspirations were taken into account. Questions also covered the opportunities and support afforded to them in the CCUs (for example, in terms of health, work, education, family contact, community access and preparation for release) and how these were experienced. Women were also asked about their relationships with prison staff – not just their POs but also with other officers working in the CCU, and how they perceive that CCU staff relate to them. The arts-based workshops produced posters which presented a visual representation of women's views and were useful tools for furthering discussions with women. Posters were produced and presented to each CCU; these posters are reproduced at the end of this chapter.

Dependent upon their length of time in the CCU and, in particular their experience of other prison establishments, women's perceptions of the CCUs and the extent to which they addressed their needs and concerns varied widely. However, rather than operating as a limitation of the research, the variety of views and differing experiences contributes to the richness of the data.

Chapter 6 highlighted the views of women on the CCU admission processes and, importantly, revealed how little most women knew about the CCUs before arriving. It also flagged up some of the tensions that exist between STPs and LTPs concerning how much 'easier' it is for STPs to be admitted to a CCU compared to 'the hoops' that needed to be jumped through by LTPs. With these tensions noted,

we commence this chapter by presenting women's first impressions on entering a CCU.

Entering the CCUs

Once in the CCUs, many women's understandings of their purposes remained relatively limited and cohere around 'being closer to home' and a 'way of progressing' through the custodial system. Whilst all women knew that the CCUs were designed specifically for women and were not available for men, none had heard of the SPS Strategy for Women in Custody nor what it might mean for them, nor why it had been introduced. This raises questions about the information that women are provided with about the CCUs, which includes information about why they are being moved there and what they might expect once living there. In particular, it suggests that more work is needed around the provision of clear and accessible information about the values and principles underpinning the SPS Strategy for Women. This would allow women to recognise and assess the concrete application of these values and principles as they may experience them. In other words, women need better and more specific information about what the CCUs will do in relation to their individual custodial experience or, for some, how it will support their progression through the prison system. It is crucial that women have greater awareness of CCU purposes in order to properly reflect on whether their aims are likely to, or are being met.

Most women, particularly those interviewed in Phase 1 of the research, held strong views about the type of prisoner likely to be moved into a CCU. For example, one STP woman, who had significant prison experience, both as an LTP and an STP said:

> "Before I came, I thought this was a place for trusted prisoners who didn't need to be in closed conditions. You know, no flight risk, no violence, no drugs… Didn't need much work to transition to the outside… So there are far more lifers here than anything else at the moment… I'm making assumptions about them but they are people who just want to live their lives without issue or problem… and I think this is a great place for them as they are then removed from the other people that have perhaps on paper committed similar crimes to them but are very different people." (LR 004 STP).

Interviews with women who came into the CCUs after 12-18 months of their inception (that is, during Phase 2 of the research) revealed that most were aware that there would be women at all progression stages residing there and that most women would be STPs.

Settling in/integrating

Entering into a CCU is a very important part of progression towards community reintegration. However, even with a degree of preparedness it can be a sudden immersion into a very different way of living, particular for those who have been in prison for some time. Women's prison journeys, and particularly those moving from closed conditions to a more flexible and 'open' space as that found in a CCU,

reflect some of the gendered tensions and challenges associated with the transition process.

When women arrive in the CCU they are given a short induction and a starter pack comprising of toiletries and other items they may need (see Appendix 3 HMP Bella Centre Induction Checklist which details the 'tour' that women are given of the facilities and the provision of a starter pack).

New culture, new living conditions

For longer-term women prisoners in particular, the CCU represents a *'*new world' whose distinctive characteristics require some getting used to. For most women, their first impressions of the CCUs were very positive; women told us of being 'blown away' on entering the shared houses and seeing their rooms, the living spaces and the kitchen. They were particularly impressed about the comfortable nature of the mattresses and bed linen, the sofas, the en-suite facilities and the shared bathrooms:

> "I was wow! One hundred per cent. Shocked, a good shock though… It is absolutely lovely. You can't fault it. It is nothing like a prison. Yes, it is a prison and you have got to… see when you are sitting in your house you, kind of, forget that you are in prison because there are no doors, you can open all the... well, most of the doors yourself. You can walk about and you can sit in the Hub, with your family, make them food." (LR 002 STP).

> "It's a beautiful place. I mean, it's really... I can't say anything bad about it. It's a cracking place. Even the way they treat you, I don't feel like a prisoner. You feel like you're moving on, this is your time to move on, you know, that kind of feeling. So I love it." (LR2 007 top end).

A woman, who had served 15 years in a closed prison before entering a CCU went on to say that she had seen the plans and maps of the CCUs before moving:

> "But it doesn't do it justice. It's just seeing wee bits. But as soon as you come, it's like... I mean, your bedroom is like a hotel, you know what I mean? It's just... and you're not thinking like you're in prison, it's all crime there. Here everybody's all talking about different things. Here it's not… you're just like in everyday living." (LR2 007 top end).

The Hub space and facilities were generally considered 'wonderful' as were the garden spaces and the lack of physical security features in and outside the CCUs:

> "You're not opening your door and looking at another cell. It's glass. You know, there's nobody across from you. And that was… that was good, a lot of glass there, eh, daylight and that…" (LR 004:1 STP).

Not all women shared this view of the CCUs. Some were more disparaging:

> “The CCU is seen as the golden gates of SPS but other than being allowed to walk around on a loop and a nice bed, there’s not much difference between CCU and closed.” (LR 004:2 STP).

Echoing this sentiment, and when reviewing the finished poster from the arts workshops, several women at HMP Bella focused in on the quote that said ‘the shine comes off’. They also requested that a question mark follow Trauma Informed care on the posters.

The fact that they were able to move freely around the CCU buildings was a big surprise for some women, who were more used to being restricted to prison halls. As one said, pointing to the key lanyard around her neck: ‘I feel free. I’m able to move wherever I want without asking a prison officer.’ (Lilias, fieldnotes).

However other women, and not only long-termers, spoke of how, initially, they found it really difficult to adjust to the new living conditions. They spoke of how, for the first few nights after their arrival, they slept on the floor and were anxious about the degree of ‘freedom’ that moving around the prison brought them:

> “The first night I couldn’t sleep, I was so like, I don’t know, un-comfy. So, like I lay right against the wall, which I used to have when I was in single, when I was in single, bed like a bloody gym mat.” (BR 002:1 STP).

This speaks to research about the difficulties those serving long-term sentences face in adapting to new cultures after spending significant periods incarcerated in closed conditions (see, for example, Crewe, Hulley & Wright, 2020).

Women on shorter term sentences found it easier to settle in. As one said:

> “Oh, I found it a doddle, just… straight in… another day in your life, right into cooking your own dinners and all that. I mean, it was brilliant. And having a real bed.” (LR 004:1 STP)

On the whole, it was considered easier to settle in a CCU than in a closed prison, partly because there were fewer new people to get used to.

Women recovering from drug addiction were worried about what they perceived as a lack of access to recovery groups in the CCUs as opposed to that available in other establishments. They had not received much information beforehand about how their medication and overall support would be provided in the CCU, which left them feeling anxious and disconcerted.

Women were however very positive about the help and support they had received from CCU staff in assisting them to settle into the CCUs. For the most part, CCU staff were said to have spent considerable time with them in the first few days, answering questions about the regime and workings of the CCU. One long-term woman said that it had taken her two and half months to settle in the CCU as she had lived in closed conditions for such a long time.

> "But the staff all really… they were helpful and they still are helpful. They go out their way for you, for anybody. And obviously again doing the lang time, they were speaking to me like, you will get used to it, you will overcome the feelings and they made sure I was alright and, like, if I was just sitting in the living room, not talking and… you know, they were making… going out their way to make sure I was alright." (BR 001 top end).

The support provided by other women already living in the CCUs was also seen as very valuable for 'showing us the ropes.' (BR 003:1 LTP).

Experiences of living in a CCU

As stated earlier, women living in the CCUs are at very different stages of sentence progression. There are STPs, LTPs and national 'top end' (NTE) prisoners in preparation for release. Some short-term women residents had been subject to transition to a CCU in the early stages of their sentence having spent relatively little time in closed conditions (i.e. weeks). Other longer-term women had spent a considerable number of years in prison and had progressed through various stages before arriving in a CCU. The significance of these categorisations and the progression stages they signify, should not be underestimated. As several women told us, they play a key determining role in the ways in which living in a CCU is experienced. There are stark differences in what women consider 'privileges' that are based on a woman's categorisation – and these can also be a key site of tension between women who are learning to live together in new surroundings.

Tensions amongst women

As in all prison environments there are clear tensions, strained relationships and a lack of trust between some women. Tensions commonly cohere around the progression status of women. STPs were often positioned as privileged by LTP and top enders, and seen to have easy access to opportunities like unsupervised home leave for which they did not need to 'work' or put in any 'effort' (BR 002 :2 LTP). This was compared to the 'hoops' LTPs had to jump through to get to a CCU and progress through it:

> "I'm having to jump through hoops just to get to a work party, or to get out and see my family unescorted. I'm having to jump through hoops for that, but yet you've got these short-termers that walk in here, and they're a couple of weeks into the building and they're going out on UDRs." (LR006 LTP).

Women in HMP Bella were particularly vocal about other women who had got UDR after a few weeks. As one said:

'I done years in Cornton Vale, done all my programmes – but she gets out and about before me – why?' (Bella, field notes). Another was upset that she would not be eligible for a work party for some months but others 'came straight in and got jobs in the CCU' (Bella, field notes).

> "Short-termers, some of them are just in two or three weeks when they get into places like this. Where is the deterrent?... I think they should be made to do

some sort of programme. Maybe not the full programme itself, but they've committed a crime just the same as me… But no, they've committed a crime just like me. Maybe not as severe." (BR 002, top end).

"Me and the other girl we stay with, we had to do SELs first, which is, like, escorted with member of staff and then you work up to UDRs. And you get your placement and that proves that you're reliable and you're not going to, like, go and muck it up or whatever. And then home leaves. But then there's certain individuals in here that have gone straight to UDR." (BR 003:2 LTP).

Being awarded home leave is a key aspiration of most women in the CCU and can be a major point of contention between women. In describing how some women obtained home leave, a long-term woman said:

"And now they're away to get home leaves. They don't engage in any of the services that come in. They don't even turn up to, like, the Monday morning meeting. Like, me and (other women) have made efforts… we made an effort to go to every group. Even if it wasn't for us, we went to every group… We went to every meeting. We made an effort to engage in every single thing. And it really bugs me when other people are getting things but they're not engaging or they're not interacting with the other girls… it really annoys me. Their attitude's stinking as well." (BR 003:2 LTP).

Within most of the interviews there was a strong sense of frustration and indignation in relation to the 'unfair' advantages STPs appeared to have. Several STP women commented that they were aware of feelings of 'jealousy' and 'resentment' others harboured towards them (LR 004 STP). LTPs believed that STPs were more cavalier with the CCU facilities, the rules, and relationships they had with officers.

"All this shouldn't be happening, should not be happening, because then what is that teaching these short-termers, and they've already had an incident in here where a short-termer got out on a UDR and came back pished, and tried to bring drugs back into the prison, and she's still here." (LR 006 LTP).

STPs were seen by some LTPs or top enders as having 'no respect', 'nothing to lose' and taking the CCUs 'for granted' (LR2 001 top end). The tightening of rules was often attributed to their behaviour. Their presence, furthermore, led some of the LTPs to question the legitimacy and purpose of the CCU, which were conceptualised by them as places that were meant to assist re-integration:

"I've seen lassies been in closed conditions for two weeks and come down for two weeks and get out. What are they learning… ken? They're not learning. So, how… in jail, we've all… it is a holiday camp for people that's been in, out, in, out. Or treat it as rehab, kind of thing. But sending somebody down here for two weeks and they get out, I'm like…" (BR2 003 top end).

"It blows my mind how… you know. Why short-term, why are you getting these facilities? It's not teaching them. There's a wee lassie here, right, she did three

weeks in the jail… And she gets home leave for seven days, she gets everything. She's out working. I'm, like, wow. What do you know about jail life – nothing. I was in for three weeks, why aye. Try 15 years in. She doesn't know what jail life is." (LR2 001)

Many LTPs and top enders felt very strongly that the CCUs should be for LTPs and top-enders only and that STPs, because of their inexperience and lack of understanding of prison life regularly 'spoilt it for everyone'. Those serving longer sentences suggested that some STPs do not appreciate what the CCU has got to offer, and 'create a different environment because they don't have a whole lot to lose'. As a top ender said:

"[STPs] don't appreciate it. I think it should be for long-termers, no short-termers, because they don't appreciate it and it kind of builds up… They mess it up sometimes, you know, like they'll come in, like for instance, there's another lassie… she got downgraded. But a lifer wouldn't do that, do you know what I mean? It's too much to lose." (LR2 007 top end).

"See when the public find out that this place is getting filled up with people that have only been in for a week, their first time in the jail, people are going to… one, prisoners are going to begin to think that this is what the jail is. Two, in the first week in the jail… first two weeks in the jail, you don't know anybody, so you are quiet. So how can you gauge if somebody is trouble or not? And three, that is not a punishment. It's not. And it's not telling people, don't come back to the jail… Like, and many people who are short-term, there is a revolving door. They're coming in, they're going out, they're coming in, they're going out, they're coming in, they're going out. If you're putting them in the really nice house in this multiple million pound structure and then you're putting them out in to a hostel, what is that teaching them as well? Like, 'cause they're getting all this thing and then they're going out to nothing. 'Cause a lot of people do have more in the jail than not." (BR2 003:2 LTP).

LTPs and top enders queried why STPs gained access to a CCU so quickly after sentence:

"Like, we've had short-termers here that aren't allowed community access. These are for integrating people back in to the community. So why have you got them here? Like… it's a difficult one. And I get that they're needing to fill it and I understand that, but I feel like there needs to be a guideline or something that people have to… like how I had… my top end date was three years in to my sentence. But it was four years by the time I got here. But I had a closed condition punishment part. So if you're doing three years short-term, well your closed condition punishment part should be three months or whatever." (BR2 003:1 top end).

Many of the STPs, on the other hand, felt that the CCUs benefitted LTPs and life prisoners more although were grateful for the opportunity of being sent there. Depending on the dynamics of the group of women in the CCUs this could also be

disruptive and create an uncomfortable, and sometimes threatening, atmosphere in the CCUs.

Women tend to form friendship groups shortly after arriving in the CCU, and this can compound tensions with other women creating further divisions and alienating those more solitary women who are already socially isolated. Throughout the research, women spoke of the animosities they felt toward one another. The tensions they experienced presented themselves in a variety of different ways. Some women described the CCUs as 'cliquey', where there was a lot of 'gossip', while a small number spoke of the 'aggressive' behaviour of others and the spreading of false rumours:

> "And make up a drama out of nothing. And like slam stuff about and make it it's all our fault… And, like, and [woman 1], the one that is causing all the bother, she said, we're all guilty of gossiping. But then [woman 2], the short-termer, was taking it round all the houses. Anybody that would listen. And I think it came to a head when [woman 2] said to [woman 1], that I licked her butter and cheese. I mean, absolutely disgusting, you know. Even worse to think that." (BR2 002 LTP).

The women also described experiencing classist and racist comments from other women within the CCU. They also noted that animosity was also often based on the crimes and offences that the women knew others were in for: "And I could have retaliated and said, well I hate drunk drivers." (BR2 002 LTP). Some of these tensions also came from views reinforced by experiences women had in closed establishments.

Officers, according to the women, reacted to the tensions in a variety of ways. Some tensions and fights between the women led to officers to 'split up the house' and 'move the women around'. However, in other instances, the officers were seen by the women to be quite dismissive and simply ignore things:

> "The lassies, including myself, are very, very bitchy. And it'll drag for weeks and weeks and weeks. Not like guys. Guys just deal with it then and shake hands and then forget about it. Lassies, no. So, I think with all that nonsense, it's come down to that... And this place would be even better when all of you get on. And I'm watching all of them and they're, like… [officer] weren't even looking at them, they're like, no, come on." (BR2 003).

Participation in CCU activities is on a voluntary basis and has no direct bearing on decisions regarding home leave or any other 'privilege'. There is nevertheless a view that involvement in CCU meetings and being seen to 'get on' with other women residents is necessary for progression. Once again, this suggests a need for the provision of clearer and consistent information and discussion with women about the differences between categorisations in the CCU. In particular, there is a need for information about the implications that this has for home leave, UDR, and access to work placements.

Purposeful activities

The CCU model aims for women to engage in activity that is likely to benefit them, including recreational and social activities. Weekly activity planners are placed in the Hub each week listing the activities scheduled for the week ahead.

There were mixed views about the levels of activity afforded women in the CCUs. The women consider there to be a considerable lack of structure as compared to other closed prison establishments they have lived in, and so days can be very long in the CCUs. Typically, women attend a morning meeting at 9am in the Hub areas where the day's activities are verified, visits are confirmed and work parties may be formed. There are two periods of in-house activity used to undertake a range of house-based activities including cooking, relaxing, and social interaction. There are very few opportunities for work parties given the smaller size of the CCUs and the low numbers of residents. Whilst some enjoyed their work in the CCUs, for example, as a member of a cleaning work party, and felt it kept them 'busy', others viewed such work as 'boring' and said there was little else for them to do.

Women in the CCUs are certainly not homogeneous and have different views and preferences regarding how they like to spend their time and what they consider to be of benefit to them. Women are supposed to have a say in the type of activities that are available to them in the CCUs, and they do have a choice as to whether or not to attend any activities. However, not all women felt that they were consulted with regards to activities, or if consulted, that their views were taken into account. Several expressed some puzzlement at how activities and delivery partners had been chosen.

A small number did however speak of being given a voice in the kinds of activities they would like, for example:

> "Aye, yeah, of course, you can make suggestions. But then everybody's hopefully going to go through like a partnership through the jail, so they can come in and do stuff. So, obviously, just see what our interests are… And like somebody coming in to do cooking. They'd find that person, do the partnership with them." (BR 002:1 top end).

During one of the arts-based workshops in HMP Lilias, there was an over-riding opinion that activities are either 'religion or recovery', and not much else. Some women enjoyed participating in activities provided by SPS delivery partners – especially the more creative activities such as fabric painting, artwork, cross-stitch, pom-pom making, jewellery and card making which are not common in closed conditions. They also really enjoyed the pet therapy and animals visiting, but felt that all of these activities were not provided regularly enough or were just one-off visits.

Talking about the lack of appealing activities, one woman said:

> "There was a group that came in that I had done, it was an eight week course from… we were looking… a business development kind of thing. Fantastic,

> yes, fantastic, that was really good, but apart from that, the other things is recovery and preaching and recovery and preaching and recovery and preaching, and I'm sorry, not my bag, so for me, I've got to make up my own, kind of, activities, so…" (LR2 006 top end).

A small number of women said they preferred to watch television in their houses rather than participate in activities but appreciated the fact that people come in from outside to deliver events and activities. As one said: "we will always go to whatever activity even if it's a piece of nonsense as people (from outside) have gone to the effort of coming in." (BR 001:2 top end).

Others were less positive: "and it would be good just to be able to like, if you're outside, right, if you're bored, you can get up and go a wee wander or a wee walk. In here you're walking around that (points to garden). It's all right for the first two weeks, three weeks, but see after, you're sick of, you're like a gerbil." (BR 002:1 top end).

Others felt 'there is too much on sometimes' saying that they would prefer 'more peace and quiet.'

Residents in HMP Bella felt that the activities were not varied enough and that there were only a few things on each week. Women also reported activities being cancelled last minute and having to be rearranged. When women approached officers to complain about the lack of activities, they were told that the increase in family visits affected what they could arrange due to the space. Women disagreed with this explanation.

Cooking lessons were at one point provided by delivery partners with help given by those women in the CCUs who are good cooks. In Phase 1 of the research CCUs had the services of a professional cook who worked with the women, which they were really positive about. However, by Phase 2 of the research, this person was no longer coming in:

> "There was a guy that does healthy cooking, eating, help you with recipes. That was on for a while, then not on and I felt like... I know how to cook, but I know how to cook as in microwave meals or spaghetti bolognaise. I wanted to try new things, maybe get a wee bit more life skills. But he doesn't come in anymore." (LR2 003 LTP).

Women who are seeking life skills considered that the activities and learning opportunities did not provide them with what they were seeking.

The lack of structure and routine in the CCU as opposed to closed conditions was difficult for some women to get used to. In Phase 2 of the research, we observed more pronounced disengagement from women, who tended to retreat to their rooms and not engage in activities provided by delivery partners or engage in interactions with other women. For a small number of women this was particularly marked. There were several reasons for this. The CCUs were becoming busier with new women arriving and settling in; tensions arose between some women during

this process which sometimes led to arguments and outbursts. Also some found living with different personalities to be be difficult, and preferred to keep to themselves.

Perceptions of differences between CCUs and closed establishments

Women were very forthcoming about the perceived differences between living in the CCUs as opposed to other prisons. All had lived in at least one other prison in the women's estate; those on longer sentences had lived in two or three women's prisons.

Virtually all women had strong views about the differences between the CCUs and closed establishments. Key amongst the perceived differences relate to the prison atmosphere which as one woman put it is like 'night and day.' She went on to describe the potential within closed conditions for 'getting lost' in the system. The risk of this 'is high if you keep yourself to yourself' as the staff ratio (prisoner to staff) is 'so high that no one notices what you are doing or how hard you are trying.' (BR 003:1 LTP).

Closed conditions were described as 'intense' and 'unsettling', 'noisy' and 'sometimes frightening' as 'it only takes one woman to kick off.' For example, an LTP told us: "closed conditions are really terrible as you are locked up with mentally ill people, there is a lot of shouting and fighting and you are sometimes locked up for 23 hours a day if you aren't working." (LR2 007).

CCUs were described as 'more relaxed' with 'less lock up time' (LR 003 top-end), 'more free time' and 'the freedom to eat when you want to' (BR 001:2 LTP). Interviews undertaken with women shortly after they had entered a CCU revealed the value that women placed on the relative quietness of the CCUs. They found this difficult to get used to at first, but then came to deeply appreciate it: 'it's very peaceful'; 'you can hear the birds singing'; and; 'there's very little noise here.'

Most women indicated that they had come to value the conditions afforded by the CCUs, especially the ability to cook and to move around the facilities:

> "You can cook your own meals at any time… you do get locked up at 8.30 pm but can roam around your own house all night if you want." (BR 001:1 top-end)

> "It is more relaxed. Because you're getting to do your own cooking, your own washing, all the things that you wouldn't do in closed conditions… Aye, so you've got more responsibility…" (LR2 010 LTP).

