

Government to fund projects to tackle problems of women in custody

Justice Secretary Michael Matheson used a visit to an Edinburgh based service to help women in the criminal justice system to announce £639,500 funding which is to be awarded to 12 projects working to tackle female offending in Scotland.

Willow Service will receive an additional £154,000 to continue the valuable work they are doing in the community.

The announcement comes just over a week after experts arrived in Edinburgh for an international summit to help shape a radical new approach to how Scotland deals with women in custody.

Between 2013 and 2015 the Scottish Government provided over £3m in grant funding to 16 projects aimed at improving community-based services for women in the criminal justice system, in line with the recommendations of the Commission on Women Offenders.

Earlier this year the Scottish Government approached these projects to confirm if they had succeeded in securing local funding to sustain their enhanced services. Whilst many had already made good progress further funding was agreed for 12 projects to help them to maintain their work and to continue to demonstrate the benefits of their expanded services.

Today's £639,500 of funding will support these projects to continue their work with female offenders as part of this Government's continued commitment to a more progressive and ambitious approach to women with convictions in Scotland.

Justice Secretary Michael Matheson said:

“I have already made it clear that I believe Scotland needs to take a new and bold approach to the way we treat female offenders and support them towards more positive futures.

“My visit to the Willow Service today has reinforced my view that initiatives like these are absolutely vital to reduce offending behaviour in women which is why we have provided this additional funding to sustain these valued services. The Willow Service, and others like it, are doing fantastic work in the community and helping to turn lives around.

“Projects like these are in a position to make a real difference to the lives of female offenders, which is why we have committed an extra £639,500 to enable them to continue the positive work that they do. By supporting services which understand the kinds of problems these vulnerable women face, helping them to rebuild their links to family and community and address any underlying issues which contribute to crime, we can enable women with a history of offending to take their lives back.

“We need to continue to transform and improve services for women so that we can help them to break the cycle of reoffending and start making a positive contribution to society. These grants have given local projects the opportunity to provide services that meet local need, and a chance to demonstrate that they can deliver the kind of improved outcomes that their local partners will want to support in the future.

“Scotland already has the second highest female prison population in Northern Europe, doubling between 2002 and 2012. This is completely unacceptable and does not fit with my vision of how a modern and progressive society should deal with female offenders.

“We recently welcomed experts on the issue of women in prison to our international summit on female offending to share their

experiences and make recommendations on the types of approaches Scotland can take forward. Representatives from countries praised for their approaches discussed international best practice and provided us with a unique opportunity to set Scotland on the path to building the most progressive justice system in the world.”

Councillor Ricky Henderson, Health, Social Care and Housing Convener for the City of Edinburgh Council, said: “Today’s announcement is fantastic news for Willow, a ground-breaking and award-winning service that plays a vital role and has a proven track record in stopping women from re-offending.

“I welcome the Scottish Government’s support of community-based alternatives such as the Willow Centre, which recognises the role that trauma and abuse can play in preventing the rehabilitation of vulnerable women.”