



agenda
Alliance for Women & Girls at Risk



Making Places Work for Women: Gender and Systems Change.

A Discussion Paper by The Point
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October 2018

Contents

Introduction	03
Executive Summary	06
Our aims and approach	11
Chapter 1: The case for change	13
Chapter 2: What's getting in the way?	20
A limited understanding of 'systems change' and what it looks like in practice	21
Data is often gender blind and service focused	22
Commissioning doesn't work with the grain of women's lives	23
Mental health services aren't sufficiently engaged in supporting women	24
The voluntary sector plays a key role but it is vulnerable	26
The need for gender-influenced 'systems leadership' is not recognised	27
There are significant cultural factors that are getting in the way of change	28

Chapter 3: Five principles for systems change: making the difference for women experiencing multiple disadvantage	30
1: Build a shared understanding of the population of women experiencing multiple disadvantage	32
2: Outcomes are attached to the system and defined by and with women, not for them	33
3: Services that work together, not just alongside one another	35
4: Visible leadership at all levels of the system	37
5: Look below the surface to address unconscious dynamics	39
Chapter 4: Where next for this work?	41
Recommendations for Trusts and Foundations	41
Recommendations for commissioners and local authorities	42
Recommendations for central government	44
Conclusion	46

Introduction

The most marginalised women in our communities rarely face just one form of disadvantage. Their lives are complex; they experience gendered inequalities and discrimination, usually underpinned by experiences of abuse and poverty. They can face overlapping and interlinked problems like poor physical and mental health, addiction, homelessness, offending and involvement in prostitution. Any combination of these issues can create what is often referred to as 'multiple disadvantage'.

Agenda exists to ensure this group of women get the support and protection they need. Our research has found one million women in England face both poverty and high levels of violence and abuse.¹ This group are disproportionately likely to have mental health disorders (55%); alcohol addiction (28%); and experiences of homelessness (21%).

The way current services are configured do not work for this group of women and too many fall through gaps in support. Specialist women's services are few and far between and increasingly struggle for funding. Gender is rarely thought about in service design, commissioning and delivery. Mixed services too often lack a gendered understanding, agencies often work in

silos and provide inadequate support meaning women and girls are unable to get the help they need to turn their lives around.

For example, homeless and drug services are often dominated by men, meaning they can be intimidating and unsafe places for women, especially those who have histories of experiencing abuse. As a result women are less likely to use them, which may lead to an assumption by providers that women do not need these services.

Meanwhile, Agenda research has suggested women are not routinely being asked by mental health services about experiences of abuse, which means they may not be getting the right care.² At the same time, some domestic and sexual abuse services are limited in their ability to support women with the most complex needs, with referrals into refuges for women with substance use support needs less likely to be successful than referrals for other women.

When women are unable to access the right support or accommodation not only do their needs go unmet but they can be trapped in abusive relationships or in other insecure and precarious situations. They can be left to spiral from crisis to crisis, with huge resulting costs

1 McManus, S., Scott, S. & Sosenko, F. (2016), *Joining the Dots: The combined burden of violence, abuse and poverty in the lives of women*. Agenda, London. Available here: http://weareagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Agenda_Joining_The_Dots_Report_VFinal_d-contents-linked.pdf [accessed 26th September 2017]

2 Agenda. (2016), *Women's needs in mental health services: a response to an FOI request*. Agenda, London. Available here: <http://weareagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Mental-health-briefing-FINAL.pdf> (accessed 26th September 2017)

to them, their families and society as a whole.

Evidence shows that women's services, particularly those that take a holistic 'whole person' approach, can lead to improved outcomes and have a positive impact on women and their families.³ These translate into social benefits as well as economic ones, with the potential for significant long-term savings to the state.⁴ But this is about more than money, it is only right that in a fair and just society, the most disadvantaged women have the chance to rebuild their lives and fulfil their potential.

To do that, Agenda believes that systems and services must work better for women and girls experiencing multiple disadvantage. Both national policy change and local place-based systems change are critical in achieving this.

By place-based systems change, we mean work aimed at tackling and changing the 'system' - structures and ways of working - in a specific geographical area. This can include policies, routines, relationships,

resources, power structures and values. It could include the work of councils, health services, voluntary organisations, the criminal justice system and so on. The potential for place-based system change is increasingly relevant in the context of devolution where strategic and financial decisions are increasingly made at local levels.

While there is a growing body of evidence around place-based systems change, there has been limited work which takes a gendered approach. That is why Agenda, supported by the Lankelly Chase Foundation, wanted to commission this discussion paper to build on the existing evidence base and consider how systems and services in a locality can be redesigned to take into account the particular experiences of women and girls.

With the systemic problems facing women outlined above, local authorities and organisations coming together to understand the issues women face and taking a new joined-up approach to tackling them, could have a hugely positive impact on the most disadvantaged women.

This discussion paper, written by The Point People for Agenda, draws on qualitative research and the existing literature on gender, place based change and systems change. It identifies some barriers to achieving place-based systems change for women experiencing multiple disadvantage. These include poor data collection, which fails to present an accurate picture of the situation for women, unrealistic

3 Nicholles, N. and Whitehead, S. (2012) Women's Community Services: A Wise Commission. Nef https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/1136a324a128c3fce6_idm6y15h9.pdf

4 Greater Manchester Combined Authority (2017) Greater Manchester Whole System Approach for Female offenders: Cost Benefit Analysis (unpublished); Kinsella, R., O'Keeffe, C., Lowthain, J., Clarke, B. and Ellison, M. (2015) Evaluation of the Whole System Approach for Women Offenders <http://www.mmuperu.co.uk/publications/evaluation-of-the-whole-system-approach-for-women-of-fenders-executive-summa>; Page, A. (2011) Counting the Cost: The financial impact of supporting women with multiple needs in the criminal justice system – Findings from Revolving Doors Agency's women-specific Financial Analysis Model http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/file/1793/download?token=_uhAj6qr; Lawlor, E., Nicholls, J. and Sanfilippo, L. (2008) Unlocking Value. London: nef <https://neweconomics.org/2008/11/unlocking-value>

commissioning of services, siloed working, difficult funding conditions for voluntary sector organisations and cultural barriers.

But these issues are not insurmountable and the paper proposes corresponding principles that can help address these, with an emphasis on increasing understanding and knowledge, being open to new ways of working and collaboration, and strengthening leadership. We have proposed some key recommendations for funders, local organisations and councils, and central government to help develop this work further.

Place-based change should be person-centred; that means starting with the women themselves, rather than starting with the services around them and trying to make women's lives fit. With this in mind, we believe place-based systems change has the potential to positively impact women's lives. By being more open and inclusive, making better use of limited resources and focusing on social as well as economic value, they open up the possibility of local areas finding better ways of supporting women experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Executive Summary

This report looks at how place-based approaches to change could improve the lives of women experiencing multiple disadvantages including poverty, violence and abuse, mental health problems, addiction and homelessness. This project has been funded by Lankelly Chase, we are grateful to them for their support.

‘Place-based approaches’ and ‘systems change’ are terms that have become increasingly popular across the public sector in recent years – although there isn’t a simple consensus on what exactly they mean. For the purposes of this report we define them as:

Place-based approaches

The term ‘place-based’ is currently used to describe a range of approaches aimed at achieving significant change in a specific geographical area. This can include funding and grantmaking to long-term, collaborative partnerships. It also describes a style and philosophy of approach which seeks to achieve ‘joined-up’ change across sectors and services in that area.

Systems change

Systems change begins with the idea that social problems are the product of complex networks of

cause and effect, or ‘systems’. These can include particular policies, relationships, resources, power structures and values. The term systems change means bringing about a new way of working or changing the pattern or structure of a system to address the root causes of an issue.

Taken together, place-based systems change means intentional change across policies, relationships, resources, power structures and values in a geographic area. This involves orchestrated activity to effect this change, with agreed outcomes that the whole system (and the people and organisations within it) are trying to achieve together in a particular place.

Chapter 1 makes the case for taking a gendered approach to understanding multiple disadvantage, and highlights the consequences of our current failure to do so.

Historically, little work has been done to understand the gendered dimensions of ‘multiple disadvantage’. The way data is collected about multiple disadvantage can render women invisible, and frequently prevents any ability to consider gender alongside other protected characteristics,

such as age, ethnicity or disability. Women's trajectories and service use are poorly understood, meaning mainstream services are often unconsciously designed around men's needs (who dominate services and are more prevalent in datasets). This is compounded by social attitudes towards this group of women, which can be toxic. A decade of austerity has exacerbated the lack of support for women experiencing multiple disadvantage. By not taking account of their specific needs, services are failing this group.

Yet evidence shows women's services can lead to improved health outcomes, reduced reoffending, and gaining and maintaining employment and stable housing. These outcomes have a positive impact on women with multiple disadvantage and their children, and translate into financial benefits to the state. Estimated savings for every £1 invested vary from £3.44 - £6.65 saved over a one-year period, to £3.85 - £11 for every £1 invested over a five year period, and £14 for every £1 invested over a ten year period.⁵

5 Greater Manchester Combined Authority (2017) Greater Manchester Whole System Approach for Female offenders: Cost Benefit Analysis (unpublished); Kinsella, R., O'Keeffe, C., Lowthain, J., Clarke, B. and Ellison, M. (2015) Evaluation of the Whole System Approach for Women Offenders <http://www.mmuperu.co.uk/publications/evaluation-of-the-whole-system-approach-for-women-of-fenders-executive-summa>; Nicholles, N. and Whitehead, S. (2012) Women's Community Services: A Wise Commission. Nef https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/1136a324a128c3fce6_idm6y15h9.pdf; Page, A. (2011) Counting the Cost: The financial impact of supporting women with multiple needs in the criminal justice system – Findings from Revolving Doors Agency's women-specific Financial Analysis Model http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/file/1793/download?token=_uhAj6qr; Lawlor, E., Nicholls, J. and Sanfilippo, L. (2008) Unlocking Value. London: nef <https://neweconomics.org/2008/11/unlocking-value>

Place-based approaches to change have the potential to improve the support available to women. By being more inclusive, by making better use of limited resources, and by focusing on social as well as economic value, they open up the possibility of local areas finding better ways of supporting women experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Chapter 2 looks at what might be getting in the way of achieving place-based systems change for women experiencing multiple disadvantage.