Another key difference remarked upon by women was the numbers of, and access to, officers in the CCU as compared to other establishments. It is common to see individual women sitting in close conversation with their PO in the Hub or walking in the garden. As one woman said, commenting on the ratio of staff to women: "there are far fewer women in Bella than in closed conditions so staff listen to CCU women more." (BR 002:1 top-end).

A key reflection of many women concerned having sole access to a PO who was not shared with lots of other women and could therefore offer them more time. As one woman who was in prison for the first time and had only spent a few weeks in closed conditions before moving to a CCU said: “I have someone to talk to when things get difficult.” (LR2 009 STP).

Some women, particularly STPs, also pointed to what they described as ‘massive’ differences between CCUs and closed conditions in relation to the rapidity with which women are able to progress. There was a widespread belief amongst STPs that they could get community access faster in CCUs than if they had remained in closed conditions. This is not strictly true as progression is managed and decided according to prison rules. Some STPs also believed that home release was simply not a possibility for those in closed conditions. Again, this suggests that women are not given clear information about progression processes within the CCUs nor guidance on what these processes may entail.

It was also generally thought that it was ‘easier’ to access health and social care needs in a CCU than in closed conditions. Several women spoke about the value of having easy access to a housing officer for help with housing needs and being able to self-refer to a nurse and be seen very quickly thereafter. Others spoke of the value of being able to talk to a psychologist and a social worker in the CCU during difficult periods they were experiencing. For example, one woman said that she enjoyed gaining swift access to the psychologist, whereas, “I would have been waiting 8, 9 month on the outside.” (LR2 009 STP).

Whilst it seemed to STPs that some of the women’s needs are being met better in the CCU, often because it is smaller, or better served by services, we also heard from some LTPs that their needs had been better met in closed conditions. This was usually for the opposite reason – that with a larger population with more people who have that particular need, it may be more likely to be attended to. For example: “I had a better package of support in closed conditions and access to a wider variety of activities” (BR 001 top end).

LTPs described how some of the ‘protective factors’ that were meeting their needs in closed conditions, such as the gym and addiction/recovery support groups were either not present in the CCUs or had been removed or reduced. In both CCUs there is a group of women who enjoy keeping fit and like to use the gym facilities, especially the cross-trainer and the weights. They considered the CCU gym rooms to be too small to enable them to train together. They felt that the fitness machines were too crammed together to work out comfortably. This is quite different from women’s experiences in closed conditions where gym areas are generally bigger and provide opportunities both for fitness and for social interaction with other women. Relatedly, women spoke about the erratic nature of CCU fitness classes, as one said: “there was a fitness class, then it was on, and then it was off.” (LR2 003 LTP).

Similarly, LTPs raised the issue of educational opportunities in the CCUs, which were considered very limited. This was the case particularly in Phase 1 of the research where visits by educational providers were seen to be erratic and unreliable. This did improve somewhat in Phase 2, however even then women considered that education was more reliable and more comprehensive in the larger closed establishments.

Many women expressed deep disappointment with the CCUs. Things that they were led to believe would happen or that they might access in the CCUs did not materialise in the way they felt that they had been led to believe. Some things did not materialise at all. The following quote highlights some of the expectations that women held about the move to a CCU:

> "The only thing that's failed me, away back when we got taken out to these mock rooms, we were told when you get to this stage you'll have computers in your room, you will book your own visits, you'll do your own shopping, do your education. Well, they sold a good one, we've not got that. We've not got it. The classroom's here in this room. The computers are over there, they've all been bought by [educational providers], but for some reason SPS headquarters aren't… There's no wifi. But they sold it to us two years ago that we would do all this from our room. We would order our messages, we would book our visits, we would, you know, deal with the jobs that they do. But there are no computers in any rooms, you know. And we've turned up here for it." (LR 004: 2 LTP).

The lack of access to computers was a recurrent theme, particularly as the computers were actually in the CCUs, but just not connected:

> "The computers… they're all there, they've all been… I don't know who's sitting up there in headquarters that's stalling it, I'm not… for them to come and put them in for us. So, we've no computer access at all. We're not allowed any computers." (LR 004:1 LTP).

Learning how to use a computer and navigate online is increasingly becoming a necessary life skill and essential preparation for release for many women, especially those who have been incarcerated for some time. The lack of access to computers is a pressing concern and one that requires to be addressed.

Relationships with staff

It is well-established that the development of positive and trusting relationships are particularly important for trauma survivors and women's relationships with prison officers are critical. Each woman in the CCU has a designated PO whose role is to assist her by constructing and reviewing her support plan in partnership with her, and helping her to access particular services, such as learning providers or health professionals. This requires the woman and the PO to be able to work together. For the most part, women spoke positively of the relationships that have been built with staff, in particular, but not exclusively, with their PO. For the most part, women expressed gratefulness for the respect that they are shown by staff, that they are

listened to and that their questions are always answered: ‘staff treat you like people’ (LR 002), and ‘staff go out their way for you.’ (BR 001:1).

Relationships forged with SPS staff, and particularly POs were perceived as largely supportive. There were some exceptions to this, notably where the women felt that they were treated as children by officers: “certain members of staff in here think it’s okay to treat you like a five year old child.” (LR004:1 STP). Relatedly, women found the language used by some officers to be objectionable. Particularly problematic was the use of the word ‘girls’ to describe them, even when some women were old enough to be the grandmother of many of the officers.

But on the whole, women felt that officers cared about them, wanted the best for them, and believed in them – and that some ‘have gone the extra mile’ to help them. Feeling that recognition, receiving positive encouragement and having their strengths recognised was highly valued by women and some reflected that it had made them feel more equipped to move on. This resonates with research on desistance which highlights the importance of respect and positive regard which can in turn inspire confidence and motivation to change (see for example: McNeill & Weaver 2010). These relationships were contrasted with experiences in closed conditions in other establishments where some officers were described as ‘indifferent’, ‘unresponsive’ ‘uncaring’ or just too busy to give the women the time they needed.

It is clear that women perceive that many staff are actively trying to respond to them with sensitivity and respect. Yet these relationships are also characterised by a complexity that is intensified in the prison environment. Officers are, by and large, considered ‘friendly’ and ‘approachable’, but some women, particularly those with more experience of prison life, are wary of this approach and wonder whether this might be used instrumentally against them. This is not without foundation. Research has shown that women’s honesty about their feelings and needs can be used to increase their risk level (Hannah-Moffat & O’Malley 2007). LTPs and top-enders may well be right then in the context of a prison environment not to disclose too much.

This also speaks to the importance of trust and trustworthiness for working with trauma survivors who may find it difficult to trust others (Herman 1992; Covington 1998). Some women are alert to the ways in which (male) prison staff react and interact with them. This stems from that fact that many women in prison have past experience of abuse and victimisation from male partners, ex-partners and male relations, and those in the CCUs are no exception. This, along with the ongoing power and gender imbalance between women (as prisoners) and prison officers, especially male POs, can create challenges for the development of relationships and interactions. This again reflects criminalised women’s gendered experiences and the ways in which their previous experience, both in and beyond the prison, may colour their perceptions and shape their actions.

Prison regimes tend to thwart personal autonomy and prisoners, in general, are reliant on their POs due to the very nature of the penal regime (see for example,

Crewe et al. 2020). Many women in prison as a result of their experiences have a fragile sense of autonomy and this is exacerbated by prison regimes. They can become heavily reliant on prison officers; this in turn can be encouraged by officers, running significant risks of infantilisation. This is an emerging theme which we observed whilst in the CCUs and is also reflected in some of the women's accounts of their relationships with their PO. Responding effectively to address women's requests and needs whilst simultaneously encouraging their independence and autonomy can be a fine line. There is a risk of what has been called the 'dependency paradox' (Haney 2010; Crewe et al. 2020) where, despite being highly reliant on staff, women are expected to act as responsible agents. Encouraging dependence and reliance on officers is at odds with the intentions of the CCU model and so is an issue to which officers and managers need to be attentive.

The research literature on relationships between male officers and female prisoners is quite limited. Carlen (1998a, 1998b) found that female prisoners considered male officers less punitive and less petty than female officers. This was not so evident in women's narratives in this research, although a small number of women clearly did not get on with their female POs. They variously characterised them as 'unhelpful', 'not really interested', 'two-faced' and 'bullying'. One woman relayed why she found her PO to be unpredictable and bullying, and gave an example of how this officer presented different sides of herself in different situations: "Aye… she was bullying me, so she comes across all nicey nicey, she would take me [on home leave] and she'd act all nicey nicey, but her personality and her whole attitude is she likes to put you up and then drag you down, strip you down ten minutes later." (LR2 006 top end).

Another said:

> "And the officer who I got, I don't know if it was a personality clash or what, I felt like she spoke to me like it was something that she… I was something that she trod on. And I was like, no. And I might be quite, like, I do… I am generally quiet but at the same time I'll not tolerate anything like that." (LR2 003 LTP).

Women also spoke of how they sometimes get contradictory information from different officers, which can compound their insecurities but also make them angry and frustrated. As described earlier, inconsistent messaging is also a key source of frustration for officers themselves. Consistent communication between officers and women is very important. A key example here concerned the relaying of different information about community access, in particular work placements. Work placements are very sensitive topics and women feel they have worked hard to obtain them. Being given conflicting information is experienced as deeply distressing, as is information being withheld from them. We heard many accounts of from the women of being told they cannot go to their work placement at the very last minute. Community access is highly prized and when women were told they were not able to attend their work placements this inevitably led to them 'kicking off.'

As previously stated, for the most part, women were very positive about the CCUs when they arrived. But as time went on, some women became more critical of the operation of the CCUs, the activities that were available to them and, most of all, the changes that they saw happening around them. Several of these criticisms revolved around the changing relationship between women and officers. In Phase 1, women talked about activities such as playing pool, or board games with officers in the Hub. We frequently saw this happening during research visits. However, this seemed to reduce and/or fluctuate over time, with women often saying that they did not see officers, including their POs, very often. When asked what had caused this shift the women responded that staffing shortages were having an impact on officer/resident relationships. Women reported that officers tended to stay in their offices for longer periods providing little opportunity for any interaction. We also observed this change in officer/resident dynamics when visiting the CCUs.

These changes were described by women as due to the increasingly high levels of staff absence, but also due to a seemingly reduced motivation by officers to spend time with them. Women also indicated that some of the underlying tensions were the result of a top-down management approach which gave officers little autonomy to make decisions and led to a more 'controlling' atmosphere. Furthermore, the lack of communication between FLMs could cause problems and women felt that there was little point in raising any concerns due to the delay in having them addressed. It should be noted that the lack of communication between CCU managers was exacerbated by the complicated shift patterns which made collaborative working difficult.

Another issue was the inconsistency in rules which could also arise as a result of different management styles. Women communicated that it was the relaxing and then tightening of rules that had contributed to the change in dynamics between staff/residents. When HMP Bella first opened officers were given the freedom to shape the direction of the Unit but this had changed over the course of the research project and was becoming more restricted and prison like.

> "And you can't cook for [visitors] anymore, and again, you can't buy stuff off your canteen list, and it's our money. It's just… it's getting more like closed conditions. And the staff hate me saying that, but I've been in that long, in the whole… the whole sentence, when you've got a jail-head, as I call it, we notice stuff like that, the changes and that… Like, for example, the vending machine. See, as soon as I've seen that, I was, like, oh, one closed condition rule. And then we weren't allowed to go into the Hub's toilet, only visitors. Stuff like that, it's just… wee things like that, it's just, like, oh, by the time I get out it'll be not this, not this, not this. I'm that used to getting, no, you can't do that, so… but I just get on with it. I'm just trying to focus on me getting community access. And then when I need to face all these terrible rules and all that nonsense… Just, kind of, keeping your head down and getting on with it. But it's become more and more, like, restricted and controlled, I was only here for two months and then I was like that, it's getting more like closed conditions, and it's getting worse." (BR2 003 top end).

Particularly in Phase 2 of the research, women routinely said that they were unable to get much one-on-one time with their POs; that their questions were not being answered and they were unable to discuss important issues with them.

> "They do numbers three times a day, but it is, like, hi, bye. When I first came, we used to sit and play games a lot and they were interacting with us. Now they just... you never see them. I just think they have got a lot of things to do in the background that we don't know about, because it wasn't like that when I first came. There were a few, me and another lassie used to come out every day and play games in the hub and see the staff interacting. Now it has all changed." (LR2 003 LTP).

This has inevitably led to much frustration and anger on the part of some women, and to the disappointment and disillusionment of others. This issue of diminishing officer contact has been exacerbated as the numbers of women sent to the CCUs has grown.

While women had previously shared that they had positive relationships with their POs and staff in general, this changed in the latter stages of the fieldwork.

Independence, autonomy and self-management

An intention of the CCUs is to restore some of the conditions associated with life beyond prison, focusing on the development of independence and autonomy of the women there. The CCU model is intended to provide opportunities to encourage individual choice, support self-management and develop independence. There is an expectation that women will be actively involved in the formulation of their time in custody. Yet, as discussed above, moving to a CCU is experienced as disruptive and adjusting to the new prison culture for many women can be difficult. For long-term and 'top-end' women in particular, moving into the distinctive conditions of a CCU following years of living in a highly securitised environment can be a 'shock' to the system. It can require women to regain independence and autonomy that may have been eroded during long years inside or worn away even before they entered prison. Prior to coming to the CCUs, some women had spent long periods of time in their cells, becoming accustomed to being alone but also having extremely limited choice over how their time was spent. It takes time to adjust. One woman told us that being in a CCU meant she has to 'start thinking for myself again' which she found 'a scary thought' (Lilias, fieldnotes).

Several women were critical of CCU officers, saying that they tend to 'micro-manage' women's relationships and don't allow them to work things out by themselves as they would in closed conditions. For example, by splitting women up and moving women out of one shared house into another.

In Phase 1 of the research, it was much more common for women to talk about working with their PO to input into their own support plans, and for their views and wishes to be taken seriously. Women found this empowering, even if it took some women some time to gain the confidence to convey their views and articulate their wishes to someone in authority. In Phase 2 of the research it appeared less

common for women to feed into their support plans, this seemed largely due to reduced contact with POs. One woman said she had not met with her PO for over two weeks.

Moving to a CCU also brought a degree of ambiguity and confusion about 'the rules' and what women could and could not do. Several women referred to the contradiction between the more informal CCU physical environment and the fact that SPS rules were very evidently in operation: "it is still prison rules… I thought it would be less strict and more relaxed… Regardless it is still a prison."

CCU conditions create space for ambiguity which can often compound uncertainty and distrust. The sudden move, along with some uncertainty about how the CCU works and navigating to avoid disciplinary sanctions presented some women with difficulties in adjustment. This led to insecurity, increased anxiety and fearfulness.

Resonating with other findings about women's imprisonment (see for example: Carlen 1983; Moore & Scraton 2013), the expectations of self-management in the CCUs are considered disconcerting by many of the women. Several spoke of the constant threat of return to closed conditions should they be considered non-compliant. This was considered by women to be a 'failure' which they wanted to avoid. The uncertainties can feed into distrust and the anticipation of discipline. Given the CCU aspirations of developing autonomy and trust, these intersecting challenges point to the need to understand the complex realities and gendered experiences in the lives of women in prison. The development of women's agency to build confidence, encourage engagement and participation are key principles of the SPS Strategy for Women. However, this requires careful consideration and an approach which prioritises working closely with and listening to women to understand their needs.

Attention to gendered needs?

Interviews and arts-based workshops with women also incorporated questions exploring the ways in which their gendered needs and aspirations were addressed in the services delivered and in their interactions with delivery partners.

On the whole women felt that the access to in-house nursing staff and the clinical psychologist was a key positive element of living in a CCU. The opportunity to speak to housing officers about homelessness and housing is also particularly valued, with women believing that they would be provided with appropriate housing on release.

Although considered insufficient in the earlier months of the operation of the CCUs, the level of support provided through addiction/recovery services was seen by women as much improved, and offered them a valuable resource. This was seen as an advantage of living in a CCU. Opportunities to learn about budgeting from CCU officers and some delivery partners were also considered valuable to help women prepare for release.

Women were however unhappy about the level of and nature of educational opportunities available within the CCUs, saying that educational providers were there too infrequently and that their learning opportunities were not tailored to their needs.

Safety and privacy

The SPS Strategy for Women and the conditions within the CCUs are aimed at enabling women to feel safe. Many women entering the CCUs have histories of abuse and victimisation, have been let down many times and their trust in others has been eroded. Trust is distinctively shaped by the prison environment and the approach of staff and peers. Women spoke of their insecurities and safety concerns which accompanied them into prison and how these have been compounded by prior prison experiences. Some women spoke of 'feeling safer' in the CCUs than they ever had in closed establishments. For some this was related to the more relaxed environment and the low noise levels; for others it is being able to remove themselves from activities at any time and retreat to their rooms.

Whilst for the most part women commented that they felt physically safe in the CCUs, in the arts-based workshop sessions some women divulged that they did not always feel emotionally safe. This appeared to relate to their sense of anxiety connected to uncertainty about 'the rules' that applied in the CCUs and the threat of 'being downgraded' (Lilias resident) for breaking rules and the lack of clarity around those rules. There was a real fear amongst the women of unintentionally breaking Prison Rules, and this fear shaped their choices and thus impacted on their agency and sense of autonomy.

Privacy is a key concern to women in prison (see for example Moran, Pallot & Piacentini 2013) and the SPS Strategy for Women aims to encourage women to understand the importance of privacy and personal space. Yet privacy is severely limited in prison environments and the CCUs are not that different. Women are keenly aware they are under surveillance at all times from CCTV cameras around the facilities, and it is difficult to find a place to be alone apart from their own rooms. Some women felt more under surveillance in the CCUs because of the more proximate relationships with officers, in particular their POs, who they felt knew everything about them and their lives.

Certainly, women viewed the levels of physical privacy offered by having their 'own space' positively and this was reflected in their descriptions of their rooms. Emotional privacy is more elusive. Some women prefer to keep themselves to themselves avoiding anything more than superficial relational interaction. This is something that we observed in both CCUs where some women appeared more solitary and did not engage in activities or interaction. Other women are more open with their peers about their feelings and histories. This can be seen in the interviews where women chose to be interviewed in their friendship groups on the grounds that they 'know all about one another.' (BR 001:1 top end).

Trustworthiness

In the context of trauma-informed practice, trustworthiness is a core principle, emphasising transparency, honesty, and reliability to build and maintain trust between individuals. Most women were of the view that a degree of trust had been invested in them by SPS placing them in a CCU. They pointed to the demonstrable lack of safety and security features in the CCU relative to closed conditions and the way that they are able to move around in the grounds and buildings. The key example that virtually all women gave was the open display of sets of sharp kitchen knives in the shared houses and the Hub kitchen area.

When it came to women's thoughts about the trustworthiness of CCU officers, a range of views were expressed. As noted earlier, Phase 1 interviews indicated the development of trusting relationships where women began to invest trust in officers, particularly their POs. This included opening up to them – to a degree – about their pasts, their concerns and hopes for the futures. On the whole, women felt that their POs looked out for them, answered their questions honestly, provided feedback and generally 'tried to do their best.'

In Phase 2, as the CCUs began to fill with more women, then levels of trust in officers diminished for some. As described above, officers were seen to have less time, and women's questions and requests went unanswered. This reflects a situation that seems to have grown more complex as time has gone on. As described by women, the combination of more women coming into the CCUs, rising tensions between women (discussed earlier), the increasing levels of staff absence, and the inconsistent messaging conveyed by management to staff and then on to the women has created an atmosphere of uncertainty. Indeed at times in Phase 2 it gave a strong impression of discord.

Choice and collaboration

Given the inherent power dynamics that exist between staff and prisoners, ensuring that women are supported to make decisions and choices, and indeed have opportunities to do so, can be challenging in a prison environment.

Some women, particularly those serving longer sentences, reported being involved in the setting of their own goals, in collaboration with their PO and their social workers. This did promote a sense amongst these women that they were being treated with respect, that their voices and wishes were being heard, and this in turn bolstered the development of healthy interpersonal relationships with staff. It reassured some of the women that they were being prepared for the decisions they would be required to make upon release.

Women appreciated not having to attend activities in the Hub when they didn't appeal to them or when they needed some time and space to themselves. They also appreciated the flexibility that was allowed in relation to the scheduling of family visits.

The principle of choice was however somewhat eroded by women not being able to make choices about the ways in which they used their weekly allowance. For example, having to buy items from the very limited choices available on the 'canteen list' which offered a very limited section of basic toiletries, snacks, and other goods. The canteen list is a critical component of women's quality of life and wellbeing, but the available toiletries for purchase were universally considered 'very limited', and 'mainly for men.' Somewhat similarly (and as discussed in more detail below) women felt they were effectively denied any choice in the purchase of food products that they were able to buy online from one supermarket. A constant gripe was the restricted choice and the fact that all too often, substitute goods arrived, which they either didn't like or did not know how to cook.

During the last stage of fieldwork, we were told that the weekly allowance that women received to spend on food in one CCU had been reduced. This was on the basis that women were spending that allowance inappropriately by buying 'expensive' and/or 'unhealthy' food. Yet, without a catering manager in the CCUs as would be the case in closed conditions, and in the absence of the provision of information about healthy eating and food preparation, then women's food choices may be understandable. As may be expected, the reduction in allowance enraged many women.[4]

Empowerment

For the women we interviewed and spoke with in arts-based workshops, identifying examples of where and when they felt empowered in the CCUs was more difficult, and centred around having their own rooms. Rather they spoke more about their feelings of powerlessness. In this regard, many women returned to the issue of body searching, which was considered demoralising and traumatising:

> "The only thing I don't like is when you get strip-searched. I think that's more... anything that's supposed to be trauma-based, you think coming here, you wouldn't go through that again. Don't get me wrong, it's only been twice, but it's still... oh, it's horrible. It's embarrassing. And… it's all them lassies, you know what I mean? Like that. Really doing it. Can they not stop that?... I think yes, if they take drugs or drink, or whatever, but I've not had a bad report all through my sentence." (LR2 007 LTP).

In one CCU, an issue arose concerning access to sanitary products. Once again there had been an unannounced change of practice. Whereas for some months women had been allowed to go to a supplies cupboard which contained cleaning supplies and sanitary products and take what they needed, this was changed overnight with no explanation given. Instead women now had to ask an officer either to get the products for them or accompany them to the now locked cupboard and oversee what they take. This was considered 'embarrassing' and 'belittling.'

[4] Following the end of fieldwork, we were informed by SPS that provision had been made for a catering officer to attend the CCUs, in the acknowledgement that women were upset about the lack of someone to provide information about food preparation and healthy eating.

Women also found it hard to practice their faith in the CCU; there is no chapel for prayer, reflection or services and the women are unable to attend a church in the community. Some women found this very difficult. Whilst some faith groups visit the CCUs as delivery partners, not all women found these to meet their faith needs.

