



CASCADE

'Together a Chance'

Evaluation of the Social Worker for Mothers in
Prison pilot project, 2021-2023

Final Report

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CASCADE Infrastructure Partnership



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Executive summary

The report presents the findings from the data collected across the duration of the study, between April 2021 and December 2023.

Demographic data

- 94 mothers have accessed the Together a Chance service since its inception in April 2021, 48 at HMP Eastwood Park, 46 at HMP Send.
- 29% of the mothers reported being in care or involved with social services as children.
- 20% of the mothers reported having no contact or very limited contact with family and friends.
- 62% of mothers were aged between 30 and 39.
- 77% of mothers reported being single or separated.
- 74% of mothers with children under the age of 18 had 2 or more children; and 13% had more than 5 children.
- Where a mother has more than one child, siblings were separated at the time of referral in 63% of cases; this high percentage often involves multiple placements and, in 55% of families, at least one of the children was accommodated away from their birth family.
- Sibling separation often involves more than one children's Social Worker, sometimes across different local authorities. In total, 101 children's Social Workers were allocated to support the 249 children linked to the mothers.
- 46% of mothers reported having no direct or indirect contact with their children at the start of the intervention.
- At the time of referral, all children were living with their father or their mother's partner in only 16% of families.
- For 17 mothers (19%), at least one child had been or was being placed for adoption, resulting in the loss of parental responsibility.
- The Pact Social Workers supported 44 mothers (48%) who were either in legal proceedings relating to their children or needed assistance with legal access. Active proceedings were more common at HMP Eastwood Park (64%) than at HMP Send (36%).

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- The Pact Social Workers have connected with 56 local authorities in total, 27 linked to HMP Eastwood Park and 32 linked to HMP Send. There are three local authorities that both Pact Social Workers have liaised with - Devon; Bridgend; and Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole.
 - Five mothers from HMP Eastwood Park have returned to prison post-release due to re-arrest, sentencing or recall. They have all chosen to re-engage with the Together a Chance service.

Findings

- Pact Social Workers are acting as mediators for mothers, supporting their engagement with social services, advocating for contact with children appropriate to the circumstance, and ensuring that wherever possible relationships are maintained.
- For the 60 mothers where contact with children had been identified as an aim, this had been achieved in 68% of cases by the end of the evaluation. For 20% of mothers, direct contact was refused, either on public protection grounds or because contact was not in the child's best interests and mothers were supported with this outcome. Therefore, for 88% of mothers, contact issues were resolved in the best interests of the child.
- The Pact Social Workers are helping mothers to improve how they engage and communicate with their children.
- Relationships between local authority Social Workers and mothers are often antagonistic, fractured and sometimes non-existent.
- Social Workers in the community often do not know where mothers are imprisoned or how to contact them.
- The Pact Social Workers act as a conduit of information between local authority practitioners and the prison establishment. They also contribute to formal assessments such as parenting assessments, risk assessments and grant applications.
- There is evidence that the Pact Social Workers play a significant role in supporting women experiencing mental health difficulties including those that self-harm, most frequently related to concerns about their children. Over one third of women (35%) had been subject to the Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) care planning process during their contact with the Pact Social Workers.
- Where the Pact Social Workers are involved in multi-disciplinary ACCT meetings, there is evidence of their role being effective. They have been able to quickly respond to child-related issues, directly or through liaison with the local authority Social Worker, to alleviate maternal anxiety.

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- There has been an improvement in the referrals from children's Social Workers over the course of the evaluation, suggesting that awareness with local authorities is increasing. Of the 83 mothers whose children had a Social Worker, referrals were received from children's Social Workers in 11% of cases.
 - Domestic abuse was a significant feature in the lives of mothers accessing the project. Where children are residing with fathers and there is a history of domestic abuse, there are ongoing issues around negotiating contact with children.
 - The Pact Social Workers are providing information and education to community practitioners and have developed a resource to support professionals in explaining to children where their mothers are.
 - The Pact Social Workers support mothers for a short time post-release and will continue to attend meetings with women, where this is required.
 - All mothers were 'very satisfied' with their Pact Social Worker in follow-up surveys. The vast majority of mothers (91%) reported feeling supported by professionals within the prison, but most reported feeling not at all or only slightly supported by professionals outside.
 - Community practitioners noted the benefits of the Pact Social Workers for children. Several community practitioners reported the children were more settled. No-one reported that the child was less settled, and everyone agreed that there had been no negative effects of the service for children. The feedback from mothers and community practitioners is that the role of the Social Worker is invaluable to both groups.
 - The trusting and respectful relationship between the Pact Social Worker and the mother contributes to a 'healthy establishment' through respect for family relationships and helping to avoid family breakdown (HM Inspectorate of Prisons 2021).
 - Prison staff report that the nature of the trusting and supportive relationship that the Pact Social Worker builds with incarcerated mothers serves to reduce suspicion and promotes trust in Social Workers in the community.
 - There is a moderate improvement in mothers' reported confidence in working with Children's Social Services. The number of mothers not feeling confident reduced from 39% to 33% six months after starting the intervention.
 - No change is evident yet in the proportion of mothers that feel they can trust social services: it continues to be low at both the start of the intervention and six months later (36% vs 35%) with the median response being "not sure". This is, in part, due to turnover of local authority staff, resulting in a lack of stable relationships being built.
 - The role of the Pact Social Worker is well embedded in both prisons and invaluable to the prison institution. The Pact Social Workers provide specialist knowledge of safeguarding and social services' processes, priorities, culture, language, and terminology, which is of assistance both to mothers and to prison staff. The Pact Social Workers also help to upskill prison staff in 'the legal landscape'.

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- All prison staff noted that the Pact Social Workers' knowledge base does not seem to be held elsewhere within the institution and so there is little if any duplication of work between roles. Probation POMs have similar knowledge, but it is reported they have insufficient understanding of the statutory children's social care environment to meet the needs and demands of mothers in prison.
 - The complexity of the work reinforces the importance of the post being held by a qualified Social Worker with statutory children's social care experience. The roles of the Social Worker and Pact family engagement worker (FEW) are however complementary and there is evidence of the effective 'step-down' of mothers once child-related needs are stabilised.
 - The pro bono legal clinics now offered by Not Beyond Redemption in both establishments complements the work of the prison-based Social Workers and has strengthened the legal support available for mothers.
 - The nature of the work in each prison differs and the role therefore does not lend itself to a manualised approach. Women in HMP Send have committed more serious offences and are less likely to have contact or have children live with them in the future, and thus the focus is often on supporting women to manage expectations and their feelings of loss and despair, with risk management around contact playing a significant role. In contrast, in HMP Eastwood Park there is a higher throughput of mothers, and the role involves more active family court work, supporting and contributing to reports for parenting assessments or for mothers who wish to be placed with their baby on the MBU.
 - The overriding view was that the Pact Social Workers should be based within the prison, although there were differing views about who should employ them - a third sector organisation, the Ministry of Justice or secondment from a local authority.
 - It would seem that the Together a Chance (TaC) scheme has led to greater utilisation of the Mother and Baby Unit at HMP Eastwood Park. The number of TaC mothers living with their baby on the MBU has increased from two to seven during the course of the evaluation. The Pact Social Worker has additionally supported five other mothers to have contact with their children on the MBU.
 - In terms of resettlement, there is some evidence of the Pact Social Workers helping mothers to plan their 'future family' and learning to accept that this may look different to what might have been envisaged without support.

Barriers

- The difference in online meeting platforms utilised by the prison service and local authorities remains a barrier to mothers' attendance at virtual meetings. Local authorities routinely use Microsoft Teams, whereas the prison service use the secure Prison Video link.

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- Communication and negotiation with courts remains difficult, often providing late notice of court dates which does not facilitate women's involvement or attendance.
 - Difficulty in engaging and moving forward with local authority Social Workers on some cases was impacted by systemic issues in Children's Social Care. Lack of Social Worker response, high staff turnover and delays in decision-making and implementing contact agreements were noted to hamper both multi-agency working and creating the right conditions for mothers to gain trust in children's Social Workers.
 - Mothers incarcerated for a short period of time, or where there is a unexpected transfer to another establishment, posed a particular challenge for the Pact Social Workers due to the immense amount of complex work required within a short amount of time. This was exacerbated by poor communication within the prison services about moves in some cases.

Conclusion

- The study has provided clear and incontrovertible evidence of the need for a qualified, prison-based Social Worker.
- The Pact Social Workers are demonstrating that they can maintain a 'child-focused plus' approach and are able to work for the benefit of the child and the mother, and that the differing perspectives are not necessarily polarised.
- This pilot scheme has demonstrated that mothers can, with the right support, continue to play a role in their children's lives and be involved in decisions relating to their welfare, where it is in the best interests of the children.
- For those children where ongoing contact is not appropriate due to the nature of the mother's offence, this early data suggests that skilled support in educating and being transparent with mothers is having a positive impact on wellbeing and contributing to the child's identity through life story work.

Recommendations

- It is clear that there is a strong need for Social Workers to be based in all women's prisons.
- Where there is prison-based Social Worker, having pro bono legal support linked to the prison is vital.
- The involvement of the prison-based Social Worker in the multi-disciplinary ACCT process should be standard practice for all mothers identified as being at risk of suicide or self-harm.
- More training is required for community Social Workers about parental rights of mothers in prison, this should be incorporated into qualifying programmes
- We recommend the project further utilise the skills of mothers who have already utilised Together a Chance to encourage other women to access the service, once staffing capacity issues have been resolved.
- It will be useful to consider if there are any ways to support contact between siblings, including during prison visits. We are aware that separation of siblings needs to be addressed by the local authority, but the advocacy role held by the prison-based Social Workers could be of value in care planning.
- More emphasis needs to be placed on strengthening the links between women and support services in their community, so that mothers have more support once released from prison. This might be linking up with through the gate services.
- Mothers are legally entitled to receive support when their children are being adopted. For some mothers in prison, adoption support will be essential, especially to deal with issues of loss. This may help reduce the risk of self-harm and suicide. Further training on post-adoption support would be useful for prison-based Social Workers. In HMP Eastwood Park there is a perinatal service who will also be dealing with this aspect of the work with mothers, although arguably it fits better within the Social Work role.
- Given domestic violence is so prolific for this population, prison-based Social Workers should be providing support and training around this where it is not provided elsewhere within the institution; we are aware that there is an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor for Welsh women at HMP Eastwood Park.
- Improvements are needed to create agreed platforms and better modes of communication between the prison and social services.

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- The process of ‘stepping down’ cases once child-related needs are stabilised should continue so that Pact Social Workers only hold complex and/or active cases.
 - Consideration should be given to how the Pact Social Workers can best support the prison at a strategic level, by sharing their knowledge and expertise more formally to enhance capacity building within the prison.
 - Prison-based Social Workers should receive clinical supervision from a qualified social worker with appropriate experience of both statutory children’s social care and the prison service.
 - Further investigation is needed to explore how the mother and baby unit could be facilitated to undertake residential parenting assessments, which would help increase its effectiveness and occupancy rates.
 - Consideration should be given to developing parenting training for mothers to support them in understanding the role of foster carers, kinship carers and Special Guardians and how to work with them, especially when only limited contact is allowed by mothers.

Background

Together a Chance

Together a Chance (TaC) is a three-year pilot project to trial embedding a Social Worker¹ in two women's prisons, HMP Eastwood Park, Gloucestershire and HMP Send, Surrey. Hereafter we refer to the Pact Social Worker to differentiate them from community Social Workers. The pilot was initially running from April 2021 to December 2023. HMPPS has taken over the funding and extended the life of the project to March 2025. This pilot is led by The Prison Advice and Care Trust (Pact), a pioneering national charity that supports prisoners, people with convictions, and their children and families. The pilot was in response to the Farmer Review of the women's prison estate (2019) which recommended that Social Workers be placed in women's prisons. In December 2019, Pact held a round table event with senior stakeholders to discuss how this project might work in practice, helping to develop this model. Pact aimed to start the pilot in April 2020. However, the Covid-19 pandemic delayed this until April 2021, albeit the project still commenced during the pandemic period.

Aims of the intervention

The post of Pact Social Worker, as part of the Pact team within the prison, is to function as an advocate for women whose children are involved with children's social care in the originating local authority. Together a Chance aims to support best practice, by working together with other agencies in the best interests of the children whilst also promoting the mother's parental rights.

All practitioners should follow the principles of the Children Acts 1989 and 2004. These Acts make clear that the welfare of children is paramount and that they are best looked after within their families, with their parents playing a full part in their lives, unless compulsory intervention in family life is necessary.

¹ We refer to Social Worker (capitalised) throughout this report to denote the protected title (2008) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukSI/2018/893/part/6/made>)

In line with statutory guidance, the Pact Social Worker works collaboratively with the child's Social Worker and/or other key professionals in the multi-agency group and supports the mother in prison to ensure that she:

- has every opportunity to be directly involved in decision making,
- is represented at key meetings and
- is empowered to take an active part in planning for her family's future.

The Pact Social Worker helps women incarcerated at the prison to engage successfully with other professionals and assists with family visits. The aim is for the Pact Social Worker to become part of the team around the child, alongside family members and other professionals. The Pact Social Worker is responsible for delivery of one to one and group interventions such as parenting courses, skills boosting sessions, family group conferencing and supported visits.

The Pact Social Worker also plays a part in upskilling both the Pact and wider social care workforce about mothers in prison, through liaison and training for external agencies and professionals, including local authority social care teams. The Pact Social Worker also forms relationships with support agencies in home communities to create effective referral pathways to other support where needed, including Pact Through the Gate support and welfare grants applications where appropriate. This evaluation aims to consider the added value brought to Pact by the two new Pact Social Worker roles.

The Pact Social Worker role is intended to offer direct support to 120 mothers across the three years of the study (20 per year per prison). The Pact Social Workers (usually via a weekly Pact management meeting) make early identification of those mothers in need of support and once identified will provide emotional and practical support, as well as advocacy with regards to any care proceedings and regaining custody. The mothers serving sentences typically originate from across the South of England and Wales although our data reveals that some come from further afield. Each Pact Social Worker will also be responsible for consulting with and providing some support to carers who are looking after the female prisoner's children in the community (foster or kinship carers).

At the outset of the pilot project, HMP Eastwood Park had one existing family engagement manager (FEM) employed by Pact (although this post was not filled at the time of our visit to the prison) and a Visiting Mum worker to support mothers from Wales (another Visiting Mum worker is based at Styal prison). The Pact Social Worker at HMP Eastwood Park collaborates with the mother and baby unit (MBU) to support the multi-disciplinary team in making decisions in the best interests of mothers and babies placed or being considered for a place in the unit and helps advocate on behalf of the mothers within the unit. There is an existing part-time Pact family engagement worker (FEW) and team manager in HMP Send.

Data collection

Over this evaluation we have collected the following data:

- We ‘tracked’ cases via questionnaires completed by each Pact Social Worker. We have gathered data from 258 case tracker questionnaires in total, 94 baseline questionnaires and 164 follow-up questionnaires completed at 6-monthly intervals.
- We visited both prison establishments. We visited HMP Eastwood Park on 8th February and HMP Send on 14th February 2023.
- We interviewed four staff whilst in HMP Eastwood Park.
- We interviewed four staff whilst in HMP Send.
- We disseminated an online survey for prison staff and received 11 valid responses.
- We interviewed each Pact Social Worker twice.
- We received a work activity diary from each worker, recording the tasks completed throughout a working week on two occasions.
- We interviewed eight mothers in prison, and six mothers one month after release.
- We analysed questionnaires completed by 41 mothers in prison, 22 from HMP Eastwood Park and 19 from HMP Send. We received 39 baselines questionnaires at the outset of the intervention for each mother and 24 follow-up questionnaires six months later.
- We interviewed seven practitioners in the community, one of whom was interviewed twice.
- We received a total of 14 online surveys from practitioners in the community.
- We interviewed two key informants - professionals with a policy remit.
- We interviewed one child.
- We have undertaken three interviews with carers, one sister and two fathers.
- We collected case studies as presented in this report.

Table 1: Summary of data collected

Data collection	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Case tracker	68	115	75	258
Interviews mothers in prison	5	3	0	8
Interviews mothers released	3	3	0	6
Surveys from mothers	T1 23 T2 14	T1 15 T2 6	T1 1 T2 4	T1 39 T2 24
Interviews with Pact Social Workers	2	2		4
Activity diaries with Pact Social Workers		2	2	4
Interviews with community practitioners	6	1	1	8
Surveys from community practitioners	5	4	5	14
Interviews with carers	1	2		3
Interviews with children		1		1
Visits to prison		2		2
Interviews with prison staff		8		8
Surveys from prison staff		11	0	11
Interviews with key informants			2	2
Case studies			2	2

Data analysis

We have reported descriptive statistics and thematically analysed the TaC case trackers and the surveys completed by community practitioners, prison staff and mothers engaged with the TaC service. All interviews have been recorded and professionally transcribed by an independent transcription service.

Background to the two prisons

HMP Eastwood Park

HMP Eastwood Park is a women's prison in Gloucestershire that has capacity for around 380 women. It has a relatively high turnover of prisoners: it received 1,133 new prisoners and released 1,067 into the community in 2021 (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons 2023, p.7).

The inspection report for the unannounced inspection of HMP Eastwood Park in October 2022 relayed a challenging environment (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons 2023). The inspectors noted:

'Eastwood Park is a women's prison in Gloucestershire that held 348 prisoners at the time of our inspection. Like the other closed prisons in the women's estate, it holds a range of prisoners from those on remand to others who are serving indeterminate sentences or life.'

The inspection identified a range of issues with the prison:

'In recent years, the prison had struggled to recruit and retain enough staff and at the time of our inspection a third of officer and operational support grades were not available'.'The effect of staff shortages meant that the already curtailed regime was often further restricted'... 'There had been two self-inflicted deaths since our last inspection and rates of self-harm were very high and increasing' ... 'many of the women we spoke to did not feel well cared for or supported.'

The inspection report went on to note,

'We have given Eastwood Park our lowest grade for safety. ... the gaps in care and the lack of support for the most vulnerable and distressed women were concerning.'

The report also identified that,

'Leaders had been too slow to reintroduce support to help women maintain relationships with their children, families, and significant others. The TaC scheme was however noted as one of several positive developments within the institution.'