While there are some pioneering examples of systems change projects in the women's sector, progress is slow. A lack of alignment - around what good systems change looks like for women experiencing multiple disadvantage and around the importance of work in this field - means this approach has only taken hold in a handful of areas.

Specifically there are six barriers to achieving positive place-based change for women experiencing multiple disadvantage:

- Patchy practice around gendered data collection and analysis prevents those working to influence change in the sector from building an accurate picture, not only of what is happening, but also what isn't happening.
- Commissioning does not work with the reality of women's lives - timeframes are too short, outcomes measures often jar with the lived

experience of trauma and recovery, and silo-ed commissioning doesn't encourage dialogue across services.

- Mental health services in particular are insufficiently involved in systems change work for women experiencing multiple disadvantage. The reasons for this are multiple – involving organisational structure, funding and accountability lines and culture – and all need further investigation.
- Voluntary sector organisations are highly effective at reaching women experiencing multiple disadvantage, including women from different communities such as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women (BAME). But austerity and an uncertain funding environment, plus short commissioning cycles have created a challenging environment for the sector.
- The importance of gender-influenced 'systems leadership'⁶ at the level of policy makers and commissioners and across services has not been sufficiently understood, recognised or supported.
- Cultural barriers that operate 'below the surface' of the organisation – including individual mindsets and group behaviours – are not always named but appear to be significant blockers to change, through exerting a subtle but significant influence on

the way services are designed and delivered.

Unless addressed, these issues make it almost impossible to achieve meaningful place-based systems change for women experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Chapter 3 offers five principles for systems change that we believe would make a difference for women experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Place-based systems change means starting with the women themselves. Rather than asking about how services can be improved, a place-based approach needs to start by asking how all women – including the most disadvantaged – can thrive in a community.

What does this person-centred (rather than service-centred) model look like in practice? And specifically, how can a person-centred model take account of the specific gender dynamics described above? Based on our interviews with a range of women, practitioners and commissioners in different areas of the country, this chapter identifies five key principles, and a set of questions for each, that are designed to encourage local areas to reflect on their progress and encourage them to go further.

1. Build a shared understanding of the diverse population of women experiencing multiple disadvantage, using qualitative and quantitative data skilfully and growing the intelligence of the system.

6 Senge, P., Hamilton, H. and Kania, J. (2015). The Dawn of System Leadership (SSIR). [online] Ssir.org. Available at: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_dawn_of_system_leadership [Accessed 9 Jun. 2018]

2. Attach outcomes to the system, not the service, and allow them to be defined by and with women, not for them. This has implications for commissioning cycles and the relative importance of different outcome metrics.
3. Foster a 'growth mindset'^{7 8}, across the public and voluntary sector that encourages services to recognise the value of working together, sharing resources in new ways and sharing responsibility for jointly-owned outcomes.
4. Recognise and support the people playing a 'system leadership' role – they are often not in current positions of hierarchy but play a crucial part in the success or otherwise of place-based change projects.
5. Make room to explore the 'below the surface' issues together, building a culture of learning and reflection and making time to build trust and shared values.

Finally, Chapter 4 makes a series of recommendations for where this work needs to go next.

We think Trusts and Foundations need to:

1. Invest in a major programme to explore how system-wide approaches can better serve women experiencing multiple disadvantage, building on the work of current pioneering approaches.
2. Fund a programme to support a network of systems changers in this area that brings together people facilitating change on the frontline and at a strategic level to share practice and grow solidarity.

We think local organisations including councils and health bodies, as well as elected Mayors and commissioners need to:

3. Promote systems change through leadership and commissioning models. This will involve greater collaboration, more sharing of data and resources, and more work to define outcomes together with women experiencing disadvantage. It will require courageous and innovative commissioning which does not just recommission services that are no longer fit for purpose.
4. Integrate mental health into all systems change work for women experiencing multiple disadvantage, with all Mental Health Trusts producing a Women's Mental Health Strategy, and with local areas

7 Dweck, C. (2013) Growth Mindset: the understanding that abilities and intelligence can be developed <https://www.mindsetworks.com/science/> [Accessed 9 Jun. 2018]

8 Dweck, C. (2007). The power of believing that you can improve. https://www.ted.com/talks/carol_dweck_the_power_of_believing_that_you_can_improve?utm_campaign=tedsread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare [Accessed 9 Jun. 2018]

appointing clinical leads for women's mental health and committing to women-only specialist services in every area.

We are asking central government to:

5. Provide leadership and pooled, ringfenced funding to promote local systems change. This should include a national fund to support work of this nature, as well as offering more incentives to local areas, such as funds that are contingent on pooled budgets.
6. Develop a national standard for gathering gender aware data and insight in local areas, that helps build a gendered picture, and looks at the experiences of different groups of women. This work should make the most of advances in digital technology, and provide training and support on how to use this data to build business cases.

Our aims and approach

Our aims

The report seeks to understand and learn from what work is already happening, both in the women's sector, as well as in the wider community of systems change practice. It explores why it is important to take a gendered approach, and highlights the consequences of our current failure to do so. We present some guiding principles for place-based change that are gender aware, alongside a set of questions that professionals working in local areas can use to provoke conversation and reflection. We propose an agenda for action, targeted at local and central government, commissioners, funders and women's organisations.

Approach

We have taken a qualitative approach to understanding the perspectives of women experiencing multiple disadvantage and those organisations and practitioners who strive to support them. The research largely consisted of one-to-one interviews with practitioners, commissioners and women who are themselves experiencing multiple disadvantage. We also held two half-day workshops with practitioners to test and develop our findings further.

Women experiencing multiple disadvantage

We undertook six interviews with women experiencing multiple disadvantage. These interviews used emotional

mapping and journey mapping tools to prompt conversation and understand the system from their perspective.

Practitioners

We interviewed eleven practitioners who support women experiencing multiple disadvantage. These interviews explored three key areas. Firstly, we sought to understand their individual experience of being commissioned, such as the process they went through, the emotions it elicited and the personalities involved. We then explored their perspectives of how decisions are made, and finally sought to understand their experiences of both the barriers and enablers to getting trauma-informed, gender sensitive services commissioned. We also held a practitioners workshop which sought to explore and develop the hypotheses we formed from one-to-one interviews. We also interviewed three systems change practitioners, without a gender focus, to integrate learning from non-gender specific approaches and models to systems change.

Commissioners

Anonymised interviews with six commissioners explored two key areas: their individual experience of commissioning and how it sat within the local authority's larger political, financial and organisational context; and their perspectives on the barriers and enablers to commissioning trauma-informed, gender sensitive services.

Desk research

This qualitative work was supplemented with desk research and a literature review of the existing body of work in this area. We used existing research to gather examples of best practice in gender-focused place-based systems change.

Soft Systems Methodology

We drew on Soft Systems Methodology⁹ to interrogate our findings and synthesise the insights from the interviews and desk research. Soft Systems methodologies are commonly recognised as a valuable approach to understand complex social, health and community issues. The main approaches used were:

- Rich pictures¹⁰, to bring to light views and perspectives which often go unnoticed or acknowledged by different services or commissioners and by women themselves, but which impact on how decisions are taken or responded to; and
- Causal Loop Analysis¹¹ to identify why there are recurrences of certain scenarios which are in opposition to the intended outcomes of the intervention/system.

9 Forrester, J. W. (1997). Industrial dynamics. *Journal of the Operational Research Society*, 48(10)

10 Checkland.P *Systems thinking, systems practice*, J. Wiley, 1981

11 Senge.P.M.*The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization*, Doubless Business, 1992

Chapter 1: The case for change

“How decisions are made, how services are commissioned, how society is structured - gender is just invisible. It’s only mentioned in terms of victimhood.”

Women’s service provider

A growing body of evidence shows women’s services can lead to improved health outcomes, reduced reoffending, and gaining and maintaining employment and stable housing. These outcomes have a positive impact on women with multiple disadvantage and their children. Estimated savings for every £1 invested vary from £3.44 - £6.65 saved over a one-year period, to £3.85 - £11 for every £1 invested over a five-year period, and £14 for every £1 invested over a ten year period.¹² In this chapter, we present the broader case for change and conclude with a deeper discussion of cost benefit analyses.

Gender and multiple disadvantage: why it matters

Historically, little work has been done to understand the gendered dimensions of ‘multiple disadvantage’. In fact, the very way it is defined can be problematic. Counting ‘multiple disadvantage’ by looking at the intersection of homelessness, substance misuse and

offending makes it look like a very male problem. But by looking instead at the intersection of homelessness, gender-based violence and mental health, multiple disadvantage also becomes a female issue.¹³

This invisibility has obscured the fact that women experiencing multiple disadvantage face a distinctive and challenging set of issues by virtue of their gender, and that other aspects of their identity can compound this. Whichever way we look at this group of women, violence is a major factor in their lives, and specifically gender-based violence. One in four women are likely to experience some form of gender-based violence, and one in 20 women experience extensive physical and sexual abuse right across their lifetime as both

12 Please see page 18 for further discussion of these estimates

13 Bramley, G. and Fitzpatrick, S. with Edwards, J., Ford, D., Johnsen, S., Sosenko, F. and Watkins, D. (2015) Hard Edges: Mapping severe and multiple disadvantage. Lankelly Chase Foundation <https://lankellychase.org.uk/resources/publications/hard-edges/>

“Their numbers may appear to be smaller, and their issues can be so much bigger.”