Community access

The majority of residents believe that a main purpose of the CCUs was to support women to gain community access: “What is the point in me coming here if it’s not for going into the community?” (Bella resident). It is clear from Chapter 6 however, that the numbers of women able to gain access to the community are lower than originally anticipated by SPS when the CCUs were being planned and built. Community access, or rather the lack of it was an ongoing and pervasive theme across all fieldwork stages. It was a major topic of discussion in the group intervews and in the arts-based workshops in particular and we draw on the conversations held during these research encounters in this section.

Before moving to the CCUs many of the women believed they would have much more in the way of community access, for example, exercising at the local gym, doing their own shopping and attending appointments on the outside by themselves: “When we came here, we were told we would get community access to go out to do our shopping.” (Lilias resident).

As mentioned earlier, there was a strong perception that they had been misled by SPS in this respect: “They sold it to me differently like.” (Lilias resident).

There was a belief that the lack of timely access could impact the progression of life prisoners and LTP’s in particular who needed to have their First Grant of Temporary Release (FGTR) in place before they could go out into the community. Women were puzzled as to why gaining community access was prohibited for so many CCU residents: “They could let us out to the library at least but because you are waiting for your first grant that stops you from stepping outside on the gate.” (Lilias resident). The local library is situated around 300 metres from HMP Lilias.

Some STPs, on the other hand, said that they had been told in advance that they would not get community access:

> “I was told I wouldn’t get community access when I was coming here and I came because it was better aesthetically and you get a bit more freedom, ken what I mean. In closed conditions you are working and you are in a routine and you don’t need to clean up after officers… you get treated the same, you get taken into the gym.” (Arts workshop, Bella resident).

Some of the women spoke about their frustration over the length and frequency of home leave. One woman on a life sentence with just over a year of her sentence to go is receiving two hours every two months, and asked the question: ‘How is 2 hours every 2 months rehabilitation?’ The women felt this contrasts with what men would receive at the male open prison once at the same stage of progression.

As there are different levels of community access (UDR, SEL, WPs etc.), this can become very confusing and frustrating for women serving longer sentences, who may have done everything that they believe is required to progress, yet are still waiting months for community access. This again speaks to the importance of women being fully informed of the implications for them of moving to a CCU, with specific attention paid to the likelihood of community access.

Lack of clarity over rules

Lack of clarity over 'the rules' emerged as a really critical issue throughout all fieldwork stages. Many of the women in both HMP Lilias and HMP Bella spoke of not knowing what the rules were, of the rules changing dependent upon which officers were present, or which FLMs were on duty, or dependent upon decisions made by SPS senior management. The Prison Rules are available, on request, but women did not know where to find them or what they are. Many expressed that they relied on other residents in the CCUs to explain the rules and processes during the initial settling in period.

Food

Despite some really positive examples and intentions of an approach that prioritises autonomy, agency and choice, the research revealed several contradictions. Food purchasing and preparation was one of them. Research and prison inspectorate reports have highlighted the important relationship between food and the social identities of those in prison, and the opportunity that food choices and practices bring to show agency (Food Matters 2024). It has also shown how food contributes to improving the quality of family visits; and more importantly, how this can strengthen ties between women and their families.

However, women described lacking autonomy in the ways in which they had to do their shopping. Whilst a restricted range of goods are obtainable from the prison canteen list, many women found these limited, and limiting. As described earlier, women are supported in making the decisions around ordering food, and operational officers complete an online supermarket order on their behalf, which women find annoying:

> "We come in here to do our shopping with an officer. And Tesco is just across the road… It annoys you some weeks, because the shopping comes every Wednesday and you're on… you're, like, can I do my shopping for next week. But they say, I'm busy just now, we'll get you later, we'll get you later, we'll get you later. Get you later, get you tonight. I say, no, you'll not, tonight's my time. I'm pyjama-ed up so don't come to me tonight. So, I've been asking for the past four days. I said, I could have been to Tesco and back." (LR 004 LTP).

This often meant a lack of choice in terms of the food and groceries that women were permitted to buy; restrictions on where they could cook, and who they could cook for. Whilst women were appreciative of the opportunity to buy and cook their own food, they all wanted to go out to do their own shopping rather than order it online as 'they send stuff you don't want and a lot of stuff is near the sell-by date' (LR 003 LTP).

In Phase 1 of the research, women were able to use the Hub kitchen to cook for their families. This was something that those women who could cook really appreciated; choosing the food and making meals, even if it was just a sandwich, made them feel ‘normal’ and ‘like a proper mum’ (arts workshop, Lilias researchers). On one occasion researchers visited the CCU just after one of the women had thrown away the sandwich she had just made for her partner. She had understood that she could cook and prepare food in the Hub only to be told having just prepared the sandwich that she should not have done so. Understandably she was annoyed and upset. Several women then described how they would prepare food in their houses in advance to bring over for a visit, rather than cooking anything in the Hub area as they knew that the rules regarding cooking in the Hub had changed. This seemed to defeat the purpose of having the kitchen area in the Hub, as it had potential to be used for women to prepare food with and for their families as they might at home.

There were other rules around food which frustrated the women – one of which concerned families not being able to bring in food for them to eat together in the Hub, as it was considered a security risk. Following the closure of the kitchen Hub for cooking by the women, one of the CCUs installed a food and drink vending machine in the reception area. However, any food or drink bought by family members from the CCU vending machine had to be finished by the women in the Hub area, rather than being allowed to take it back to their houses. The vending machine was also controversial for other reasons – it was very expensive, and only available in one of the CCUs. One incident that researchers were told about by a woman involved food being given to her from the vending machine when some of her family was visiting. Suspicion from officers over this resulted in very negative consequences for the woman, including having to undergo a full body search. Months later this still impacted upon the woman and her family, who were far warier in visits than previously. This took place despite officers describing efforts to make the CCUs a different visiting experience for families than in closed conditions.

Women also described how phone credit for all calls needs to be bought by the women on their canteen sheet. They spend around £10 a week and this always runs out. All calls must be made from this – legal, professional and personal. Some said that it was hard with children who just like to chat or share imaginative stories. One woman talked of how she’d planned to call her young daughter at 10am on her birthday after she would have opened her presents and cards. She had used her last 30p as she needed to call her father to check if he was coming to visit her. When she realised she’d run out of telephone money she explained the situation to her PO but was denied the chance to be given a call for free at that point. Another officer later relented but by then she said she was in floods of tears and that the plan was ruined. As her children do not know that she is in prison, she always has to phone her mother or father to get the children ready first, before she can call them which is a complicated and expensive procedure.

Family visits

A key strategic aim of the CCUs was to support family contact. The importance of family ties, both in terms of women's wellbeing and rehabilitative ideals, is emphasised in many reviews and reports and reiterated in the SPS Strategy for Women. The aim is to support women to maintain and build positive relationships involving their family and especially their children. For some women, this was a key reason why they wished to move to a CCU, particularly if it was located near to where family reside. For those women, the access to family was the best thing about the CCUs. It allowed them to see family frequently; to spend time with their children and grandchildren, and; have the opportunity to find out more about family news.

> "Oh, it's amazing, because in closed conditions you've got the prison officer decides, you're talking, you can't really talk to your family. Whereas here it's a lot more relaxed. You're in there, you should see how big it is. You can just talk to your family and they bring the grandkids up, now that's good… they love it... Aye, because they were more anxious than me. They kept phoning up and asking me what's happening. Aye, it's just great. The grandweans love it, do you know what I mean? They love playing about in it. They think this is my house." (LR2 007 LTP).

Other women said that they had not wished to have family visits whilst in closed conditions due to feelings of shame and not wanting to upset their family members, especially children. This resonates with research on the challenges of negotiating motherhood whilst in prison (Umeh 2025). In the following quote, a woman speaks about the relief that she – and her family – felt when coming into the CCUs for the first time and seeing the layout:

> "Family been up visiting, what a great… you know, for them to walk into that Hub was like… You know, seeing the height of the fence, my family were like, you know, they're coming into closed conditions, big iron gates and big high walls, and then they're walking into that and they're like, wow, you know, what's happening here, you know, so it was a shock for my family as well, but a pleasant shock." (LR2 006 top end).

The opportunity to have more family contact was raised by most women in response to questions about the differences between living in a CCU and other prisons. However, relatively few actually had regular family visits, reflecting the more limited relational support networks of women in prison as opposed to men (Crewe et al 2017). For those that do get family visits, it is considered a major benefit. As one said:

> "Visits are important – you have more time with your family. In closed there is always a prison officer standing beside you. You have to stay sitting down in a closed visiting room… can't take kids into the fresh air like you can here." (BR 001:1 top end).

Yet as noted, there is a relative lack of family visits to the CCUs. A small number of women said they saw their families regularly. But in all cases, those families lived close by. Other women were more ambivalent about family visits. There were a number of reasons for this: their children had been removed by social services prior to or following their imprisonment; long-time estrangement from their family sometimes predating their arrest; or because they did not want their family to see them in prison. One woman told us that she found it painful to see families visit as she had not seen her own children for many years (LR 003 top end).

During the course of the research, an event took place in one of the CCUs: families had the opportunity to visit for an afternoon, were given a tour around some areas of the unit (but not the shared houses), and enjoy food and live music together with their relative. For some women though this event proved hard and upsetting. For those who did not have family able or willing to attend, or those who were let down at the last minute by their intended visitors, some avoided the Hub and retreated to their rooms. Seeing other women have family visits was deeply upsetting for them, though they said they were happy for those women who did get visits.

The relative lack of family visits is something that we observed whilst in the CCUs and heard about from both women and officers. The CCU's ability to support women's relationships with their children, families and others significant to them is an important question. It is important to acknowledge the significant challenges of supporting women to maintain and build positive family relationships, of supporting women who do not have family relationships, and the roles of family members in such endeavours who may be unwilling to participate. However, there did seem to be a paucity of work in place in the CCUs to facilitate family contact.

Getting 'papped back'

As presented in Chapter 6, women can be sent back to closed conditions if it is considered that they have breached prison rules, behaved badly or are deemed to present a high risk. Officers and women gave several reasons for returning women:

- 'dirty' mandatory drug tests (MDTs);
- the presence of alcohol in their system after being let out on day release;
- being late back from a UDR;
- tampering or misuse of mobile phones;
- bad or disruptive behaviour, and;
- taking too much of their medication (in one case this was paracetamol which resulted in the woman being put on report and sent back to closed conditions for three months).

Interviews and observations revealed that women were sometimes penalised for circumstances outside their control when out in the community and, in some cases, for relatively minor incidents. Examples included being late back to a CCU after a UDR due to using public transport for the first time in many years and being unfamiliar with the route. The travelling time that had been allocated to the woman was also insufficient given the distance she had to travel.

This could lead to an Adverse Circumstances Report (ACR) being made by a member of staff, usually the woman's PO. Under some circumstances it would result in a woman being moved back to closed conditions or losing her community access.

Women were understandably fearful of being 'papped back' to closed conditions because of the adverse consequences for them and, in some instances, for their families. Although relatively few women are sent back to closed conditions (as shown in Chapter 6, there were eight women sent back from HMP Lilias between March 2023 and February 2025), the consequences can be immense. For example, a woman who was moved back to closed conditions lost her family home in the process, which had a detrimental impact on her own psychological and emotional wellbeing and her family relationships. It also meant that she could not receive family visits because the closed prison was a considerable distance away from where her familly lived (BR2 006 STP).

The decision on whether to return a woman to closed conditions rests with the duty manager of the CCU and will usually happen immediately as there is no appropriate safe space in the CCU to hold women who are perceived a risk. While there are holding cells in the CCU, as described earlier, they are not fit for purpose because the design does not comply with SPS requirements.

In terms of the ACR process officers explained that many things can be recorded in an ACR and that it is not always used to document serious incidents or perceived by officers as detrimental to a woman's progression (i.e. putting her place in the CCU or community access at risk). While adverse circumstances could include a positive drug test/being found with drugs or getting into a fight with another woman it might also relate to her personal circumstances. For example, feeing sad, anxious, having a fall out with family, family illness etc.. Women were therefore understandably anxious about the potential for them to be returned to closed conditions if an officer decided to raise an ACR. Women explained that they felt as if their community access could be revoked at any given time or staff would regularly remind them that they could lose their home leave if they broke Prison Rules.

This meant that some women became more guarded about disclosing personal matters to members of staff for fear of it being used against them. For example, a woman with a history of alcohol addiction who was given community access disclosed to officers in advance of leaving the CCU that she was worried she would relapse when out in the community on her own. Officers offered to support her by arranging for her to have a meal on licensed premises and obtained the necessary clearance. It emerged during her Parole hearing that the woman's license conditions stated she was not permitted to enter licensed premises. As a result she was told by her PO that she may have to go back to closed conditions despite being given clearance and being accompanied by an officer on the day (BR2 001). This indicates that some women are not always aware of their license conditions and it is not clear if this is discussed with women prior to them going out into the community.

The fairness of the decision-making process for returning women was also perceived differently by women and officers. Several women were of the view that officers only do so after giving women ample warnings and that there were usually legitimate reasons for returning them. Then there were examples of women being sent back for, what was perceived by the women, as 'trivial mistakes', such as being slightly late returning from a work placement.

Amongst women there was the perception that STPs avoided being sent back to closed conditions for breaching prison rules, although life prisoners/top-enders were returned more promptly. However the SPS data presented in Chapter 6 highlighted that of the eight women in HMP Lilias returned to closed conditions, four were LTPs and three were STPs (the status of one was not provided).

It was also suggested by women that staff may be wary of sending women back to closed conditions as it could evidence that the CCUs were not working in practice.

Those serving longer sentences believed they had more to lose than STPs because of how their progression pathway differed. The threat of being downgraded and sent back to closed conditions or losing their privileges meant that they were 'more likely to comply with the rules' (LR 001 LTP). Being put on report would get women sent back to closed immediately. One woman was returned to closed conditions for a day and when she came back to the CCU her home leaves were stopped. She was later told by her PO that there was a likelihood this would affect her eligibility for home detention curfew (HDC). With 'rules' changing so often, this added to women's anxiety about 'getting things wrong'.

Views of women in a closed establishment

As stated in Chapter 3, part of the research specification developed by the research commissioners was the requirement to include the views of prison officers and women prisoners in a female closed establishment, who may be assessed as potentially likely to move to a CCU.

There were some delays in SPS identifying another prison establishment wherein we might approach women for interview. As a result, these interviews were conducted only in Phase 2 of the research. The prison that we were given access to was originally a male prison but one of the existing residential halls had been given over to women in November 2002, as a result of the high numbers of women prisoners in HMP & YOI Cornton Vale. The prison houses adult male and female prisoners serving short and long-term sentences, as well as those on remand. There were stark differences observed between the CCUs and the physical environment and facilities in the closed establishment. For example, most of the prison is over 100 years old and the fabric of the building quite out-moded. There is no visitor centre and the foyer where visitors wait to enter the visits room is cramped and limited in provision.

Interviews with women were sought to determine their understanding of gender-specific and trauma-informed approaches and their operationalisation in their

mainstream prison. Six women prisoners were interviewed. Unlike women in the CCUs, two of these women had heard of the SPS Strategy for Women and had taken part in some discussions with SPS management about it some years earlier. The other four women had no knowledge of the strategy. All women had variable levels of knowledge about the CCUs. They knew they were exclusively for women and believed that women in the CCUs were supposed to be allowed greater community access than they had in closed conditions. However, other than that, they did not have much detail.

All but one of the women interviewed were clear that they had no desire to move to a CCU. Most said that they would be very reticent to leave their current prison, where there is considered to be a stable officer contingent. For example:

> “For me, if I need to be in prison, this is probably the best it’s going to get, I would imagine. Like, good relationships with staff, good relationships with cons, so settled. Able to get my head into my sentence. Whereas up there in Cornton Vale, you weren't getting a night’s sleep so there was no settlement.” (GR 001: 1 LTP).

Many also said that they had ‘heard bad things’ about the CCUs, the lack of structure and community connection and the women living there, mainly from women who had moved to a CCU or via the ‘prison grapevine’.

> “Certainly from interviews that I’ve been involved in from the women’s strategy, it seems to be that they have this glamourised approach towards moving women into more safer custody units or CCUs, Community Custody Units. And that’s, like, a progression from closed into more semi and open conditions. And they were… we were sold this, kind of, idea that there were not going to be bars, there was going to be a lot more family contact, there was going to be a lot more life skill choices there. There was going to be connections to the community. And certainly from the women that we've spoken to that have either got out or unfortunately come back in, that doesn’t seem to be happening.” (GR 001:2 LTP).

> “So we have… we’ve had a few friends that have left and ended up either back downgraded or stuff through things that seem silly, trivial. I think they're super risk averse, that they’re maybe too scared to actually let people do the things that the units were for. So, yeah, they end up mini prisons, where you're not really getting much more freedom that we’re getting now. So it seems like a lot of money that we’ve spent on a strategy that isn't groundbreaking like they thought.” (GR 001:1 LTP).

There were three key reasons why women did not want to move to a CCU. The first cohered around the nature of the prisoner/staff relationships operating in this closed establishment. Staff there were considered ‘approachable’ and seen to take women’s concerns and questions seriously:

> “I’ve always found ninety per cent of staff members are approachable. You can talk to them if you have an issue or they do PIAC [Prisoner Information and

Advice Council] meetings obviously where… whether that's about food, canteen sheets, just the general regime of the hall. And I would say as well at the moment [hall] has got good managers that if you do have an issue, you can chap the door and just say, could I get a word, and they don't turn you away. They'll listen if it's… obviously they're not going to give you whatever you want but within reason, if there's a genuine issue or complaint, then they'll take it seriously, yeah." (GR 001:1 LTP).

"I would approach any staff member if I had an issue. And they wouldn't turn you away just because they're not your PO. It was something specific that you needed your PO to deal with, they'd note it and put it onto your narrative so that your PO knew when they came back." (GR001:2 LTP).

Most highlighted the strength and consistency of officer/prisoner relationships which, for the most part, were more evident in this prison than in others that they had been in. That said, two women were less enthusiastic about their relationships with officers. One said she had only met her after being in the prison for almost a month. Another would much rather speak about personal issues with her friends inside than staff:

"Aye, you'd probably go and talk to another con. I… don't get us wrong, they'll say to you are you alright and that, like... like, my pal, her dad just died, they've said to her is she alright and that, do you know what I mean, like, they have, and, like, how are you, but they've… got other things to do, do you know what I mean. As I've said about the start, that rapport, and then there's the relationship and it's just not going to happen, is it? You would rather talk to people that you have got a friendship with, and you've built a relationship with... opposed to talking to the screws, do you know what I mean." (GR 003 remand).

The second main reason for wanting to remain in the closed establishment was because of the structured regime. The importance of having a clear structure and a clear understanding of what each day would bring was something all women spoke about:

"Aye, because it's routine in the jail, it's routine… And that's one of the things that really helps, because you wake up and you know what's happening with your day, do you know what I mean, it's all planned. We get out at nine, for a shower, but we kind of, sit and get a coffee in each other's cell. And we're out for an hour 'till ten, and then we're locked back in our cell. And at half one, quarter to two, we've got another exercise, we can get out then, outside. And then, we have dinner at six, quarter to six, and we're back in our rooms for half six. And then, we're out from seven 'till eight. But on the weekend, the routine changes. We're still allowed our shower, like from nine 'till ten, still exercise half one to two, but rec is like, half three, to four, and then it's an early dinner, at half four. And then, once we come back from our dinner, that's us dubbed up, we don't get out for the seven 'till eight, at the weekend." (GR 002 STP).

> “I settled in here really quick, to be honest. I just adapted to, like, the routine and stuff like that. I find it easier to have a routine and when I don’t have that routine it’s no good for me. Do you know what I mean? So, I settled in really quickly and really well.” (GR 004 remand).

The third reason concerned the range of activities available to women, and the opportunities that they have to participate in recreational, sporting, religious and cultural activities. Some of these were peer-led. There is an emphasis on the development of peer-led activities in this establishment. Women considered these opportunities to be both empowering and to represent ways in which they can enable initiative on the part of the women.

We did however hear of a range of different initiatives that had been or were in the process of being rolled out by some of the women, which they thought enabled them to have a voice and a choice in the kinds of things that they do in the prison. There is nevertheless some feeling that they are denied some facilities which are provided for men.

There were some women who did not think there were enough peer-led activities and that this could be improved. For example:

> “I don’t think there’s enough. I would like to see more peer led opportunities. There are various different women in the hall that have got multiple skills… And I feel that it’s a massive failure on the prison’s part that they're not being utilised.” (GR 001:2 LTP).

There also appeared to be more scope for engagement in work parties, which again is in some contrast to the CCUs:

> “There's the laundry, there's the pantry, there's in the factory, and there's the cleaning pass, and the shower pass, and the library.” (GR 002 STP).

> “So, as soon as I came down here, I was straight on the pass and my time has flew in. Do you know what I mean?” (GR 004 remand).

Summary

Included in this chapter are the wide-ranging views of women about life in the CCUs. With few exceptions, women were positive about the physical environment and facilities, the relative quietness and the levels of privacy afforded to them, which were seen as so very different from their experiences in closed conditions. Most women felt physically ‘safer’ than in closed conditions. The access to health care, community social work and housing officers were considered to be extremely valuable. The proximity to family and the improved conditions for family visits, for those who had them, were also viewed very positively. However, without the structure found in closed conditions many women felt ‘bored’ and available activities were largely considered insufficient, variable and disjointed.

Women, for the most part, felt ‘respected’ by prison officers and believed that they treated them with sensitivity and candour and provided appropriate support, including recognition of women’s experiences of trauma. There were (limited) opportunities to feed into planning and decision-making. Power imbalances between officers and women were evident, suggesting the need for attentiveness to the development and maintenance of the ‘right’ relationships. Work on tackling some adversely stereotypical views about women by officers would also help here. Relationships between officers and women appeared to deteriorate somewhat as the CCUs became fuller, which seemed to be compounded by high levels of staff absence.

Full body searching, unsurprisingly, was experienced as traumatising, degrading and demoralising for women. Its necessity and the frequency with which it is carried out was questioned.

The limited (or lack of) community access was a significant source of disappointment, frustration and disillusionment for women; many felt they had been misled about this issue. A key source of friction amongst women cohered around the different sentencing profiles of women in the CCUs, and the relative benefits and entitlements that different categories of women were perceived to experience. Other tensions arose around the limitations placed on food purchasing, food preparation and the ‘canteen list’.