The Welsh Government, in a cabinet statement on 8 February 2023 (Hutt 2023), noted their concerns for women from Wales and that:

'The findings underline the importance of diverting women away from custody wherever possible. The Women's Justice Blueprint, which was developed jointly by the Welsh Government, HMPPS and Policing in Wales, supports initiatives such as the Women's Pathfinder diversion scheme and engagement work with magistrates to help ensure women are not faced with unnecessary and hugely disruptive prison sentences for minor offences.'

Representatives of Welsh Government visited the prison and saw 'the value of some of the Blueprint initiatives referenced positively in the HMIP report, including the Visiting Mum Scheme', and the role played by the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor for Welsh women at HMP Eastwood Park.

The Welsh Government cabinet statement concluded (Hutt 2023):

'There is much more to be done to improve outcomes for women in contact with the justice system. As justice remains at present a reserved matter, we will continue in our commitment to reducing crime and reoffending to create a better Wales for all under the current system, alongside work to progress the case for the devolution of justice in Wales'

The work of the Pact Social Worker in HMP Eastwood Park must be seen within the context and background of this negative inspection report.

HMP Send

HMP Send is a women's prison in Surrey that has capacity for around 200 women. HMP Send was inspected in 2021, the report was mostly positive, despite the impact of Covid-19. We note however that 'rehabilitation and release planning' was identified as an area in need of improvement. There are two types of specialist units at HMP Send. First, a psychologically informed planned environment (PIPE) that supports women with personality disorders and complex needs. Second, a democratic therapeutic community (DTC, more commonly referred to as therapeutic community or TC) that provides women with the opportunity to take part in a group-based approach

to addressing mental illness, personality disorders, and drug addiction. HMP Send is the only women's prison in England to have a therapeutic community.

Legal services

By the end of the study both prisons have access to pro bono solicitor services offered by Not Beyond Redemption, this has strengthened the support available for mothers in their applications to the family courts. This is seen as a vital, as noted in other studies (O'Brien and King 2023).

Literature review

Women in prison

In 2019, 5% of the prison population were women (n = 3,800) and 95% were men (n = 78,000; MoJ 2020a). The small proportion of women in the prison estate can lead them to be “easily overlooked in policy, planning, and services” (Prison Reform Trust 2017). Women in prison require a distinct approach from men for many reasons including because women with histories of being victims of violence and abuse are over-represented in the criminal justice system (O’Brien and King 2023). Women commit a different range of offences (e.g., more acquisitive crime than men), relationship problems feature strongly in women’s pathways into crime, particularly domestic abuse (Prison Reform Trust 2017) and women in prison are much more likely to be primary carers of children and this make the prison experience significantly different (Corston 2007).

There are 12 prisons for women in England, and none in Wales, as a result, many women are incarcerated far away from where they live (Rees et al. 2017). One in five women are held more than 100 miles away from home (Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Task Force 2009). There is one women’s prison in Scotland. The UK has one of the highest rates of women in custody in Western Europe (Beresford 2018). The Government estimated that the cost of dealing with women encountering the criminal justice system in 2015-16 was £1.7 billion (NAO 2022). This estimate excludes wider social costs including the impact on the lives of children of women in prison. The annual average cost of a women’s prison place in 2019-20 was £52,000 (MOJ 2022).

In 2019, more women in prison were serving shorter custodial sentences than men. On 30 June 2019, 15% of women and 6% of men were serving sentences of less than 12 months (MoJ 2020a). In 2021, over half of women (52%) remanded and tried by the magistrates’ court did not receive a custodial sentence. In the Crown Court this figure was more than two in five (43%) (Prison Reform Trust 2022).

Violence against the person and theft offences accounted for the largest proportion of arrests for both women and men (MoJ 2020a). Theft from shops was the most common indictable offence for which 34% of women and 14% men were convicted in 2019 (ibid). A higher proportion of women who were cautioned or convicted in 2019 were first time offenders (35%) compared to male offenders (22%) (MoJ 2020a). Thus, we can see women are being treated more harshly than their male counterparts. This is consistent with the findings of Hester’s (2013) longitudinal study of police records of domestic violence in the north-east of England. In cases where both partners were recorded as a perpetrator at different times over the six years studied, the female partner was three times more likely to be arrested per incident and for a more serious offence that in some cases appeared to be ‘violent resistance’ (Hester 2013).

Women are more likely to re-offend within a year after a short-term prison sentence of less than 12 months (77% compared to 62% of men in 2017; (NAO 2022)). This suggests that women are more impacted as a result of their experience and prison is not achieving its goals of rehabilitation.

Women in custody have specific vulnerabilities and complex needs (O'Brien and King 2023). A higher proportion of women in prison self-harm. The number of individuals who self-harmed per 1,000 prisoners was 335 for women and 148 for men (MoJ 2020a); this is a significant difference. The 2021/22 annual inspection report of prisons (2022) states that 76% of women reported mental health problems, 48% declared a disability, and 37% said they had a problem with drugs when they went into prison. In addition, 52% of women surveyed reported that they were separated from children under 18. However, women generally reported having good relationships with staff; 84% agreed that they had a member of staff they could turn to for help. However, only 30% felt that staff understood their personal circumstances.

Williams et al. (2014) conducted a survey regarding prisoners' childhood experiences and family background and found: 53% of women in prison reporting having experienced emotional, physical, or sexual abuse as a child (a higher proportion than men which is 27%). 50% of women in prison said they had observed violence at home as a child (a higher proportion than men which is 40%). 30% of women in prison reporting having a family member with a current alcohol problem and 22% reporting having a family member with a current drug problem. 31% of women in prison reported that they had spent time in care as a child (higher proportion than men 24%). Prisoners that had been in care were younger when they were first arrested and more likely to be reconvicted in the year after release from prison, than those who had never been in care.

Corston's (2007) review of the female estate highlights that a distinct approach is needed to support women in the criminal justice system because, for example, women with histories of violence and abuse are overrepresented in the criminal justice system and can be described as victims as well as offenders. For women, drug addiction plays a large role in offending, mental health problems and self-harm are more prevalent in the women's estate. The [Female Offender Strategy](#) (2018) acknowledges that women in custody have distinct needs, commit less serious crimes, on average, and have poorer outcomes than men in custody. The [Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan 2022-2025](#) lays out the Ministry of Justice's updated framework to improve support for females in prison, this included as one of its aims 'the effective resettlement of female prison leavers back into communities, to reduce the risk of reoffending' (MoJ 2023a, p.3).

Mothers in prison

There has been much concern about mothers in prison for many years with Corston (2007) reporting

- Women in prison are more likely to be primary carers of children than men in prison.
- Two-thirds of mothers were living with their children before they were incarcerated.
- Only 5% of women prisoners' children remain in their home once the mother is incarcerated.

Data on mothers in prison is not consistently collected and figures or estimates vary. e.g. the Ministry of Justice estimated that between 13% and 19% of women in custody have one or more children under 18 (MoJ 2015). Whereas 52% of women surveyed in 2021/22 inspections reported having one or more children under 18 (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons 2022).

Imprisonment impacts women's maternal identity and their ability to take an active mothering role (Baldwin 2017; Breuer et al. 2021; Rees et al. 2021) and separation has a huge impact on maternal mental health and rates of self-harm (Prison Reform Trust 2022; HM Chief Inspector of Prisons 2023).

In 2017, the Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody (IAPDC) conducted a review to look at preventing the deaths of women in prison. The review was conducted after 12 self-inflicted deaths in women's prisons in England in 2016. They reported that:

- Mothers in prison are likely to experience severe distress from the separation from their child.
- “For 85% of mothers in custody, their imprisonment was the first time they had been separated from their children for an appreciable period.”
- They highlighted that “Family contact is a hugely significant factor in keeping women safe in custody and on release – yet prison location, technology, and visiting arrangements make this harder for women than men.”

They recommended using community sentences where possible, creating custodial systems close to homes, maximising family contact by extending the use of release on temporary license (ROTL) for child resettlement, spending time with family. They also suggested training and supporting staff to work with families and establishing partnerships with voluntary organisations offering family support (IAPDC 2017).

Pitman and Hull (2021) published a useful report on maternal imprisonment. They interviewed professionals from statutory and voluntary services and 13 mothers who have spent time in prison. The authors found that mothers often did not understand their parental rights and none of the mothers interviewed reported receiving any support or advice from the prison. This can lead to long periods of no contact with their children. Mothers reported a distrust in community Social Workers and that they regularly experienced significant challenges in communicating with them. Family engagement workers (FEW) said there was a lack of consistency in whether individual Social Workers supported children to visit their mothers in prison. The FEWs felt that the Social Workers' decisions were often influenced by 'value judgements' and the distance to the prison. Mothers' contact with their children could also be limited when relationships with family members or ex-partners were strained. In these cases, family and ex-partners tried to prevent or limit contact between the mother and child while the mother is in prison. Mothers often did not have the knowledge or confidence to attend meetings about their child's care. Local authority meetings were often scheduled at short notice with limited time for professionals at the prison to arrange for the mother to attend (in person or virtually). There was also limited flexibility and a lack of understanding about the prison regime (e.g. some prisons are unable to accommodate meetings

during lunch time). They recommended that greater steps need to be taken to ensure mothers can engage in local authority meetings about their child's care and court proceedings. Some mothers were able to maintain their maternal identity and appreciated family days (although spaces were often limited). Mothers reported frustrations with ROTL applications for Child Resettlement Leave, as it was often a lengthy process and lacked transparency. Mothers also reported experiencing challenges on release, including a lack of appropriate housing, probation officers who did not recognise their role as mothers, and feeling unprepared and uncertain about how they can rebuild their relationship with their children. The authors noted maternal imprisonment can have long-term adverse consequences for children, in particular, arrest and court proceeding can be traumatic for children, and family members can struggle to explain to children what has happened and where their mother is. As has been noted by other authors children can experience stigma and shame when their mother is in prison and having a trusted adult or mentor to talk to can be valuable. Practitioners reported that children can have mixed emotions and experiences of contacting and visiting their mother in prison. The authors make many recommendations. One of the recommendations is "A Social Worker in every woman's prison." The authors conclude "There is a clear need for the specific skills and knowledge of Social Workers to support mothers in prison, in particular to understand their rights and navigate local authority and Family Court processes related to the care of their children. The government should immediately fund the roll out of the current Social Worker pilot being run in two prisons by the Prison Advice and Care Trust across the entire female estate" (Pitman and Hull 2021, p.83). Before reviewing that further, we consider the impact of maternal incarceration on children.

Impact of maternal incarceration on children

The numbers of children impacted by having a mother in prison are not routinely collected, and therefore can only be estimated. Williams et al. (2014) found that 54% of all prisoners surveyed (male and female) reported that they had children under the age of 18. This figure was used to estimate the total number of children affected by parental imprisonment and the authors suggest that approximately 200,000 children had a parent in prison at some point during 2009. More recently, Kincaid, Roberts and Kane (2019) estimated 312,000 children are affected by parental imprisonment in England and Wales.

The Prison Reform Trust and Families Outside published a report by Beresford (2018) on the impact on children when mothers are involved in the criminal justice system. The study conducted interviews and focus groups with mothers in prison and recently released from prison and a focus group with children who have experience of a mother in prison. The authors report that there is no accurate recording of the number of children affected by maternal imprisonment. They noted that separation from mothers can be traumatic for children, and children reported feeling angry, upset, lonely, sad, and confused. Children reported experiencing stigma, feeling shame, and being judged (e.g., by teachers, Social Workers). For example, in some cases Social Workers had decided it was 'not right' for children to visit their mother in prison, but the children concerned felt that they had not been listened to" (Beresford 2018, p.22). Mothers reported being worried about their children

while they were in prison. Mothers often wanted to engage with their children's Social Workers and were frustrated about the frequent staff changes. Mother believed they were lacking timely communication from Social Workers about the welfare of their children, and many felt they were "the last person to know what was happening to their children" (Beresford 2018, p.26). Similarly, mothers reported feeling judged by Social Workers and prison staff and spoke about the lack of trust that staff had in their potential to change. Lastly, mothers reported that the process to apply for release of temporary licence was slow and lacked clarity.

Rees et al. (2017; 2022) undertook an evaluation of Visiting Mum in HMP Eastwood Park, a scheme to support children and mothers from Wales. They found some children were negatively impacted by visiting their mother in prison on 'regular' visits; Visiting Mum seeks to address this by providing an allocated volunteer to travel with the children and who they could talk to. They found that without the scheme children were generally unsupported by professionals in visiting mothers, which was costly, difficult to navigate across significant distances, incurring lengthy journeys, involved taking time out of school and also difficult to arrange. Additionally, children felt stigmatised by having a mother in prison and were sometimes scapegoated by their community for their mothers' offending. Children were moved from their homes to live with friends and family away from their locality and support networks; no one was tracking where they were or what happened to them. When accessing the Visiting Mum scheme, children very much looked forward to visiting their mothers, although were sad when they left.

Kincaid, Roberts, and Kane (2019) published a report on the children of prisoners. They found that children with a parent in prison often experience anger, rejection, confusion, worry, shame, and stigma. Children can also experience sleep disturbances, change in behaviour, and problems with concentration at school. Children with a parent in prison are at higher risk of poor education, health, and criminal justice outcomes later in life. The evidence suggests imprisonment of a mother is more damaging for children's outcomes than the imprisonment of a father; this may be because mothers are more likely to be primary caregivers and sole parents before imprisonment than fathers. Mothers are also more likely to be in custody further from home which can make family visits problematic and expensive (Kincaid et al. 2019).

Minson (2019) conducted interviews with 14 children whose mothers were in prison in England and Wales and 22 of their caregivers. Children talked about feeling sad about their mother's incarceration, and not having anyone to talk to about their feelings. Carers described children as having intense emotional needs and displaying sadness and anger after being separated from their mother and experiencing sleeping difficulties. Children often had to move away from their home when their mother was incarcerated and on occasions this happened with little or no preparation. Like Rees et al. (2017), Minson found that children's ability to visit their mother was dependent on the prison's regulations, the distance to travel, and their caregiver's willingness and financial resources to support the visit. Children had mixed experiences and feelings about the visits.

Policy context

Female Offender Strategy 2022-2025

The Ministry of Justice published a [Female Offender Strategy](#) for women in the criminal justice system in 2018. The strategic priorities include: (1) fewer women coming into the criminal justice system, (2) fewer women in custody (especially on short-term sentences) and a greater proportion of women managed in the community successfully, and (3) better conditions for those in custody including improving family ties (MoJ 2018).

Wales has its own strategy [Female Offending Blueprint for Wales](#) (2019) which recognises the impact of maternal imprisonment, sets out its commitment to breaking intergenerational cycles of crime, and highlights that women who offend are often victims themselves. The aim is to create a joined-up approach which will result in better emotional, physical health and wellbeing, building positive supporting relationships within families.

Key reviews

The following reviews have been undertaken:

- The Farmer Review for Women on the importance of family ties was commissioned, and a [report](#) published in 2019 (see details above).
- A [review](#) of the operational policy on pregnancy, mother and baby units and maternal separation in women's prisons was published in 2020 (MoJ 2020b). This was followed by a new operational [framework](#) in 2021 which has since been updated (MoJ 2023b).
- A study on MBUs undertaken by the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families in England in conjunction with the What Works for Children's Social Care was published in 2022 and is discussed in the next section (Osthwaite et al. 2022; Trowler 2022).
- In 2023, a [progress report](#) on the Farmer Review for Women reported progress on implementing Lord Farmer's recommendations, with 27 of the 33 recommendations completed. This included the funding of a pilot for social workers in the Women's Estate, which we will discuss below (MoJ 2023d).

Concordat

A [Concordat](#) was published in 2020 to detail how the Government and other partners should work together at national and local levels to identify and respond to the needs of women in or at risk of contact with criminal justice system (MoJ 2020c). At the same time, in England, the Government announced plans for 500 new prison places for women, which seems in direct opposition to the Female Offender Strategy and Farmer Review (MoJ and Frazer 2021). The Concordat was reviewed in 2023 and the progress report identified examples of cross-agency working at a local level but highlighted a need for greater alignment between government departments and agencies (MoJ 2023c). The review identified two main points of focus for the Concordat (1) further supporting the development of whole system approaches at the local level; and (2) offering more support to women with complex needs before they offend (MoJ 2023c, pp.19–20).

The Female Offender Strategy Delivery Plan (MoJ 2023a) has been identified as the channel for taking forward this work.

Inspection of prisons

Prisons are inspected by the HM Inspectorate of Prisons at least once every five years. The stated purpose of these inspections is to “report on conditions and treatment and promote positive outcomes for those detained and the public” (HM Inspectorate of Prisons 2022, p.4). This judgement is based on assessment against four so-called “healthy establishment tests”: (1) safety; (2) respect/care; (3) purposeful activity and (4) rehabilitation and release planning/resettlement (HM Inspectorate of Prisons 2022, p.18). For each test, a graded judgement based on outcomes for prisoners is given, ranging from one (poor) to four (good), and this contributes to the overall assessment of the prison.

There have been recent inspection reports in both prisons, with a follow-up response to the inspection of HMP Eastwood Park by the Welsh Government.

- [HMP Send](#) - inspection May 2021, report published 26/08/2021 (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons 2021).
- [HMP Eastwood Park](#) - inspection October 2022, report published 03/02/2023 (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons 2023).

The [Welsh Government response](#) to the inspection report for HMP Eastwood Park was issued by way of a cabinet statement (Hutt 2023).

Mother and Baby Units (MBUs)

Mother and Baby units would appear to be underutilised and this was highlighted by The Farmer Review (Farmer 2017). A review of applications to MBUs was thus conducted by Isabelle Trowler, the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families in England, in partnership with What Works for Children's Social Care (2022) because Lord Farmer (2017) raised concerns about the low take up of places of MBUs. The review consisted of two parts:

- (1) A **thematic review** of all MBU applications between 2017 to 2022 (Osthwaite et al. 2022).
- (2) A panel of Social Workers examined a sample of applications made to MBUs between 2017 and 2021 to determine whether the decision to accept or reject the application were reasonable (Trowler 2022). This **case review** found that of the 39 applications that had been rejected, the panel agreed with the decision and the decision-making process in 25 cases. The panel raised **concerns about 14 of the rejected cases**. This was because:
 - The decision to reject the application was not considered reasonable in three cases.
 - There was a **lack of Social Worker involvement** in 10 applications.
 - Social worker engagement was deemed to be below-standard in three applications.

