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This response was submitted to the [Equality and Social Justice Committee](#) consultation on [Women's experiences in the criminal justice system](#)

WECJS 04

Ymateb gan: Coleg Brenhinol Meddygon Teulu Cymru | Response from:  
Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Eastwood Park

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## **Senedd Equality and Social Justice Committee's inquiry into women's experiences in the criminal justice system**

### **Written evidence from the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP/YOI Eastwood Park<sup>1</sup>**

#### **About Independent Monitoring Boards**

Appointed by Ministers under the Prison Act 1952, Independent Monitoring Boards (IMBs) are an integral part of the independent oversight of prisons. IMB members are a regular presence, visiting the establishment, monitoring the treatment and conditions of prisoners, reporting what they find to those running the prison, and dealing with queries and concerns from individual prisoners. They are unpaid but have statutory powers, granting them unrestricted access.

#### **Eastwood Park IMB findings**

HMP/YOI Eastwood Park is the establishment to which most women prisoners from the southern part of Wales are sent. The Board at Eastwood Park found that approximately a third of prisoners at the establishment come from Wales. Sentencing data from 2019 showed that in the South Wales Police Force area, there was an imprisonment rate of 62 per 100,000, compared to 14 per 100,000 in Devon and Cornwall, the lowest in the prison's catchment area.

There is still no prison for women in Wales. The relatively small number of Welsh women in prison would provide an ideal opportunity to put into practice the principles and proposals in the 2006 Corston Report, of small units close to home, closely linked to women's centres in the community.

#### **Equality and diversity**

The Board reported on improved accessibility for prisoners with physical disabilities. As a result of significant financial investment, work was undertaken to convert two single cells into a single accessible cell.

In June 2021, in a joint project with the Criminal Justice Alliance, IMBs across the women's prison estate conducted a survey of minoritised prisoners, including foreign nationals and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller individuals.<sup>2</sup> At the time of the survey, there were 44 prisoners within scope at Eastwood Park and the Board received 30 survey responses. While there were some examples of positive interactions between prisoners and staff, almost half of the respondents said that the prison understood their cultural needs poorly or very poorly.

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<sup>1</sup> This evidence is drawn from Eastwood Park IMB's 2020/21 annual report, monitoring records and discussions with staff and prisoners. Not all findings are specific to prisoners from Wales.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.imb.org.uk/towards-race-equality/>

## **Mental health**

The Board recently reported that the prisoners arriving at Eastwood Park have more complex mental health issues. Both prisoners and prison healthcare staff with whom the Board had spoken were of the view that there were insufficient mental health services in the community to meet the high levels of need, resulting in early warning opportunities being missed and acutely mentally unwell individuals being sent to prison. The Board found that this was a particular issue with the services in Wales, compared to those in other areas.

The Board noted that a mental health crisis team operated across all prison wings 365 days a year, with an 8am to 8pm service. Group therapy sessions were suspended during Covid-19 lockdowns, however the psychiatrist completed assessments and reviews for relevant prisoners.

During the 2020/21 reporting period, waiting times for Mental Health Act transfers to secure mental health hospitals were exacerbated by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the availability of community-based secure mental health services.

## **Drug and alcohol rehabilitation**

The Board reported that the drug recovery community service at the prison continued to deliver good results, despite the Covid-19 restrictions. Of the prisoners who participated in the drug recovery community between 1 November 2020 and 31 October 2021, 92% completed their treatment, 92% who detoxed with the drug recovery community stayed sober at the time of release/completion, 58% engaged with the outreach work, 10% went to rehab and 24% went to supported housing (referred by drug recovery community workers).

The Board conducted a prisoner wellbeing survey in February 2022. Almost 60% of respondents were satisfied or above with the prison's drug and alcohol rehabilitation services.

## **Resettlement services**

Following the return to the national probation service in mid-2021, the resettlement service at Eastwood Park is now provided by the Nelson Trust in partnership with Safer Wales. The Board commended the recent appointment of two members of staff who work with prisoners from Wales in preparation for their release from prison, with very positive feedback to date.

The Board continued to raise concerns about securing safe, secure and reliable housing for prison leavers in order to break the cycle of reoffending. Three of the 12 prison leavers recently surveyed by the Board were going back to Wales. One woman reported that she had lost her home upon imprisonment and was unhappy with the proposal to stay in a mixed hostel on release, as she was afraid of being used by the majority men in the hostel. Another woman had been in the drug recovery community at HMP Eastwood Park and was positive about her experience and support provided by the Nelson Trust. She was homeless and reported that the probation team was trying to find her a hostel.

The residential women's centre in Swansea, due to open in 2024, will be accessed by women who live in the local community. The Board raised concerns that if the definition of 'local' were to be too narrow it would exclude many women who may need access to this type of facility.

### **Probation**

There has been a significant reduction in the number of probation offices nationwide over the last 10 to 15 years. In some cases, the limited probation presence in the community hindered the engagement of those released on licence. One prisoner from Wales informed a member of the Board that they had been recalled because they could not keep their probation appointment in Swansea, as they lived in Port Talbot and could not get to the office.