Women’s service provider

children and adults.¹⁴ A history of abuse and violence is correlated to a host of other factors, including homelessness and substance misuse, and mental health issues, a topic we explore in greater depth later on in this report.

Women’s trajectories are also very different to men’s. Women are more likely to show up in mental health or children’s services, rather than the justice system, or drug and alcohol services. They are more likely to enter services later, with very high needs, having stayed invisible to services for longer.¹⁵ This is often driven by a fear of losing children, or because they are trapped in a situation where violence makes it harder to escape. Once women present to a service they are more likely to bring more entrenched and complex issues.¹⁶

Social attitudes towards women, and gendered power relations, still deeply affect the lives of women experiencing multiple disadvantage, through shaping

societal responses to the difficulties they face. Discrimination and disadvantage can also be compounded and multiplied for particular groups, such as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women (BAME). Women who transgress social norms are treated differently because of their gender. This can manifest itself in harsher sentences for equivalent crimes; it can also show up as a form of paternalism where women are seen as less capable of making decisions about their own lives. These unhelpful gendered ways of responding to women that focus on a woman’s ‘badness’ or ‘weakness’ fail to take account of what these women really share: neglect in childhood, early or prolonged exposure to violence and abuse, early loss – and negative experiences of agencies trying to help.

14 Scott, S. and McManus, S. (2016) Hidden Hurt – violence, abuse, and disadvantage in the lives of women. Agenda <https://weare-agenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Hidden-Hurt-full-report1.pdf>

15 Hutchinson, S., Page, A. and Sample, E. (2014) Rebuilding Shattered Lives: Getting the right help at the right time to women who are homeless or at risk <https://www.mungos.org/publication/rebuilding-shattered-lives-final-report/>

16 Hutchinson, S., Page, A. and Sample, E., *ibid.*

“The journey to where they are is symptomatic of wider social attitudes, which are toxic.”

Commissioning manager

The current system is failing women experiencing multiple disadvantage

There are wider beliefs in play that ‘equality’ means men and women should be treated the same, with access to the same services. But there is no evidence that equal treatment leads to equal outcomes. Instead the evidence shows the vital role that gender-specific services can play in supporting women and helping them to move on in life.¹⁷

This widespread failure to recognise the importance of gender-specific services has led to very patchy provision for women experiencing the most pressing needs across the country. For example, the overwhelming majority of substance misuse services in the UK are mixed gender services, and only half of local authorities report having women-specific substance misuse services, the majority of which are aimed at women in the perinatal period or are delivered within a generic service. Mental health support for women is often reserved for

ante/post-natal women. Services for LGBTQI women, those with a physical or learning disability, who are refugees or asylums seekers, are particularly limited. And whilst two thirds of local authorities report having specialist support in place for women in the criminal justice system, this offers no indication about the level of support provided nor the capacity of a service.¹⁸

Cuts are exacerbating this situation. Local authorities had their government funding cut by 50% between 2010/11 and 2017/18.¹⁹ Three quarters of the councils in England reduced the amount they spend on refugees between 2010 and 2017.²⁰ Nearly a third of local authority funding for domestic violence and abuse was cut between 2010/11 and 2011/12, with the most significant cuts to the smallest organisations.²¹ Mental

17 AVA and Agenda (2017) The core components of a gender sensitive service for women experiencing multiple disadvantage: A review of the literature <https://weareagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Mapping-the-Maze-Literature-Review-Full-updated.pdf>; Women’s Resource Centre (2007) Why Women Only? The value and benefit of by women, for women services <https://thewomensresourcecentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/whywomenonly.pdf>; Carroll, N. and Grant, C. (2014) Showcasing Women Centred Solutions: Women Centred Working. <http://www.womencentredworking.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/WCW-A4.pdf> Hutchinson, S., Page, A. and Sample, E., *ibid*.

18 AVA and Agenda (2017) Mapping the Maze: Services for women experiencing multiple disadvantage in England and Wales <https://www.mappingthemaze.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Mapping-the-Maze-final-report-for-publication.pdf>

19 National Audit Office (2018) Financial sustainability of local authorities 2018 <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/financial-sustainability-of-local-authorities-2018/>

20 Buchan, L. (2017) Article: “Women’s refuge budgets slashed by nearly a quarter over past seven years”, The Independent <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/women-refuge-budget-cut-quarter-domestic-violence-victims-children-support-a8003066.html>

21 Towers, J. and Walby, S. (2012) Measuring the impact of cuts in public expenditure on the provision of services to prevent violence against women and girls. Trust for London <https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/publications/measuring-impact-cuts-public-expenditure-provision-services-prevent-violence-against-women-and-girls/>

health trusts in England had their funding cut by £150m in the four years to 2017²², while instances of poor quality care have increased.²³ There is also evidence of greater insecurity and reduced services in the voluntary sector, with women's organisations and specialists such as those providing services to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women particularly affected. An EHRC study found those organisations most at risk were those offering holistic services capable of reaching the most disadvantaged women.²⁴

The potential of place-based approaches to systems change

From the Policy Action Teams of the late 1990s, to the Total Place initiative of 2008/9, from the Modernising Government White Paper of 1999, to the latest attempts to integrate health and social care, there's a long history of attempts to create joined up approaches in localities that bring together government, civil society, citizens, as well as businesses and foundations, to achieve change. Whole reports have been written about the history of place-based approaches.²⁵

22 Hutchinson, S. (2017) Article: "Unexpected mental health deaths up 50% in three years", BBC Online <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-38852420>

23 Gilbert, H. (2015) Mental health under pressure. King's Fund <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/mental-health-under-pressure>

24 Hirst, A. and Rinne, S. (2012) The impact of changes in commissioning and funding on women-only services: Equality and Human Rights Commission <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research-report-86-the-impact-of-changes-in-commissioning-and-funding-on-women-only-services.pdf>

25 Nabatu, H. and Evans, A. (2017). Lankelly Chase | Historical review of place based approaches. <https://lankellychase.org.uk/resources/publications/historical-review-of-place-based-approaches/> [Accessed 9 Jun. 2018]

The core elements of effective place-based systems change*

- A shared vision for the area, developed in collaboration with a range of stakeholders including the community, grounded in reality and evidence-based, but focused on the future, which in turn defines the purpose of the work.
- Governance structures that are designed to support collaboration and cross-sector working, alongside digital infrastructure, data sharing and technology that does the same.
- A focus on commissioning for social as well as economic value, bringing all the key players around the table.
- An aligned approach to defining and measuring impact.
- A defined and ongoing task of building relationships, trust and a culture of collaboration and learning, that is shaped by strong, accountable system leadership.

* Wilson, S., Casebourne, J., Clarke, M. and Davison, N. (2015). Attempts to join up public services: timeline. The Institute for Government. <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/attempts-join-public-services-timeline> [Accessed 9 Jun. 2018].

There are pioneering public servants, charitable foundations and charities that are working together on practical place-based work to put these ideas into action. Wigan, for example, is taking a whole-system approach to redesigning front line children's services, bringing together social care, education and a host of other services to better support children in the area.²⁶ Plymouth is experimenting with taking a life-time approach to service provision by integrating funds from cradle to grave.²⁷ Oldham has for a long time been involved in pioneering work to put people in charge of their care, and more recently Barking and Dagenham are attempting a community-led participation approach to economic renewal on a major scale.²⁸ The Big Lottery Fund has created a £112 million fund to support projects focused on multiple and complex needs²⁹, and the Lankelly Chase Foundation has set up a place-based systems change programme of work.³⁰

Social and financial benefits

Though it is hard to quantify the efficacy of place-based systems change (whether gender-focused or not)³¹, there are clear social benefits. Evaluations point to improved health outcomes³², such as reductions in substance misuse and in mental health symptoms.³³ Women offenders are less likely to reoffend after their involvement with such systems.³⁴ Improvements in health outcomes and reoffending then have positive impacts in other spheres, such as gaining and maintaining employment and stable housing.

The reduction in reoffending also has positive impacts on the children of women with multiple disadvantage. Women's imprisonment very often results in children being separated from their mothers and, in many cases, going into care.³⁵ Evidence suggests that this causes significant long-term harm to the child. These children are more likely

26 Cottam, H. (2018) Radical Help: How We Can Remake Relationships Between Us and Transform The Welfare State

27 Wallace, G. (2017) Transformational change and complex needs. A Whole New World Conference <https://campus.recap.ncl.ac.uk/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=df91e-bad-4f28-4a8b-a24a-84b4137f90d3>

28 Britton, T. (2017) Article: "Ground-breaking £6.4m initiative to create largest ever participatory project in Barking and Dagenham", Participatory City <http://www.participatorycity.org/blog/2017/7/23/eighbourhoods-made-by-everyone-for-everyone-multimillion-pound-initiative-set-to-launch-in-barking-and-dagenham-this-year>

29 Big Lottery Fund website: Fulfilling Lives: Supporting people with multiple needs <https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/global-content/programmes/england/multiple-and-complex-needs>

30 Lankelly Chase's Place action inquiry <https://lankellychase.org.uk/our-work/place/>

31 Moore, T. G. and Fry, R. (2011) Place-based approaches to child and family services: A literature review. Murdoch Children's Research Institute and The Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Community Child Health. https://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccch/Place_based_services_literature_review.pdf

32 Kinsella, R., O'Keeffe, C., Lowthain, J., Clarke, B. and Ellison, M. (2015) Evaluation of the Whole System Approach for Women Offenders <http://www.mmuperu.co.uk/publications/evaluation-of-the-whole-system-approach-for-women-offenders-executive-summa>

33 Burcu, O. (2017) An evaluative report on the Mental Health & Therapeutic Services. Anawim <http://www.anawim.co.uk/documents/MH%20report%202017%20final%20pdf%20LOW.pdf>

34 *ibid*; Kinsella, R., O'Keeffe, C., Lowthain, J., Clarke, B. and Ellison, M. (2015) Evaluation of the Whole System Approach for Women Offenders <http://www.mmuperu.co.uk/publications/evaluation-of-the-whole-system-approach-for-women-offenders-executive-summa>

35 Minson, S. (2017) Briefing Paper: The Impact of Maternal Imprisonment upon a Child's Wellbeing and Their Relationship with Their Mother: Findings from 'Who Cares? Analysing the Place of Children in Maternal Sentencing Decisions in England and Wales'. Social Science Research Network https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3067653

to stay out of education, employment or training for sustained periods and more likely to develop mental ill health than those of the general population.³⁶ This harm can then perpetuate through generations.³⁷ Reduced reoffending and imprisonment breaks these damaging cycles.