They found that overall, **women lacked support with the MBU application process** and there is a lack of scrutiny in the decisions. Recommendations from this review included giving women access to **emotional support and advocacy** before, during and after the application process.

Social workers in women's prisons

Having Social Workers based within women's prisons has been recommended by numerous researchers and policy makers, for example, Rees et al. (2017) recommended this based on an evaluation of Visiting Mum scheme in HMP Eastwood Park (this scheme has subsequently also been rolled out in HMP Styal). Pitman and Hull (2021) also recommended having a Social Worker in prison, as mentioned above.

There is a strong argument for placing Social Workers in women's prisons. Currently such a role, if taken on at all, falls to Prison Offender Managers (POMs) some of whom are probation trained. However, probation training separated from that of Social Workers in the 1980s, and since 'Transforming Rehabilitation' (MoJ 2013) the Probation Service has become more punitive and enforcement focussed, as a result much of the 'welfare' aspect of probation work been lost (Baldwin et al. 2022).

O'Malley and Devaney (2016) suggest that Social Workers in prisons would be able to support and advocate for the rights and needs of incarcerated women and their children. They argue that there is a clear need for the role to provide support to mothers, their children, and their families, in order to help to maintain relationships. They also highlight the shift from welfare and care to risk and

control has meant a reduction in a probation officer's discretionary time involved in supportive direct work with offenders. They suggest the role could provide services such as,

“directly supporting mothers who keep her baby in prison while attempting to manage their own complex needs; the transition of babies from prison into the community and the aftermath of separation, possible loss and/or access visits; seeking the child's voice and direct opinions on the level and nature of contact they wish to have with their mother and communicating and negotiating this between interested parties; overall child protection management of babies in prison and their contact with the outside world; encouraging and supporting co-parenting and access with family during the sentence; and overseeing the release of mothers and babies into a safe environment in the community.” (O'Malley and Devaney 2016, p.304)

O'Malley and Devaney (2016) suggest Social Workers are well placed to take on this role, as social work is based on the principles of human rights and social justice.

Lord Farmer (2017) recommended the need for a Social Worker based in women's prisons. In his review of the women's estate, Lord Farmer found that there is not a consistent approach from Social Workers in the community to help mothers in prison maintain their family ties. He found evidence that many Social Workers take the view that children should not visit prison and Mother and Baby Units (MBU) are not an appropriate for young children. He also noted there was some evidence that the rights of birth parents whose children are being adopted are not made clear enough. Within the Farmer review, governors of female prisons reported that they would find it useful to have at least one Social Worker permanently based at the prison and more family engagement workers. Farmer recommended that the Ministry of Justice fund an on-site Social Worker as part of the multi-disciplinary team within each prison. The 2023 progress report of the Farmer Review for Women noted that the Ministry of Justice is funding a pilot scheme for Social Workers in the women's estate (this Together a Chance scheme) until 2025 and will use this to improve partnership working and collaboration between the prisons and local authorities when supporting mothers in custody (MoJ 2023d).

Farmer (2017) suggested that a Social Worker based at the prison would be able to:

- Provide a link to community Social Workers who may be unfamiliar with the prison system and be based far away from the prison.
- Get to know the mother well and report on her mothering capabilities.
- Share information with the mother (e.g., about care proceedings) in a timely manner.
- Develop a more meaningful and trusting relationship with the mother than Social Workers in the community.
- Improve take up of places on Mother and Baby Units and provide support to mothers who applications are refused.
- Act as a key point of communication for mothers e.g. by helping them to communicate with their solicitor.
- Promote the rights of children and recognise that ongoing contact between the mother and children is often in the best interest of children.
- Help women connect to community services prior to and on release.

Farmer distinguished between the role of family engagement workers (FEW) and Social Workers and argued that qualified Social Workers are needed, noting,

“However well-informed the family engagement worker advocating on her behalf, it is unlikely they will be able to persuade the social work professional that the best interests of the child will be served by doing all that is possible to maintain and strengthen ties, not least by facilitating frequent contact. FEWs are not part of the statutory service and not necessarily part of the team around the child.” (Farmer 2019, p.99)

Farmer highlighted that other practitioners such as probation workers, family engagement workers or specially trained prison officers could also act as advocates, however community Social Workers need to know that they are dealing with someone who understands that the child’s best interests must always be the paramount consideration. They would likely have more respect for in-prison Social Workers, who would help greatly in liaison with family courts and decisions about custody, on this ground” (Farmer 2019, p.101).

O’Brien and King, in their study of parental rights for mothers in prison, noted that many women felt ‘fobbed off’, ‘forgotten’, ‘cast aside’ or ‘not listened to’ in their attempts to get information about their children, especially from children’s Social Workers (O’Brien and King 2023, p.41). They concluded, as their first recommendation, the need for a specialist worker to be placed in all women’s prisons who could help support and advocate on behalf of women; they suggest this should be a third sector or local authority Social Worker with experience of working in the field (O’Brien and King 2023, p.8).

Cost implications of Social Workers in prisons

Lord Farmer noted that creating Social Worker posts and employing more family engagement workers as part of multi-disciplinary teams obviously carries a cost to the Ministry of Justice, although he suggested that joint funding models with local authorities could be considered as part of the more joined up services. He goes on to note, if there was flexibility in how the Offender Management in Custody (OMIC) model is implemented so that governors who wanted the more diverse staffing structure were willing to have fewer prison officers to fund it, this could be more cost-neutral. The Farmer Review for Women clarified however that “social workers and family engagement workers should not be imposed upon establishments as an alternative to prison officers and that there should be flexibility” (Farmer 2019, pp.101–102).”

Case tracker data findings

Overview

The case tracker data provided by the Pact Social Workers and presented in this section of our report reveals the nature of the work undertaken with the 94 mothers (46 at HMP Send and 48 at HMP Eastwood Park) who are reported to have accessed the Together a Chance service since the pilot project commenced in April 2021. It also provides an indication of the presenting needs of mothers at these two prisons which may assist more widely with gaining a better understanding of this client group and planning future service development.

This part of the report focuses on data for the whole evaluation period and therefore draws on the 258 case tracker questionnaires completed by the Pact Social Workers. In the main², we are reporting on a sample of 94 mothers. It should be noted that two TaC mothers transferred from HMP Eastwood Park transferred to HMP Send and this means that overall 92 mothers have been supported by the pilot scheme. For the purposes of our evaluation, however, we treated the mothers transferring into HMP Send as ‘new’ mothers. Conversely, work with 5 mothers at HMP Eastwood Park was ‘closed’ and then ‘reopened’ due to sentencing decisions (bail and re-remand, sentencing following remand, recall) bringing the total cases worked to ninety-nine, as shown in Table 2 below. However, as these mothers returned to the same prison, and the same Pact Social Worker, we simply collected follow-up data to continue tracking progress.

Table 2: Overview of cases

	Start date prior to April 2021	Mothers since April 2021	Total TaC mothers at each prison	Mothers closed and then reopened	Total cases worked to December 2023
HMP Send	5	41	46	0	46
HMP Eastwood Park	0	48	48	5	53
Total	5	33	94	5	99

² For a few analyses, we report on a reduced sample of 92 mothers as two ‘cases’ tracked at HMP Send relate to support given to an aunt and a grandmother. As they do not hold parental responsibility (PR), some analyses (e.g. legal proceedings) do not apply.

Timeline of mothers entering the service

Table 3 provides an overview of the timeline of the start periods for every mother that engaged with the service at each prison. As the Pact Social Worker at HMP Send was in post as a family engagement worker, mothers who met the TaC criteria transferred with her in April 2021, when the pilot project officially started. The Pact Social Worker at HMP Eastwood Park was new in post for the project and this explains the delay and catch up seen in Figure 1 below. It appears that cases have been spread fairly consistently across the evaluation period.

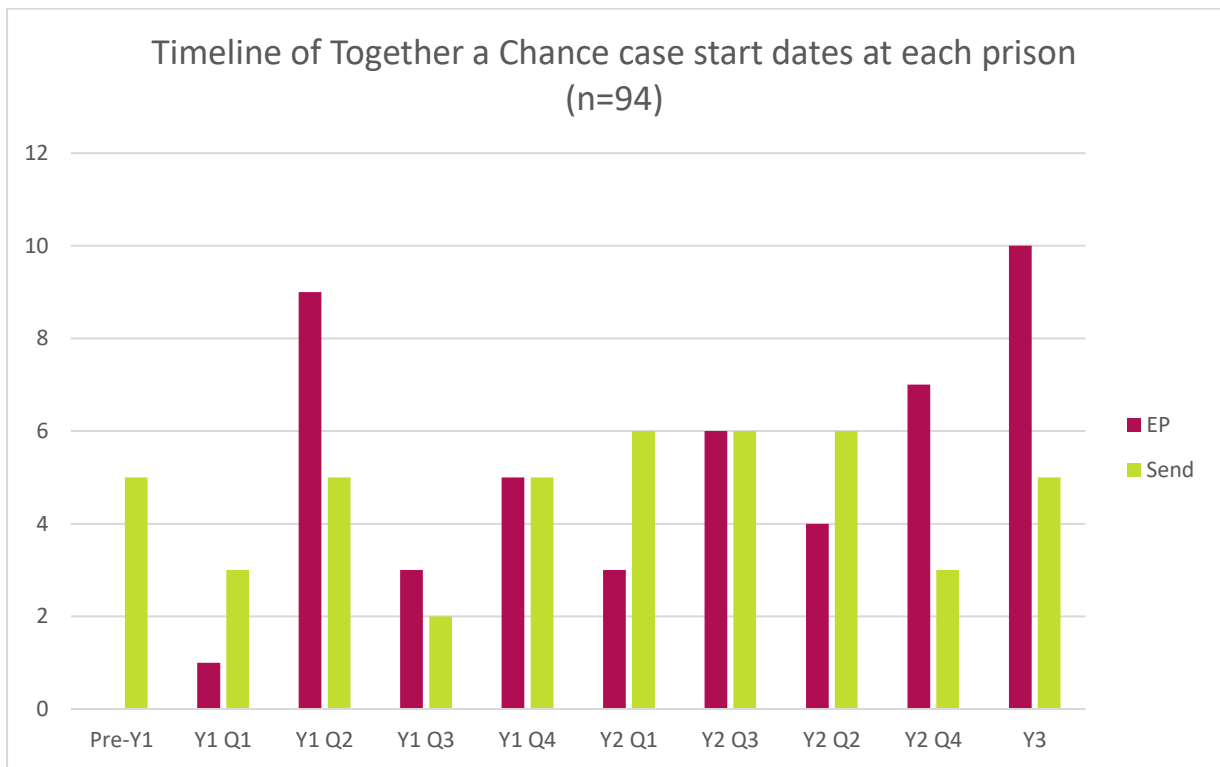


Figure 1: Timeline of case start dates at each prison

Case duration and closures

It is pleasing to see that significantly more cases have closed in recent months. According to our case tracker data, the Pact Social Workers are continuing to work with fifteen mothers at HMP Send and eleven mothers at HMP Eastwood Park (plus any new referrals since June 2023 which we have not collected as we needed 6 months for follow-up data).

Table 3: Together a Chance cases: open/closed cases (at December 2023)

	Send	Eastwood Park	Total
Cases reported as 'closed'	31	37	68
Cases 'open' at December 2023	15	11	26
Total TaC mothers at each prison	46	48	94

We have undertaken an analysis of the duration of working with each mother, from the date of the first meeting to the case closure date. As seen in Table 4 below, the case duration is highly variable at both prisons and this reflects the variable and often complex nature of the work, which is described in more detail below. In both prisons the median case duration is eight months. The average case duration is skewed by long-running cases which have been open for well over two years: it is currently eleven months in HMP Send and nine months in HMP Eastwood Park.

Table 4: Together a Chance case duration of cases evaluated (at December 2023)

Case duration (in months):	Send	Eastwood Park	Both prisons
Average case duration (months)	11	9	21
Median case duration (months)	8	8	16
Analysis of variability in case duration:			
Minimum case duration (months)	0	0	0
Total cases open for less than 3 months	8	11	0
Maximum case duration to date (months)	33	27	60
Total cases open for 12 months or more	18	17	35

Referrals into the Together a Chance service

Source of referrals

Most referrals at both prisons have been noted as self-referrals (67% at HMP Eastwood Park and 50% at HMP Send) and we assume that this reflects both the active way in which Pact Social Workers have raised awareness of the programme and word of mouth recommendations.

The route of access has been similar at both prisons, as seen in Table 5. Just under one third of the referrals (32%) were already know to Pact – either in the same prison or another prison where the mother transferred from. However, as seen in Figure 2 below, 68% have been reported as ‘new referrals’, meaning that they have not previously engaged with other family services run by Pact.

Table 5: Route taken by mothers to access TaC, by prison

	Eastwood Park	Send	Total
Already known to Pact	10	11	21
Co-working with FEW	2	1	3
Transfer in from other Pact SW	0	2	2
Transfer in from other prison	1	3	4
New referral	35	29	64
Total	48	46	94

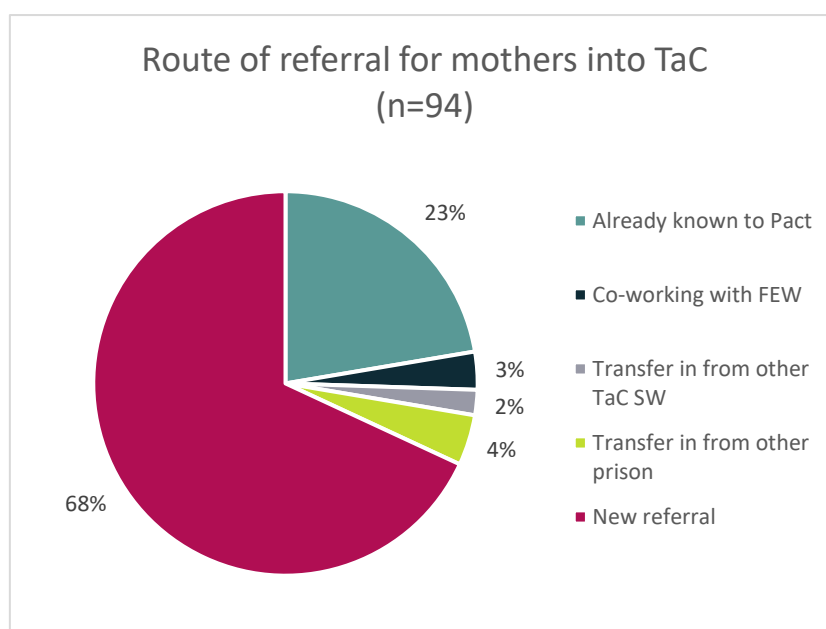


Figure 2: Route for mothers accessing Together a Chance

Source of professional referrals

Looking at the sources of professional referrals over the evaluation period (see Figure 3), it is notable that a higher proportion of referrals come from the Prison Offender Managers working within the Offender Manager Unit, which when we visited was co-located with Pact services at HMP Send. At HMP Send, ten referrals (22% of all referrals) have come from the OMU compared to five referrals (10% of all referrals) at HMP Eastwood Park. Although low in number, it is pleasing to see that an increasing number of practitioners in the community (11% of all referrals) have contacted the prison and referred into the Together a Chance scheme.

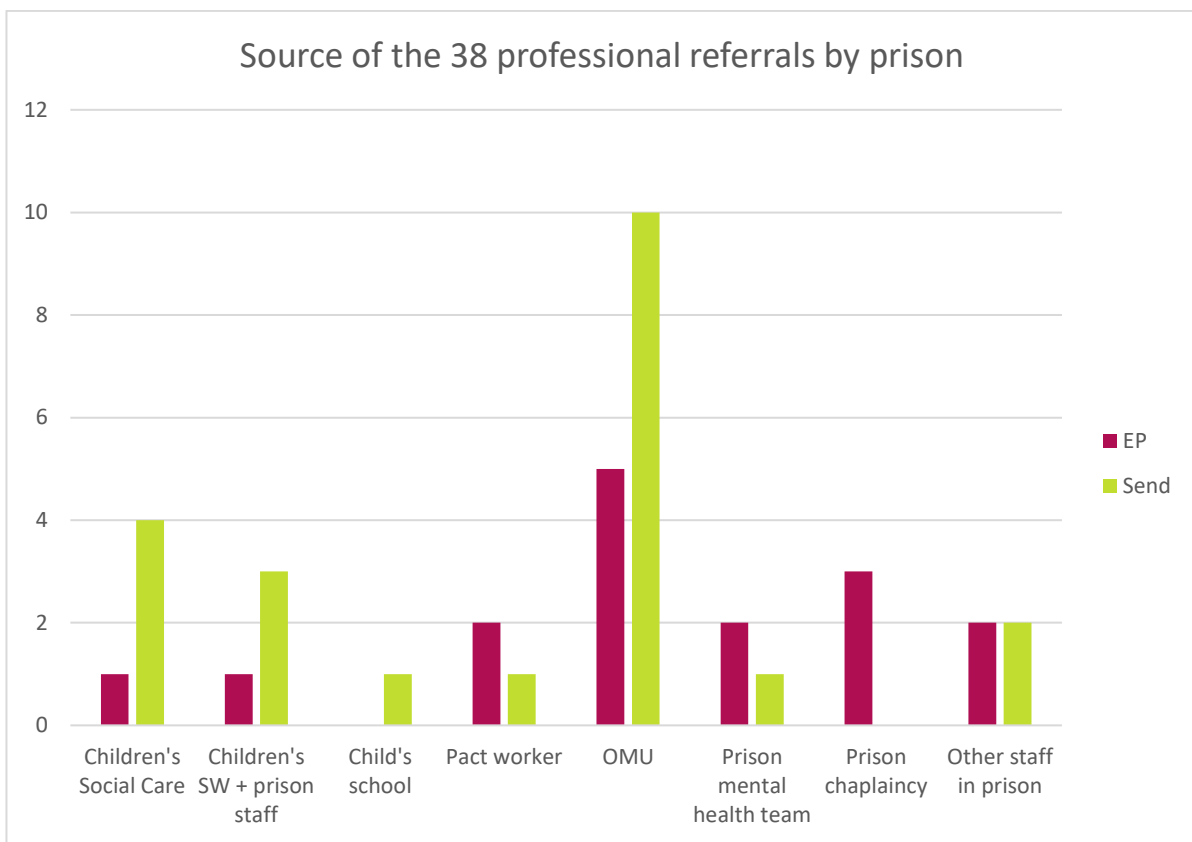


Figure 3: Source of professional referrals

Profile of the mothers

The ethnicity of the 94 mothers who accessed the Together a Chance service is shown in Figure 4. Most were White British (79%), though it is worth noting that those identifying as gypsy or Irish traveller were over-represented at 4%, compared to 0.1% across the general population (HM Government 2022). Those identifying as Black, Black British, Black African or Black Caribbean at 9% compared to 4% across the general population (HMG, 2022) and 6% across the female prison population in England and Wales in 2019 (MoJ 2020a).