In respect of the views expressed by women in the closed establishment, given that such a small number of women were interviewed, our conclusions here are necessarily limited. It is clear though that women are provided with more structure and activities in closed conditions than are available in the CCUs, which the women say that they prefer. Officer/prisoner relationships are considered positive and supportive and there are opportunities for women to exercise agency and autonomy through the development and pursuit of peer-led opportunities, albeit within some tight constraints. Importantly, women have a clearer idea of how their progression status will be managed through the prison, and when – and how – they are likely to gain community access.

It seems clear that more work needs to be done to raise awareness of the CCUs across the women’s estate, to provide clear and accurate explanations about the realities of life in the CCU for both women and for staff.

The two posters below were the product of the arts-based workshops conducted with women in both CCUs. They provide excellent visual summaries of the views and experiences of the women in the CCUs.


BELLA
CCU
Some of us have trauma around things that have happened in the past
FAMILY VISITS
WE'D LIKE TO COOK IN THE HUB
The cooker is fixed!
GENDER SPECIFIC
It's nice to make food for our FAMILIES
WE ALL NEED TO FEEL COMFORTABLE AND SAFE HERE.
Expectations can be set too high when people come here. It's still a prison.
TRAUMA INFORMED?
IMPROVING COMMUNITY INTEGRATION
We need easy access to feminine hygiene Products
EXCEPTIONAL NEEDS FORM IS GOOD
A lack of PRIVATE SPACES
My experience here has been good I've got alot out of my time here and have been treated well
ENABLE PRIVACY
When discussing personal issues
VENDING MACHINE WITH SWEETS FOR RESIDENTS, THEIR CHILDREN LIKE IS WELCOME
DYNAMICS CHANGE CAN LEAD TO TENSIONS
As women Come and Go
We'd like More CHOICE on the CANTEEN SHEET
MORE AFFORDABLE PRODUCTS
So You can get what you want
Different people get treated differently
DIGNITY IS IMPORTANT
AVOID CANCELLATIONS
WE NEED STRUCTURE
You can Work and get Paid for it.
IT'S GOOD TO FEEL TRUSTED
GOOD COMMUNICATION is needed
AVOID NO SHOWS AND NOT ENOUGH NUMBERS
To help EVERYONE understand what's expected here
I WAS REALLY GRATEFUL FOR IT
My NHS experience has been really good
IT'S NOT ALWAYS CLEAR WHY WITHOUT EXPLANATION
NEED TRANSPARENCY
Need to have enough to DO
maintain Community relationships
BUILD TRUST WITH LOCAL PROVIDERS
in mental health week there was supposed to be lots on but not much happened
MORE ACTIVITIES AND EDUCATION IS PLANNED
IMPROVEMENTS to GYM FOR EXERCISING
MORE COMMUNITY ACCESS
We have to be accompanied by Staff... That can be traumatic
ATTENDING NHS APPOINTMENTS
POSITIVE CHANGE
MANAGER LISTENS TO WOMEN
APPRECIATED JEWELLERY CLASSES
LINKS + SUPPORT ALL IMPROVED
INCREASE SOCIAL EVENTS IN THE CENTRE
STAFF WITH EXPERIENCE IN OPEN ESTATE IS POSITIVE
THERE SHOULD BE A RULE BOOK
WE NEED TO TRUST IN CONFIDENTIALITY
SUPPORT STAFF WELLBEING
I'd like to see My P.O. MORE
There's not enough staff
The staff are in a difficult position
We are afraid to get sent back to Closed for Something we didn't know we couldn't do.
I've got a lot out of my time here
My PO has been great
STAFF HAVE BEEN VERY SUPPORTIVE TO ME
RELATIONSHIPS WITH STAFF ARE IMPORTANT
THE RULES?
WE NEED CLEAR TIMESCALES
CLARIFY CHANNELS
WE NEED CLEAR PROCESSES
CONSISTENCY
CLARITY
HAVE THEM WRITTEN DOWN
It's good to be outside in the good weather.
I feel proud of myself for coming here
I feel like I've done well
It's different for every person, we all have a different experience
AM I BREAKING A RULE?
I don't know
MENTAL HEALTH IS BETTER WHEN YOU KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT.
How to Complain if you need to?
The Shine comes off a bit after a while. It's Cloudy. What you are and aren't allowed to do
IT'S SUCH A GOOD FACILITY WE NEED TO GET THINGS RIGHT
NEED CLEAR BOUNDARIES
WANT TO FEEL CONFIDENT TO HAVE FAMILY VISIT
UNCERTAINTY PUTS US RISK
The Bella Centre


LILIAS CCU
TRAUMA INFORMED?
TRAINING NEEDED
Children can move around and play
More time for visits
Improve awareness of impact of processes (eg Scanners) on young/ neurodiverse visitors.
MAKE ACCOMODATIONS CONSISTENTLY
Mostly on Weekends
FAMILY VISITS
BETTER FOR CHILDREN
Kitchen not in use
Lack of Privacy
THE HUB
NICER ENVIRONMENT
MEDICAL
TREATMENT IS QUICK AND GOOD
CONSISTENCY AND TRUST ARE CRUCIAL
THE RULES
Some inconsistencies eg around searches
WE GET AN INDUCTION
WE ALL NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE RULES
"Sometimes short termers have broken the rules and then they've been changed"
Short termers just get brought here
I didn't go on induction
So Women could LEARN I.T. SKILLS
RISK AVERSE
INCREASE ACCESS
EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES
Classroom
Teacher monday-friday
computer learning
MOVING ON
NEED GOOD PREPARATION FOR PAROLE FOR ALL WOMEN.
I have to present to homeless shelter
I know where Im going, im ready
I worry about it
I am trusted
I look after the cleaning cupboard
Your room is stocked with sanitary products when you arrive at the CCU.
GOOD RELATIONSHIPS ARE VALUED
I plan with my PO
MEET EVERY MORNING
Have to stay in houses
Cancelled appointments
SHORT STAFFING ISSUES NEGATIVELY IMPACT ALL IN CCU
WE HAVE 2 POs
THE GOVERNOR HAS COME IN
STAFF
The Staff join in. They're more relaxed than in closed
SHORT STAFFING = INCONSISTENCY = ERODE TRUST BETWEEN STAFF & WOMEN
I have a GOOD RELATIONSHIP with staff
You can have a laugh with them
WE NEED GOOD COMMUNICATION
Between staff
Between staff & women
PASSING THINGS ON
IMPROVE SYSTEMS
Virtual visits for example, you need a code for access and you don't always get it in time
ENABLE COMPUTER ACCESS IN CCU?
Higher / further education courses
KEEPING IN TOUCH
PHONE CREDIT IS EXPENSIVE
GYM?
LOCAL TESCO?
FOOD SHOP?
After you've been in jail for 15 years you forget what food you like to eat.
PHONE NUMBERS VETTED
MORE CHOICE ON THE CANTEEN SHEET
Not much available
We are going out to CHURCH I'm looking forward to it.
MORE VARIETY IN ACTIVITIES AVAILABLE
I MISS SINGING
WORK PLACEMENT
THEY TRY AND TAILOR IT
Food bank
Charity Shop
I knit hats for Premature babies
The prison gets me wool for it.
I FIND TIME PASSES QUITE QUICKLY HERE
THERE ARE GROUPS ON
ZUMBA led by a prisoner
Citizens theatre
ACTIVITIES APPRECIATED
Regular visits?
Making scented Candles
Visiting children would enjoy this
PET THERAPY WAS GOOD!
Some people just don't want to get involved Some are working
IMPROVING COMMUNITY ACCESS
RED TAPE
I NEED IT FOR MY PAROLE
ENABLE GETTING OUT MORE
GETTING LTPS OUT TO WORK SOONER
THE ACCOMMODATION IS MUCH NICER
It's like night and day coming here from closed conditions
SOME PEOPLE HAVE BECOME INSTITUTIONALISED
TOO LONG IN CLOSED CONDITIONS
IT'S DARK AND NOISY IN CLOSED
But people from Polmont don't want to come
BUDGETING
LIFE SKILLS TRAINING
LEARN TO COOK
Improve knowledge in CCU life across estate
THEY'VE HEARD STORIES FROM PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN SENT BACK
BEFORE MOVING TO IMPROVE TRANSITION
MANAGE OWN TIME
Lilias Centre

8. SPS officers working in the CCUs

In this chapter, we provide information on the backgrounds and experience of SPS officers working in the CCUs, and their views on their preparedness for working in a CCU, including any training they have undergone to support them for the work. In particular, we focus upon the ability and motivation of staff to practise gender-specific and trauma-informed principles in their work. We also highlight the ways in which officers adapt to work in the CCUs, as opposed to other closed establishments, and the challenges that they identified within the CCU environment. The final section of this chapter draws in the views of officers working in a female closed establishment with women who potentially may move to a CCU.

As outlined in Chapter 5, in each CCU there are a combination of residential and operational officers, along with up to six line managers. Each CCU has a staff contingent of between 30 and 36. However, staff work a shift pattern in line with a set roster so are not all in the CCU at the same time.

Given the centrality of the gender-specific and trauma-informed approach to the strategy underlying the work of the CCUs, a key component of the research was to explore the extent to which the principles of these approaches were understood and embedded in the CCUs. For officers, this was explored through interviews and observations. Interviews incorporated questions exploring gender-sensitivity (adoption of a gendered lens; gendered needs, values, risks, capacities and aspirations being taken into account in services and interactions). Interviews also explored how the key elements of trauma-informed practice (safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration and empowerment) shape staff behaviour and the services delivered. For example, throughout the interviews officers were prompted to provide examples of what they consider to be gender-specific and trauma-informed approaches. They were also promted to discuss how individual needs were being addressed, and asked to draw on their own experiences within the CCUs, alongside their experiences of working in other establishments.

Backgrounds and experience of CCU staff

As outlined in Chapter 5, there was variability in the level of experience of officers working in the CCUs. Whilst most had experience of working for the prison service before transferring into a CCU, some were new recruits with little or no previous experience of working in a prison. Most of those with previous experience had only ever worked in male prisons. In Phase 1 of the research most CCU officers were male, although the proportion of female officers grew over the course of the research.

Most officers chose to work in the CCU and had applied to do so. All underwent a competitive recruitment process and were specifically selected. For the most part, the interview process for the newly created roles in the CCUs was considered by officers to be ‘rigorous’ and ‘testing’. According to one officer with lengthy experience, the interview process was more demanding than for any other role he had previously applied for in the prison service. Some officers however did not find

the recruitment process at all challenging, with one describing it as ‘just a bit of a chat’. Senior SPS strategic managers, in interviews, said that value-based interviewing was used to ensure that the ‘right people’ were recruited for the job.

Although it was recognised by SPS that imprisoned women would prefer women officers, CCU managers said that there was always an intention to deploy male officers to the CCUs. This was on the basis that SPS considered there to be benefits in having males working with women prisoners, for example to show that non-transactional and positive relationships with men are possible.

Staff motivations for wishing to work in a CCU were varied; some saw this as a great opportunity to work in a ‘radically different’ prison environment where they could deploy their skills and experience from long years of service. Others spoke of being interested in the novel concept of the CCUs and the opportunity that they gave for working in an environment of full throughcare for women. For example, one officer was motivated by what he had heard about CCUs from a colleague who described the less formal environment of the CCUs and ‘wanted to give it a try’ (Lilias fieldnotes). Others were more pragmatic and said they were motivated by the physical location of the CCUs and their proximity to their homes, which meant a shortened commuting time. Almost all officers, except for those very new in service, went straight to the CCUs from other prison establishments without a break in their service.

The small number of CCU staff who had previously worked with women in prison were puzzled as to why the CCUs drew in officers with no prior experience of working in the women’s estate. As even the limited number of interviews with officers in the closed prison indicated, there is a wealth of experience there, with three of the four officers interviewed having worked with women in prison for several years. As one female operational officer in HMP Lilias who was interviewed in Phase 1 of the research said:

> “I really enjoy my job. And I try and always do it to the best of my ability and I think having experience working with women prisoners in the past has really helped me in this role because… it doesn’t help the fact that probably ninety-eight per cent of staff that work in here have never worked with women before. So… and that’s strange, you would think, why would they bring that amount of people in that have never worked with women?… Women are very… women in custody are very complex. And very, very different from men. And it does take years to learn about their traits, how… you know, how they are and how you should really be working with them, it’s not something that you learn overnight. And don’t get me wrong, I know everyone needs to start somewhere but, like, one day’s women in custody training at the college just doesn’t cut it.” (LS 001 operational).

Officers with long service records were also puzzled about the high proportion of new recruits and relatively inexperienced staff coming into the CCUs, with limited knowledge of risk processes and the associated paperwork. This is considered to be important and core work.

Preparedness for working in a CCU

Gender-specific and trauma-informed work requires organisational support and leadership buy-in, promoting an environment that is supportive of the care and compassion required to deliver and sustain the therapeutic nature of the practice. It also, crucially, requires officers who are informed, properly trained and knowledgeable about the principles of gender-specific and trauma-informed approaches. They need to be equipped to deliver these on the ground, as well as understanding how these principles fit within the wider overarching strategy.

Officers differed not only in terms of how their backgrounds equipped them for working in a CCU, but also in their level of preparation for working in small, women-only units. For the most part, longer-serving officers had been aware of the proposals regarding the development of the CCUs for many years. Other officers had limited knowledge of the aims of the CCUs and their purposes in advance of moving, and so the experience, for some, was something of 'a shock'. The CCUs are much smaller than other prisons, with a much smaller number of women. The physical environment is also unlike any other prisons most officers had previously worked in. There is deliberately a *'*much more subdued atmosphere' with lower noise levels and the use of different terminology (e.g. use of women's first names rather than numbers or nicknames, referring to women as 'residents' rather than prisoners). This is done to intentionally create a new kind of environment.

Some of the FLMs interviewed had direct experience in the development of the SPS Strategy for Women, and there were other officers who appeared to have a working knowledge of the Strategy, for example:

> "I think we were given a general… when we were at the College and things, or it will come up here when we do different classes or different issues come up. So, I've got a good understanding of things that they're adapting for the Women Strategy team and make a difference here. Or I know who I could go to, to ask if I needed to know any more…" (LS2 004 operational).

However, the majority of officers, when asked about it, were very vague about what the strategy says, or even having heard of it. Even where officers had an awareness of the existence of the SPS Strategy for Women, it was not referred to spontaneously, nor did many appear to have much knowledge of its actual contents. For example: "I have [been given information about the strategy], but off the top of my mind, I couldn't tell you anything about it." (BS 002 operational).

Some officers described how there had been, in their view, a lack of consultation and involvement with SPS senior management about the development or operationalisation of the strategy. This felt like a missed opportunity, given that greater engagement and discussion with officers could have strengthened their knowledge and awareness, and possibly their buy-in and implementation of the strategic goals. The following quotes highlight this:

> "So, when we first came [to CCUs] the Women's Strategy team were still here. So, we knew basically what their aim was. I don't think it's really had much of

> an impact and I don't think they told us a lot of stuff, like, when they eventually left and moved onto Stirling to set up Stirling there was loads of things that we were asking questions about. And the answer was really, oh that's the Women's Strategy team and it's nothing really to do with us. So, I don't really feel, like, we got a lot of what they were expecting to us. It was quite vague." (BS2 001 residential).

> "We probably were [given information about the SPS Strategy for Women], but I don't think we had too much to do with... I think it was more that was all dealt with at a higher level, as far as I am aware." (BS 001 operational).

There was some confusion and concern voiced over the SPS Strategy for Women, in terms of how it could be (or was being) operationalised, due to the aims seeming ambitious, wide-reaching and far-removed from day-to-day realities. Uncertainty was also voiced over how progress towards meeting the strategic goals was being measured, in order that SPS would know what was going well, and what might need amending. Finally, a couple of officers raised questions over the current status of the Strategy; whether it had changed or been adapted over time, especially as its end date (2025) was approaching. Those interviewed did not know what the strategic direction would be beyond this date.

> "I suppose everything we do here strives towards meeting the strategy and the aims of the strategy, but, again, I think it's… we probably aren't crystal clear as to what the strategy is at the moment. Has it changed? Has it been adapted? And exactly how we are meeting or not meeting the goals of that because we're so involved and engrossed in the day to day running here. I think the strategy seems quite far removed." (BS2 008 FLM).

An officer interviewed towards the end of the research fieldwork, in December 2024, said:

> "I just get a sense that SPS... this could be cutting edge, this could be so completely different, but it is... I could see it being just such a spectacular place to work. It is, but it could be so different if prison service allowed it to run or had some sort of plan beyond their strategy. I don't see any evidence of what happens next… Again, beyond that we don't have a women's strategy beyond 2025. I am looking for direction from SPS about what happens next." (LS3 001 Manager).

Many officers felt that they had not received adequate information about the CCU in advance of working there and said that they would have appreciated more detail on their operation and the expectations placed on those working there. There was a clear dissonance between their expectations of the CCUs and the reality of working in post. This related to the idea that the CCUs were going to be 'more like an open prison' with women able to 'come and go' (BS 002 operational). Therefore officers found the reality where women had very limited community access to be quite different from their expectations.

Some officers said that they had expected to be working with women at different progression stages, as is the case. For others however, predominantly interviewed in the earlier stages of the research, there was an expectation they would be working predominantly with 'low risk women presenting with mental health and addictions issues'. There was the expectation that these women were to be supported back into the community through the CCUs. To encounter women who did not fit this profile and with limited community access was at odds with their expectations:

> "So, I was hoping that it was going to be more likely we'd be taking the women out to like link up with the Jobcentre and go to places of interest, such as, like, going to the museums or potentially going out to, kind of, charities and getting them linked up with, obviously, like clothing and stuff like that, which we are doing now. But it's now in a closed rather than us going out and stuff like that, to them." (LS2 003 residential).

Officers also described how the reality of working in the CCU was different to expectations, going as far as saying that they felt they had been 'fed false expectations', describing demoralised staff who had been promised a lot that had not (yet) been delivered.

Perceptions and past experiences inevitably shape the approach that officers bring to the CCUs. For most male officers interviewed, moving to work in a women-only facility was a major change and required significant adaptation to what they had done previously. This adaptation was also felt by female officers who had previously only worked in the male estate: 'So, it's a learning curve for us as well working with women if you've not worked with them before' (BS2 001 residential).

Understanding of the gender-specific and trauma-informed approach

Delving deeper into the key principles contained within the SPS Strategy for Women, interviews included asking officers about their knowledge and awareness of its underlying approach – gender-specificity and trauma-informed care. Officers were asked about their understanding of these principles, and what these meant to them. There were some reasonable working definitions provided, for example:

> "Trauma-informed approach is basically getting to know the individual and find out if there's anything that… in the past that has inflicted trauma on to them. So for example, if I'm going to take Jo Bloggs for a mandatory drug test and that woman has experienced trauma in the past from being sexually abused or raped or that, then I need to think, is it appropriate for me to ask her to take her clothing off? So it's very self-centred, depends on what trauma… or if any trauma that person's faced in the past. And we need to be careful how we work around that." (LS 001 FLM).

However, articulating these principles seemed difficult for some officers, who were either vague or unsure:

> “I’m just going to do, like, a stab in the dark kind of thing. It’s definitely catering to women’s needs in particular their characteristics, as opposed to maybe men. That’s my stab in the dark.” (BS2 004 operational).

> “But other than that [body searches]… it’s difficult to find gender-specifics in here, because it’s… I’m trying to think, my mind’s gone blank.” (BS 002 operational).

A small number of officers believed that taking a gender-specific approach should mean that principles of fairness and equality should, or did shape the men’s and women’s prison estates, rather than, perhaps, being a response to specific needs:

> “I think that’s what it is, exactly, is my understanding, it's a fairness and equality thing. It doesn't happen at the [open prison for men], so it can't happen here, because if the men get wind of the women doing it, they’ll want it.” (BS 003 Manager).

Further to this, some CCU staff felt that taking a gender-specific approach resulted in inequalities between the men’s and women’s prison estates, with men being disadvantaged in comparison to women. This was particularly in relation to the men not having an establishment and service of the same type and quality as the CCUs which they viewed as ‘unfair.’ They were keen to point out that men also experience trauma and are deserving of an environment that addresses this. However, at several times in interviews, the point was made that men in the open prison estate have more freedoms in some areas of prison life than women, which was seen as the trade-off for the women living in the better physical environment of the CCUs.

> “They’re all very keen to have something like this for men. Like, you know, men deserve it too. You know, men have trauma and that – they’re right, they absolutely are right, and I think men should have something similar.” (BS2 006 operational).

> “It's gender-specific, you know, this is a first. It doesn't mean the men will never get this; it just means they haven't got it yet. But the reason women have got this is because the men have got that [male open prison]. But what the men haven't got, that the women have got, is a fence.” (BS 003 Manager).

Comprehending officer understanding and perceptions of the SPS Strategy for Women and its approaches is in turn a key part of understanding the extent to which the principles of gender-specificity and trauma-informed practice are embedded in the CCUs. Officers expressing uncertainty and vagueness, or even misunderstanding of and opposition to the principles may of course affect how far these can be meaningfully operationalised.

Officers’ views on training

In order for the SPS to meet their vision and goals for the CCUs, it is crucial that the training delivered to officers who are deployed within them is comprehensive and ensures that they feel equipped to do the job expected of them.

As outlined in Chapter 5, officers receive training on working with women that incorporates trauma-informed and gender-specific approaches delivered by the SPS Scottish Prison Service College (SPSC). They are also expected to undergo trauma-informed training sessions developed by National Health Service (NHS) Education Scotland.

With a few exceptions, CCU officers were unable to provide detailed information about any specific training that they had received in order to prepare them for working in the CCUs. Those that could, described it as a ‘waste of time’; their recall of training was at best hazy. They found it difficult to describe key components of training and relate these to the skills and understandings they needed to equip them to work with women in the CCUs. For example:

> “No, I can't remember a lot of that. I mean, they did say... you know, obviously you did... women’s needs are different to men’s needs in a prison and as to why, you know, obviously certain times obviously ladies on their cycles and things... certain things are allowed and... so it... but it wasn’t really on a great deal... you know, you'd speak about... women seem to get less visitors because normally they're the ones at home looking after children.” (BS3 002 residential).

Two officers, who both had a significant length of service, could not recall much detail about the trauma-informed training, but believed they had gained appropriate skills on the job:

> “I mean, it was… that was, kind of, pumped out a lot, trauma-informed, trauma-informed, trauma-informed… But I don’t really know if it ever got to the crux of what trauma-informed meant… Again, I'm not trying to blow my own trumpet by any means but I was just lucky enough to have had that experience. Whereas I think, like, some of the staff maybe not have had that experience and I'm not slating anybody ‘cause they’ve all done brilliantly, everybody done really well in here. But I think it must be very difficult if you haven't had the experiences like I've had and a couple of other senior officers have had.” (LS2 002 residential).