These improved outcomes translate into financial benefits to the state. Cost benefit analyses for gender-focused whole systems approaches have focused on women's interactions with the criminal justice system. These analyses show clear financial benefits.

The Greater Manchester Whole System Approach for Women Offenders found that £3.85 is saved for every £1 invested in the project; equivalent to a saving of £10 million over five years. Around a third of these fiscal benefits fall to the local authority.³⁸ This analysis takes into account eight outcome areas: mental health, emotional well-being, alcohol dependency, drug dependency, homelessness, offending, custodial sentences and children in care. nef took into account a broader range of potential outcomes and estimated that £14 worth

of social value is generated over a ten-year period for every £1 invested in support-focused alternatives to prison for women offenders, or more than £100 million.³⁹ This analysis includes outcomes related to criminal justice, social services, health, employment, housing, and children in care.

Focusing on women's centres/ organisations, nef found that social return on investment of between £3.44 and £6.65 for every £1 invested in a one-year period. Outcomes included in the analysis are selected elements of housing, health and criminal justice.⁴⁰ Earlier analysis by nef found that a network of support and supervision centres for non-violent women offenders would produce savings of around £10,000 per female offender.⁴¹

36 Lawlor, E., Nicholls, J. and Sanfilippo, L. (2008) *Unlocking Value*. London: nef
<https://neweconomics.org/2008/11/unlocking-value>

37 Minson, S. (2017) *Briefing Paper: The Impact of Maternal Imprisonment upon a Child's Wellbeing and Their Relationship with Their Mother: Findings from 'Who Cares? Analysing the Place of Children in Maternal Sentencing Decisions in England and Wales'*. Social Science Research Network https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3067653

38 Greater Manchester Combined Authority (2017) *Greater Manchester Whole System Approach for Female offenders: Cost Benefit Analysis* (unpublished); Kinsella, R., O'Keeffe, C., Lowthain, J., Clarke, B. and Ellison, M. (2015) *Evaluation of the Whole System Approach for Women Offenders* <http://www.mmuperu.co.uk/publications/evaluation-of-the-whole-system-approach-for-women-of-fenders-executive-summa>

39 Lawlor, E., Nicholls, J. and Sanfilippo, L. (2008) *Unlocking Value*. London: nef
<https://neweconomics.org/2008/11/unlocking-value>

40 Nicholles, N. and Whitehead, S. (2012) *Women's Community Services: A Wise Commission*. Nef https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/1136a324a128c3fce6_idm6y15h9.pdf

41 Nef (2007) *Measuring what Matters: women and criminal justice*. Interim briefing 2007 for the Prison Reform Trust. London: nef. <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/nef%20measuring%20what%20matters%20women%20in%20the%20criminal%20justice%20system.pdf>

Taking into account a broader range of outcomes, modelling by Revolving Doors focusing on women offenders shows that an investment of £18 million per year in women's centres could save almost £1 billion over five years - a saving of £11 for every £1 invested.⁴² This analysis takes into account outcomes across housing, criminal justice, employment and income support, some aspects of health, and the costs of children in care.

Anawim Women's Centre, a voluntary sector organisation in Birmingham providing support and services to disadvantaged women with multiple and complex needs, estimate that on average £1 spent by Anawim saves the public service between £7 and £13.⁴³ This analysis takes into account criminal justice and health outcomes only. Other analyses have also pointed to the financial and social benefits of place-based approaches for women⁴⁴, and for children⁴⁵.

Women facing multiple disadvantage are amongst the most at-risk and excluded in society, facing complex and overlapping problems. We know that the way current services are configured do not work for this group. Specialist services are few and far between, and are struggling for funding. Gender is rarely considered in service design, commissioning or delivery. For all these reasons, there is a case for taking a gendered approach to place-based systems change, and the remainder of this report explores what that might look like in practice.

42 Page, A. (2011) Counting the Cost: The financial impact of supporting women with multiple needs in the criminal justice system – Findings from Revolving Doors Agency's women-specific Financial Analysis Model http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/file/1793/download?token=_uhAj6qr

43 Burcu, O. (2017) An evaluative report on the Mental Health & Therapeutic Services. Anawim <http://www.anawim.co.uk/documents/MH%20report%202017%20final%20pdf%20LOW.pdf>

44 For example, see: Carroll, N. and Grant, C. (2014) Showcasing Women Centred Solutions: Women Centred Working. <http://www.womencentredworking.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/WCW-A4.pdf>

45 For example, see: Statham, J. (2011) A review of international evidence on interagency working, to inform the development of Children's Services Committees in Ireland. Department of Children and Youth Affairs <https://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/publications/wtfchildren.pdf>; Moore, T.G., McHugh-Dillon, H., Bull, K., Fry, R., Laidlaw, B., & West, S. (2014). The evidence: what we know about place-based approaches to support children's wellbeing. Parkville, Victoria: Murdoch Childrens Research Institute and The Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Community Child Health. https://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccch/CCCH_Collaborate_for_Children_Report_The_Evidence_Nov2014.pdf

Chapter 2: What's getting in the way?

“Some of the services and what they are expect of me are just impossible. I feel like I am being set up to fail all the time.”

Woman experiencing multiple disadvantage

Before setting out some principles for what place-based systems change for women facing multiple disadvantage could look like, this chapter summarises the insights from the wide range of interviews and workshops we conducted as part of this work. Taken together these insights paint a picture of frustration and missed opportunities. They underline how there is an uneven understanding of the value of place-based approaches, and limited buy-in to the potential of systems change work.

The areas we highlight here show the ways in which current thinking, structures, cultures and working practices are getting in the way of achieving meaningful change for women experiencing multiple disadvantage. They take account of the conscious and explicit barriers and challenges that people told us about, as well as the unconscious and more hidden factors in play.

“People are talking about systems change a lot but I think it is a word people are throwing around and I am not sure anyone has really tried to define it together.”

Women’s sector practitioner

A limited understanding of ‘systems change’ and what it looks like in practice

There are multiple views about the root cause underlying the behaviours exhibited by women experiencing multiple disadvantage, and the most appropriate way of tackling the issues they face. Different services across an area can expend a lot of energy trying to win the arguments about whose perspective is right. Children’s services might want to provide more support for the families, but housing services might want to evict them for “anti-social behaviour”. Drug services might want to engage mental health professionals to address the trauma causing the drug taking in the first place, but mental health providers might refuse to accept a referral until the woman is no longer using drugs.

There is a risk that these disagreements create inaction, or a worsening of the situation, at great cost to the very women that these services should be seeking to support. These different perspectives can make it almost impossible to build consensus around the purpose of any place-based systems change work, which in turn can dilute and dissipate energy for change.

“There is no shared understanding of what systems change is [for women experiencing multiple disadvantage] or what it looks like.”

Women’s sector practitioner

“The sector isn’t aligned.”

Women’s sector practitioner

“I really just need someone in one place, in one go. If you have children, you can’t just run around. It’s just impossible. If you’re trying to work and you’re trying to take care of your children, and do everything yourself, you just really need one person to call.”

Woman experiencing multiple disadvantage

Data is often gender blind and service focused

The way in which localities gather and analyse data is very mixed. Some have whole teams of analysts dedicated to the task; others have one person for whom this is a small part of their role. When it comes to disaggregating by gender, practice is patchy, and certainly not routine. Being able to analyse data by both gender and other identity characteristics is even less common. For example, one commissioner told us that they don’t disaggregate because their bosses hadn’t told them to; another argued that they didn’t need to as they already commission a women-only service, so they were confident disadvantaged women were being catered for.

Gender bias within the data is also a challenge. Looking at the data, it would appear that the majority of severe and

multiple disadvantage is identified among men; however this is likely to be a symptom of failing to take account of gender in data collection, rather than a reflection of reality.⁴⁶ This gender bias leaves many women uncounted.

When data is collected about a specific service, it doesn’t offer any insight about the people not accessing that service. Take, for example, homelessness data. Women are less likely to be found in street homeless figures, and they are less likely to stay in hostels. This is for a range of reasons including the fact that women who sleep rough are more likely to hide themselves away because of fears for their safety; they are more likely to go to lengths such as ‘survival sex’ or forming or staying in unwanted relationships to avoid sleeping on the streets; and they are less likely to enter male-dominated

46 Bramley, G. and Fitzpatrick, S. with Edwards, J., Ford, D., Johnsen, S., Sosenko, F. and Watkins, D. (2015) Hard Edges: Mapping severe and multiple disadvantage. Lankily Chase Foundation <https://lankellychase.org.uk/resources/publications/hard-edges/>

“Commissioners are looking at data sets where women are under-reported. If women are not showing up at places because they are male environments then they are not represented. Services are commissioned and designed based on what is there, without asking who isn’t here, who and what is missing in the data?”

Commissioning manager

hostels - all of which mean they are less likely to show up in formal statistics as they are currently collected.