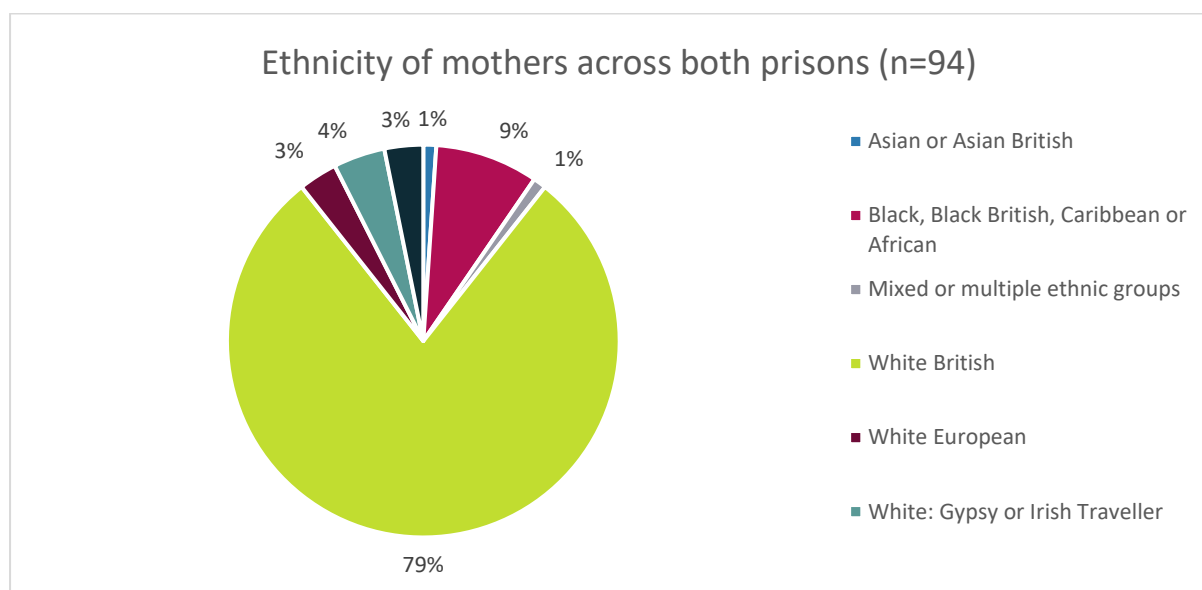


Figure 4: Ethnicity of mothers accessing the Together a Chance service

The majority of women (62%) were aged between 30 and 39 and the age profile is broadly similar at both prisons (see Figure 5).

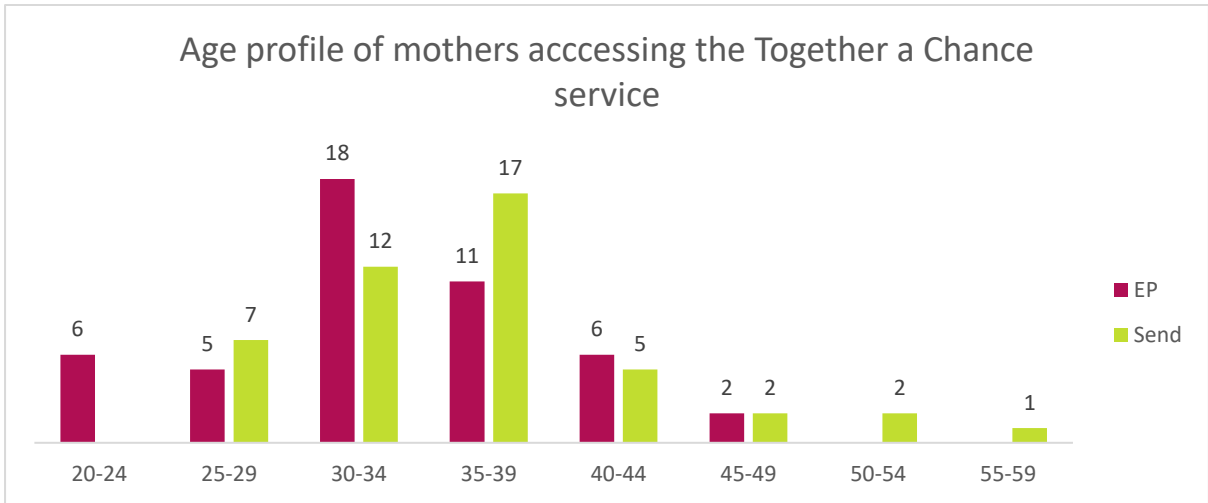


Figure 5: Age profile of mothers accessing the Together a Chance service

The majority of mothers reported themselves as single (72%) (see Figure 6). It is not known whether this statistic is consistent across the women’s estate or whether demand for support is higher from mothers who are single or estranged on account of difficulties with childcare and contact arrangements whilst incarcerated. The high self-referral and engagement rate will be discussed in the next section.

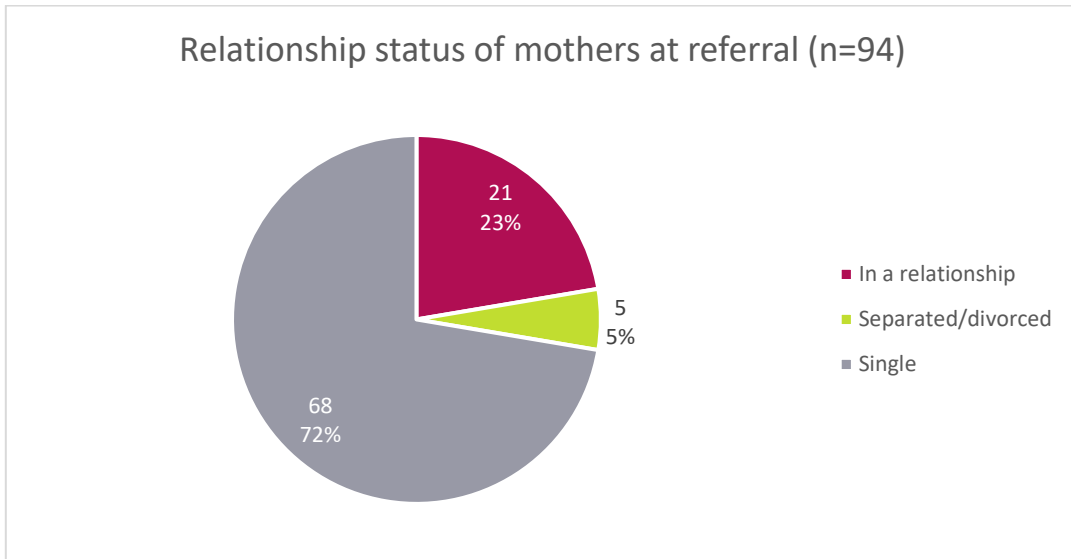


Figure 6: Relationship status of mothers at referral

Originating local authorities

The geographical origin of the women is diverse which naturally has implications for contact arrangements as well as the workload of the Pact Social Workers. Consistent with the access criteria for the service, almost all mothers (83 out of the 94) had at least one Social Worker allocated to their child/ren. Based on the reported local authorities for their children's Social Worker(s), mothers at HMP Send are estimated to have originated from 32 local authority areas and mothers at HMP Eastwood Park from 27 different local authority areas. Whilst the Pact Social Workers reported links with 56 different local authorities in total, they have so far had only three local authorities in common: Devon; Bridgend; and Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole. Figure 7 weights each local authority according to the number of mothers linked to the area. The spread of local authorities is such that the Together a Chance service has so far connected with each local authority on behalf of one or at most two mothers, with three exceptions: Devon was reported as the originating local authority for the child/ren of 9 mothers across both prisons; Oxfordshire by 6 mothers at HMP Eastwood Park; and Bridgend by 3 mothers across both prisons.

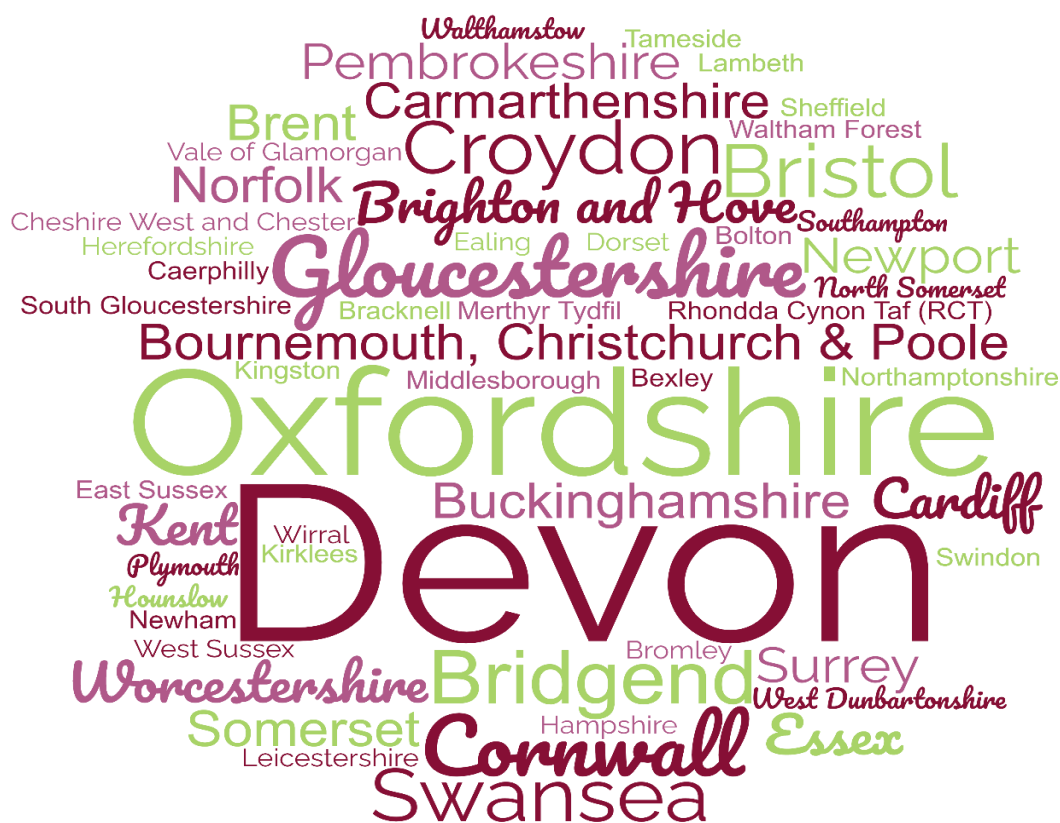


Figure 7: Local authorities responsible for the children of TaC mothers at HMP Send and HMP Eastwood Park, weighted by case frequency

Mother's prior experience of social services

Our previous report highlighted the high prevalence of TaC mothers known to social services or in care as a child. Whilst there continue to be some gaps in the data, 27 mothers (29%) have so far reported being known to social services as children (see Figure 8). This is significant given the 1.15% population average found in communities across the UK (Home for Good, 2021.)

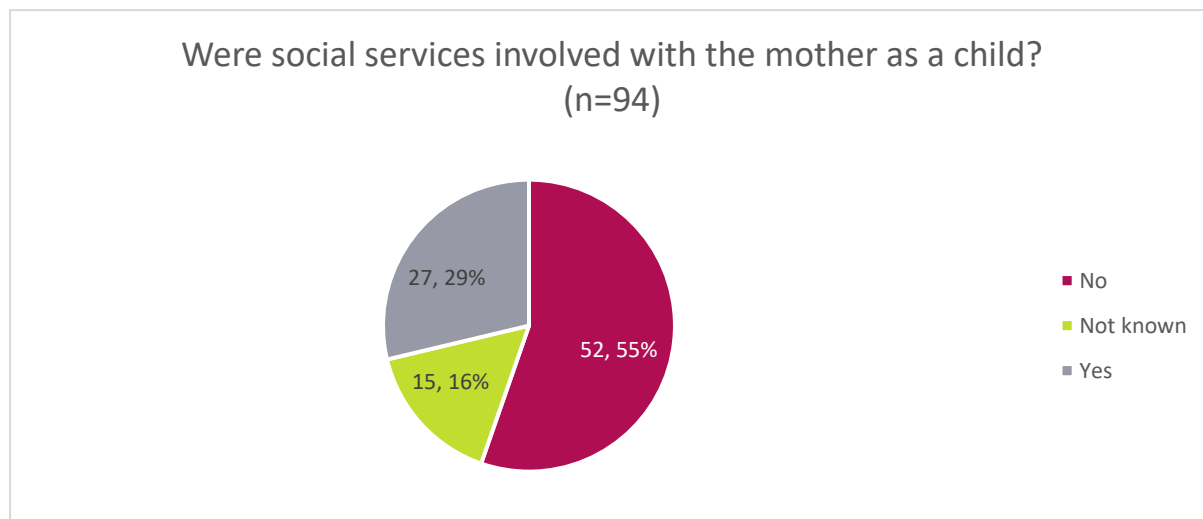


Figure 8: Mothers accessing the Together a Chance service who were in care or known to social services as a child

Sentencing profile for mothers

Offence profile

The tracker data reports each mother's offence, and this has been categorised and amalgamated across both prisons to protect anonymity (see Figure 9).

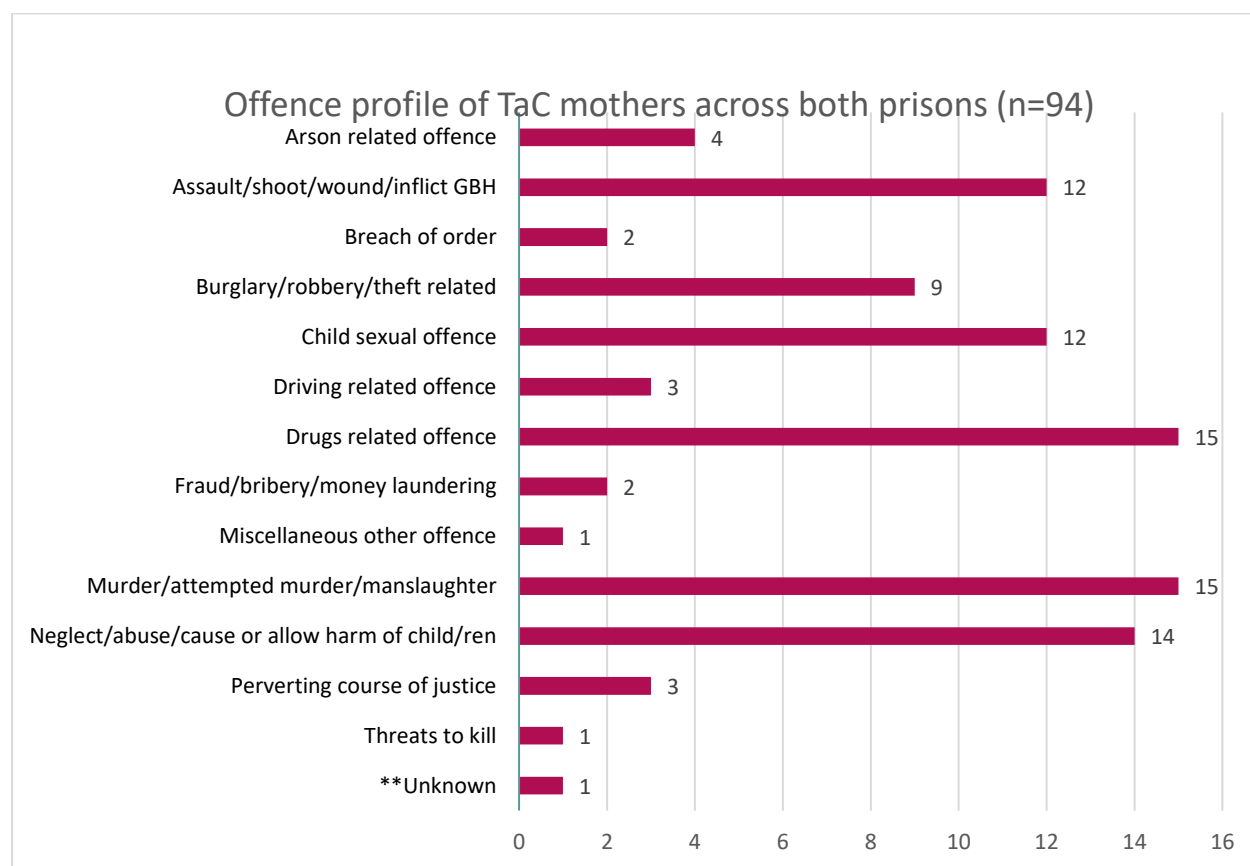


Figure 9: Offence profile of mothers accessing the Together a Chance service (n=94)

Length of sentence

The length of sentence varies quite considerably at the two prisons, reflecting the different prison profiles (see Figure 10). Of the 94 mothers accessing Together a Chance, eleven were serving life sentences at HMP Send (24%), compared to two mothers at HMP Eastwood Park (4%). Conversely, fifteen mothers at HMP Eastwood Park were on remand and eleven on sentences of less than one year (54%); at HMP Send the Pact Social Worker had not mothers on remand and only three mothers with a sentence length of less than one year (7%). Our data suggests that both long and short sentences can present intervention challenges.