> “So, we got like a kind of, trauma-based, kind of, like, training to do. And we got some, like, videos and all that, that we had to watch and stuff like that. So, yeah, that was interesting. But I’d kind of already had quite a good understanding of trauma-based work from, like, my programmes work and stuff like that… We did definitely talk about trauma-informed practices and we were, I’m pretty sure we were given, like case studies to have a wee look at and stuff like that. But no. That’s really all.” (LS2 003 residential).

Most staff however – both residential and operational – felt that not much had been provided in the way of initial training in gender-specific and trauma-informed ways of working. Most did not think that the training they received equipped them particularly well for working in the CCUs; many said it was not worthwhile. This included the view that the training had been ‘quite theoretical and quite generic’, and that conducting the work in practice was more complex, such as dealing with

individual triggers and manifestations of trauma. Others described the training as: “it’s PowerPoint to death”. (LS2 002 residential).

Some officers described the training as too condensed: “There was loads of stuff. Don’t get… there was loads of that stuff going on but it’s all just thrown at you within two weeks, do you know what I mean, so I don’t think that’s a great way of doing it.” (BS3 003:1 residential).

> “So, we do go into it a bit, I mean, there is so much to pack in this six weeks at college that they can’t delve into see, you are, kind of, like left at the end of a full day’s like learning on trauma, you are like, so many questions and you, kind of, like have to do your own research into it. I've actually sat doing modules when I've been sitting, time to spare, I have sat doing modules on, like, trauma and stress and things like that, to try and learn myself on how to, kind of, go a bit more into it. Because I think, you know, you have to, you can do the job, but I think if you really want to know more, you’ve, kind of, got to go for it and put your own learning into it.” (BS 002 operational).

At the time of the fieldwork, there did not appear to be much refresher/ongoing training. One officer described how there had been no follow-up to the initial training, and that, despite having to fill in a needs assessment (training needs etc.) upon starting work at the CCU, nothing appeared to have been done with this.

> “I guess, kind of, one of the main barriers would be the lack of ongoing training. I feel like that’s something everyone would benefit from. One of the biggest issues here is complacency, a lot of staff have become extremely complacent, a lot of women in our care have become extremely complacent. So, that’s, kind of, like, a warning shot to everyone, a lot of people became complacent, so, like, ongoing training would be so beneficial.” (BS2 003 operational).

All of this echoes Vaswani and Paul’s (2019) findings that many prison staff lacked the necessary training confidence and capacities to address trauma-related issues, such as grief or post-traumatic stress.

Significantly most officers could not recall elements of gender-specificity in the training apart from searching procedures and control and restraint training. This is shown in the following example from a relatively new recruit to the prison service, who had recently completed initial training delivered by the SPS College:

> “I don’t think so. The only thing that they kind of base gender on really is searching, is the only thing they really focus on, obviously for when gender comes into question, because obviously it is women to women, male to male. So, that is the only kind of really thing. Even like when we were doing like the [control and restraint] training, we spent a full week, and that’s obviously quite hands on… fear control and restraint training. So, when we spent a full week doing that you, kind of, automatically think it is the man’s job.” (BS2 002 operational).

This officer did however recall receiving training about trauma:

> "I don't know if it was gender-specific, but there was a bit of trauma training that we did and things… I wouldn't say that is even specific to women, is it, because men suffer from trauma as well? That was quite a lot of... that was used quite heavily, trauma-informed approach and things." (BS 001 operational).

This view, that men and women equally experience trauma, was widely held by officers; they related this to their experience of working in male establishments.

On the whole, officers said that the trauma-informed training could have been more comprehensive in order to equip staff to be better prepared and more confident in working with women in the CCUs. There was a consensus that 'learning on the job', whereby newer recruits learn from working side by side with more experienced officers, was the key way in which officers gained knowledge and insight into working in prison. The CCUs were no exception. Yet, staff absences and high levels of short-staffing meant that practical learning was not always available or feasible. Officers also said they would have appreciated some targeted training on women's substance misuse, suicide awareness and on dealing with women with poor mental health. Others highlighted the importance of being able to write reports about women's progress and in relation to their case management. Whilst all officers complete a refresher course entitled Talk to Me every three years, and there are options to sign up to refresher training courses, officers do not have support or options to pursue training in this area.

Those with experience of working in other prison establishments felt that the key skills required for working with women were listening and negotiation skills, which cannot necessarily be taught:

> "A lot of kind of negotiation, which is something you definitely need when working with women. Obviously working with males, they're very different creatures to females, there's a lot of similarities and there's a lot of issues that come up that are pretty much the same. A lot of confrontation, luckily, we don't get a lot of that here, but yeah, that's, kind of, like, the main skills." (BS2 003 operational).

Officers were, however, very positive about the learning they received in the CCUs from the clinical psychologists: "We're very lucky we've got the psychologist in here as well and the psychologist is brilliant. See the difference… see even her at the training, that would have been amazing because she's so knowledgeable, informative. She speaks to you at the right level and she gets things over." (LS2 002 residential).

Understanding of the purposes of the CCUs

Officer understandings of the aims and purposes of the CCU are fairly aligned reflecting a shared consensus around supporting women's progression, providing

opportunities for development and for building confidence, as the following quotes suggest:

> "It's about… you know, it's about offering women the opportunity to come here to make links with the community so that we hopefully would be in a position where they're not returning to us… I think that's easy to say. I think, you know, progress for women is… or men, is… you know, it's completely different for everybody. If it means that somebody's not coming back into custody or is in the community for a little bit longer before they're returned to custody, I see that as a success… Likewise, here, this is about providing opportunities. This is about providing a host of supports and a host of I suppose opportunities to not come back to prison. To break that cycle." (LS 002 Manager).

Some officers viewed women's progression as a linear process, as the following quote reveals:

> "It is obviously open plan, it is a recovery centre, my sense is to get them ready for the outside world, to go from that rehabilitation, from the locked up to freedom. So, it is that kind of middle step where we obviously help, we slowly give them more and more freedom, work placement, there are then day releases to go and see family, and then they work their way up to get their home leave." (BS 002 operational).

Others described how the CCUs were about 'lessening the impact of prison' on the women (Lilias fieldnotes), by giving more tailored support for reintegration into the community, putting plans in place, setting up and continuing partnerships, and finding tailored work parties. In other words, providing 'full throughcare'.

However there were different opinions about the value of the CCUs for particular types of prisoner, with officers frequently reflecting on the changes with regard to the sentencing profiles of women entering the CCUs since the facilities opened:

> "I didn't realise there was going to be short-termers here… I just thought it was going to be top-end and open, as opposed to short-termers, but I did think yeah, there would be women at different stages, so some on community access, some not on community access… But it boggles your mind a bit that we've got open, closed and top end all in one place." (BS2 003 operational).

Some thought that living in the CCUs was not beneficial for STPs who had only a very short period left to serve. For example, a male operational officer highlighted the challenge of making 'a real difference' to women's lives when they were there for just a couple of months:

> "The main purpose for me is to get women who want to progress, who have maybe struggled with a few things, to come here for us to work with them for a while. I think them coming here for a month or two is difficult to make any real difference in that time… if you have got them for a year I think we could do some good work with them. Get them placements, get them their housing all

sorted, get their money sorted, get everything in place so that they feel comfortable and confident when they get out." (BS 001 operational).

Officers recognised that time (and effort) was needed to build trusting relationships with women, particularly with those who had a previous history of trauma. There was a general view that by the time residential staff had established a relationship with STPs 'it was time for them to move on' which they found discouraging (BS2 004 operational).

"[STPs] know they're getting home. Whereas your lifers and LTPs are depending on parole and things like that. They've got a lot more reason to engage in a purposeful way." (BS2 007: 1 residential).

Other officers, particularly those interviewed in the middle and latter stages of the research, were more disparaging in their assessment of the value that the CCUs had for STPs:

"If you've only got someone here for a few weeks like you're just boarding them. You can't work with somebody like that." (BS2 007: 1 residential).

Some officers, however, felt that for STPs who may have not had the skills to live independently or had yet to gain some life skills (e.g. cooking, budgeting) then the CCU could offer some benefit. However, the length of time was a significant factor regarding what was achievable. There was a view that LTPs and those at the 'top-end' of their sentences benefitted more from skills training because they had more of an incentive to do so:

"I think it's beneficial, whereas I think long termers get a lot more out of it, because they've not been out, so they might not know how certain things work now out there, and how to do this and how to do that, but then you get short-termers in that are not great and they still need to learn a lot, so it helps everybody to be honest." (LS2 005 residential).

Commenting on the changes in the profiles of women residents, one officer said*:* 'this is now just open conditions for top-end women' (LS 004 FLM), and another: 'I feel like, it's a numbers game. Being honest here it's a numbers game." (BS2 004 operational). The changing profile of the CCUs may have been driven by changes in the women's population, but many officers interviewed, particularly in Phase 2 of fieldwork, felt there was indeed 'a numbers game', referring to 'political imperatives' to fill the CCU facilities. That said, officers could see the benefits for all women being transferred to a CCU, in terms of accessing support, and having their needs met.

Challenges faced by staff

In addition to adjusting to new ways of working, key challenges reported by staff concerned the effect of numerous and frequent staff absences which meant extra or longer shifts. There was also what was referred to as the 'adverse knock-on effect' that staff absence had on the efficacy of working in the CCUs. SPS is experiencing high levels of staff shortage across the whole estate; this is largely

due to staff absences from illness but also due to under-recruitment. Both CCUs were below optimum numbers of staff and those going into work felt this keenly. It created difficulties for developing shift rosters and placed pressures on existing staff.

The shift pattern as described earlier could also create problems both for officers and women. Inconsistences in practice and rules, and even a feeling that the CCU varied in terms of its ethos were consequences of different shift groups, including FLMs, working in relative isolation from each other, with little crossover. One key challenge raised by several officers was around funding/budget for activities within the CCU. They described how this appeared to be limited, meaning that officers would supply food for movie nights, books, DVDs, even gym equipment out of their own pockets. They were also frustrated by the funding of activities programmes. Sometimes successful activities that were really enjoyed by the women were unable to continue. There were also problems getting some programmes started due to the partnership agreements (see Chapter 9 for further discussion on funding concerns of delivery partners).

Budget issues were also mentioned in relation to the women's weekly budget, and where they could buy their groceries from (limited to one supermarket, and to the SPS canteen sheet). This echoed complaints by women about being restricted to one supermarket delivery where food was often close to the sell-by date and the alternatives provided when certain stock was unavailable were not suitable. Women were unable to shop themselves; they could not visit shops and were denied online access to order food from supermarkets. Rather online food shopping orders were made by an SPS staff member on behalf of the women. Officers thought that this created dependence.

Several officers viewed the arrangements in the CCUs as 'too risk averse'. They believed that they had developed nuanced understandings of the women in their care and as such would, if they could, have taken different decisions than those imposed on women's lives. Examples given were of decisions to deny home leave and parole decisions. Several voiced frustrations over their lack of involvement in supporting women to reintegrate to the community. This alludes to the frustration that several officers (in both CCUs) described in relation to some risk-based decisions. These decisions prevented or delayed women accessing the community, which they understood to be a primary purpose of transfer to a CCU.

The wider view was also expressed that the SPS were themselves holding back progress on their own strategy. This was believed to be happening through risk aversion or a reluctance to embrace the different way of working, and that the SPS 'won't be forefront of criminal justice as not allowed to be' (Bella, field notes).

> "But we are, as an organisation, risk averse, we manage risk, it is what we do. We need to keep the public safe, that's why we exist, I get that. But we're innovative, we're forward thinking, we're taking the lead, we're world-changing, we're reinventing the wheel as far as custodial services are concerned. But we're not really, because we're risk averse. That risk averse-ness stops

us. We were told when we came in, both these places, women will be able to cook for their visitors when they come in, and they can have their kids in, and they can cook them their dinner. They're not allowed to because legal services say, what happens if somebody gets not well as a consequence of the women cooking, right, and then they get unwell. Same as, my missus cooks me a dinner, I cook her a dinner, aye, one of us might take not well, I'm not going to go and sue her, or vice versa." (BS 003 Manager).

Poor communication with senior management and inconsistencies in messaging

On the whole, officers reported that they felt well supported by local CCU managers who took time to listen to them, offer advice and were generally encouraging and reassuring. However, the distance described earlier between frontline officers working in the CCUs, and SPS senior management/policy officials around involvement in the SPS Strategy for Women was not only evident in the early days of the CCUs, but appeared to be ongoing. Most staff considered the support that they received to be less from 'higher-ups' who were considered 'far removed' from the daily operation and challenges and were infrequent visitors to the CCUs. There were several examples provided of officer requests for information from SPS senior management which were ignored or not fully addressed. As such, officers indicated they felt unsupported by senior management.

For those who had been in the CCU since its opening, ongoing communication about any changes to the running of or vision for the CCUs would keep them feeling involved. For those who joined the CCU later, ensuring a good understanding of this would be critical. Yet some officers felt that this was lacking. For example:

"No, I don't think we've been given anything specific, or at least not that I've been fully aware of. There's obviously stuff, like, that goes up on SharePoint that you could access to look at what the kind of, vision was. But I don't think there's been anything that's been updated or, I don't feel as if we're regularly involved in any, kind of, meetings where… Because I think that could be potentially quite beneficial to understand. Because obviously we changed governors, and it would have been quite good for the governor to come in and talk to us and talk about how she wanted this place run and her vision. And how we slotted into that and what she would want." (LS2 003 residential).

Officers described poor communication between staff on the ground, and more senior staff, resulting either in inconsistent decision making, or decisions removed from the reality of life in the CCUs. There was a strong view that senior management lacked cohesion and that, to do their jobs properly,officers required a better understanding from senior management of what was expected from them, and what should be prioritised. As described earlier, some officers felt unsupported by 'higher ups' who, it was suggested, 'just sit there unless there is an inspection' and officer requests went unanswered. Frustration was exacerbated by the issue of

inconsistent messages from management which, officers indicated, they found disconcerting, provoking uncertainty and a lack of confidence amongst staff:

> "Things change daily, depending on the managers and you'll get one rule that's set in stone and you'll tell the girls, then it's changed a couple of days later… you don't know where you stand and as an officer, I don't feel confident sometimes if they ask me, well what is it?, and I'm, like, I don't know. You're guess is as good as mine at this point. And I think that affects maybe how the girls are as well, because they don't know what rules are set in stone and then they maybe do something that they don't realise is now a rule again and that will obviously aggravate anybody. So, it aggravates them, then it makes the girls fall out over things and then it can become hostile and it shouldn't happen. Like, if there's rules there's rules, keep them that way so everybody knows and nobody is stepping over the line." (BS2 004 operational).

> "I think it's people's opinions, interpretations of, kind of, how it should be. And again, we're a different environment. We're trying something new. We're trying to be trauma-informed. So, for example, when physical visits are on in the Hub, some managers will say, you go in there and you be floating about. Some of them will say, no, that's not trauma-informed. Monitor it from the CCTV, or just pop in and out. So, even little things like that. Or the way that transfers are processed when they're coming in front of house. Again, it varies every time they come in… There will be an SOP [standard operating procedure] for it, but again, depending on the day and depending who is on shift will depend on how it's… So, even with the prison monitor people in and, the likes of the body searching. Like, they don't like the fact that we body search the women, but we have to because it's in the rules, the prison rules… that we have to body search, so… Again, it doesn't fall in line with what they're saying here as trauma-informed." (BS2 007:2 FLM).

Feeling unsupported meant that officers felt they had always to 'watch their backs'. An example provided here was the issue of a lack of a secure residential room in the CCUs. Officers described how when the units were first set up, and at the time of fieldwork, the dedicated secure rooms were not signed off and so could not be used for their intended purpose. As a result of a design fault, the 'secure rooms' contained potential ligature points, and there was also water ingress, so the room could not be considered a safe space for women. As this meant that there was no where to put the women if removed from association, they had to be sent back to closed conditions. Despite some work later being finished on the secure rooms, we were told how there is a reluctance to sign them off, due to concern that if something goes wrong, their 'name will be on it'.

The issue was also raised of the 'linked prisoner area', which is to ensure that people who are not allowed by law to be in contact with one another, can be held separately. This was described as not being possible in the CCUs, with there needing to be flexibility to the approach over this, but officers received mixed messaging on this.

In a discussion about UDR, one officer gave the following example of mixed messaging from managers:

> "So, one manager looking at [UDR] could say, yeah, you're fine, you can go to the shop. Go and nip to Home Bargains, go and do this, go and do that, whereas the manager who signs off the second [UDR] has a different opinion of it. And that's just where the inconsistencies come in and cause stress and cause… cause drama for people, which I totally understand… And they think that it's coming from us as well, because we're directly the ones that are left to speak to the women." (BS2 007:1 residential).

This theme of inconsistency in what was conveyed to officers by SPS senior management (and in turn passed on to the women by officers) extended to lack of clarity around rules and policies.

Inconsistent messaging often centred around what was allowed and what was not allowed in the Hub when family visits took place, as well as last minute changes to rosters and shift patterns. This further resulted in officer frustration and a lowering of morale due to uncertainties about what to tell the women and/or their visitors which, in turn eroded officers' sense of professionalism. Regular 'mornng meetings' are the key mechanism for staff feedback in the CCUs; with surveys as the means for staff to provide feedback which they may not want to disclose in person or have attributed to them. However, there was a general perception that officers were good at supporting each other and helping each other out if needed.

Besides inconsistency, the most prominent challenge referenced by staff related to understaffing, with new officers being inexperienced and posts not being filled. Some officers believed this was motivated by cost-savings and others emphasised that there was no way to progress in post, which led to colleagues going elsewhere after having worked less than a year in the CCU.

Working with delivery partners

Officers said that there was an emphasis on the fact that it was part of the CCU officer's role to build relationships with delivery partners. While some saw and enjoyed this being part of their remit, others felt it was not their responsibility. Some also described how they had to stake their own reputation for building these relationships. They were accordingly disappointed when the process of getting delivery partners into the CCU was so protracted and complicated that potential delivery partners gave up (see Chapter 9). Some officers described how they felt they were burning bridges with organisations who had been keen and enthusiastic. Officers referred to the barriers faced by SPS delivery partners: 'SPS put a lot of blockers on it'. They also said 'there is no guidance on how to fill out the Partnership Pack' – the completion of which is part of the process to be able to deliver services in Scottish prisons. Whilst it was later clarified to us that there is guidance available on how to fill in the Partnership Packs, it is clear that officers are not aware of it and considered the Packs to be 'horrendous' and 'not user friendly'. The associated paperwork was described as 'unfair', 'confusing' and' frustrating.' The time that it took to allow delivery partners into the CCUs was seen as a

considerable obstacle. As those in direct contact with prospective delivery partners, officers believed that all of these issues 'made staff look stupid.'

Additionally, the fact that organisations had to self-fund their visits to the CCUs and the complexity of the application process to be a delivery partner were considered obstacles and the key reasons why there were insufficient activities available. Across the interviews from all fieldwork rounds, there was a concern relayed by officers about the level of activities on offer to the women and doubts expressed about whether there were enough activities. Additional challenges were noted including lack of operational computers, no access to the internet and not having the proper equipment in place within the CCUs for the women to fully engage in the activities offered by the delivery partners.

Differences between CCUs and other closed establishments

Officers were very clear about the differences between the CCUs and the other establishments in which they had worked and how this meant that they had to adapt their working practices. In their descriptions, there was an emphasis on the lack of physical security features of the CCUs, informality versus formality, and structure versus lack of structure. Like the women, it took officers some time to adjust to the new environment and culture of working. Several spoke about having to 'change mindsets' to work in the CCUs. For example:

> "It's just… it's so different. It's hard to put into words because for as much as we think some of these women in here are institutionalised, somebody like me for example is institutionalised as well, so you come to this type of environment… [in closed establishments] you've got all that routine and structure around you… But here it's completely different. So it took me a while to adapt to this role after closed establishments." (LS 001 FLM).

Officers with long experience working in closed male prisons spoke about the need to 'spin plates' in those establishments and the stressful nature of having to deal with constant incidents as hall officers. They spoke of how it is a different type of pressure that they experience in the CCUs:

> "It's incident, incident, incident all the time… lots of pressure on you for incidents, medical emergencies… Here, although you are responsible for much more... the pressure feels less. You are not under the same stress levels but likewise… the stuff we are dealing with is arguably more important… It isn't less stressful but we are not under time pressures… but the pressures are different." (LS 003 Manager).

Working in a CCU required not only a new way of thinking in relation to working with women but also required adapting to an environment with much less emphasis placed on security and maintaining order, and fewer prisoners. Officers spoke of having to recalibrate their approach to working in the less formal and less structured environment of the CCUs. Just like for the women, moving to a CCU was a sudden immersion for staff and a cultural shock. As one said:

> "Yes, so in a closed prison, you know what your boundaries are, whereas you come here and it's like, right, okay, we've got knives up on the wall, you know, is that alright, you know?" (LS 002 FLM).

Some officers described how compared to a closed prison, the CCU was about 'relationships rather than numbers', stating that as a result, their jobs were very different. Part of the approach to working in a CCU was 'looking at people as people', not as potential risks or dangers, and building a rapport. One key difference identified was that in the CCU, staff members were involved in all elements of the work, whereas in the closed prison there were separate and distinct tasks/roles.

For some officers, the lack of structure and the degree of flexibility afforded by the CCUs was considered problematic for both officers and for women, reflecting some of the concerns and uncertainties of the women (see Chapter 8):

> "And the women need [structure] as well. They need to see that. So I was just saying to you there that I was institutionalised because I've worked in the [prison] service so long and I need structure. They a hundred per cent need that, 'cause at least I can then go home at night. They're around that all the time and with no structure brings uncertainty and it's just… it's not a nice feeling." (LS 001 FLM).

Given that most officers had only worked in men's prisons, the shift from working in closed conditions to CCUs was bound up in views of gender differences. On the theme of differences in prison cultures, several officers raised the issue of professional boundaries, and how these can be eroded in the CCUs, particularly for female officers. For example:

> "I think, in the male estate it's much more clear cut that you're an officer, they're a prisoner, and very rarely the two meet… whereas especially in [CCU] just now, there's a much more, like, friendship working relationship, which, again, brings in professional boundaries. It can be quite difficult to maintain the custody and order in terms of we are still officers, but we're asking them to be a lot more open and honest with us…" (BS2 006 operational).