Data and its analysis can often be useful for multiple organisations or across various teams within a local authority. Yet data sharing at a local government level remains patchy.⁴⁷ Disaggregating data by gender, focusing on who isn’t showing up in the figures as well as who is, and sharing data make it more likely that a local area will ‘see’ and be able to support women experiencing multiple disadvantage. Without this kind of skilled work, we saw how hard it was for areas to build powerful business cases for organising services and support differently.

Commissioning doesn’t work with the grain of women’s lives

Women describe their recovery as a winding path, unpredictable and hard to complete within a fixed timeframe. The challenges women face as services try to support them are multiple, non-linear

and interconnected. Issues interact in unpredictable ways to create changes that are hard to foresee. Yet most commissioners and funders are looking for measurable change that has been delivered or achieved - often in timeframes as short as one or two years. Incremental steps that could represent a person moving on with their lives risk being dismissed by commissioners - they are too small to measure or quantify cost savings against.

“I don’t know what good looks like. I find that a really hard question. It’s not one I’ve been asked before.”

Woman experiencing multiple disadvantage

47 Symons, T. (2016) Datavores of Local Government: Using data to make services more personalised, effective and efficient. Nesta https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/local_datavores_discussion_paper-july-2016.pdf

“The time frames are an issue. You might get something commissioned for a one year contract but the nature of women’s issues are long term and complex.”

Commissioning manager

This mismatch is even more pronounced because of the sheer number of outcomes service commissioners are trying to measure in relation to this group – across housing, criminal justice, community safety and mental health. Many of these outcomes are not particularly good indicators of success (or otherwise) for women experiencing multiple disadvantage. The justice system’s focus on defining people as either victims or perpetrators, or the housing system’s interest in the number of people able to maintain tenancies or pay council tax are examples of outcomes that might make sense for the mainstream, but do not necessarily work for this group of women.

are now questioning whether that is always the right measure of success, particularly for women experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Mental health services aren’t sufficiently engaged in supporting women

We identified a specific issue around the way mental health and other services interact to support women experiencing multiple disadvantage. During this project we heard frequently about how little appropriate mental health provision is available to women experiencing multiple disadvantage.

“Within the domestic abuse world there is conflict about what our messages are. We all have different opinions and commissioners don’t know who to listen to.”

Women’s sector practitioner

As this comment suggests, there are tensions between practitioners about what ‘good’ looks like for women experiencing multiple disadvantage. For example, in domestic abuse, historically ‘leaving the perpetrator’ has been seen as a good outcome, but some experts

Access, thresholds, waiting lists and reduced services combine to make it very difficult for women needing support. Adult mental health services are narrowly defined, with very high thresholds: and as one professional

said, “a lot of barriers are created to protect services from people.” Severely traumatised women are often offered short courses of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy which do little to help them address the deep rooted trauma they have experienced. There are few services which work with complex trauma and many of those that have existed historically have been or are being cut. Professionals in both the public sector

layer upon layer of reorganisation, makes it very hard for mental health professionals to recognise the financial value, let alone the wider social value, of working together in new ways to support women experiencing multiple disadvantage. Unpacking the relationships and accountabilities between regionally-commissioned mental health services, and other locally commissioned services such

“I’m not saying the answer is necessarily more mental health provision or more availability. We need a more fundamental shift in how it is delivered. What we see locally is a few very skilled people desperate to work with us in new ways, but they are in an environment and structures which are totally unsuitable for supporting the people they are there to serve.”

Women’s service manager

and voluntary sector also told us that the culture and structure of mental health provision makes it very hard to bring them into projects designed to support women experiencing multiple disadvantage in more systemic ways. Mental health providers are seen to have rigid requirements - “it’s a very black-and-white view of the world” - for example around women attending appointments on time, and without having used substances - that simply aren’t appropriate for this group of women.

Furthermore, a labyrinthine system of commissioning that operates at multiple levels, regional and local, and reflects

as community support, is almost impossible, even for seasoned professionals.

This picture is troubling given what we know about the mental health needs of women experiencing multiple disadvantage. As a sector mental health should be leading the way in designing new ways of supporting this group. Instead, it often appears to be disengaged from women, distant from other services supporting this group and unable to take a more holistic view of impact.

The voluntary sector plays a key role but it is vulnerable

The voluntary sector loomed large in all our interviews about how to achieve systems change that better supports women experiencing multiple disadvantage. Commissioners saw these organisations as vital gateways to hidden women who might otherwise remain invisible. Through their work, voluntary organisations are perceived to be more able to build the kind of relationships that women say are important – where there’s time to build trust, and connection, sometimes through shared experience.

There was another more challenging theme we heard in our interviews – of insecurity leading to a culture of survival rather than collaboration. In a scramble to win scarce resources, some interviewees suggested voluntary organisations can lose sight of their priorities, finding it harder to collaborate. The spectre of decommissioning can loom large and encourage a culture of overclaiming organisational impact and leaving little space for more reflective work about successes and failures.

“You cannot have a relational model driven only by the public sector.”

Women’s sector practitioner

“You go a tremendous amount of effort to build relationships, and then the bastards leave, not only do you need to start again, but the new people feel they need to distinguish themselves”

Women’s sector practitioner

This includes those with particular specialisms, including services that provide culturally specific support to women from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women (BAME), which are often preferred and trusted by BAME women.⁴⁸

The sense that survival mattered more than collaboration did not only exist in the public sector’s perception of the voluntary sector. In fact, the feeling was mutual. Voluntary sector organisations described public sector organisations distracted from the business of supporting people to thrive by endless reorganisations and ever diminishing

48 Women’s Resource Centre (2015) Women’s organisations; the ‘net beneath the net’; p.4

resources. Both sectors complained of high staff turnover, meaning that relationships had to be continuously made and re-made - a deeply frustrating situation.

The need for gender influenced 'systems leadership' is not recognised

We identified two themes around leadership. First, it can be very powerful to have women in hierarchical positions of power as sponsors of this kind of work, particularly when those women have experienced some of the issues themselves. This must include diverse groups of women, reflecting the demographics of the community and women who systems are intended to support. Across public life, time and again we see how women's representation drives structural changes in policies such as childcare, equal pay and parental rights. Crucially, having women at the decision-making table has an impact on how money is spent. This is not to diminish the power of work being undertaken by men in this field - but it is to note that representation matters in and of itself.

Second, we heard about the importance of a more distributed kind of leadership.⁴⁹ This leadership wasn't necessarily from a position of traditional authority within the hierarchy. Instead, it was a form of leadership defined by leading across services and sectors, and focused on preparing the whole system

for different ways of working. These kinds of 'system leaders' are well placed to spot opportunities for collaborations and identify blockers to that happening. They are skilled listeners and connectors, able to bridge the different cultures and practices of sectors and services. They are able to convene and to advocate - and people want to listen to them.

This emerging role appeared to be crucially important in systems change success stories, and yet it is not an easily recognised role with a clearly defined job description; nor is it a set of skills recognised by HR or pay teams in local authorities. The people in the roles appeared to need high levels of resilience and entrepreneurialism, combined with a willingness to flex the rules and sometimes take a risk. Few places seem to be embracing these roles, and thinking about how the people undertaking them can be better supported, and recognised, for the value that they are creating.

More work is needed to explore and define this 'systems facilitation' role, how it could be configured⁵⁰, and the part it might play in sustaining real change.

49 Heifetz, R. A., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world.

50 For example, in Plymouth, this is a role played by a group (the Systems Optimisation Group)

“My work often feels invisible, nobody knows or understands quite what I am doing. In fact every day I am keeping our work at the forefront of people’s minds, especially commissioners, and knitting together all these relationships around our work that keep it buoyant and visible.”

Women’s sector practitioner

There are significant cultural factors that are getting in the way of change

According to a recent survey conducted by the Public Service Transformation Academy, the most significant barrier to public service transformation is cultural issues (81%), such as disengagement, change fatigue and ineffectual leadership.⁵¹

In other words, it is the issues that have slipped below an organisation’s radar that play the biggest role in blocking change. Individual mindsets and group behaviours have an impact on the way an organisation functions, and yet frequently they remain unconscious and unspoken.⁵² These ‘below the surface’ factors weren’t the things people talked to us about - instead we observed them - though people found them easy enough to recognise when we named them. The issues outlined here could be among the most difficult

factors to address by virtue of their subtle and indirect influence on the way commissioners think and the way organisational cultures grow.

First, we saw how the system conspires to focus on a presenting risk - such as a child at risk, or the potential for a crime to be committed - rather than the woman herself and the longer-term traumas and challenges with which she is dealing. There are powerful feedback loops⁵³ that sustain this focus on risk, which are particularly powerful when gender is compounded by cultural prejudice and racism. Our legal system is weighted towards children more than mothers. Political pressures and social expectations are reinforced by concerns about any immediate risk to a child’s wellbeing, as well as a fear of trauma being passed on to the next generation.

Second, we identified a series of barriers that got in the way of services building positive relationships with women, even when they knew that a trusting, positive relationship was the foundation of a woman being able to move forward with

51 Public service: state of transformation. 2018 report from the Public Service Transformation Academy <https://www.publicservicetransformation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/public-service-state-of-transformation-2018-report-from-the-public-service-transformation-academy-e-version.pdf>

52 Huffington, C., Armstrong, D., Halton, W., Hoyle, L. and Pooley, J. (2007) Working below the surface: The emotional life of contemporary organizations. Karnac

53 Feedback loops are a core concept in systems approaches. Systems practitioners look for ‘reinforcing loops’ and ‘balancing loops’ – in other words those actions and attitudes which serve to reinforce one another, which make it very hard to change the status quo. See methodology section for more information about systems thinking.

her life. A short-term focus on narrowly defined outcomes made it very difficult for public sector organisations to create the space needed to nurture these kinds of relationships. When a service fails to build such relationships, it increases the chances of the woman herself choosing to disengage. In turn, that diminishes commissioners' sense of what's possible, which ultimately impacts on funding decisions as the woman begins to be seen as a "hopeless case" - an "antisocial tenant", a "bad mother", an "unreliable witness".