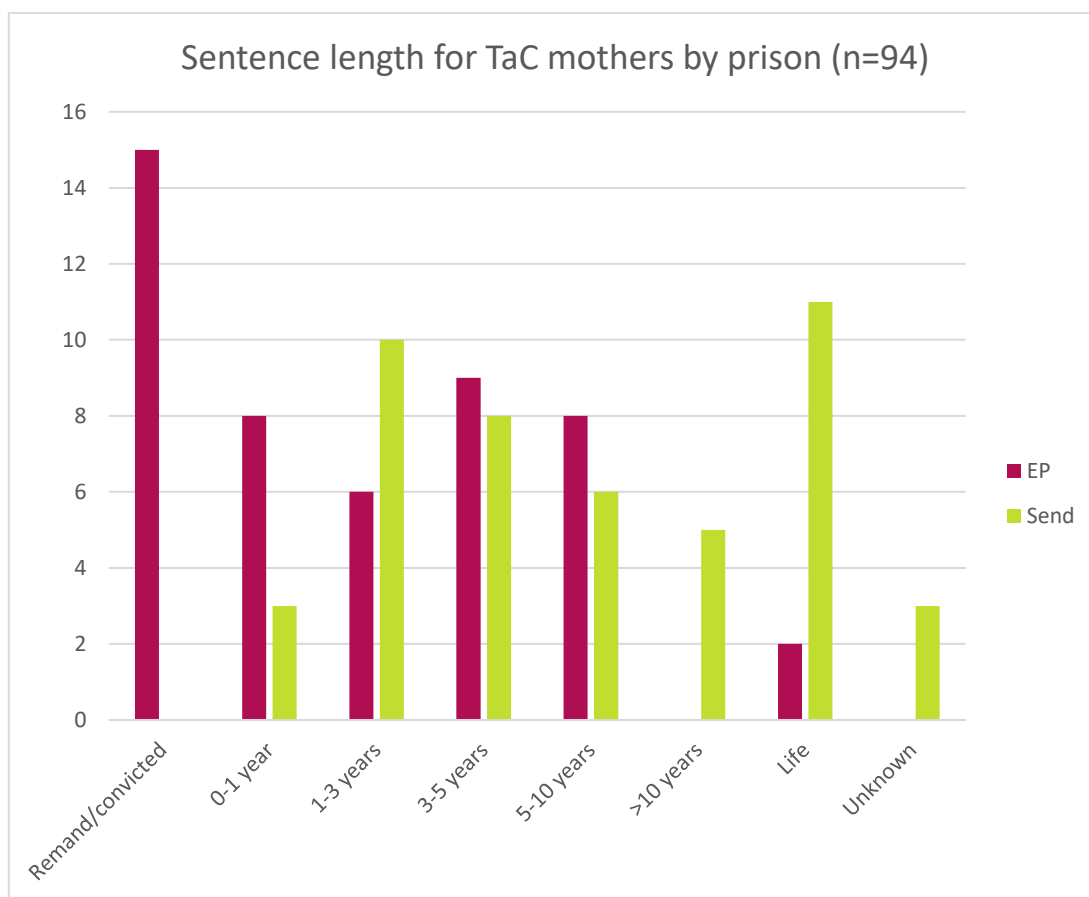


Figure 10: Length of sentence for TaC mothers

Incarceration history

Our baseline questionnaire recorded the incarceration history for each mother and the comparative profile for each prison is presented in Figure 11.

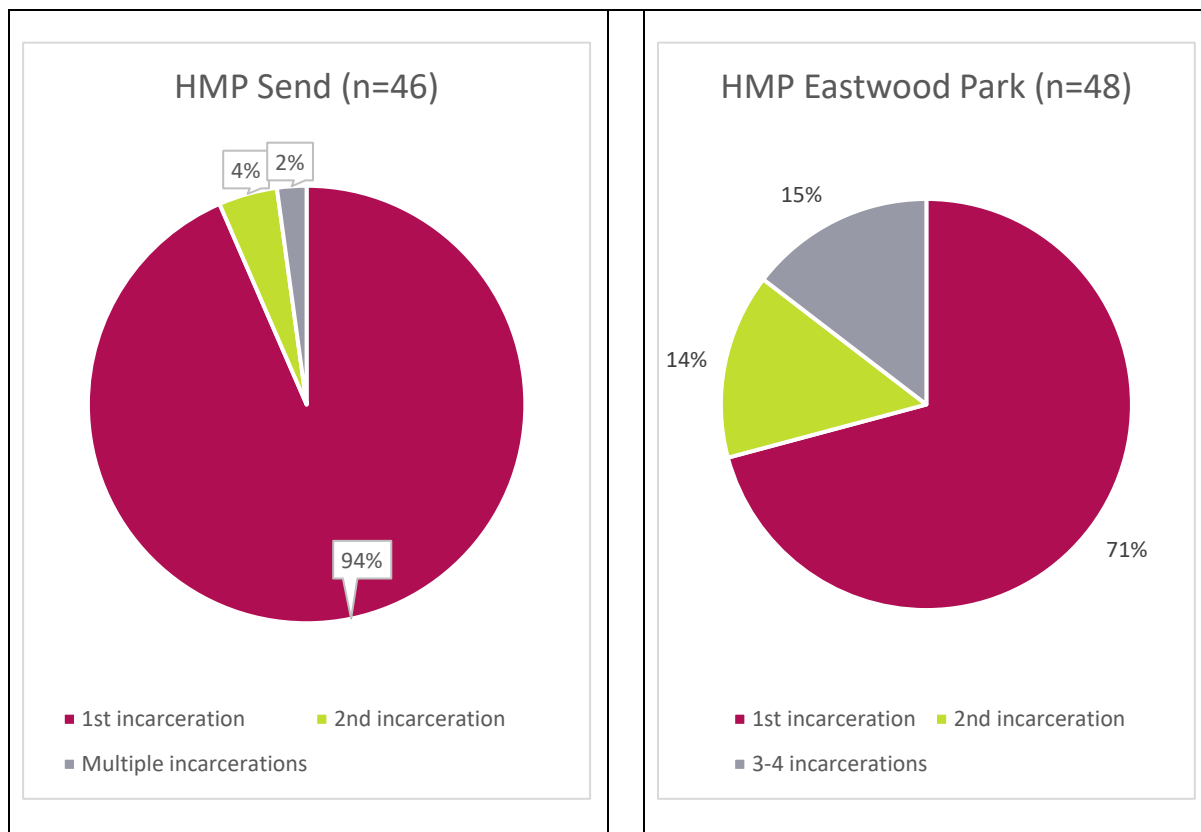


Figure 11: Incarceration history for mothers accessing the Together a Chance service at each prison

Child-related offences

We have specifically analysed offences that have resulted in harm to children as this has implications for the outcome of any assessments in relation to contact and care of children. A greater proportion of cases at HMP Send (46%) relate to mothers that have committed offences which have caused harm to their own or other children, compared to HMP Eastwood Park (21%), as shown in Figure 12.

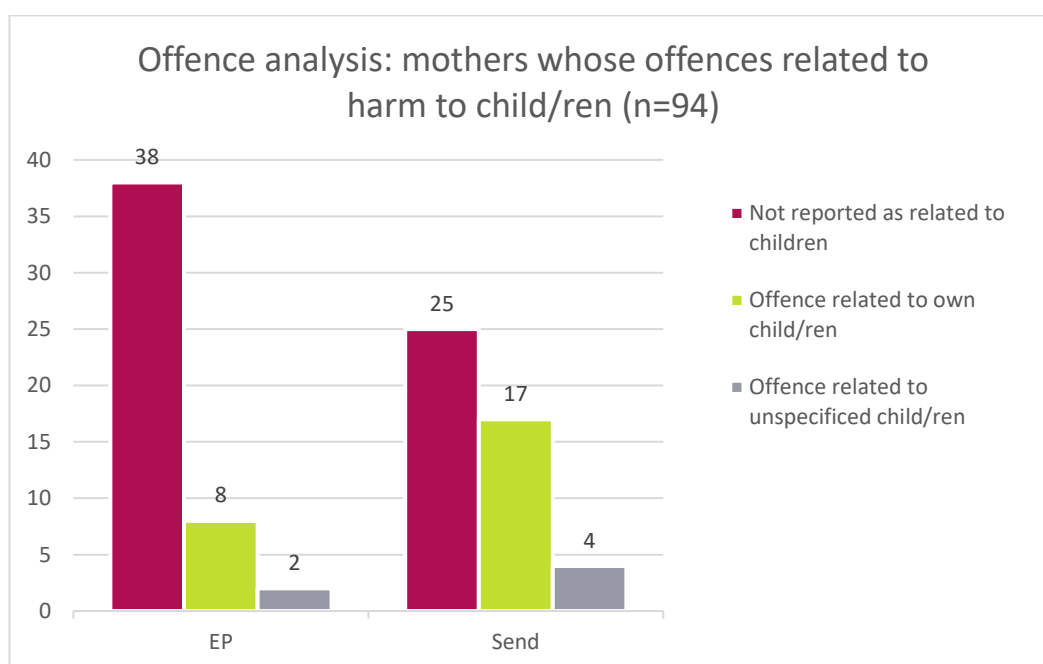


Figure 12: Child-related offences by prison for TaC mothers

Vulnerabilities identified at start of intervention

Specialist support in prison

The baseline questionnaire captured the wing where each mother was placed at and the Pact Social Workers reported any additional support being provided at any time during the course of the intervention. The detailed breakdown for each prison is provided in Table 6.

The different profiles of support reflect the different provision at each prison – HMP Send has the only Therapeutic Community (TC) in the women’s estate, and the Mother and Baby Unit (MBU) at HMP Eastwood Park is one of six MBUs in England. The PIPE unit at HMP Send and the Nexus unit at HMP Eastwood Park are psychologically informed environments for women with personality disorders and related difficulties.

It is notable that a higher proportion of TaC mothers at HMP Eastwood Park have identified needs for specialist support (60% compared to 26% at HMP Send) and this is not fully explained by the MBU which only accounts for 13%.

No additional support needs were reported for 74% of mothers at HMP Send compared to 40% of mothers at HMP Eastwood Park. This is possibly due to the nature of the prisons and sentence progression.

Table 6: Specialist support reported for women accessing TaC (n=94)

		Women accessing support	% at Tac mothers each prison
HMP Eastwood Park			
	Nexus Unit	2	4%
	Enhanced wing	6	13%
	Measures in place due to vulnerability	2	4%
	Mental Health Unit	2	4%
	Drug/alcohol detox	5	10%
	Community mental health support	1	2%
	MBU	6	13%
	Perinatal mental health team	3	6%
	Specialist antenatal care	1	2%
	DV services	1	2%
	No additional support reported	19	40%
	Eastwood Park total	48	100%
HMP Send			
	Therapeutic Community	7	15%
	PIPE wing	3	7%
	Measures in place due to vulnerability	1	2%
	DV services	1	2%
	No additional support reported	34	74%
	Send total	46	100%
	Total mothers	94	

Lack of social network

The detrimental impact associated with a lack of social network is well researched in the health and social care literature. We therefore asked Pact Social Workers to explore this with mothers at the point of referral and to document each mother's contacts on the baseline questionnaire. A lack of social network was reported for thirteen women at HMP Eastwood Park (27%) and six women at HMP Send (13%); though as shown in Figure 13 below, it was not clear that the six mothers at HMP Send had any contacts with friends or family. Nineteen further mothers were reported to have limited contact with friends and family at triage.

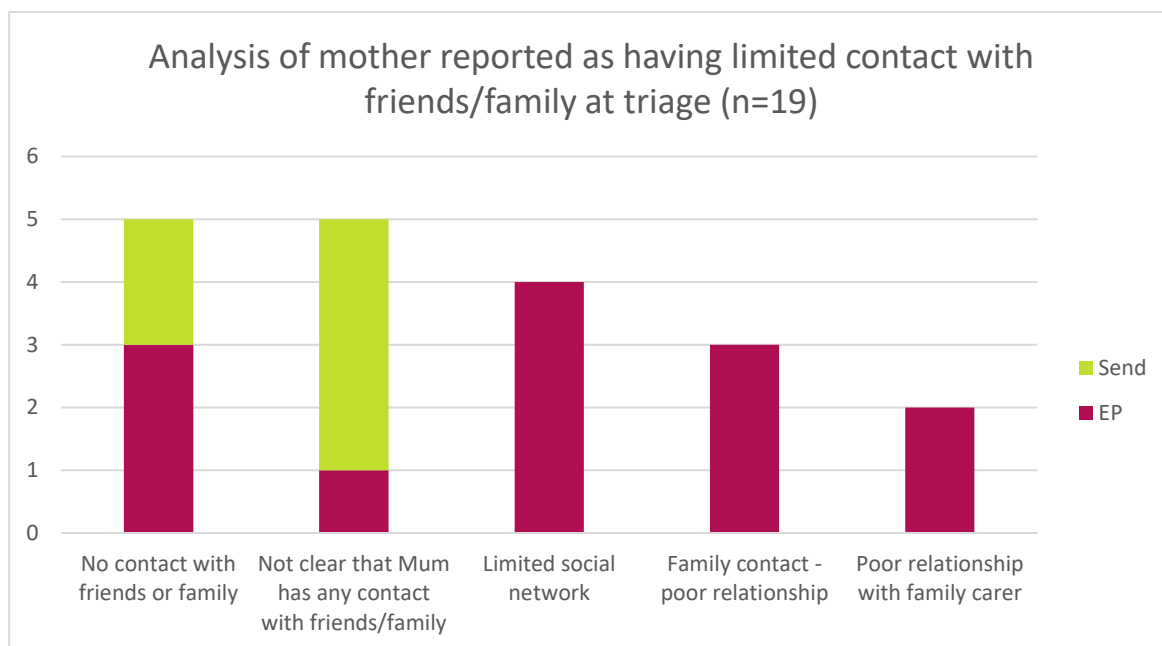


Figure 13: Assessment of isolation: mothers with limited social contact at triage (n=19)

Mothers affected by domestic abuse

In addition to the high incidence of self-reports of domestic abuse in interviews with mothers, our tracker data reveals reports of both historical domestic violence and ongoing issues associated with domestic abuse. The 6-monthly tracker reports reveal that 21 women (22%) that are known to have experienced or have self-reported domestic violence with a previous or current partner. Of these 21 women, the Pact Social Worker has reported ongoing domestic abuse issues in 20 cases, most frequently in relation to an ex-partner restricting contact.

Issues commonly associated with domestic violence are more evident in the reports relating to women at HMP Eastwood Park: of the 21 women who are reported to have experienced domestic violence in previous or current relationships, 14 were at HMP Eastwood Park (see Figure 14) and this represents 29% (almost 1 in 3) of the mothers who accessed Together a Chance at this prison. Whilst domestic violence is frequently under-reported, and this cannot be regarded as an accurate picture, the differences between the prisons do align with the different profiles of mothers - their sentence lengths, relationship status, care arrangements for their children and level of contact with children.

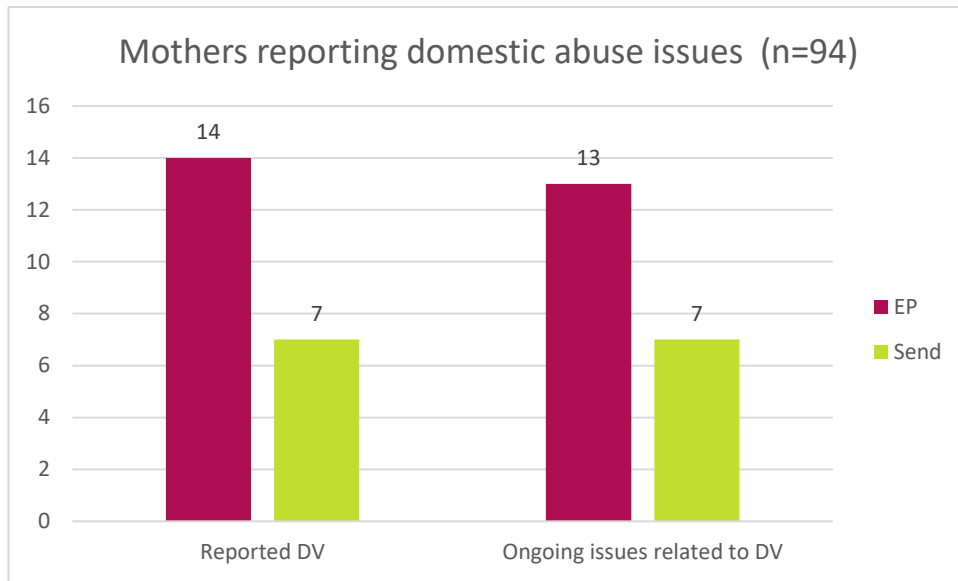


Figure 14: Reports of domestic abuse from Together a Chance mothers, by prison

...Almost 1 in 3 women at HMP Eastwood Park reported domestic abuse from a current or ex-partner

Profile of associated families

Number of children

We have continued to collect data relating to the family size of each mother at the point of referral to the Together a Chance service. The baseline questionnaires asked Pact Social Workers to report on the number of children in each mother's family and these are grouped and presented in Figure 15. This analysis relates to 91 mothers as three mothers had adult children or the case related to a relative's child. Across the sample, 74% had more than one child and 13% had at least five children. However, family size was not consistent across the prisons, as shown in Figure 16. TaC mothers at HMP Eastwood Park tended to have larger families: 50% of the mothers had at least three children. This compares to 40% at HMP Send, and may be explained by mothers tending to have longer sentences at this prison.