Another officer spoke of 'having to give a bit of yourself' when engaging with women:

> "But the thing I've noticed about females is, they approach you, so you'll be approached all the time, they tell you so much information, they want to chat… They want to just talk about their past, about their future, predominantly their past, they really like to talk about their past. I think they just want, like, another opinion on it, almost, so… It was a bit difficult at first, because I'm so used to the males. If you're one on one, they'd open up a bit and you'd get a bit with them, but I was just so used to males just being disrespectful and that… disrespectful to me and then that it was it, it was, kind of, like a… it was hard, kind of, to adjust and almost, like, bring my walls down a wee bit, because I was so used to, when you work with males, obviously you wouldn't really give

any personal information, and you'd be so coy in what you were saying… But with the females, I had to, kind of, let my guard down a bit, because I found at times, not being standoffish, but I was just more listening, active listening, I suppose I were putting, kind of, my side across. But with females, you've, kind of, got to relate a bit, and if they're telling you all this information, all this trauma, and they're giving a lot of themselves to you, you can't just nod and go, yeah, yeah. You've got to give a bit of yourself." (BS2 003 operational).

Officers' views in a closed establishment

Part of the research specification for the evaluation was to include the views of officers working in a female closed establishment with women who potentially may move to a CCU. Four officers were interviewed in the closed establishment. Three of the four had significant experience in SPS prisons and several years experience of working with women. The other officer had three years' experience and had been working with women for under a year. Two officers had been promoted into the role which necessitated a move to this establishment. They had some idea about the CCUs but none had visited one:

> "I don't know much... We, obviously, have the basics on them, the pictures, the leaflets, that we go through national induction with, and the information that we share with the prisoners within our establishment... So, we've got the slides, and we'll go through that. So, that's basically what we know, and what they tell us, as well. It would be good to see what it looks like… Aye. I think when it came on, I think everybody was quite interested how it was going to work, how it was going to look." (GS 002 residential).

As with the women, officers also spoke of the negative press that the CCUs were getting from women who had either been liberated or returned to closed conditions:

> "I think at the beginning, but then some of the girls who had been in have turned round, and it's not getting the best reports. And that's being honest. When we're speaking at national induction – oh, you don't want to go there, it's boring, there's no regime, there's nothing. Nothing to do for the women. And you've got to remember what they're used to." (GS 002 residential).

He went on to say:

> "There's not a daily routine. And I think, if you're behind walls, and there's nothing happening… there's no structure there, there's no regime, then, because they rely on their regime to get through day to day in here. And that's what they're looking at, they're looking at, what do I do at night, and what do I do at ten, and what do I do after lunch, what do I do after tea, you know what I mean, so they've got all that in place. But they don't seem to have it there, so I think that, sort of, lets it down a bit." (GS 002 residential).

In line with the research in the CCUs, interviews with women and officers in the closed establishment sought to determine their understanding of gender-specific and trauma-informed approaches and their operationalisation in their mainstream

prison. As with those working in the CCUs, officers considered that women needed to be treated differently than men and also displayed the same kind of sentiments about the differences between working with women as opposed to men. For example:

> “Men are much more straightforward. The way that they're managed is very different within the prison system. So, they're not as emotionally led, as what women are... With women, you're mentally exhausted at the end of the day, with men, you're physically exhausted at the end of the day. They're needy in two different ways.” (GS 001 residential).

There was a view, echoed by the CCU officers, that women get a ‘better deal’ than men in prisons. For example:

> “They get a lot more resources put towards them. They get a lot more free rein, they get a lot more time out of cell. They get a lot more attention, than what the male estate does. Sometimes, the men's estate gets almost neglected in comparison... You would expect a male to be able to stay behind his door twenty three hours a day. If a female is behind their door twenty three hours a day, there's something up, there's some crisis, that the women hard done to. They are, there's different expectations from males and females within a prison population.” (GS 001 residential).

Reflecting on their training, and how it prepared them for working with women officers held similar views:

> “We did trauma-informed practice, we did women in custody, we did all sorts, again, all theory based. And my honest opinion to that is that, it's great in theory, in reality unless you've got the resources to actually put it into practice… It doesn't… yeah, it doesn't live up to the actual reality of the job. It's two different things. It's very difficult to transfer that theory into reality, when you have such a lack of resources.” (GS 001 residential).

When asked to provide an example of the use of a trauma-informed approach in this establishment, this officer described several challenges which relate particularly to the closed prison environment. The examples given reveal how the design and environment of a CCU may be more well suited to implementation of this approach:

> “I think about, the kind of, trauma-informed practice, and not closing doors… Or, you can't bang doors because that will maybe trigger someone. And that’s great in theory, but in reality, you're working in a hall where you've maybe got 50, 60, sometimes, sitting in that hall. And you've got one girl who's got all these triggers, but you've got a full hall, so you're trying to move someone, or relocate someone to a different area. Where the girl next door is maybe going through drug psychosis, or alcohol withdrawals, or maybe she's schizophrenic, or has some kind of personality disorder. And is kicking off, and using a lot of the resources that we need in place, a lot of the staff resources. And then have to be focused on this individual, the girl next door, as much as you could try and minimise… it's always going to occur. So, that then escalates because

she's in, not meaning it bad, she's very much still getting the same attention, and she's still getting a lot more than – going back to the male estate – she's getting a lot more than what someone in the male estate would get. But that still then escalates, and escalates, until there becomes a breaking point here, and then you're, kind of, chasing your tail throughout. So, as much as it's all well and good in practice, it will deviate in practice." (GR 001 residential).

Officers were very clear about the importance of developing strong professional relationships with the women, and on what these might look like. They were, however, of the view that women's relationships are likely to be more easily developed with female officers and that it is difficult to for male officers to engage with women on deeper levels:

"Don't get me wrong, we get females coming over asking for [male officer], and asking for me, saying, can I speak to [male officer] today – aye, no bother. Chuck them in a booth, and I'll speak to them for two minutes, oh about that, aye, I'll try and sort that out for you. That is different, but once it's an emotional stress, or they want to speak about their trauma, and all that stuff, that's when it's hard for a male in my position to talk to a female." (GS 002 residential).

Officers thought there 'should be more thought' by SPS given to deploying officers to work with women in the women's estate:

"I think it should be more structured. Because if I'm working with a female for a year, they're going to come to me rather than go to somebody who they've only worked with three or four months. Like males, but it's harder to build a relationship, a working relationship, with females, when you're not working within that hall, you know what I mean? And it's that, they come with a lot more emotional stress, and it's, are we trained on it – no, we're not, none of us are." (GS 002 residential).

Given that such a small number of women and officers were interviewed in the closed establishment, our conclusions here are necessarily limited and we can only offer a partial view. It is clear though that women are provided with more structure and activities in closed conditions than are available in the CCUs, which the women say that they prefer. Staff/prisoner relationships are considered positive and supportive and there are opportunities for women to exercise agency and autonomy through the development and pursuit of peer-led opportunities, albeit within some tight constraints. Importantly, women have a clearer idea of how their progression status will be managed through the prison, and when – and how – they are likely to gain community access.

Officers in the closed prison are not so dissimilar to those working in the CCUs, sharing similar views about the need to 'work differently' and the challenges presented by working closely with women. However, for the most part, this was put down to working in a context of restricted resources. The same gendered views about women as being 'emotional' and 'needy', and that female officers are far better equipped to work with female prisoners were present in officers' accounts and, as such, seem entrenched.

The use of trauma-informed and gender-specific approaches are visible in closed establishments, though possibly not implemented in such a direct, sentient and purposeful way as in the CCUs. Not withstanding the challenges to implenting these approaches that may be posed by the closed environment, officers seemed to consider the attention to prisoner's needs to be a key expectation of their role. This was not necessarily seen as part of a dedicated gender-specific and trauma informed approach.

Summary

Officers working in the CCUs had varied lengths of experience and different career trajectories. For the most part, they had very limited experience of working with women in the prison estate. There was a feeling of unpreparedness for working in the CCUs, which was intensified by the changes that they perceived in the profile of women moved to the CCUs. The training that staff were provided with was not seen as particularly useful, nor had it equipped them for working in the CCUs. Improving officer training around working with women will likely help the SPS prisons to retain staff and enable them to feel more confident and assured in their work. Raising more awareness of the CCUs across the women's estate, including closed establishments, to provide clear and accurate explanations about the realities of life in the CCU for both women and for staff can only help with setting and managing expectations.

Yet, running through the officer accounts of the work that they do, and aspire to do, in the CCUs, is a sense of concern for the women and a desire to 'do things differently.' This can be considered an important outcome for staff, although there are some concerning views about how working with women should be done. In line with other research about staff working with women in prison (Vince & Edison 2023; HM Inspectorate of Probation and HM Inspectorate of Prisons 2024), gender performativity in male (and female) establishments appears to have shaped officer views, attitudes and expectations of women in prison. This is leading to some stereotypical views and presumptions about them and differences between women and men. This was evident in the language used to describe the women.

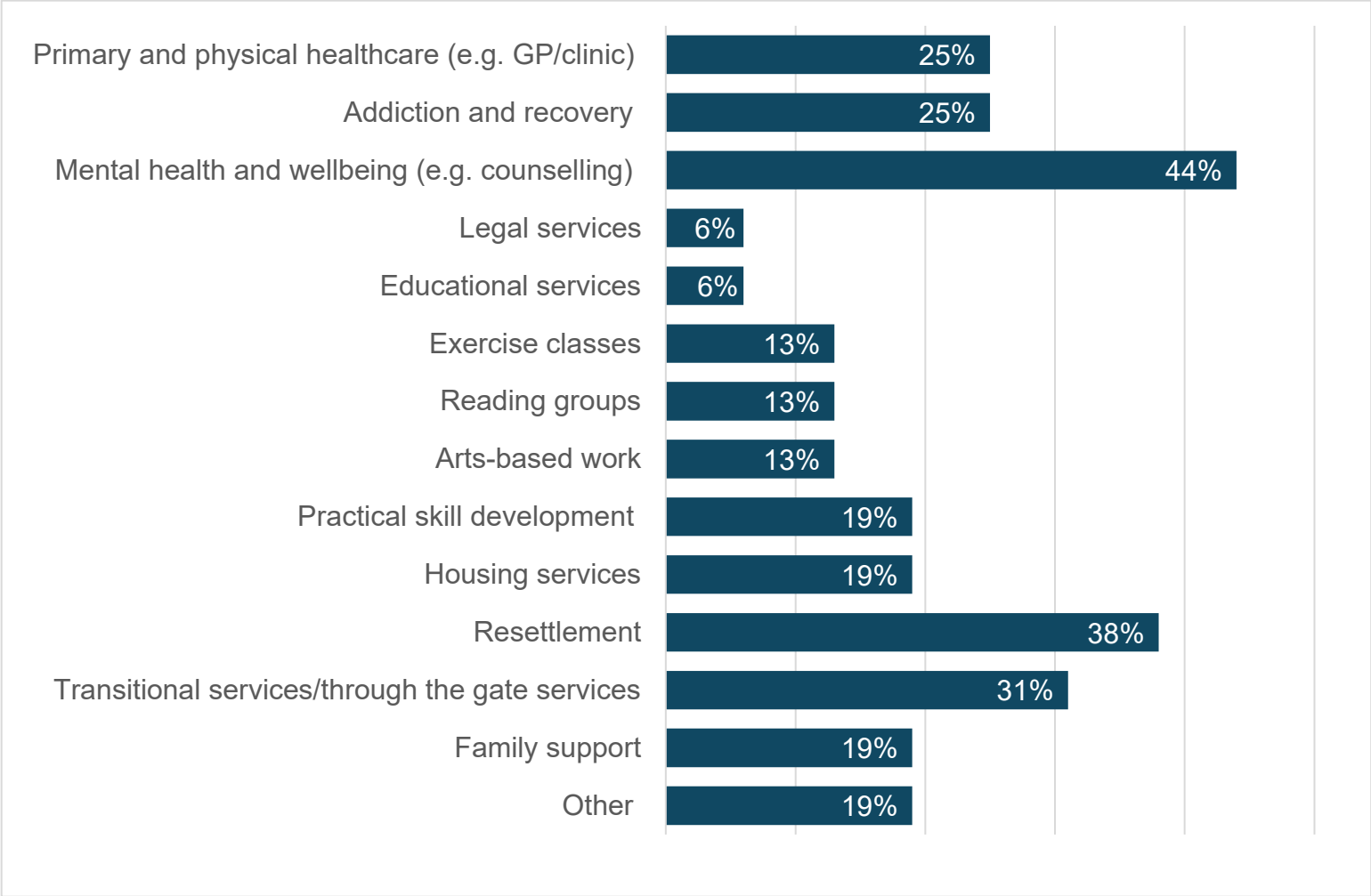
Officers raised several challenges that hindered their work. Key amongst these were what they considered inconsistent messages about the application of rules, and what was and was not allowed in the CCUs. Officers saw this as a source of tension and frustration both for themselves and for the women. Other challenges related to a lack of flexibility, for example around the wearing of prison uniforms. Whilst, for the most part, strong support was provided to officers from managers at a local level in the CCUs, there was a widespread feeling of being unsupported and not listened to by SPS senior management.

9. Experience and views of CCU delivery partners

Delivery partners (DPs) provide an important link between the CCUs and the community. Their involvement with SPS more broadly is intended to facilitate engagement between prisoners and the community both during and at the end of their sentence. The views of delivery partners were sought to explore their aspirations and experiences of providing services to women in the CCUs.

The chart below shows the range of delivery partner organisations who responded to the online surveys and reveals the range of services offered.

Chart 4. The nature of services provided by organisations who responded to the online survey



Organisations were at different stages of involvement with the CCUs: some were delivering regular courses or sessions, some were awaiting approval from SPS and others were in the process of completing their SPS Partnership Packs. Some found the process of gaining approval for entry to the CCUs frustrating and/or challenging, and not all persisted. This was especially true for smaller organisations, or individuals who would have liked to provide a voluntary service to the CCUs but

found the bureaucracy particularly prohibitive. As one survey respondent noted in the free text space of the first online survey:

> "We have had very mixed success in our liaison with the CCUs, with Bella so far being more responsive than Lilias. This is an ongoing challenge."

Some survey participants indicated that they were in the process of establishing a service in one or both CCUs. Other service providers had established either a regular service that operated across several prisons or were providing a time-specific programme to one or other of the CCUs (as well as across other prisons). One organisation had regularly delivered a programme to several prisons, but this was currently suspended "due to a lack of funding".

DP representatives who participated in the focus groups included statutory service providers with direct and integral roles in the CCUs and wider penal estate providing input to wellbeing and criminal justice focused roles. There were also other organisations located in the voluntary sector with a specific community-based service provision (i.e. specialist support, mental health and recovery services) or more generally in the arts or creative activities.

Access to the CCUs

Access to establishments varied. While delivery partners who had well established links across the prison estate were positive about communication processes within CCUs, others noted various issues with timetable clashes and challenges accessing the women.

One noted that their organisation had previously worked for several years with prisons across SPS but had withdrawn their service – "it was a lot of system barriers that kind of ground us down eventually." (DP FG3).

The opening of Lilias offered a 'new resurgence', new energy and an innovative approach which resulted in the organisation re-establishing themselves as a delivery partner. However, they did not receive any funding from SPS – "But everybody else, the health and social care partnership and criminal justice pay, you know, a decent contribution towards the running costs, same in the homeless sector, but not with the Scottish Prison Service." (DP FG3).

Participants were very positive about the CCU environment. In the free text space of the online survey, it was remarked that the 'relaxed space' of the CCUs was considered to encourage participation – it 'freed up the atmosphere'. Most participants agreed that the CCU atmosphere was completely different to closed conditions, that the units felt like a new approach and that women were 'a lot more relaxed at the CCUs':

> "Well, I think what Lilias and Bella probably stand for is a kind of modern, fresh, innovative approach that… just the atmosphere is so, so unbelievably different to, you know, Barlinnie or what was Cornton Vale or Polmont, you know, the atmosphere, it's like… it feels like a community centre. What just

gives us a little reminder that it's not is that prison officer moving around in uniform." (DP FG 3).

Challenges in delivering a gender-responsive and trauma-informed service

Delivery partners were generally aware of the SPS Women's Strategy. According to Survey 1 responses, 56 per cent of delivery partner respondents were fully aware of the women's strategy, 38 per cent were somewhat aware and 6 per cent were not aware. In focus groups and interviews, all participants indicated their awareness of the SPS emphasis on both gender-responsive prisons and trauma-informed approaches. However, there were differing views on the extent to which these concepts were understood and implemented in practice.

While more intensive support was considered possible when the CCUs had lower numbers of prisoners, it was noted that this became more challenging when the units neared capacity. Resourcing also affected delivery partners' ability to provide support to women in the CCUs. For some service providers, support/intervention in community settings was provided on a one-to-one level before participants joined a group with others at similar stages of progress. This was not possible for third-sector DPs when working in prisons. Relatedly, several participants noted that while they felt the environment of the CCUs was intended to be 'therapeutic', they were unclear if individual therapeutic interventions were being offered to the women. It appeared that delivery partners were generally organising their intervention around groupwork which worked well for many, but not all:

> "For us, you know, that is trauma-informed, that a group would be made up of people who are at the same sort of stage, level, and there's not too many dominant people. That's how we would do it here [in the community]. Obviously for Lilias we can't do that. We're having just random women dropping in and out of sessions depending on who is there. We don't always know the background." (DP FG1).

It was noted that the SPS Women's Strategy 2021-2025 acknowledges that women's needs are different to those of men. However, delivery partners noted that SPS (as an organisation) applies the same rules, processes and procedures, regardless of gender, claiming this was an 'equalities issue':

> "I think, locally, within Lilias, we are seeing real progress in terms of the culture shift. But as a wider organisation, you're, kind of, then hit with, really rigid structures, and processes and procedures, that don't really meet the needs of the women, from where we see it at times." (DP FG2).

One participant noted that there is an absence of any nuanced understanding of 'risk' (as gendered) and women with adverse circumstances/experiences are often viewed in terms of risk rather than need. One DP noted that CCUs are trying to "do everything right" in terms of culture, but noted that there remain anomalies – i.e. why do prison officers still wear uniforms? Why, if all women have a key to the facility, are rooms still locked? This was generally viewed as the result of the

application of the wider SPS rules (designed for closed prisons), to the CCUs which were intended to operate under a different ethos.

Community access and throughcare

A key issue to emerge from the delivery partners was the expectations around community access and anticipation that the CCUs would operate in line with the open prison estate in terms of community engagement. The process of transfer between closed prisons and CCUs was also somewhat unclear to several of the DP participants. They also indicated this process was not always clear to the women themselves. Of note, was the lack of information shared with family members when a woman had been identified for the CCUs. Some DPs noted that they were unclear if Family Strategy Meetings were taking place on a regular basis in either of the CCUs. Whilst such meetings do take place on a weekly basis within the CCUs, it is clear that DPs are unaware of this.

Community access for the women appeared to be variable and differed from how DPs and women had anticipated. It was perceived by some that individual CCU managers could influence this, with one DP noting that a new manager who tried to 'push for this', led to more women being able to go out of the unit for various things, as a result:

> "I think it's definitely got a lot better, I'd say in the last six months or so, it's a lot better, there's so much more. At any one time, there's at least a couple of women out and about doing things in the community or at appointments or work or stuff." (DP FG3).

Throughcare was considered by two participants (in relation to new funding arrangements) who noted that it was difficult to anticipate what DPs might be able to provide if new commissioning arrangements required changes to their working practices. Another participant referred to the importance of throughcare officers, noting that they no longer accompany people to services on release. This was seen as a challenge for sustaining continuity with services in the community:

> "I think throughcare's really critical. So, you do hope that they (the prisoner) form a strong bond, an alliance with certain organisations where there is a possibility to come and do things, but it's just being really mindful of the magnitude of what it takes, perhaps an element of bravery or motivation to actually go to a group outside when you've completed your sentence." (DP FG3).

Another participant added:

> "The throughcare officers were absolutely amazing, it was a brilliant service… that was a shocking decision [not to continue with this], but yeah, it's definitely been a big loss, and we've found, you know, a lot more that we've had to try and cover within the prison before the release as well, because we don't have that person within the prison to bring in and make that seamless transition anymore. It's been tough." (DP FG3).

However, ongoing challenges of access to the community were identified. One participant indicated:

> "I don't recall having any conversation then about, well, what will the ladies actually be doing? And, I guess, I assumed that with a name like a Community Custody Unit, I assumed they would be out in the community a lot more than they actually were". (DP FG3).

While it was noted that there was increasing third sector input to the CCU – which provides good connections and continuity for release – other opportunities were not available to the women (i.e. prisoners were not able to shop in a nearby Tesco store). Overall, however, there was a general view that access to the community from the CCUs had improved considerably, in the last six months.

Suggestions from delivery partners

Participants were asked about the kind of support or resources that would assist them in delivering trauma-informed and gender-specific work in women's prisons – and in meeting the aims of the Women's Strategy. Suggestions included having a key member of staff that could provide a central contact for delivery partners, joint training with SPS staff and more training round specific issues. Access to small private spaces, and improved flexibility with timings were noted, along with better access to establishments and improved funding – where limited funding acted as a barrier for some service-providers. Other suggestions included easier or better access to the community for prisoners. It was felt this would allow them to engage with services in the community while in the CCUs and thus to establish improved opportunities for longer-term engagement after release.

> "Raising awareness of the work we do and why is an ongoing challenge. Support for women in prison can be a crowded landscape; perhaps a role that focuses on community engagement/awareness of local services would be helpful, especially for CCUs, as women there are supposed to be linking with community-based services anyway?" (DP FG3).

It was also noted that delivery partners appreciated the engagement of women prisoners and prison staff with their service, but that it would be useful to have an opportunity to meet with senior SPS management. This would be useful to discuss and reflect upon what was working well and how services could develop in co-operation with the unit.

The applicability of Prison Rules and their enforcement in the CCUs was identified as an area worth further consideration with SPS management, as the focus on risk could undermine the intention and efficacy of service delivery with the women.

Summary

This chapter highlights that DPs generally found the CCU environments and aesthetics to be impressive. However for some, lack of resources (funding) and private space could inhibit their opportunity to work with individual women. Lack of

equipment in the CCUs was also noted (for example no hairdressing facilities or library) – which was more noticeable when women were not generally able to access these services in the community. They found the CCUs to be welcoming and the atmosphere generally conducive to the work that they wanted to do. However, the Prison Rules impacted significantly on what was achievable and the lack of community access for most women was seen as an impediment. In this regard, the SPS focus on risk appeared to be at odds with the stated ethos of the CCUs.

The process for gaining access to the CCUs was considered onerous and lengthy. Once access was gained, individual DPs had differing views as to whether women had been made aware of the service delivered by their organisation and whether, or not, it was appropriately advertised to women by CCU staff. There was a perception that officers seemed committed to supporting women, however it was considered that CCU staffing issues (i.e. retention, absences, turnover) impacted service provision.

That DPs fund their services was seen as prohibitive for smaller third sector organisation and individuals. It seemed to some, that at times services going into the CCUs were uncoordinated with some degree of overlap on what was offered. This suggests the need for a strategic overview of services and activities in the CCUs, with some DPs indicating that the opportunity to discuss what they could offer and how it might be delivered in the CCUs, with senior SPS management would be welcome.