And finally we saw how professionals often unconsciously come to mirror the experiences of the women themselves. In systems where traumatised women are judged and deprived of agency it is perhaps not that surprising that they will feel angry, anxious, stressed, helpless and hopeless. And it is perhaps not surprising that these feelings can rub off on professionals. This is manifested in several ways. It can trigger trauma in staff members themselves. It can cause staff members to withdraw, to focus on anything other than the issue itself. And it can also cause staff to feel the very same feelings of the women - anger, fatigue, hopelessness - effectively replicating them and reflecting them back.

Where present, these 'below the surface' patterns reduced expectations for change, reduced the capacity of organisations to sustain relationships with women, and made it harder for commissioners to justify what they perceived as high levels of spending on the group of women because of the absence of hope and the need to tackle immediate presenting risks rather than longer-term trauma. Far from seeing this work as worth the investment for the long-term future of the woman and any children present, these 'below the surface' factors led to commissioners seeing this work as expensive work that was unlikely to yield results.

Chapter 3: Five principles for systems change - making the difference for women experiencing multiple disadvantage

“People know what I’ve been through. I know that they help others who have been through what I have. I don’t have to keep telling my story over and over.”

Woman experiencing multiple disadvantage

“I can see people who are dressed like me, who look like me. That’s reassuring because everywhere else I usually get judged.”

Woman experiencing multiple disadvantage

Women’s lives exist outside of public services and that needs to be the starting point of any place-based system change work. Women are not defined by the services they use. They don’t ‘belong’ to particular service as clients. Rather, they are women, dealing with a complicated set of issues like mental health and homelessness, who may or may not be accessing services to support them. The ways in which these services interact, and the way in which they connect with a woman’s wider life, is what produces the outcome. We need to shift our mindset from services to women.

This shift in mindset is illustrated by asking two different questions. First

– ‘how can we improve our current services for women experiencing multiple disadvantage?’. The answer to this would probably include making them more trauma-informed, allowing time, focusing on relationships and creating safe women-only spaces. The second question is a more open one: ‘how can all women, including the most disadvantaged, thrive in our community?’ and this in turn opens up a wider range of possible answers. It invites more people in to consider the question, and offers up more power to other players beyond services alone. It brings a place together and helps them to define their intent in relation to the systems change they want to see for that local area.

Posing the second question rather than the first also helps many different actors in an area to understand that they have a part to play in this work. We picked up a tendency to assume that this group of women are catered for through the commissioning of women-only services. But those areas focusing on the second question had a more thoughtful response, recognising that gender-neutral and gender specific services had a part to play. They saw the crucial importance of specialist services and engaging mainstream services, particularly those in housing and education, as that is where women so often show up.

complex needs, and creating the capacity at multiple points in the system to continue doing that over time.

If starting with women themselves is the foundation of good place-based systems change, we have identified five further principles that we think have a particular importance for women experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Some of these principles are reflected in the wider place-based systems change literature; in these cases we bring a gendered lens to bear. Others are more distinctive. After each principle there are a set of questions designed to help

“I don’t have any stability, so coming here gives me one consistent thing to do and to hold on to.”

Woman experiencing multiple disadvantage

“Everything around me is chaotic. It’s hard for me to tick boxes and fit in with how things are done. My life isn’t like that and so straight away I feel like I am doing things wrong.”

Woman experiencing multiple disadvantage

Starting with women and where they are needs to be at the heart of any work to achieve systems change in a local area. They need to be involved in defining the goal of any systems change work, the process of doing that work, and the leadership that oversees it. It means working with the widest possible range of women, including those experiencing

local areas to reflect on the progress they are making. We hope they are a spur to people up and down the country who are trying to break the cycle of failing women experiencing multiple disadvantage.

1: Build a shared understanding of the population of women experiencing multiple disadvantage

Skilful use of data takes account of the shortcomings outlined in Chapter 2 when it comes to analysing gender and multiple disadvantage. Better technology has opened up digitally-enabled ways of gathering and sharing intelligence across a system. Where it's done well, data is supplemented by careful use of qualitative data and insight. For example, the homelessness team in Manchester identified a growth in young women experiencing homelessness through storytelling and story gathering work – long before these women showed up in official data. This team understood that data only ever presents a partial picture, and doesn't say anything about the people missing from it.

We heard how powerful this kind of qualitative insight can be, particularly when paired with careful quantitative analysis. Not only does this use of data help people to put themselves in the shoes of those experiencing disadvantage, but it also can provide a very powerful, stark call to action that evokes an emotional as well as rational response. By creating a detailed picture of the women's lives, the need for change can be laid bare in a way that's hard to ignore or forget.

Using data well is not only a way of monitoring progress. It can provoke great questions as well as answering them. It can help people to shift perspectives and look at things

differently to gain new insight. And, importantly, it can reduce the trauma women experience of having to tell their stories again and again.

For example, Greater Manchester's Whole System Approach for Women Offenders brought together a wide coalition of organisations (which have now become the [Greater Manchester Women's Support Alliance](#)) to co-produce a system that would work for women offenders using funds gathered from multiple existing pots and new streams. The local authority, which brought together this coalition, built a convincing case for the work through the smart use of data, evidencing the scale and breadth of the social networks of which the women offenders were at the centre.

Questions for local areas to reflect on:

- Are available datasets being systematically and regularly disaggregated by gender, ethnicity and age and other important demographic measures?
- Are you asking what and who the data omits, as well as what it shows?
- How are you sharing data across services, and sectors? Have you addressed any governance issues that are limiting opportunities to share insight? Are data sharing agreements in place?
- Are you using technology to support data sharing in the best possible way?

- Do you systematically gather and make use of the voices of women experiencing multiple disadvantage to inform strategic and commissioning decisions?
- Are you using a range of quantitative and qualitative methodologies to build your insight?
- Does your local authority use gender impact assessments, or gender budgeting tools, to evaluate the likely impact of decisions on women?

2: Outcomes are attached to the system and defined by and with women, not for them

The importance attached to measurable outcomes has evolved over the years. Where they were front and centre in the world of 'new public management' and delivery units in the early 2000s, some are now questioning whether they have a place at all in place-based systems change work. For example, a study in 2016 of Outcomes-Based Commissioning showed that as an approach it only achieved improvements in narrow service silos, rather than bringing about any change in 'real-life' outcomes defined by people.⁵⁴

"A great outcome is meeting the aspiration of the individual."

Commissioning manager

"They take the time here to help me find what I need. Nothing is forced upon me. I feel like it's on my terms and because it makes sense for me. I've been able to do things at my own pace. You can find your own pace and rhythm to heal."

Woman experiencing multiple disadvantage

⁵⁴ Tomkinson, E. (2016). Outcome-based contracting for human services. Evidence Base. 2016. 1-20. 10.21307/eb-2016-002.

Demos⁵⁵, Participle⁵⁶, and more recently ippr⁵⁷ and Collaborate⁵⁸ all argue that we are witnessing the emergence of a new paradigm, where outcomes are understood as the product of a system, not a service or particular intervention. Cause and effect in this paradigm are not linear: because a service does X, it does not mean it can claim credit solely for Y. Rather, there are a whole host of factors contributing to Y and whether it is achieved. In this paradigm, there is less of a place for metric-based performance management. Instead, trust, relationships, and learning become the driving forces of change.

Most areas would find it extremely politically challenging to do away with measurable outcomes altogether, all the more so in the current climate of retrenchment and austerity. And yet as we found in this project, the way outcomes shape commissioner and funder behaviour is problematic for achieving place-based systems change for women experiencing multiple disadvantage.

The challenge is to shift away from seeking outcomes from individual services, to understanding outcomes

as the product of a system. This system will certainly include public services, but it will also include the voluntary sector. Indeed, it will go even wider than that to include local businesses, social enterprises, neighbourhoods and of course, the women, their families and friends themselves. Each of these actors has a part to play in the outcomes that are created, and indeed the relationships between these actors are also vital to consider.

Culturally, it is easier to accept the role of some of these players than others. For example, while it may be commonly accepted that women should define their own outcomes within the women's sector, it is not always part of the wider picture. And even when women are asked what 'good' would look like for them, their answers are not treated as seriously as so-called objective measures of success. As one woman's service manager commented, *'our women's accounts of the value of our service are seen as the icing on the cake, a pat on the back to us, rather than the real hard evidence of the difference we've made.'*

This needs to change. Many of the people interviewed for this project talked about the importance of inviting the women themselves to define what good looks like, and this needs to be at the heart of effective place-based systems change work.

Outcomes belong to the system, not individual services, and the system is co-created by a whole host of players, including the women themselves.