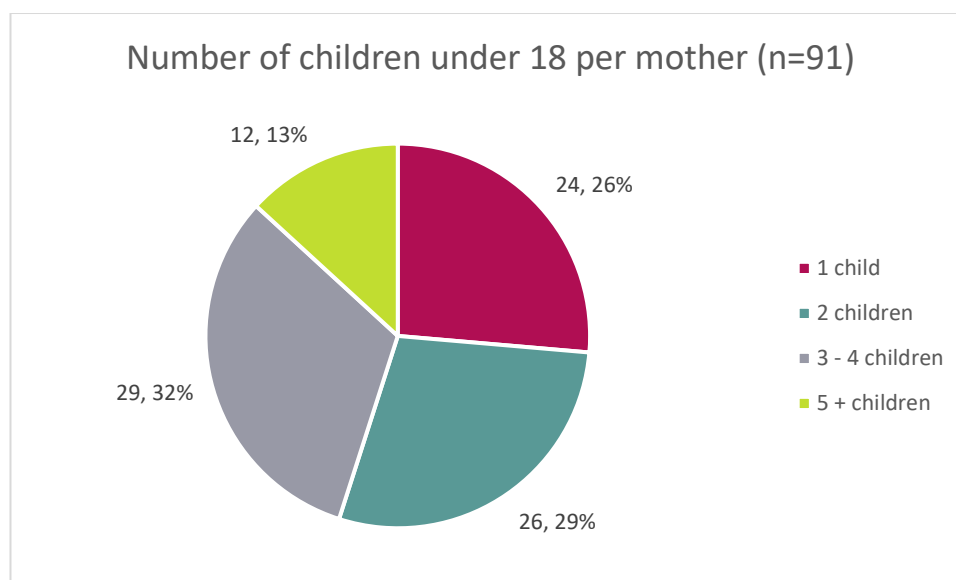


Figure 15: Number of children per TaC mother for mothers with their own children under 18

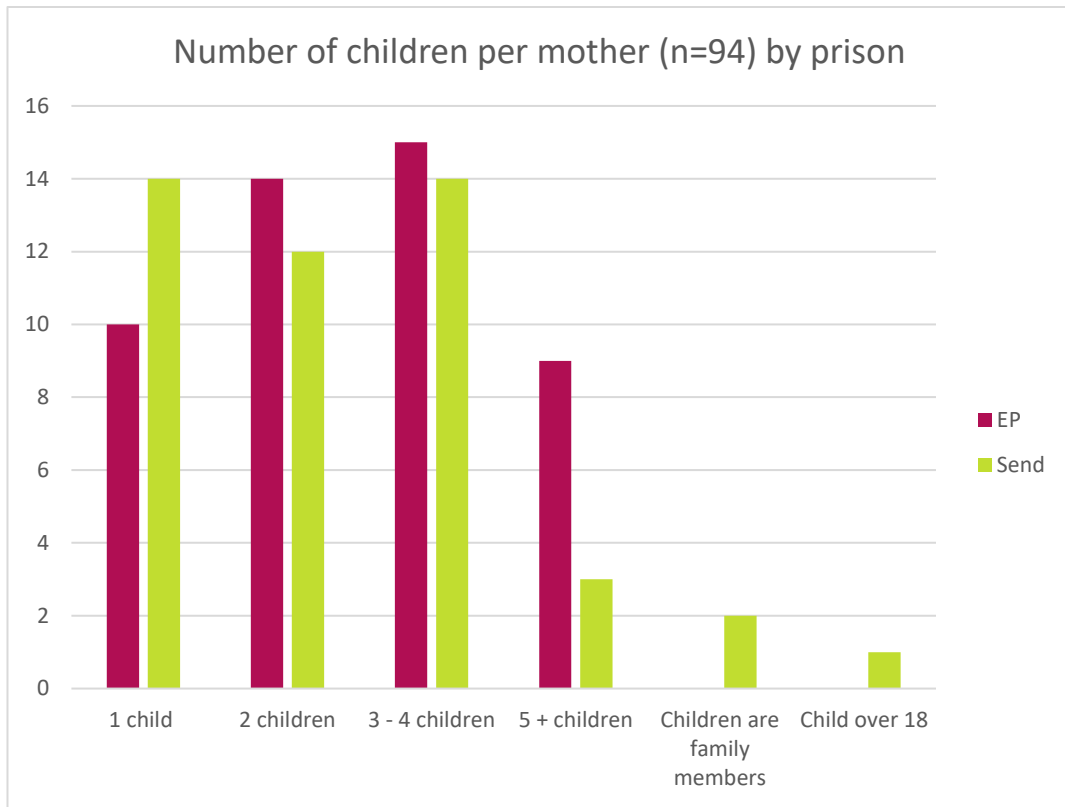


Figure 16: Number of children per Tac mother by prison (n=94)

Age profile of children

As expected given the different sentencing profiles and the MBU provision, there is a higher proportion of mothers with younger children at HMP Eastwood Park. A comparative analysis of the number of mothers with at least one child under 2 years of age at each prison is presented in Figure 17.

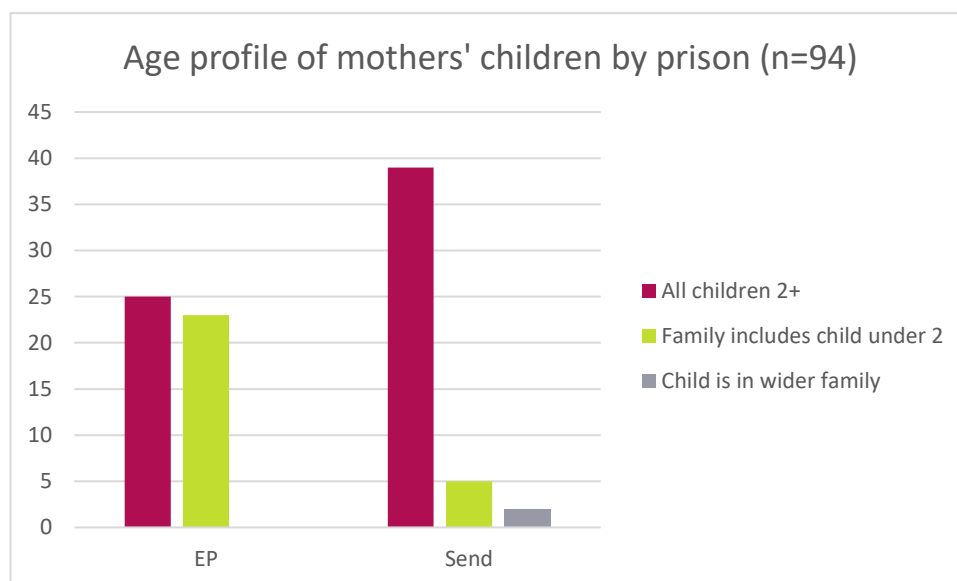


Figure 17: Age profile of children for TaC mothers by prison

Care arrangements for the mothers' children

Children's care arrangements at referral

We have recorded the care arrangements for the children of the 92 mothers who accessed the Together a Chance service in relation to their own children. A summary of care arrangement configurations for these 92 mothers is shown in Figure 18. Only 41 mothers (44%) had all their children living in a family or kinship care arrangement during their incarceration. For 17 mothers (19%), at least one child had been or was being placed for adoption, resulting in the loss of parental responsibility. In total, 51 of the 92 mothers (55%) had at least one child placed in care by the originating local authority.

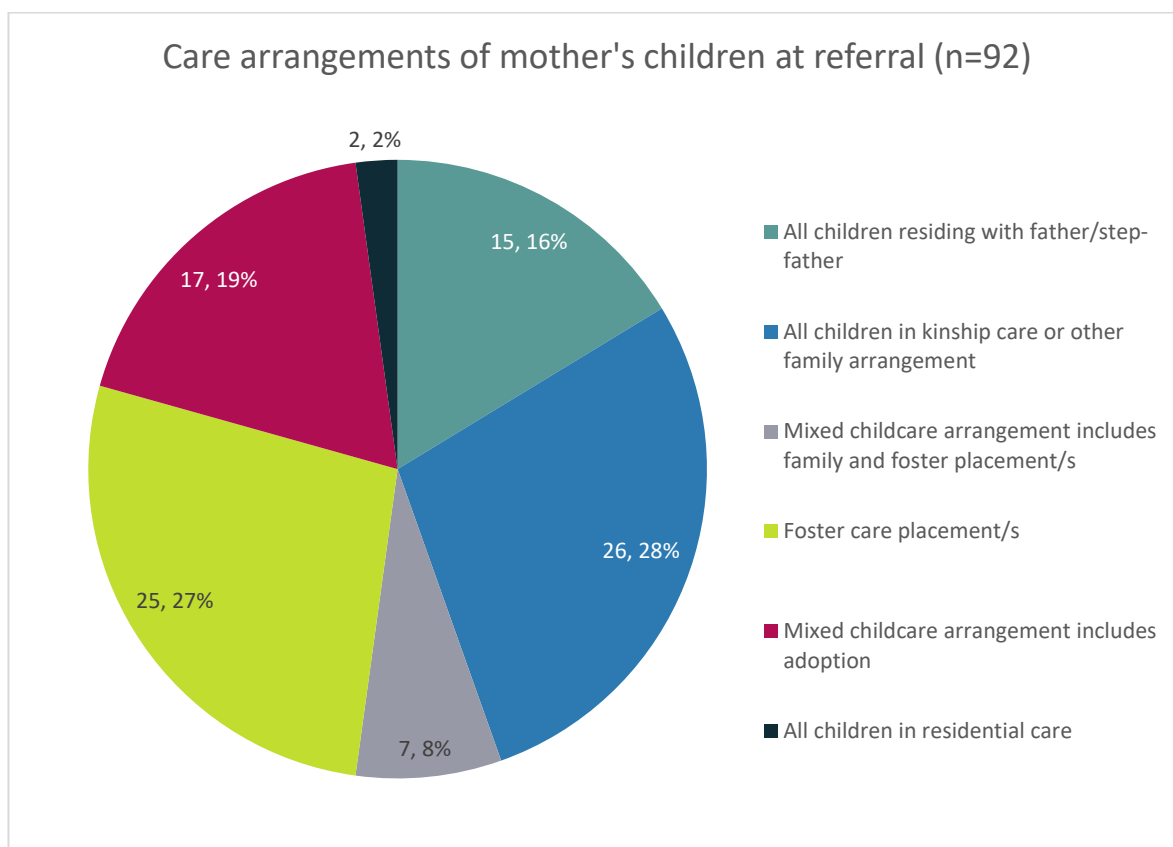


Figure 18: Care arrangements in place for the children of TaC mothers at the point of referral

The different profile of care configurations for mothers' children at each prison is presented in Figure 19. It can be seen that only 10% of mothers at HMP Eastwood Park had children living with their father (or the mother's partner) compared to 23% at HMP Eastwood Park. In contrast, at the time of referral, there was a significantly larger proportion of mothers at HMP Eastwood Park (40%) whose children were living with wider family members at the time of referral compared to HMP Send (16%).

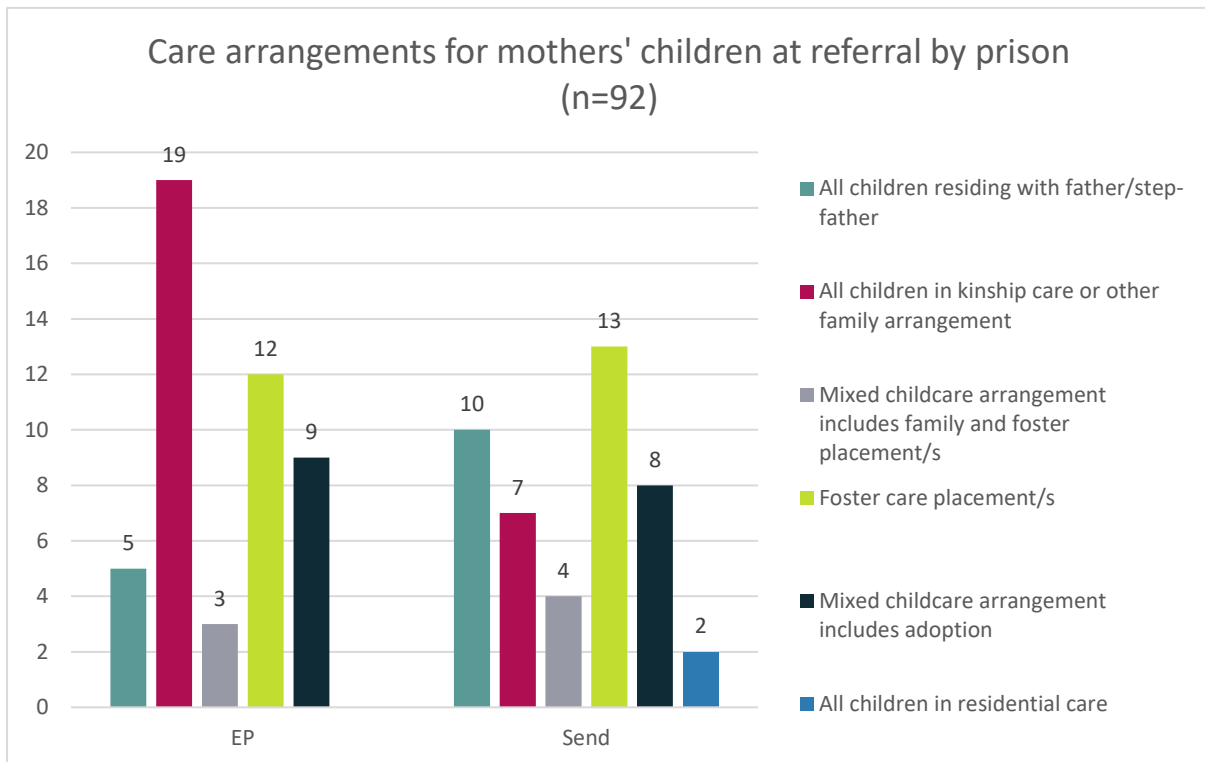


Figure 19: Care arrangements by prison

Sibling separation

Of the 67 mothers with more than one child (aged under 18), the majority (63%) of siblings continue to be separated (see Figure 20), either amongst family members; in different foster care placements; in a mixed arrangement including family and foster care; or a mixed arrangement including adoption.

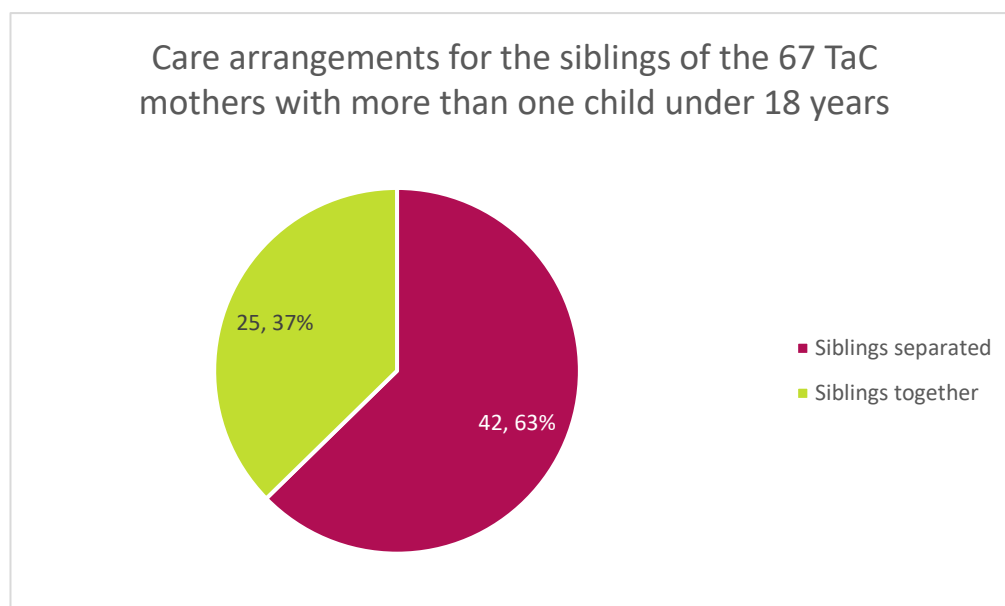


Figure 20: Sibling arrangements for TaC mothers with more than one child (n=67)

Mother and Baby Unit at HMP Eastwood Park

The Mother and Baby Unit did not feature on the 'care arrangements' data above as there were only two mothers who were residing in the MBU at the point of referral to Together a Chance, and in both cases the mother had older children and so a mixed arrangement was in place. We have continued to analyse data about the MBU, as well as visiting and interviewing MBU staff to gain a clearer understanding of access arrangements and how it fits in with the Together a Chance service. Data relating to this is presented later in this section as it forms part of our analysis of outcomes.

Mothers' needs in relation to Together a Chance

As outlined earlier in this report, the Together a Chance service is intended to support mothers in prison who have children who are the subject of children's social care involvement and our sense from the tracker data is that this has broadly been applied. We have received ad hoc information that the threshold criteria applied at HMP Eastwood Park is higher due to capacity issues and this will be discussed below where we discuss delivery of the service. Our questionnaire asked about social work and court involvement to assess how thresholds have been applied in practice, and to gain an understanding of the complexity of the work. We also asked the Pact Social Workers to specify each mother's "self-identified needs", as well as the Pact Social Worker's assessment of need at triage.

Number of Social Workers per 'case'

Of the mothers that accessed the Together a Chance service, 83 (90%) had at least one Social Worker allocated to the child/ren. Some families had two (17%) or three (1%) Social Workers allocated, and this was aligned to siblings being separated. As can be seen in Table 7 below, this equates to 101 allocated children's Social Workers for the 249 children of the 92 mothers with their own children across the evaluation period (two mothers are not included as their involvement with TaC related to children that were not their own).

... 101 allocated social workers for the 249 children of 92 mothers at HMP Eastwood Park and HMP Send ...

Table 7: number of children's Social Workers allocated to each family by prison

Number of allocated Social Workers for children of each mother at triage					
No. of children's SWs	Eastwood Park	Send	Total cases	% of all cases	Total children's SWs
0	5	4	9	10%	0
1	34	32	66	72%	66
2	9	7	16	17%	32
3		1	1	1%	3
Total	48	44	92	100%	101

Needs of mothers whose children had no Social Worker

Including the two women who accessed Together a Chance but were not seeking assistance with their own children, eleven mothers were reported to have no allocated Social Worker at triage. However, there was clear evidence of work to resolve family issues and to promote or clarify contact. A further analysis was conducted to ascertain the key link professional for the Pact worker. This was fairly simplistic, as there is clear evidence in the case tracker data that the Pact workers were in contact with a range of professionals in pursuit of casework goals. However, it can be seen that for six mothers, the main professional contact was the front door of children's services (called the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub or MASH in some local authorities) for assistance with locating a child and to ascertain if there was an allocated Social Worker; to raise a safeguarding concern and/or seek allocation of a case; or to get clearance for the purposes of reviewing Public Protection restrictions. For the remaining five mothers, the key professional contact was the Early Help team of Children's Services in relation to an unborn child and supporting an MBU application; the Special Guardianship Social Worker; a family law solicitor in relation to private proceedings for breach of a contact order; an immigration lawyer in relation to a mother at risk of deportation on release; and internal prison staff as external contacts were managed by a colleague as part of an agreed plan due to the mother's specific needs and presenting behaviours.