10. To what extent is SPAROW's Theory of Change for CCUs being implemented as planned and are its anticipated outcomes occurring as anticipated?

This penultimate chapter makes use of the full suite of research data gathered across the separate phases of the study. Using the initial SPAROW Theory of Change (ToC) set out in Chapter 4, it outlines the key challenges to implementation as evidenced by our research data. These are used to set out a revised ToC.

Testing the key strands of the initial ToC

In this section we take each of the 'activities' set out in the initial ToC and summarise the evidence that exists to support/challenge the anticipated short/medium term outputs and outcomes. These activities are:

- establishment of CCUs with appropriate and informed staff recruitment;
- training for staff in gender- and trauma-informed care;
- identification of target women and implementation of informed choice in move to CCUs;
- delivery of care informed by gender- and trauma-informed principles, and;
- working with delivery partners to facilitate development of wellbeing, empowerment, life skills and successful reintegration.

The key barriers to successful implementation are presented in Figure 4: A Revised ToC.

Establishment of CCUs with appropriate and informed staff recruitment

The first part of this activity within the ToC is the easiest to measure and confirm that short-term outcomes have been met. The aspiration in the original strategy to open five CCUs had soon shifted to two and there were delays in construction, partly as a result of COVID-19 and because of longer than anticipated processes to make CCUs fit within local communities. However, from a strategic point of view, the built environments of the two established CCUs were viewed to meet the vision of 'light, garden, colour, connections between buildings' and 'to look and feel like home'. The built environment and aesthetics were positively viewed across all research stakeholder groups.

The recruitment of the right staff proved challenging for several operational reasons despite strategic recognition of the fundamental importance of having the best people in place. Strategic-level stakeholders reflected that initial recruitment and training had taken place too early (due to delays in establishment of the CCUs), resulting in recruited staff moving on to different roles.

By the time that fieldwork was taking place, some officers did not remember the details of training. Some felt the shift from closed conditions to be a significant change for which they didn't feel prepared (although they remembered recruitment as being rigorous). Officers who had been recruited had significantly varying lengths of service (from under three weeks to over three decades). Some had little experience of procedures such as risk assessment and monitoring, and remained uncertain about these, and the majority had no experience of working with women in prison. Those who did have this experience viewed it as a requisite for working in a CCU.

Training for staff in gender and trauma-informed care

This element of the ToC is not well supported by the evidence collected from officers. They either did not remember the content of training received or they recalled it to have been poorly focused on gender-specific training (beyond methods of control) and on trauma-informed care (which was felt to be generic and not sufficiently focused on managing specific triggers). Training was felt to have been too condensed with insufficient follow-up or missing important reflection and practice-based learning. A challenge was found in balancing some of the tenets of trauma-based care (including breaking down power imbalances) with the rules and systems of prison life, even within CCUs. There was also a concern that staff were insufficiently experienced to understand the implications and practice of trauma-based care.

Identification of target women and implementation of informed choice in move to CCUs

As discussed earlier, a set of criteria and a process were established to identify women who would be suitable for transfer to CCUs with different levels of scrutiny dependent on sentence tariff. There is oversight by the Governor of HMP Stirling, who has discretion in decisions. The process includes different access to communities depending on category of sentence and progression status. In this respect this component of this activity is demonstrably in place.

However, concerns were expressed about the identification and admission process, the resulting CCU population and about the implementation of informed choice for women. The process of identification and decisions on progress to community access was not clear to women (or to many officers). There was a commonly expressed view that 'corners were being cut' in the assessment of suitability – for example, by conducting interviews with women by phone rather than in person. Examples were given of women being approved for CCUs despite breaching one or other exemption – such as a serious mental health diagnosis.

A major source of tension within the CCUs, as perceived by officers and women, was the fact that women have different progression categories and different levels of community access (including work placements). Relatedly, both officers and women considered that those on LTP and top-end tariffs view it as unfair that STPs have not spent sufficient time in closed conditions and are not as invested in making the CCUs work. A further concern raised by officers was that women are

being moved who have not met the requirement of three months in closed conditions. This was felt to be driven by an imperative to show that the CCUs are operating at capacity. Decisions on community access for LTPs were felt to be inconsistent and unnecessarily time-consuming because of the need for involvement of HMP Stirling.

Officers and women shared the view that the extent to which informed choices were made by women to move to the CCUs was compromised. This was caused by a lack of information about their purpose, limited information provided on the reasons why individual women were selected, a lack of familiarisation visits and limited time to consider the move. For some women the move happened within a matter of days and the rapidity of the move could feel overwhelming, particularly for LTPs.

A further element of transparency around the identification of women relates to the process and criteria for the return of women to closed conditions. This is discussed further below but women expressed a lack of understanding of what would constitute a reason for return. An example was given whereby a lack of clarity by officers resulted in a woman's conditions being breached and a return effected.

Delivery of care informed by gender-and trauma-informed principles

This is in many ways the most difficult strand of the CCUs to evaluate because of the highly subjective and abstract nature of certain aspects of the principles and the heterogenous nature of women and officers. Here we highlight both the positive experiences delivered to women in CCUs but also how barriers to gender- and trauma-informed care were manifest. In the round these suggest that more needs to be done over a longer time frame to better embed these principles in care.

The physical environment and the opportunity for greater privacy alongside staff who treated them with respect and humanity were highly appreciated. Nonetheless there are a series of paradoxes at play which make trauma-informed and gender sensitive practices difficult to square with prison rules and institutionalisation. For example, a constant fear of having community access revoked or of being returned to closed conditions meant that women withheld issues of concern from their POs to avoid an Adverse Circumstances Report being compiled. This acts contrary to the development of autonomy and independence.

The physical layout and relative freedom of movement within communal spaces increased autonomy and privacy to a degree. However, for some women this was discombobulating and made privacy more difficult than the more binary contrast between locked cell and communal activity within closed conditions.

The relationship which women have with their POs is core to trauma-informed practice. By and large women were very positive about being treated with respect. However, for those who have experienced significant trauma, this can be treated with wariness and there is the risk of dependency which operates against autonomy and independence.

There was wide recognition from staff that women prisoners have gendered pathways, experiences and needs but frequently this led to rather stereotyped and essentialising differences around emotions and neediness.

The number of areas where women identify inconsistencies in treatment and opportunities or a lack of knowledge about why things are as they are also act as barriers to empowerment. A key example of this is in relation to the ordering of food, its preparation, and the ability to share it with families. Food can be transgressive in the CCUs and can be a rationale for returning women to closed conditions due to a lack of clarity and inconsistencies in what can and cannot be done with it.

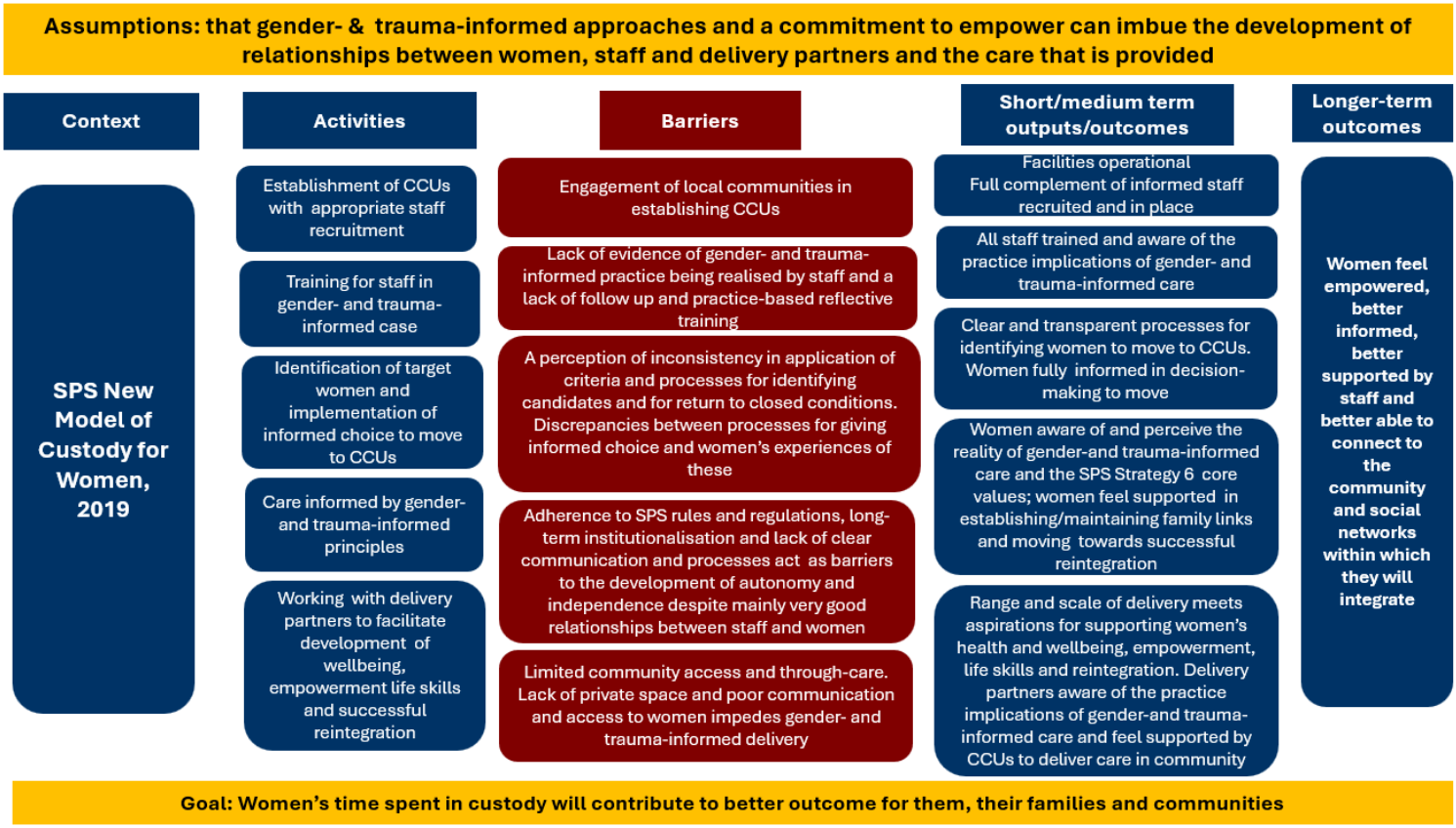
Working with delivery partners to facilitate development of wellbeing, empowerment, life skills and successful reintegration

As discussed in Chapter 3, we were unable to include the views of women who had been released nor their family members and so successful reintegration to communities and families could not be assessed. Further, despite best efforts we were able to secure research participation from only a relatively small number of delivery partners (although these did cover both CCUs and a variety of delivery partner types including the extent of their experience in working with SPS). The small number makes assessment of this range of activities more difficult to conclusively assess. However, those that were surveyed/took part in focus groups had relatively similar perspectives on working with the CCUs.

Delivery partners who participated in the evaluation included statutory services with a regular and ongoing presence within the CCUs (and wider prison estate) and third sector providers. They had a wide remit and offered a range of services that included health, wellbeing and support, arts and creative engagement. Delivery partners were very positive about the built environment of the CCUs but some would have liked the opportunity to see women in smaller private spaces rather than in groupwork settings especially when prior histories are not known. Private spaces would help with the delivery of trauma-informed care. The bureaucracy of accessing CCUs was felt to be prohibitive, and some potential partners had not persisted for this reason. Whilst some partners noted positive communications with the CCU, others noted the opposite and experienced challenges in accessing women and timetable clashes. Some partners noted the lack of funding for their activities and contrasted this with funding from other public sector organisations. In addition, the limited community access across the CCU population and of throughcare were identified as barriers to reintegration. There was a view that a focus on risk was impeding community access and causing anxiety for women, compromising their wellbeing. Further barriers included an overreliance on the concept of equalities – ensuring that what was available to women or allowed in terms of rules and regulations should match that for men. A gendered analysis of risk was thought not to be always understood and enacted. It was noted that joint staff training and a key contact would be useful in breaking down barriers and in helping facilitate the aspirations around improved wellbeing, life-skills and longer-term community reintegration.

Women identified that in CCUs they had better access to social workers and to housing officers although access to formal education programmes was felt to be better in closed conditions. As identified before, access to home leave and other privileges and work placements were thought to be inconsistent. Women's experiences of activities offered in the CCU were mainly positive, but it is unclear the extent to which they felt empowered by them. They were positive about the efforts made by delivery partners but there was a sense that some activities were rather randomly selected rather than being part of a wider programme of life skill or empowerment and not always consulted on.

Figure 4. SPAROW – A Revised Theory of Change



11. Reflections and recommendations

This research study set out to examine the early impact and emerging outcomes of the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) new custodial arrangements for women and the application of the SPS Strategy for Women in Custody 2021-2025. This was carried out in the context of the recently established CCUs, which heralded a new approach to the custody of women in Scotland. The overall objective was to provide an in-depth and focused assessment of the operation of the CCUs, the experiences of the women who live in them, the staff who work within them and the partners that deliver services into the CCUs. A second objective was to include the participation of SPS staff working in other prison establishment(s) in Scotland and women who are not currently living in a CCU.

In this final chapter, we reflect on the encouraging practices that were observed across the research period, as well as the challenges and barriers of implementing a gender-specific and trauma–informed approach in the CCUs.

We distil 19 key messages from the research findings. These encapsulate the ways in which the CCUs are operating, and the ways in which gender-specific and trauma-informed approaches are conceptualised, implemented and experienced.

Key messages

Encouraging practices

1. A conducive environment

The CCUs are physically designed and equipped in such a way that they provide a conducive environment for the operationalisation and implementation of gender-specific and trauma-informed practice. Living and communal areas reflect the values of the SPS Strategy for Women and the therapeutic ethos of the CCUs. For the most part, women living in the CCUs found the physical environment, including the garden areas, to be peaceful and quiet and most felt safe living there.

2. On-site access to health and social care staff

The presence of primary care and mental health support in the CCUs meets the principle of equivalence, and ensures that women's rights to health care are unaffected by their incarceration. Women consider that the provison of health and socal care in the CCUs is gender specific, accessible, and personalised. As such, women's access to assessment, treatment and ongoing care ensure that their gendered health needs are addressed. Regular visits by social workers and housing officers provide opportunity for women's social care needs to be acted upon.

3. Committed and well-intentioned CCU prison staff

There was wide variation in the experience of staff deployed to the CCUs, and most were ambivalent about the value of training. However, on the whole, officers demonstrate commitment to their role and a shared view about wanting to do their best for the women in their care. Many work outside their comfort zones to fulfil that

commitment to 'do things differently', and many use their own resources to buy materials for women when they were not provided by SPS. CCU officers constitute a potentially very strong staff base for the embedding of gender-sensitive and trauma-informed practice for women in their care. For the most part, officers enjoy their work and wish to remain working in the CCUs. However, high levels of staff absence are impacting CCU operations, leading to increased workloads and adversely affecting officer wellbeing. This, in turn, is having an effect on women and the ways in which they perceive their needs to be addressed.

4. Women's relationships with CCU prison staff

On the whole, women considered that CCU officers had their best interests at heart and provided support and assistance to them throughout their time in the CCUs. They were particularly appreciative of the help they received from officers upon their arrival at a CCU. For the most part, women spoke positively of the relationships that have been built with staff. They spoke about this particularly, but not exclusively, with their PO, although as time went on some women felt that the amount of time their PO spent with them decreased.

Women were pleased and grateful for the respect that they are shown by officers, that they are listened to and that officers try to answer any questions that they might have, with some officers going 'the extra mile' to help them. Recognition, receiving positive encouragement and having their strengths recognised was highly valued by women. Some reflected that it had made them feel more equipped to move on. The positive regard shown by many officers towards the women inspired their confidence and motivation, and so is an issue to which officers and managers need to be attentive.

5. Goal setting

For some women, particularly those serving longer sentences, the opportunity to be involved in the setting of their own goals and development plansin collaboration with their PO and social workers promoted a sense that they were being treated with respect. It bolstered the development of interpersonal relationships with officers, and reassured women that they were being prepared for the decisions they would be required to make upon release. Yet, despite the positive experience of goal-setting, women were frustrated that the resources or opportunities they would need to meet these goals were not accessible (e.g. access to computers).

6. Family visits

The importance of maintaining family ties, in terms of women's wellbeing and motivation, is considered key to their reintegration back into the community. The CCU family visitor facilities are viewed very positively by those women who have maintained good relationshps with their families and whose families visit them. Opportunities for frequent family visits are considered a key benefit of the CCUs. In particular, women are able to see and interact freely with their children and grandchildren in a relaxed setting that is conducive to maintaining and strengthening family relations.

7. Delivery partner engagement

In principle, the engagement of statutory and third sector DPs to deliver services into the CCUs is a positive development. This engagement enables partners with different remits and skill-bases to work with the women and support community reintegration. However, delivery partners anticipated that their engagement with women would extend into the community. The limited space in the CCUs for some activities (for example no library or hairdressing facilities, very small gym space) encouraged a view that the CCUs would support greater community interaction. This was not the case in practice. Services who had secured SPS partnership status, after a lengthy process, were often limited to delivering their service within the CCU. This was managed as effectively as possible. Some services could provide a resource or activity within the CCUs, while others tried to focus on connecting with women (where they met the criteria for their service) and to encourage them to follow-up the service on release.

This was recognised as a challenge and one that throughcare provision may previously have addressed. DPs highlighted this issue of throughcare and reintegration in the context of the closure of services such as the 218 Centre in Glasgow, which provided a range of services, including a day services and supported accommodation, for women in the criminal justice system. DPs noted that CCUs appear to be seen (in some settings) as a substitute for 218 but clearly constitute a prison setting rather than a community setting (which appears very much in contrast to the recommendations from the Commission for Women Offenders Report (2012)).

Challenges and barriers

1. Constraints, rules and regimes

The constraints, rules and regimes of life within the CCUs impede the implementation of gender-specific and trauma-informed practice. The CCUs operate under the strictures of SPS Prison Rules. The application and enforcement of these can inhibit the stated ethos of the CCUs and constrain the realisation of the vision of the CCUs as constituting a radical change in the way that Scotland manages women in custody. In line with conclusions from other research (Vaswani & Paul 2019; Auty et al. 2022), it is not possible for a custodial establishment to become trauma-informed whilst punishment remains a fundamental element of the prison system. Until the application of Prison Rules are reviewed in relation to the CCUs, they will remain ‘mini prisons’ retaining many of the features of more traditional prisons and not the radical departure that was envisaged.

2. Understanding of gender-specific and trauma-informed principles and approaches

Officer understanding of gender-specific and trauma-informed approaches are limited and lack the depth of understanding of women’s gendered needs and trauma experiences that SPS aspire to encourage in staff in the CCUs. Trauma-informed working provides opportunities to improve women’s experiences, improve working environments for staff, increase job satisfaction and reduce stress levels by improving the relationships between staff and women. Yet given the lack of deep

understanding of the effects of trauma, and the entrenched stereotypical views that some hold about women and their needs, there are variable and limited opportunities for gender-specific and trauma-informed practice. This further reduces the ability to create settings conducive to such practice. These findings have important implications for the CCUs and across the women's estate.

3. Encouraging dependence

Ongoing power and gender imbalances between women and officers can create challenges for the development of relationships and interactions. Some women were wary of becoming overly reliant on prison officers, and spoke of feeling infantilised by officers' actions and the language they used towards them. Relatedly women felt that officers tend to 'micro manage' them rather than encouraging them to come to their own decisions or work on their relationships with other women in the CCU as they would in closed conditions. Encouraging dependence and reliance on officers is at odds with the intentions of the CCU model, and so vigilance is required to prevent over-dependence.

4. Barriers to building trust

Whilst it is recognised that developing strong relational working is key to the provision of a gender-specific and trauma-informed approach, there are however some concerning views about how working with women should be done. The conflict between the need for CCUs to maintain custodial boundaries whilst operating a trauma-informed approach is a challenge in terms of building trusting relationships. Close proximity between women and POs and the potential for relationship-building, while perhaps meeting the requirements of gender-responsive and trauma-informed practice, was noted to be a useful way of gathering 'intelligence' by some officers. Along with the use of cameras throughout the buildings, there is no doubt the emphasis on security was prioritised, perhaps in contrast to the aims and objectives of relational approaches to the provision of support.

Increasing tensions that emerged over time and the shifts towards a more prison-like regime seemed to coincide with the reduction of individual prison officer autonomy and the growing emphasis on broader Prison Rules.

5. Staff training and support

Training provision is considered limited and officers registered concerns about the level of support provided to them from SPS senior management. Trauma-informed practice can be carried out in prison environments by ensuring clear communication, to explain decisions, creating safe spaces for prisoners, and by understanding how to minimise power dynamics. Yet officers find it difficult to translate the theoretical to the practical and find clear examples of how to 'do things differently'. This suggests the need first to be clearer on what this practice means and why it is being introduced. There is also a need to review and revise gender-specific and trauma-informed training for new and existing staff, improve communication, and prioritise officers wellbeing and support. This should help to develop a staff group with the aptitude and skills to deliver on the aims and aspirations of the SPS Strategy for Women in Custody and the CCUs.

6. Practical challenges to the implementation of gender-specific and trauma-informed practice

There are practical challenges to implementing gender-specific and trauma-informed practice. The CCUs were designed to house only a small number of women for reasons relating to their strategic purpose. This included being situated within communities, enabling closer working relationships between staff and the women, and responding on a more individual basis to the women's needs. However, their size did create some barriers to their strategic purpose, which included the mix of women in any one house, and issues that may be experienced as a result. Tensions between women regarding sentence profiles and progression stages undermine efforts to introduce trauma-informed practice.

Other practical challenges include the dual purpose of the Hub space both for visits, and for activities and socialisation between the women residents in the CCU. This resulted in some avoidance of this space by women and reduced the potential of the latter's purpose.

7. Trauma-informed programmes

Therapeutic, trauma-informed programmes for women to actively engage in their own personal recovery journey appear absent in the CCUs. Instead, women have a support plan interview, followed by monthly support plans, and finally a case conference six to eight weeks before leaving the CCU. These should all identify areas that the women wish or need to address, and plans to do so, but no mention was made of these being trauma-informed, or linking to therapeutic, trauma-informed programmes.

8. Body searching of women

A significant challenge to trauma-informed practice in the CCUs is the continued use of full body searches. This creates additional difficulties for relationship building, the development of trust, and may echo or resonate with traumatic experiences.

9. Purposeful activity

Whilst women enjoy some of the activities on offer in the CCUs, women and staff perceive there to be a lack of appealing purposeful activity as compared to closed conditions. Life skills tuition, particularly cooking, is limited. Many women are 'bored' and disaffected. There is a danger that, over time, more women withdraw from activities and the life of the CCUs.