55 Chapman, J. (2004) System Failure: Why governments must learn to think differently. Demos <https://www.demos.co.uk/files/systemfailure2.pdf>

56 Participle, (2008) Beveridge 4.0 http://www.participle.net/includes/downloader/MzExYWNjYWU3ZGZkMjQ5YmI0MjkxOTUxNGYtMjZmNmN2Fvy_Bkw5J5tvpI8s7ajaLKVGhIMHZCTHdsZGwzUGlQUm-JYVzMrb0dFdmxBVDJwc3Bxc2Y5dXEyRGg0OTA1VTkxT0VuVDhoV3FmZmFYXTNzN1lzR2dzRHRmNWorMVZIQTNPNUlvV0E9PQ

57 Muir, R. and Parker, I. (2014) Many to Many: how the relational state will transform public services. Institute for Public Policy Research <https://www.ippr.org/publications/many-to-many-how-the-relational-state-will-transform-public-services>

58 Davidson Knight, A., Lowe, T., Brossard, M. and Wilson, J. (2017) A whole new world: Funding and Commissioning in Complexity. Collaborate <https://collaboratecic.com/a-whole-new-world-funding-and-commissioning-in-complexity-12b6bdc2abd8>

Questions for local areas to reflect on:

- To what extent are diverse women's voices an integral part of service design and decision-making processes? Can you point to an example of where women's voices have changed something (if you can't, there's a chance their voices aren't being taken seriously enough)?
- Who defines what 'good' looks like? What would local politicians say? What would service commissioners say? What would voluntary sector partners say?
- Who determines the timeframe within which an outcome needs to be achieved? What would local politicians say? What would service commissioners say? What would voluntary sector partners say?
- Which service-level outcomes do not make sense for women experiencing multiple disadvantage? How will you address this?
- To what extent is there a culture of measuring cause and effect? What work is being done to raise awareness about the risks of unintended consequences from this way of thinking?

3: Services that work together, not just alongside one another

Even if each of the services in any given area is the 'gold standard' for women experiencing multiple disadvantage – trauma-informed, gender-focused, women-centred – without taking a systemic perspective, there is a danger that individual women get passported across multiple services, each doing a good job but fundamentally in isolation

from one another. At best this is exhausting and frustrating, but at worst, many women described how the task of telling and re-telling their stories became a source of trauma in itself.

“Each agency has to work beyond its natural perspective.”

Woman experiencing multiple disadvantage

Interviews revealed a very service-centric perspective. Little is known about where disadvantaged women are when they aren't accessing services. We asked professionals to map out the infrastructure in place to support disadvantaged women in their area and the complexity this exercise revealed underlined the extent to which services are still operating within their own world. In particular we noted how independently mental health services operated, and also the lack of connection between children's and adult services. Both of these are significant issues for women experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Taking that systemic view can be extremely challenging, and all the more so in an era of cuts. The tighter the budget lines get drawn, the more specialisms get focused, and the more professionals zone in on what they can do in their immediate sphere of influence.

“Commissioning tends to focus on a particular issue.. [for example] courts. But this is just one part of a woman’s experience and set of needs.”

Women’s service manager

“You need to turn it on its head and commission services based on people’s potential, thinking about the life course, prevention.”

Women’s sector practitioner

Organisations need to find ways of moving from a survival mindset to a growth mindset which puts greater value on collaboration.⁵⁹ This shift is particularly vital when it comes to supporting women experiencing multiple disadvantage, given the historical importance of the third sector in this field, and the limited resources the sector now has to work with. For example, in Blackburn, the council’s partnership with the voluntary sector enabled them to attract additional funding to the prototyping work they are doing around a Complex Cases Hub.

Part of this growth mindset is about recognising how each partner can help the other be the best they can be and play to their strengths. So for example, where the voluntary sector can build trust and relationships with women very effectively, the local authority can facilitate greater shared working through the provision of shared physical space

(an issue which is very important for a group of women who need safe places to go to), or a template for gathering gender-sensitive data to better measure impact.

Questions for local areas to reflect on:

- What are the barriers to services coming together and pooling funds? How can you overcome these?
- Are some services easier to engage than others? If so, what are the barriers preventing some services from engaging in systems change work in this field?
- Does the local authority make it easy to collaborate with the voluntary sector, including specialist providers - for example through supporting data collection, the provision of shared spaces, or through making it easy to put together joint bids?

59 Dweck, C. (2017) Mindset: Changing the way you think to fulfill your potential. Robinson

- Are there accessible spaces made available, where women can go to access a range of support? Are these spaces perceived to be desirable, convenient and safe? Does the local authority provide low or no rent options, or set-up grants for premises and equipment? Does it facilitate co-location?
- What incentives and disincentives can you identify in your local area for organisations to work together?
- How easy is it for the public sector and voluntary sector to share data and insight about women experiencing multiple disadvantage? How could you remove any barriers to this happening? Are steps being taken to address these barriers?

often show up during times of change. Most importantly, they foster collective leadership - building the capacity of others to learn and lead change, rather than fostering dependence of single charismatic individuals.⁶⁰

System leaders do three things really well. First, they challenge unhelpful stereotyping and cultures. They are skilled at seeing and revealing the system to others, and encouraging a more reflective conversation about what is and isn't working.

Second, system leaders are highly effective at encouraging people to move from addressing the immediate problem, to co-creating the future.⁶¹ Change only happens when it has an 'authorising environment' created by leaders that allow new approaches to emerge.⁶²

"My role is primarily about keeping the work we are doing visible to commissioners. I persistently show them what we are doing and keep in regular contact with them so they can't forget about this work."

Women's sector practitioner

4: Visible leadership at all levels of the system

Leadership, and in particular systems leadership, features in any study of what it takes to achieve place-based systems change. Systems leaders are skilled at holding open a space for new work to happen and for learning to take place. They help groups to resolve values-based conflicts that might otherwise get in the way of collaboration. They focus attention on the work that needs doing, rather than allowing people to deploy the work avoidance tactics that

Without that environment, the levels of perceived risk involved in trying to tackle such entrenched issues around women experiencing multiple disadvantage are simply too great for managers to take on.

60 Heifetz, *ibid.*

61 Senge, P., Hamilton, H. and Kania, J. (2015) Article: "The Dawn of System Leadership". Stanford Social Innovation Review https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_dawn_of_system_leadership

62 Moore, M. (1997) *Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government*

“You can’t only hear the lived experience voices, you can effect change a lot faster if you listen and make use of the voices in other parts of the systems too.”

Women’s sector practitioner

And third, the most successful systems leaders do not let ‘women’s issues’ become a closed shop, of women only talking to other women. They are not exclusive. Far from it: they play a vital convening role, making sure that it’s more than women in the room but all those needed to bring about change, and demanding that everyone is very clear what an important stake they have in the success of the work. They bring players together from across the system in a way that gives everyone ownership of the issues that need to be addressed.

Questions for local areas to reflect on:

- Is there a senior officer or elected member championing women’s issues? What is their understanding of the gendered challenges of the local area?
- Are there women in leadership roles? Are there women in commissioning and strategic commissioning roles? And are these women representative of diverse backgrounds?
- Is work being done to raise awareness and gain support for women centered working at a multi-agency strategic level, e.g. Health and wellbeing boards, safeguarding boards, clinical commissioning groups?
- How are mayors, political leaders and commissioners being brought into systems approaches? Who is making the case to them, and are they the right people?
- Where are the potential leaders who can bring services together? Do they have a shared understanding of the gendered challenges faced by the local area?

5: Look below the surface to address unconscious dynamics

A question we returned to again and again during this project is – why are we still failing so many women? Why is that still the case, when the principles for systems change outlined here are unlikely to be controversial? If there is a reasonable degree of consensus about the key ingredients for achieving systems change in local areas, what else is getting in the way?

It is tempting to make systems change a paint-by-numbers challenge which can be achieved by following a checklist with the right tools. But making change happen isn't that simple, and nor will it be achieved unless local areas are willing to work on the issues 'below the surface' outlined in this report, as well as those that are more easily identified.

A central tenet of a systems approach is paying attention to the way different parts of the system interact. It is not feasible to breakdown the problems facing disadvantaged women into a straightforward linear cause and effect that commissioners and services can directly respond to. There are multiple, nonlinear interactions between the services, space and people of any given system that often result in feedback, which exacerbates the problem. This is more commonly known as the vicious or virtuous circle - and often the factors in play are not consciously recognised.

There are simple but effective ways in which to make explicit these system interactions (for example, through causal loop analysis⁶³) that allow system leaders to act appropriately to avoid generating unintended consequences. Seeing these

system interactions in a new, clearer light, is fundamental if local areas want to make the shift from a commissioning- or service-centric perspective to thinking on more of a systems level.

Equally important is learning to recognise and work with the multiple perspectives that always exist within a system: each actors will have their own view on what the problem is and what potential solutions might look like. There is an unconscious tendency to label some perspectives as more valid than others, rather than seeing them as all belonging to the system and therefore important to engage with.

Questions for local areas to reflect on:

- To what extent is the culture one of learning, and reflection? Is this encouraged, and are the structures to facilitate this learning?
- Is sufficient time built in to establish trust and consensus across the different parts of the system.
- Is there space for staff to reflect on the impact of the work they are doing on their own mental health and attitudes?
- Is there organisational capacity to do group work on the cultures and beliefs in play?
- Have any staff been trained in systems methodologies, or is there capacity to work with external providers of systems approaches?

63 Causal loop analysis is a core component of systems methodologies. It explores how the different variables in a system are interrelated. For more information, see methodology section

- Does the strategic framework within which commissioners are operating reflect a commitment to systems approaches? Is there a shared understanding of what systems change might look like for women experiencing multiple disadvantage?
- Can you identify people who act as system facilitators - building relationships and trust across the system, including the public sector and the voluntary sector? Does their role give them time to do this properly? Are they recognised for the value of this work or does it happen around the sidelines of their main job?

Chapter 4: Where next for this work?

This report is a call to action, rather than the final word, on how local areas can design systems change work for women experiencing multiple disadvantage. So this final chapter is an agenda for action - a list of where the work needs to go next. The suggestions here are designed to spur conversations across the women's sector, and with forward thinking commissioners, service providers, voluntary sector, funders and government.

For Trusts and Foundations

1: Invest in a major programme to explore how local system-wide approaches to change can better serve women experiencing multiple disadvantage

We would like to see a major programme of work - or a gender-specific extension of current programmes such as the Big Lottery Fund's Multiple and Complex Needs Programme - that supports a series of local projects to pioneer new approaches and put some of the principles outlined in this report into practice.

This programme would need to be designed collaboratively, involving women experiencing multiple disadvantage themselves, key players in the women's sector, as well as a mix of commissioners, service providers and funders working on these issues currently.