Family Court involvement

Many of the mothers accessing the Together a Chance programme are, or have been, party to proceedings or are seeking assistance with making an application to the Family Court, separate from their criminal trial. Across both prisons, 76 mothers (83%) are either currently or have been party to proceedings, or proceedings are expected imminently (see Figure 21). Most of these cases (seventy) related to proceedings instigated by the local authority in relation to acquiring Parental Responsibility and overseeing the care arrangements for at least one child. For the remaining six mothers, contact was being restricted by a family member and they were seeking support from the Pact Social Worker to make an application for contact or breach of an existing order.

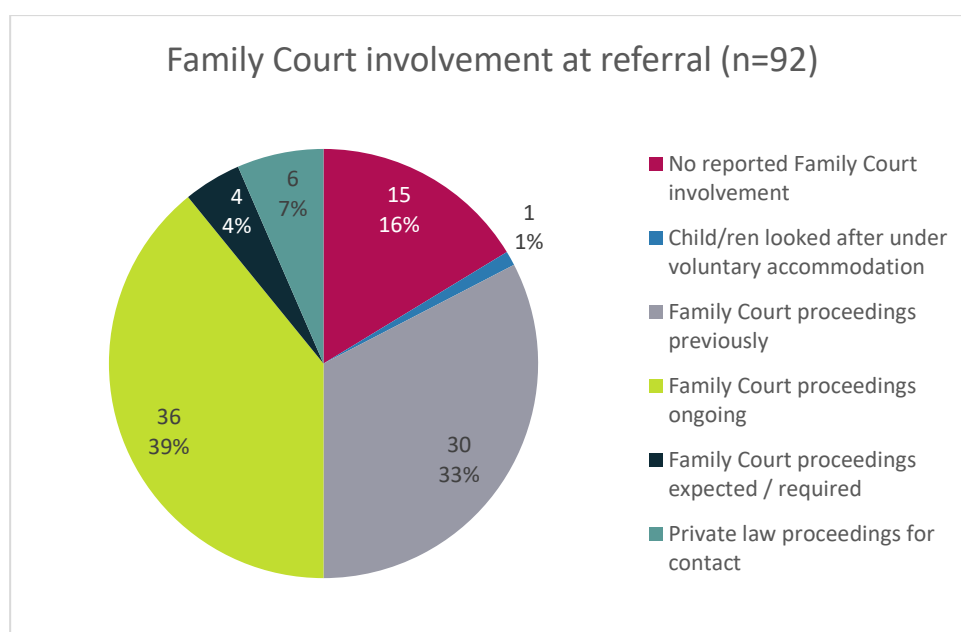


Figure 21: Different types of Family Court involvement for the TaC mothers at referral

The care proceedings data highlights a difference between the prisons in relation to the mothers' timeline for family court involvement, and this has implications for Pact Social Worker workload (see Figure 22). Most mothers at HMP Send reported that care proceedings were completed at the time of referral, and only 14 of the 44 mothers with their own children (32%) required support with legal proceedings in the Family Court. In contrast, at HMP Eastwood Park, 32 of the 48 mothers (67%) were currently in proceedings or were seeking support with applications for contact at the time of referral. This may also explain the difference in care arrangements already presented (Figure 19). Data detailing mothers' positions in relation to Family Court involvement at the outset of the intervention is provided for each prison in Table 8.

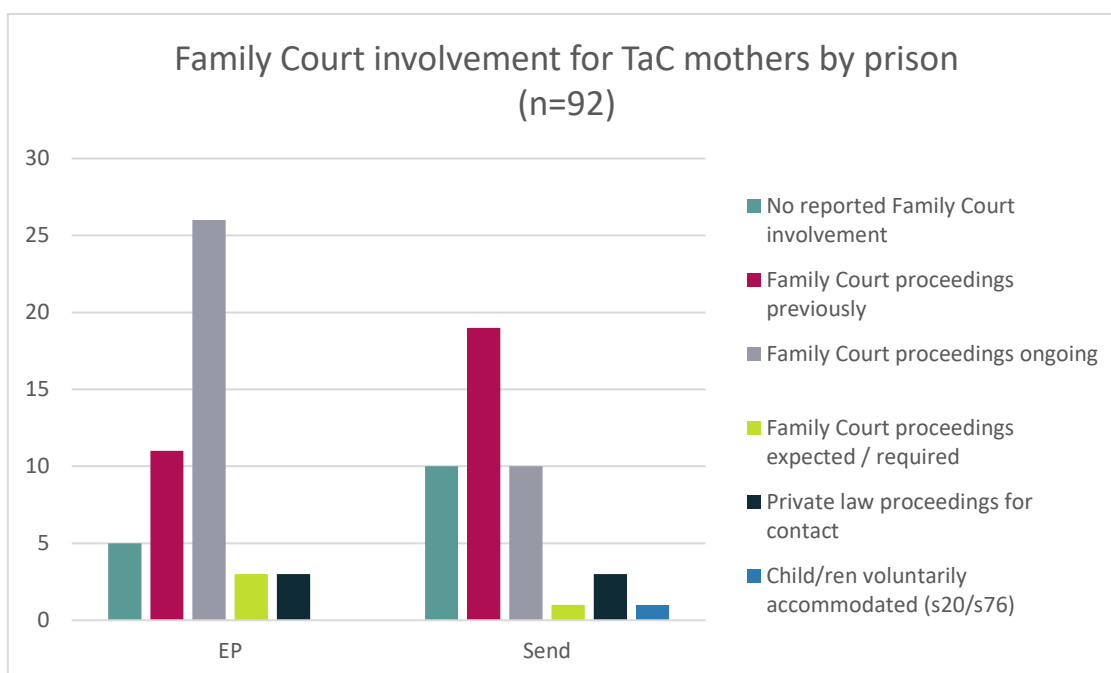


Figure 22: Profile of TaC mothers' involvement in proceedings in the Family Court by prison

Table 8: Analysis of Family Court involvement for TaC mothers at referral

Family Court involvement for TaC mothers at referral (n=92)					
	Send		Eastwood Park		Total
	n	%	n	%	
No reported Family Court involvement	10	23	5	10	15
Child/ren voluntarily accommodated (s20/276)	1	2	0	0	1
Family Court proceedings previously	19	43	11	23	30
Family Court proceedings ongoing	10	23	26	54	36
Family Court proceedings expected / required	1	2	3	6	4
Private law proceedings for contact	3	7	3	6	6
Total	44	100	48	100	92

Contact with children

Given that one of the main aims of the Together a Chance intervention is to promote appropriate contact in the child/ren's best interests, we asked the Pact Social Workers to report on the level of contact each mother had with her children at the point of triage. It was noticeable that this was highly variable, both across and within families of multiple children. Most striking is that 42 mothers (46% of the 92 mothers that had their own children) reporting having absolutely no contact with their children at the start of the intervention. Figure 23 describes the types of contact reported in broad categories and encompasses telephone calls, video calls and direct visits. For seven of the women, it was noted that there were restrictions in place preventing contact, either as part of Public Protection restrictions or a prohibitive order (restraining or non-molestation order).

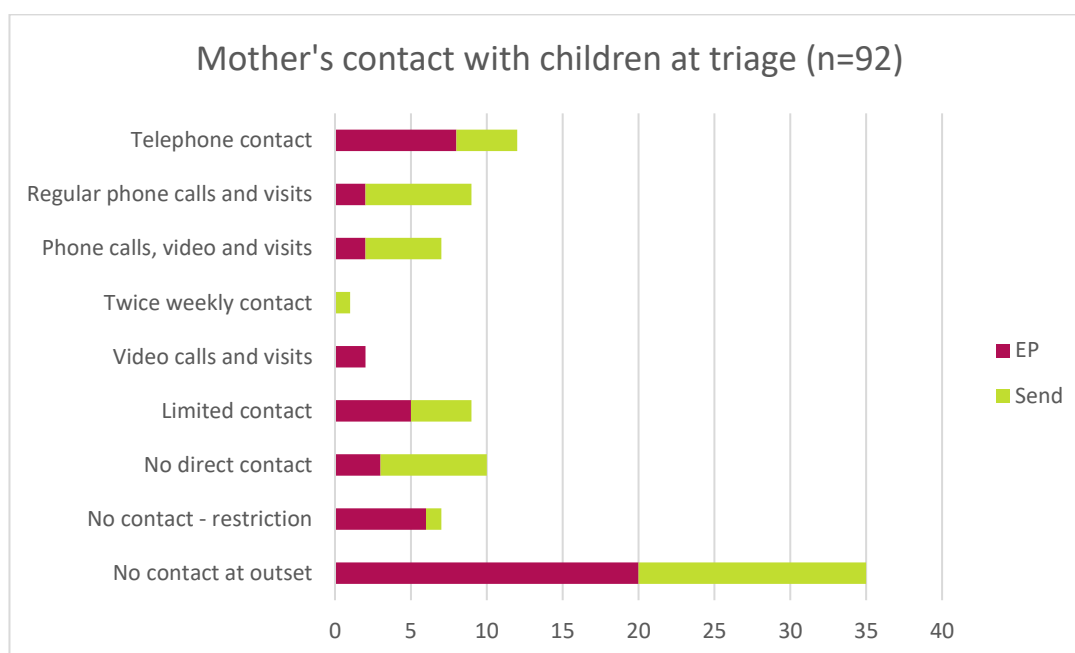


Figure 23: Mother's contact with their children at triage (n=92)

... 46% of mother had no contact with their children when they first accessed Together a Chance ...

Self-identified needs of mothers

With the exception of requesting support to access a place on the Mother and Baby Unit which came from five mothers at HMP Eastwood Park, self-identified needs were consistent across the groups of mothers at both prisons (see Figure 24). The most common request for support was with improving the level or quality of contact with children (both direct and indirect) and this was requested by 66 women (70%). Across both groups, 47% requested support to improve communication with their child's Social Worker. Consistent with the reported numbers in family court proceedings, support to navigate the Family Court was a request from 31% of women at HMP Eastwood Park and only 18% at HMP Send.

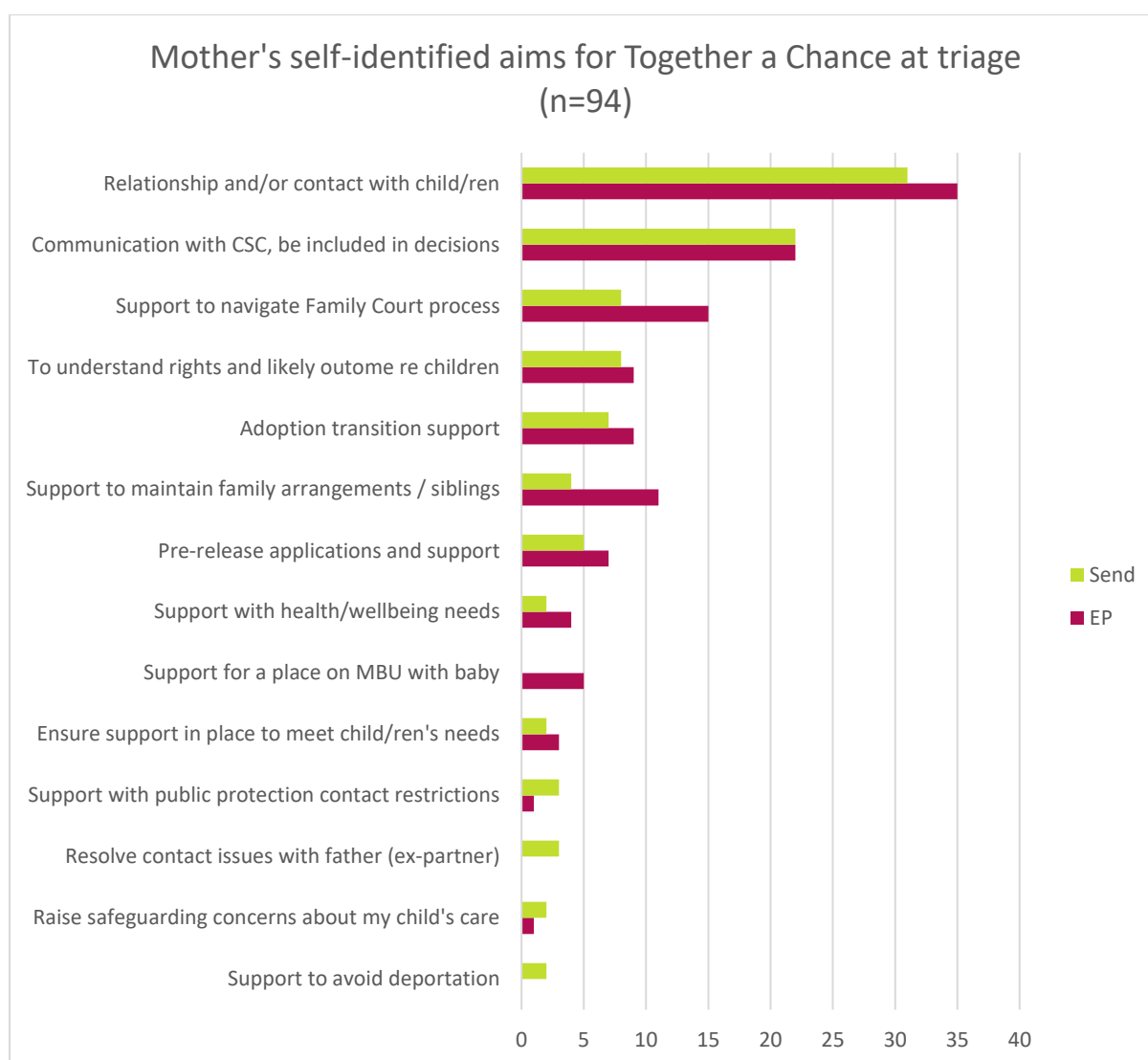


Figure 24: Self-identified needs of mothers at triage

Pact Social Worker assessment of mother's needs

As shown in Figure 25, putting in place contact agreements and linking with the allocated Social Worker in local authority children's social care services were the most frequently cited aims by the Pact Social Workers. They also both specified support with legal proceedings, improving working relationships with social services staff and educating mothers on navigating children's social care and the court as high priorities: these were more evident from the Pact Social Worker at HMP Eastwood Park, reflecting the wishes of the mothers and the earlier trajectory of Family Court proceedings amongst the mothers accessing Together a Chance there.

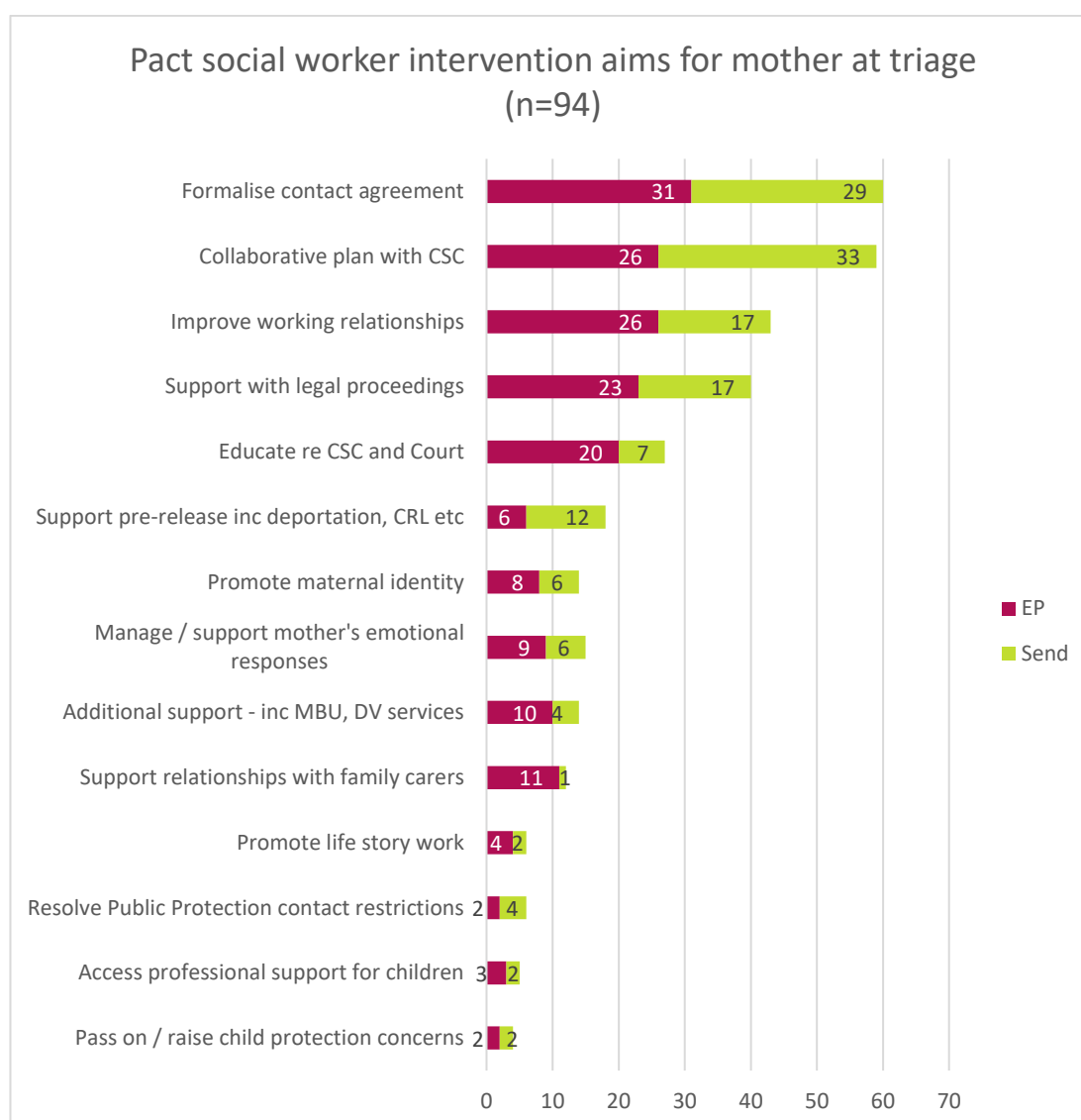


Figure 25: Pact Social Worker aims for individual mothers

Access and engagement: delivery of the service

Mother's engagement with TaC

Given the well-recognised difficulties parents have engaging with Social Workers relating to child protection issues, the level of engagement from mothers has been exceptionally high throughout the intervention. Over 90% of mothers never missed an appointment, except for those attributed to the prison regime, such as a conflicting appointment or the appointment invitation not being delivered on time. An analysis has been undertaken of the eight mothers where engagement difficulties were reported by the Pact Social Workers (see Figure 26).