10. Inconsistent messaging and changes of rules

It is clear from the research that a significant and ongoing challenge to the implementation of gender-specific and trauma-informed approaches is the different understandings or interpretations of what these approaches mean. This concerns different interpretations by individuals, and interpretation by managers which officers were required to follow. Either way, these resulted in inconsistent practices in the CCUs, which were experienced as confusing and frustrating by officers and created uncertainty and anxiousness as to what was allowed. This lack of consistency in 'the rules' was a key theme across both CCUs; officers considered

these to vary depending upon which FLM was on duty. There was also a perception from some that arbitrary rules were being made by senior management who did not really know the women, or the environment of the CCU.

11. Community access

Contrary to expectations of many staff and most women, community access is only permitted for a relatively small number of women. The numbers gaining community access are much more limited than envisaged in the SPS Strategy for Women, and opportunities for community integration is reduced as a result. This is perhaps the most significant barrier preventing the realisation of the vision for the CCUs. There is a troubled relationship between the risk averse nature of decision-making, which extends beyond operational arrangements within the CCUs to the identification and selection of women for transfer/progress to them. A culture of risk averseness permeates decision-making and can be seen to thwart the intended ethos and stated aims of CCUs.

12. Limited throughcare

A notable finding, remarked upon by officers and women, concerns the lack of throughcare opportunities for women. This was seen as a stark difference between the CCUs and closed conditions where throughcare arrangements are considered more structured. Ensuring that women have access to housing, training, employment opportunities, and social welfare support upon release is essential for successful re-integration into the community.

Recommendations

These messages lead on to ten recommendations based on the views and experiences of women, SPS officers and delivery partners which, if realised, could potentially improve the experiences of, and outcomes for, women in the CCUs. The recommendations include a range of actions that we consider are required to address the issues identified in the report. As researchers, we believe that the recommendations are best addressed through collaborative action by SPS and the Scottish Government.

Recommendation 1

Following the intention of the SPS Strategy for Women, a culture of continuous improvement should be embedded, based on evaluation, evidence and lived experience of women and the officers working in the CCUs. The physical environment, the garden surrounds and equipment within the CCUs should be kept under review to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of women.

Recommendation 2

The provision of primary care, mental health support and social care within the CCUs should be kept under review to ensure the maintenance of the principle of equivalence. This esnures women are afforded provision of, and access to, appropriate services or treatment which is consistent with that available to the wider community.

Recommendation 3

Officer training should be improved to enable officers to feel more informed and confident in working in a gender-specific and trauma-informed way. This should include how to identify the various manifestations and effects of trauma, including cognitive, emotional, and physical impacts, and the application of trauma-informed principles. The use of concrete examples drawn from lived experience will help officers to bridge the gap between the theoretical and practical. Opportunities for integrated training, with continued oportunities for 'on-the-job' elements could be usefully explored.

Recommendation 4

To supplement the learning from training and to provide opportunities for peer learning, enhanced self-awareness and improved practice, regular opportunities for critical reflective practice should be implemented for officers. Reflective practice potentially offers value for both personal and professional development and learning. Where conducted in a group setting it may also usefully address some of the inconsistencies in messaging.

Recommendation 5

Consideration should be given to a review of risk assessments for the CCUs, if they are to reach their full potential (i.e. they are currently too risk averse to do so). Officer understanding of the operation of risk assessment processes that apply in the CCUs should also be enhanced. A closer alignment between manager and officer understanding on what is and what is not allowed in CCUs could reduce inconsistent messaging and resultant confusion. Clarity on operational arrangements is essential.

Recommendation 6

The CCUs need to encourage and support the access of delivery partners into the prison estate. A thorough review of the process for becoming a delivery partner should be conducted to ensure a smoother and less protracted process.

Recommendation 7

Increased opportunities for engagement with services in the community would enable delivery partners to provide more direct provision for women and would more effectively support the reintegration that many of the delivery partners anticipated. A strategic overview of how best to work effectively with delivery partners in this process should take place.

Recommendation 8

SPS should consider investing in technology and the installation of a body scanner to replace the use of strip searches in the CCUs to reduce the humiliation and trauma caused by strip searching of women. This investment in technology should also extend to the provision of computers for women either for their education or as preparation for release.

Recommendation 9

Close consideration should be given to the development and implementation of evidence-based therapeutic programes for women in the CCUs that address trauma. Pathways of care for women who are survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence should also be ensured.

Recommendation 10

A review of throughcare arrangements for women in the CCUs should be undertaken as a matter of priority.

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Appendix 1. SPAROW research questions

In the table below, we have summarised research questions and proposed research methods. We added additional text and research questions (**in bold)** to those set out in the tender documentation.

PHASE 1: Understanding the CCU Theory of Change and assessing early implementation

Question Set 1: To what extent are the principles of gender specificity (g-s) and trauma informed (t-i) practice understood and embedded in CCUs?

- **How are the g-s and t-I principles understood by women and staff? What benefits are expected to follow for women, their families, for staff and the wider justice system?**
- How far have gender-specific and trauma-informed principles/approaches been implemented in practice in the new CCU model?
- How are the g-s and t-i principles/approaches working for women?
- How are the g-s and t-i principles/approaches working for staff?
- How are the g-s and t-i principles/approaches working for delivery partners?
- **What are the assessment and admission criteria for women to be admitted to the CCUs?**

Question Set 2: What are the lived experiences of women in CCUs?

- How do women describe their experience of living in a CCU? How do they describe their day-to-day life?
- How do women describe their relationships with other women, SPS staff and delivery partners?
- **How do these compare with expectations and with experience in previous establishment?**
- **How do women describe their experiences of coming to be in the CCU – what was the process and the experience of moving/integrating?**
- Compared to living in their previous establishment, do women experience different relational, behavioural and cultural dynamics?
- **What are women's views of completing the JAS baseline survey?**

Question Set 3: What are the experiences of staff (strategic, operational and frontline)

- How do staff describe their experience of working in a CCU, in a gender-specific and trauma-informed way? How do they describe their day-to-day working life?
- How do staff describe their relationships with other staff members, women in their care, and the delivery partners they work with to provide gender-specific and trauma-informed care and support to women living in a CCU? Compared to working in another establishment, are the relational dynamics different?
- Do staff feel they are supported (e.g. through training, supervisory practice, reflective practice) to work in a gender-specific and trauma-informed way?
- **What are staff experiences of the process of women moving in, through and out of a CCU? How are decisions made about throughput and about engaging with outside services?**

Question Set 4: What are the experiences of SPS delivery partners?

- How do delivery partners describe their experience of working in a gender-specific and trauma-informed way with other delivery partners, SPS staff and women in a CCU? How do they describe their day-to-day working life?
- **How do these practices align with their outside CCU organisational practices? What are the perceived barriers for women in accessing and utilising services once in the community?**
- How do delivery partners describe their relationships with other delivery partners, SPS staff and women to provide gender-specific and trauma-informed care and support to women living in a CCU? Are the relational dynamics different to working with other prison establishments?
- Do delivery partners feel they are supported to work in a gender-specific and trauma-informed way?

Question Set 5: What are the examples of successes/good practice in implementing gender-specific and trauma-informed care and support to women in custody?

- What successes/good practice have women experienced through their journey into, through and out of a CCU? **What is needed to ensure sustainability?**
- What successes/good practice have staff experienced working in a g-s and t-i way**? What is needed to ensure sustainability?**
- What successes/good practice have there been to implementing g-s and t-i principles/approaches to care and support women in custody? **What is needed to ensure sustainability?**

Question Set 6: What are the examples of challenges/barriers to implementing gender-specific and trauma-informed care and support to women in custody?

- What challenges/barriers have women experienced through their journey into, through and out of a CCU?
- What successes/good practice have staff experienced working in a g-s and t-i way? **What is needed to ensure sustainability?**
- What challenges/barriers have delivery partners experienced working in a CCU in a g-s and t-i way? **How might these be mitigated?**

Appendix 2. Research methods

Methods of data collection

We adopted a multi-method approach focused on capturing the experiences and views of women, SPS staff and delivery partners. The methods of data collection in each phase are summarised below.

Table 1. SPAROW research methods by fieldwork phase

SPAROW Research Methods	First stage fieldwork (phase 1)	Second stage fieldwork (phase 2)	Third stage fieldwork (phase 2)
Review of SPS documentation	*	-	-
Fieldnotes	*	*	*
Online interviews with SPS senior managers (policy and strategic)	*	-	-
Face-to-face interviews with women living in CCUs	*	*	*
Photo-elicitation with women living in CCUs	-	*	*
Arts-based workshops	-	*	*
Face-to-face interviews with SPS staff working in CCUs	*	*	*
Face-to-face interviews with women in closed conditions in another SPS establishment	-	*	*
Face-to-face interviews with SPS staff working in closed conditions in another SPS establishment	-	*	*
Online survey to SPS delivery partners	*	*	-
Online focus groups and interviews with SPS delivery partners	-	*	*

Each method is described in more detail below:

- **A review of SPS documentation** (Phase 1) to provide background information on the aims and aspirations of the CCUs and the risk and progression processes for women. These documents, which included the SPS Strategy for Women in Custody 2021-2025; the SPS Risk Management,

Progression and Temporary Release Guidance (2018); the SPS Risk Management Team - Adverse Circumstance Report; the Women's Strategy Custodial Flow-Chart, and; the SPS Risk Management Team (RMT) Guidance Leaflet, informed the design of questions on these topics in the interview guides. We also reviewed the SPS Partnership Agreement for prison-based services (2018 version) which assisted in drafting questions for inclusion in the online survey of delivery partners. It should be noted however that much of this documentation precedes the establishment of the CCUs (Phase 1).

- **Fieldnotes (Phases 1 and 2)** were taken within CCUs either during or following each visit. Rather than deploying formal overt observation we gathered systematic field notes. We agreed with women and SPS staff in advance the kinds of features we might note. Fieldnotes paid particular attention to the ways in which the facilities were used. They focussed on the nature of women's interactions with each other and with staff, the types of activities engaged in and women's movements within the facility.
- **Online semi-structured qualitative interviews with SPS senior managers** (Phase 1) were conducted to gain insight into the policy perspective on the CCUs. These interviews explored both the strategic and operational aims of the CCUs, interviewees' reflections on the identification and selection of women for the CCUs and; the overall functioning of the CCUs. Four interviews were conducted with SPS managers with a range of strategic and/or operational roles. These participants, all senior strategic managers, are referred to in the Report as SSM 1 – 4.
- **Face-to-face semi-structured qualitative interviews with women living in CCUs** (Phases 1 and 2) were undertaken to explore the key pre-determined research questions identified in the specification documents. Interviews also allowed for a narrative approach to more fully elicit participants' views and experiences and any issues that were especially important to them. A bespoke approach to conducting interviews was used to ensure that the methods used were appropriate to the needs of individual participants rather than a rigid set and ordering of research questions.
- Following the 'get to know you' visits, all women resident in the CCUs during the periods of fieldwork were invited to participate in interviews. Posters outlining the research and what participation entailed were displayed in the Community Hub areas. Members of the research team visited the CCUs to answer any questions and engage the women in the research. In Phase 1 of the research, there was some marked hesitancy amongst women to participate in interviews. This was because they had recently participated in other research and some thought our research was the same as what they had participated in recently (see chapter 3 on Research hesitancy and research fatigue).
- Most interviews with women were conducted on a 1-to-1 basis, but some were conducted in twos or threes where this was the preference of the women. Interviews generally took around 60 minutes in duration, but some took considerably longer where women wished to carry on talking. A small number of interviews in each field work phase took place over two separate visits at the behest of the women who participated.

Table 2. Number of interviews with women in CCUs by fieldwork phase and sentence type

Phase	Bella CCU	Lilias CCU	Sentence: STP	Sentence: LTP	Sentence: Life/Top-end	Total
Phase 1	7	7	9	3	2	**14**
Phase 2	7	12	9	7	3	**19**
Total	**14**	**19**	**18**	**10**	**5**	**33**

- Table 2 above summarises the numbers of women interviewed in each phase of fieldwork in both units. In total, 33 women were interviewed.
- In addition to these interviews, we also conducted four larger group discussions with women (two in each CCU) where images from the photo elicitation exercises were used to stimulate reflection and a range of views. Numbers of women in attendance in these larger discussion groups ranged from five to eleven.
- Throughout the report, women residents are referred to by the CCU in which they reside, an ‘R’ to denote they are residents, the fieldwork stage in which they were interviewed, and a number (e.g. BR2 005). Where women were interviewed in pairs, then they are distinguished as BR2 004:1 and BR2 004:2).
- **Photo-elicitation with women in CCUs (Phase 2)** was incorporated into group discussions as a means of evoking reflection and to enrich the interview experience. This method was chosen as a means of enabling women to articulate experiences that would, otherwise, have been difficult to articulate through talk-only interviews. SPS would not allow women to use cameras to photograph their own non-personal images of the CCUs. Therefore, photo-elicitation in this prison context involved members of the research team taking photographs in the units under the women’s direction. Cameras and photographed images were checked by prison staff before we left the units. The developed photographs were used mainly in group interviews as a means of producing data through negotiation and reflexivity and to explore the emotions and experiences that were evoked by the photographs.
- **Arts-based workshops with women in CCUs** (Phase 2) were used as a participatory approach with groups of women living in CCUs in order to enable creative agency in articulating their unique experiences. Like photo-elicitation, this method was chosen as a means of facilitating reflection and dialogue, and also to access knowledge which is not easily expressed in words (Bagnoli, 2009; Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2009).
- Data and findings from Phase 1 of the research were used as the basis of the arts-based workshops. Findings from interviews and fieldnotes were fed back to the women but were also used to stimulate further dialogue on issues that had arisen, and to explore how things might have changed in the time between the fieldwork stages. Workshops involved an illustrator working directly with women in each CCU to 'visually minute' what women were saying in words, metaphors and drawings that evoked their experiences. Women

attended in groups ranging from six to eleven in number; however, as each workshop lasted around two and a half hours, some women attended at different times. Three members of the research team and the graphic illustrator were present at all workshops.

- Three arts-based workshops took place in each CCU around 3-4 weeks apart. Large poster-style drawings were produced by the graphic illustrator in situ using pencil as the women were talking, reflecting and debating with each other and the research team about their views and experiences of the CCU. Some women actively added to the drawings, whilst others suggested changes and additions. The women were very engaged in the workshops, which provided a collective space for discussing, sharing and reinterpreting the lived experience of women in the CCUs. The workshops were then followed up with a subsequent visit in each unit to show the women a more worked-up colour version of each drawing and to allow them to check accuracy and make any final changes. Workshops became a strong thread running through the last two fieldwork stages, as we were able to both conduct the workshops, and to take back and discuss the drawings produced as a result. The finalised large colour images were printed and presented to each unit.
- **Face-to-face semi-structured qualitative interviews with SPS staff in CCUs** (Phases 1 and 2) were undertaken to explore staff experiences and views about working within the CCUs. Interviews also explored how the CCU model enables different relational, behavioural and cultural dynamics. They also covered the successes/good practice and challenges/barriers to implementing gender-specific and trauma-informed principles/approaches to care and support for women in custody. Information about the research and a call for participation were provided by the research team and circulated to SPS staff via CCU managers before the research commenced. All SPS staff in each unit were invited to participate. Members of the research team met with SPS staff at the ‘getting to know you’ visits and provided further verbal and written information.
- It was originally intended to conduct a series of focus groups with SPS staff in each CCU, with each focus group taking place at two points, during Phase 1 and Phase 2. However, it soon became apparent that this was not feasible given staff shift patterns, staff rotas, and marked levels of staff absence. We quickly pivoted to the use of semi-structured qualitative interviews as this method was considered more manageable by staff given their shift patterns. This was not without challenge, however. Focus groups were chosen for their benefits in facilitating interpersonal discussions between staff, and the observation of group dynamics and body language and also as they allow for the generation of data from a number of participants simultaneously. Interviews reflect a different dynamic and do not allow for discussions between staff but also, crucially are much more resource intensive than focus groups and take longer to arrange and conduct.
- Residential officers work closely with the women on a day-to-day basis to provide support and care; they have a role in case management, and sometimes also undertake a PO role to individual women. Operational officers are responsible for the overall security and functioning of the CCUs. They

work in the reception and office areas, maintain CCTV surveillance in the CCUs and surrounds, and organise and oversee the visits of family members and other visitors to the CCUs. Whilst they do not have responsibility for direct care of the women, they do play a role in maintaining their safety and security. First line managers (FLM) have responsibility for the managing of resources, overseeing shift rosters, and supporting other staff. They can also act as a duty manager with responsibility for the running of the CCUs on a shift basis.

- After some initial hesitation (as described in Chapter 3), both operational and residential staff consented to take part in interviews, see Table 3 below for breakdown of staff and job roles. CCU SPS staff interviews were of between 45-60 minutes duration. Most were conducted 1:1, although some staff chose to be interviewed in pairs. A total of 40 officers were interviewed; five officers were interviewed twice, in both Phase 1 and Phase 2.

Table 3. Number of interviews with SPS staff in Bella CCU by fieldwork phase and type of job role

Phase	Job type: Operational	Job type: Residential	Job type: First Line Manager	Job type: Unit Manager	Total
Phase 1	2	4	1	-	**7**
Phase 2	8	6	1	1	**16**
Total	**10**	**10**	**2**	**1**	**23**

Table 4. Number of interviews with SPS staff in Lilias CCU by fieldwork phase and type of job role

Phase	Job type: Operational	Job type: Residential	Job type: First Line Manager	Job type: Unit Manager	Total
Phase 1	3	1	3	1	**8**
Phase 2	4	3	1	1	**9**
Total	**7**	**4**	**4**	**2**	**17**

- Throughout the report, CCU staff are referred to by the CCU in which they work, an ‘S’ to denote they are staff, the fieldwork stage in which they were interviewed, and a number (e.g. LS2 002. Where officers were interviewed in pairs, then they are distinguished as, e.g., BS2 002:1 and BS2 002:2).

- **Face-to-face semi-structured qualitative interviews with women in closed conditions in another prison establishment** (Phase 2) were conducted in order to explore the key pre-determined research questions identified in the specification documents. The particular focus here was on women’s experiences of gender-specific and trauma-informed approaches in

mainstream prison. There were considerable delays in SPS identifying another prison establishment wherein we were able to approach women for interview. This meant that we were only able to conduct interviews in Phase 2 of the research. Six women were eventually interviewed.

- **Face-to-face semi-structured qualitative interviews with SPS staff working with women in closed conditions in another prison establishment** (Phase 2). Interviews addressed how the CCU model is challenging working practice in other prison establishment(s) where women are detained, and in particular, how gender-specific and trauma-informed care and support of women is working in those other establishments. Four SPS staff members from the same prison as the six women were interviewed; three were operational officers and one was a Hall officer. Participants are referred to using the same protocol as women and officers in the CCUs, that is, GR 001 (for women) and GS 001 (for staff).

- **Online survey with SPS delivery partners** (Phases 1 and 2). The views of delivery partners were sought with the aim of supporting the ongoing improvement of partnership working with delivery partners to design and deliver appropriate services that are gender-specific and trauma-informed. The survey sought to gain: an understanding of how the partners are delivering gender-sensitive and trauma-informed care and support; documenting any changes partners may have made to align their services to the SPS strategy and partners' experiences of successes and challenges to implementing gender-specific and trauma-informed care and support to women in custody.
- The first online survey, implemented in Phase 1, was developed and distributed to SPS delivery partners (from 9th – 30th November 2023). Survey questions were developed using Qualtrics, a web-based software that facilitates the construction, analysis and dissemination of online surveys. Research team members attended a meeting of the Criminal Justice Voluntary Sector Forum (CJVSF) on 13 September 2023 to discuss the evaluation and establish reflections and suggestions from Forum members. This assisted in identifying themes and issues to explore further in the study.
- Initial challenges were encountered in gaining a comprehensive and up-to-date listing of delivery partners in each CCU, and compiling this list took several months. In addition, delivery partners can change regularly, as they may provide a service for a number of weeks and then finish (before sometimes returning at a later date to run a course or activity again). Names of delivery partners were received from a range of sources: the Scottish Government, SPS and the CCUs. In Phase 1 the survey was initially distributed to 25 delivery partners, identified primarily via the CCUs. A wider invitation to the survey was also included in the CJVSF newsletter which was distributed to all member organisations. The Phase 1 survey resulted in 23 responses from a range of organisations. A second survey, using the same contact list, with distribution assisted by CJVSF, was implemented in Phase 2. This was also sent to other organisations that we were informed about during fieldwork, or who had recently become/were in the process of becoming SPS

delivery partners. Despite ongoing requests and reminders, this survey, (opened between 3 July – 30 August 2024) had a much lower response rate, with just five organisational representatives completing it.

- **Online focus groups and semi-structured qualitative interviews with SPS delivery partners** (Phase 2). To elaborate on the survey results, all delivery partners who responded to the online survey were also invited to take part in an online focus group. This aimed to explore the factors that either facilitated/enhanced or limited their ability to engage directly with women. It also sought views on issues of community reintegration during sentence and support for transition at the end of sentences. The views of delivery partners were sought with the aim of supporting the ongoing improvement of partnership working with delivery partners to design and deliver appropriate services that are gender-specific and trauma-informed.
- Across Phase 2 (fieldwork stages 2 and 3) four focus groups took place with, respectively, two, four, five and six participants. Each lasted between 50 – 60 minutes and involved a range of delivery partners. Five individual interviews were also carried out with participants who were either unable to attend a scheduled focus group, or who requested an individual interview. Delivery partner participants are referred to in the Report as DP 001 where the quote came from an interview or DP FG 1 if from a focus group.

Appendix 3: Bella Induction Checklist

Bella Centre
Induction Checklist

Please complete for each Resident and retain a copy in their personal prisoner file located in main admin office.

Task	Completed By	Date
Reception Risk Assessment (RRA)		
Update PR2 Location		
Confirm Numbers with Ops Base		
Room Key Allocation		
X-Ray Property / FoH Security Procedures		
Complete Property Card		
Tour of Accessible Indoor Areas - Hub - CV Room - Gallery Tour of Accessible Outdoor Areas - Children's Play Area - Decking - Main Gardens Tour of House Block - Bedroom - Communal Kitchen/Living - Utilities		
Fire Evacuation Procedures Explained: - Self-Evacuating Building - How to Raise Alarm - Assembly Point(s)		
Residency Contracts Agreed & Signed. (Retain Copy in the Induction Folder) Welcome Pack Issued to Resident.		
CV Room Induction		

social research

The views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and do not necessarily represent those of the Scottish Government or Scottish Ministers.

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