The design of this programme would need to give attention to the factors 'below the surface' that we explored in Chapter 3. Funding would need to

cover work to surface any unconscious assumptions in play. It would need to cover the costs of collaborative development work, involving women experiencing multiple disadvantage, to build greater collective understanding of the way in which social inequalities, gendered expectations and abuse and violence intersect for this marginalised group of women.

2: Fund a network of systems changers to share practice and grow solidarity in this area

During this project people frequently referred to the need for a particular kind of capacity within any local area trying to achieve systems change. This capacity was focused on nurturing relationships within the system, and supporting different parts of the system to engage with one another in a productive way. By definition, the people in these roles were 'on the frontline' - they were able to see where there is dissonance between services, or gaps for people to fall into. They seemed to play a key role in getting the system ready - through building trust and relationships, the building blocks without which systems change cannot happen.

At the same time, as we have seen, women in positions of hierarchical power can play a crucial role in achieving place-based systems change for women. We saw places where they were vital to maintaining profile and focus for this work. As one practitioner said, "*you have to keep saying what about the women, what about the women?*"

Systems change needs a cohort of people, leading from different points of the system, deploying their skills as convenors and advocates, and bringing the high levels of energy needed to sustain focus and commitment over a long period of time. The system needs leaders who know how to bring sectors with different cultures and languages together. There is an opportunity to build a powerful network that brings together women in positions of hierarchical power, with those people demonstrating system leadership skills on the ground, to share practice and spread good ideas.

Crucially, this network will also provide this group with the solidarity and resilience we know they will need to continue doing good work in the face of continued gender blindness and gender bias.

For local organisations including councils and health bodies, as well as elected Mayors and commissioners

3: Promote systems change through leadership and commissioning models

A lack of integrated commissioning makes it harder for local services to pool their budgets to achieve a shared goal of systems change. The current difficulties of doing so have been exacerbated by austerity. Services have tended to retreat and defend the dwindling funds allocated to them. This makes it extraordinarily difficult to do things differently.

More work is needed to help local areas move existing resources around the system, so that limited funds are used in the best possible way. Building a model of shared finance for shared outcomes is something that think tanks

and consultancies like Collaborate, the Innovation Unit and Dartington could provide really valuable support on. These models would improve the issues around a lack of alignment across different commissioning cycles, multiple and sometimes conflicting outcomes measures, and a lack of dialogue between different commissioning bodies.

In addition, local areas also need more skills and confidence when it comes to decommissioning and reinvesting funds in more promising approaches. Skills in cost-benefit analysis, economic modelling, alongside work on public communications and negotiation, all need to be grown here.

An example of why this matters came from one area, where the current approach to supporting domestic abuse was showing less of an impact across a number of women-centred indicators than a small systems-based pilot. But in order to scale up the pilot, it would need funding to be diverted from the less effective but more established service. The political challenges of decommissioning the existing service were proving extremely challenging, and the lack of compelling evidence around the cost of not making the transition made it insurmountable. This story is not an isolated one.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ See Bunt, L. and Leadbeater, C. (2014) *The Art of Exit*. Nesta <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/the-art-of-exit/>

“We’re uncomfortable going into difficult conversations about this stuff - we worry about pot-holes – will I be misunderstood, will this be used by somebody. We need to be more confident about the fact that it’s not good enough to keep delivering services that keep a large number of people happy-ish. We need to search for new solutions that are better.”

Women’s service manager

4: Integrate mental health within systems change work for women experiencing multiple disadvantage

Services are failing to address the mental health needs of women experiencing multiple disadvantage and this needs to change. This report has begun to outline some of the challenges and we want to see further, in-depth work to assess the current state of women’s mental health services and more dialogue about how these services need to change.

Mental health services need to take a trauma-informed approach, recognising non-linear paths to recovery and the need for specialist services. They need to be available to women at all points of their journey, rather than only being triggered in crisis. Every area should have at least one women-only dedicated service, where women can be offered a female practitioner.⁶⁵ Thresholds need to be reviewed with a greater

understanding of the specific challenges women experiencing multiple disadvantage face.

We believe the changes outlined here require a significant shift in culture and a clearer evidence base about the impact of effective mental health provision for this group.

Therefore we recommend the development of a Women’s Mental Health Strategy in every Mental Health Trust, and a clinical lead for women’s mental health in each area to lead this work, plus a guarantee to maintain and invest in women-only specialist services.

65 Clifton, J. and Thorley, C. (2014) Think Ahead: Meeting the workforce challenges in mental health social work. Institute for Public Policy Research https://www.ippr.org/files/publications/pdf/ThinkAhead_May2014.pdf

For central government

5: Provide central leadership and pooled funding to promote local systems change

Fragmented and silo-ed working is reflected at a national level. At times in the past central government have led the way on tackling systemic issues in more cross-cutting ways. For example, the Women and Equality Unit, Social Exclusion Unit, and more recently, the Troubled Families Initiative. There is a need for cross-departmental working on women experiencing multiple disadvantage which should include pooling budgets across departments to create a single, focused fund for this work, in recognition both of where costs lie and of the savings joined up working could bring.

There is an opportunity for central government to offer incentives to those areas who can overcome difficulties in joining up and pooling budgets to achieve shared goals in relation to women experiencing multiple disadvantage. Creating funds for new work in this field that are contingent on evidence of putting budgets together in new ways is one such incentive.

In addition all future approaches to tackle multiple disadvantage must include a gender specific strand for women.

6: Develop a leading standard for gendered data and insight collection

There are few national standards when it comes to gathering gender-aware data and insight in local areas. Poor data collection (by which we mean quantitative and qualitative) is not only leading to gender blindness, but gender bias and a lack of intersectional analysis

of how other identity characteristics impact on women's outcomes. Women do not appear in the system in the same way - for example, "survival sex" doesn't show up as clearly as street homelessness - and that has an impact on service design and, crucially, the allocation of funding.

This work cannot be done without taking account of the advances in digital technology that are unleashing new ways of sharing data and analysing it. Nor can it be done by the public sector alone. Organisations across sectors need to work together to define this industry standard. As part of this standard, work is also needed to skill up commissioners and funders to be able to use the data appropriately.

There's scope here for central government, alongside umbrella organisations such as the Local Government Association, to provide greater support to local authorities and service providers to make their business cases more effectively. This could be in the form of online/phone-based support, webinars and communities of practice.

Alongside this, central government should lead by example and ensure that national data sets are disaggregated by gender and other characteristics, making this available to local areas to build a picture of need, so that managers like the one on the following page can quickly access clean, accurate and usable data to build their evidence base.

“To do a good cost-benefit analysis, you don’t need thousands of pounds or academics to do it for you. You need to get a group of local people together with a piece of paper and ask - what are the costs of people disengaging? What will our model do to change that? This isn’t about overclaiming, it’s about working with the data you’ve got, it’s about using stories powerfully. It’s all about creativity and confidence.”

Women’s service manager

Conclusion

This report has explored how place-based approaches to change could improve the lives of women experiencing multiple disadvantage. We have identified some significant barriers to working in this way that need to be overcome. Women experiencing multiple disadvantage are losing out because of the way services are currently configured; they are losing out disproportionately after a decade of cuts which have hit specialist services hard; and they are losing out because of wider social attitudes to them, which remain prejudiced and problematic.

What we have written here is very much the beginning of a conversation that is crucial if we are to do a better job of supporting women experiencing multiple disadvantage. There are issues we've identified in this report – such as the challenges around engaging mental health services, building more support infrastructure for people trying to create systems change, and the need for better use of data – that we believe require further investigation.

There is a clear social, economic and moral case for better supporting women

“We need to make it harder for people to say no to new initiatives. We can do this by making a better case, or by showing how the system really isn't working at the moment... we find it hard to be brave enough to do something new and say that the way things are now isn't working.”

Women's service manager

We have proposed some principles that local areas can use to build the foundations necessary to work in new ways. We've also offered readers a set of questions they can use to review progress and assess their capacity to change. This approach is vital: local areas have to find ways of bringing people together and creating common purpose themselves – it is not something that can be done 'to' them.

facing multiple disadvantage. We want to see that being translated into local action plans that bring the widest possible group of people and services together, to start making a difference today.

Thanks

We would like to thank the commissioners and the women with lived experience who gave their time to contribute to this report. Additionally, we would like to thank:

- Neil Berry, York Pathways (delivered by [Together for Mental Wellbeing](#))
- Clare Jones, runs workshops on women-centred commissioning in local authorities
- Clare Hyde MBE, Director of [The Foundation for Families](#)
- Vickie Barrit, Strategic Lead for Female Offender Whole Systems Approach, [Lancashire Women's Centre](#)
- Sarah Walters and Paul Pandolfo, [Inspiring Change Manchester](#)
- Rebecca Vagi, [Women's Aid](#) (Change that Lasts programme)
- Nicole Jacobs, CEO of [Standing Together](#)
- Rachel Ozanne, [Safe Lives](#)
- Tabz O'Brien Butcher, Partnerships Manager for the North West at [Homeless Link](#)
- Ian Treasure, Addaction, Partnerships Manager, Blackpool Fulfilling Lives
- Tassie Weaver, Local Networks Manager, [Making Every Adult Matter \(Meam\)](#)
- Anna Randle, Chief Executive of [Collaborate CIC](#)
- Habiba Nabatu, Lankelly Chase
- Anna Birney, Forum for the Future

Agenda, the alliance for women and girls at risk, is working to build a society where women and girls are able to live their lives free from inequality, poverty and violence. We campaign for women and girls facing abuse, poverty, poor mental health, addiction and homelessness to get the support and protection they need. We work to get systems and services transformed, to raise awareness across sectors and to promote public and political understanding of the lives of women and girls facing multiple disadvantage.

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