For five mothers, the challenges reported by the Pact Social Workers were associated with the mother's presenting behaviours, either being seen as too demanding (typically where the child is the subject of the index offence and the mother presents with a high level of entitlement) or erratic. Only two mothers are reported to have disengaged, and this was attributed to receiving bad news:

"Mother is not pleased with me as she doesn't believe the information I am giving her to be true. Difficult working with mother due to her thoughts and beliefs around this. Mother also has autism and struggles in social interactions. It is reported that mother can also be difficult to engage from wing staff." (HMP Send)

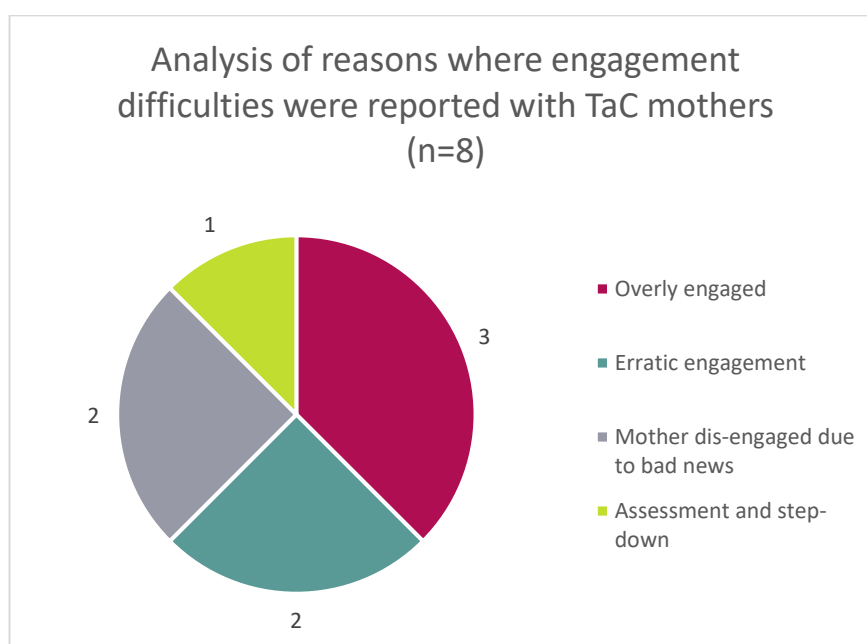


Figure 26: Reported level of mothers' engagement

Time spent addressing mothers' needs

To get an indication of the time spent on each 'case', we asked the Pact Social Workers to categorise the frequency and type of contact with each mother compared to the rest of their caseload (see Figure 27). In approximately half of the cases (49%) work was undertaken with the mother at least weekly.

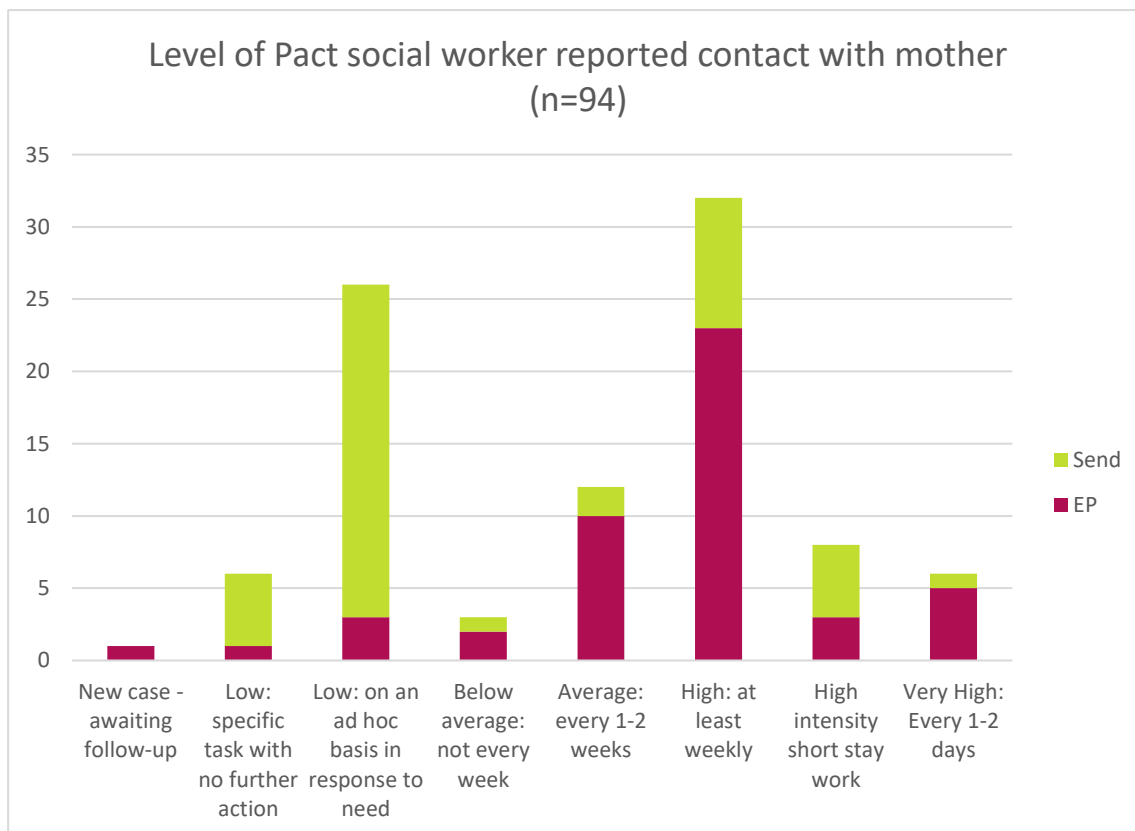


Figure 27: Reported level of Pact Social Worker contact with each mother (n=94)

This data enabled us to rank frequency of contact to get a sense of mothers' presenting needs at each prison and it is unsurprising that cases where legal proceedings were ongoing were particularly time-consuming, more so if the mother did not have legal representation.

Case intensity

Based on this data from the Pact Social Workers, we grouped the cases into three workload categories: (1) very high intensity, typically work relating to Court preparation or unexpected transfer or release; (2) high, where work was undertaken with the mother at least every 1-2 weeks, consistent with the statutory requirement for a 'child protection' case in Children's Social Care; (3) low, consistent with expected workload in a local authority 'child in need' case.

Using these three categories, we were able to compare the workload patterns at the two prisons (see Table 9). The prisons had a similar proportion of very high intensity cases (15%) where the Pact Social Worker worked with the mother almost daily; but HMP Eastwood Park also had an extremely high proportion of high frequency cases (69% compared to 24% at HMP Send); and HMP Send had a much higher proportion of low 'ad hoc' cases where the Pact Social Worker was often waiting on updates from the local authority children's Social Worker (63% compared to 15% at HMP Eastwood Park).

Table 9: Analysis of Pact Social Worker contact with each mother by prison (n=94)

	Eastwood Park	Send	Total
Very high intensity cases (daily/short stay)	8	6	14
as % of total cases	17%	13%	15%
High frequency cases (statutory CP)	33	11	44
as % of total cases	69%	24%	47%
Low frequency cases	7	29	36
as % of total cases	15%	63%	38%
Total no. of mothers	48	46	94

The higher workload at HMP Eastwood Park reflects the different prison profiles and is consistent with the higher level of Family Court involvement reported above; and also our visit observations; updates from the Pact Social Workers and their activity diaries.

Case variability over time and caseload management

This data does not present the full story as the narrative reports from the Pact Social Workers reveal a high degree of variability in the time required for each mother's case: many seemed to require an initial burst of activity, often within a short timescale, and this would stabilise, though in some cases increase again in response to an emergency or unexpected additional need.

“During period on constant watch I was seeing mum almost daily, however since she has stabilised and developed a sense of routine and consistency again contact is approx weekly. This is also reflected in 1 court application being resolved (1 remaining).” (Pact Social Worker, HMP Eastwood Park)

“Average- bi weekly contact to monthly contact depending on her mental state. If high anxiety and acct open - weekly, if in a better place, every few weeks.” (Pact Social Worker, HMP Send)

It is possible that some of these cases could be 'stepped down' when the mother's child-related needs have stabilised, and, as the evaluation progressed, there was evidence of the Pact Social Worker using the Pact family engagement worker (FEW) in this way to manage throughput.

“Mother to be transferred to Open Condition soon therefore, case to be handed to FEW at that time.” (Pact Social Worker, HMP Send)

“Transferred to another worker following period of minimal involvement and new support not reflecting complexity of SW caseload.” (Pact Social Worker, HMP Eastwood Park)

Volume of direct casework with mothers

We also asked the Pact Social Workers to estimate, at case closure, the total number of 'casework sessions' spent with each mother (see Figure 28). (For cases open at the end of the evaluation, we estimated total sessions based on reported contact frequency and the length of time since the mother's first session). Again, the variability across different cases is evident with some mothers requiring a minimal number of contacts and others requiring more than fifty sessions over several months.

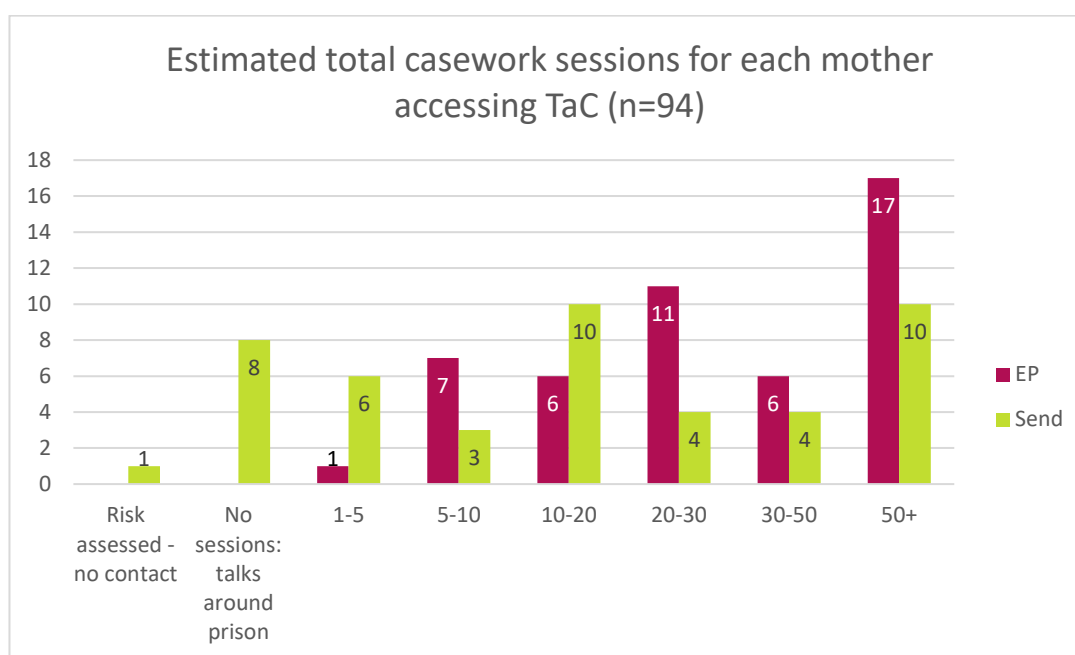


Figure 28: Estimated total casework sessions for each mother based on Pact Social Worker report

From this data we can estimate that the Pact Social Workers have completed 2,731 casework sessions with mothers across both prisons over the course of the evaluation, 62% at HMP Eastwood Park and 38% at HMP Send. It should be stressed that this is an approximation only; it is calculated from retrospective case reporting which is unlikely to be precise; and does not take into account other forms of work around the prison and with external professionals. It is therefore being reported as an indicator rather than a main finding, though the ratio between the prisons may be useful in considering future resource allocation.

Complexities associated with individual prisons

HMP Eastwood Park

At HMP Eastwood Park, there have been five returning mothers (10%) that were re-opened following closure – in these cases, the mothers re-entered the prison in the New Admissions Unit. The reported reasons for ‘return’ cases re-opening are:

- recall due to breach of license conditions
- following sentencing having been initially remanded and then bailed
- being re-arrested following an initial remand and bail cycle.

All five mothers self-referred back into the Together a Chance service. The process of release preparation, and then re-referral increases the workload for the Pact Social Worker and the case data highlights the need for knowledge and expertise when a mother is unexpectedly returned to prison, for example, in challenging voluntary care arrangements for children when a mother did not fully comprehend what she was being asked to sign and then discovering her children were placed in foster care. The return to prison possibly also indicates a need for more support and follow-up post release.

We have also been advised that the criteria for access to the service at HMP Eastwood Park is higher as there have been capacity issues. A case now meets the criteria for the Pact Social Worker’s involvement when the local authority children’s social care team are involved “AND there is a challenging/strained relationship that is preventing progress or particular complexity and/or family court proceedings.”

HMP Send

The case data reveals the offence and sentencing profile of mothers based at HMP Send can create challenges for contact with their children. In particular, the narrative evidence highlighted the complexity of navigating Public Protection policies and this was more common at HMP Send. For mothers starting a life sentence, or being refused parole with no clear end in sight, there is a period of adjustment and there is clear evidence throughout the case data questionnaires that the Pact Social Worker provides support for women who are considered to be a risk to themselves.

Intervention challenges reported

We have collected data on challenges reported by the Pact Social Workers, either during the intervention or on case closure. In 70 of the 94 cases (74%), the Pact Social Worker cited at least one barrier to progress. These have been analysed thematically and are reported in Figure 29.

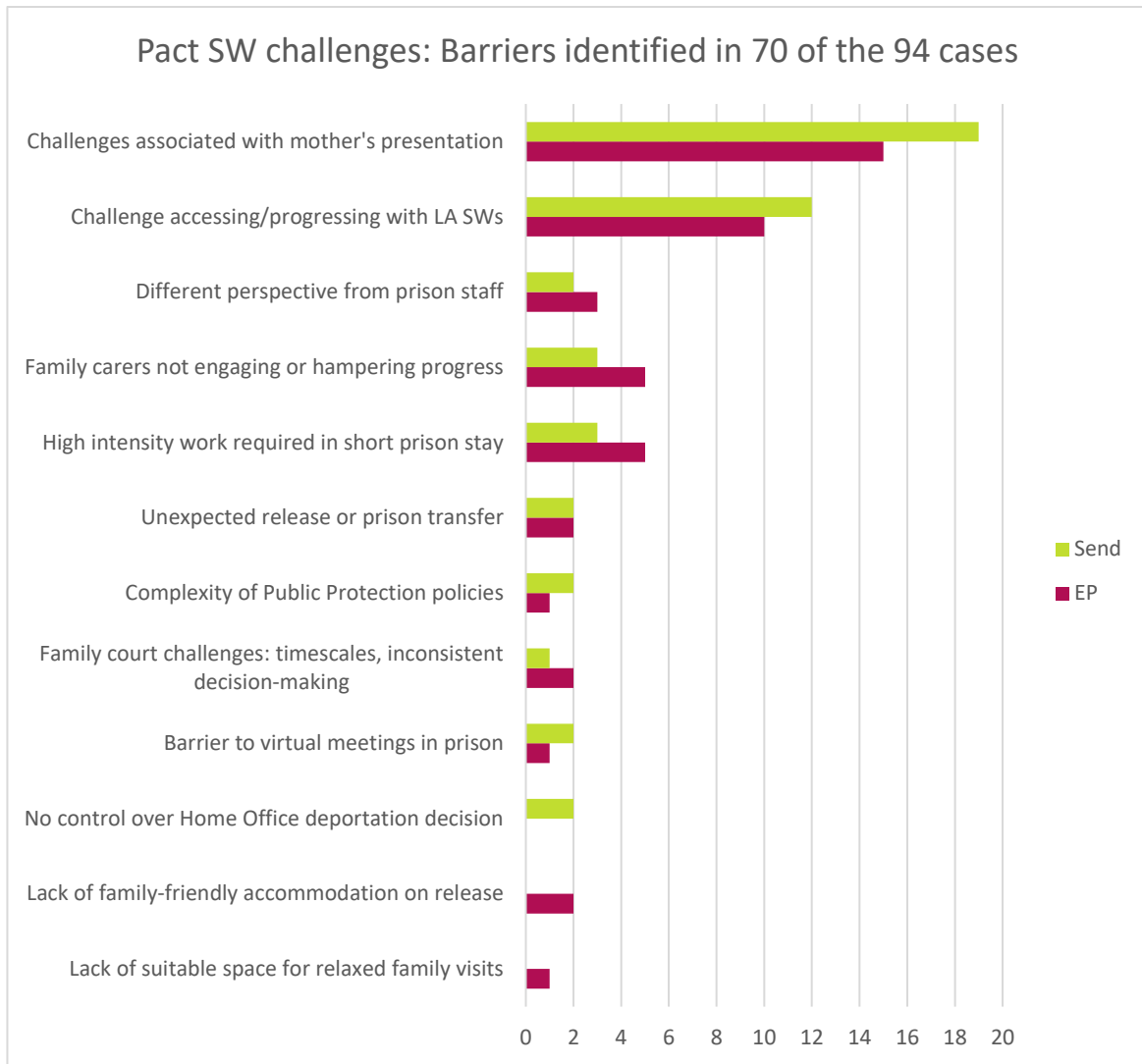


Figure 29: Types of barriers reported by Pact Social Workers in cases reported as challenging (n=70)

Mothers who present as challenging

We asked the Pact Social Workers to note down challenges associated with the mother's presentation, both at baseline and in the 6-monthly follow-up questionnaires. As we would expect amongst this population, this was recorded for a relatively high number of mothers (36%) and we received a range of responses on the nature of the challenge. We have summarised these for each prison in Figure 30 below.

"Mum becomes highly distressed when she does not receive communication or updates from the LA when she is promised them or where there are agreements are in place to secure such arrangements." (HMP Eastwood Park)

We do not intend to draw any conclusion from such a limited snapshot; merely to make a note as it highlights the demanding nature of the work undertaken and it contributes to building a picture for future provision.

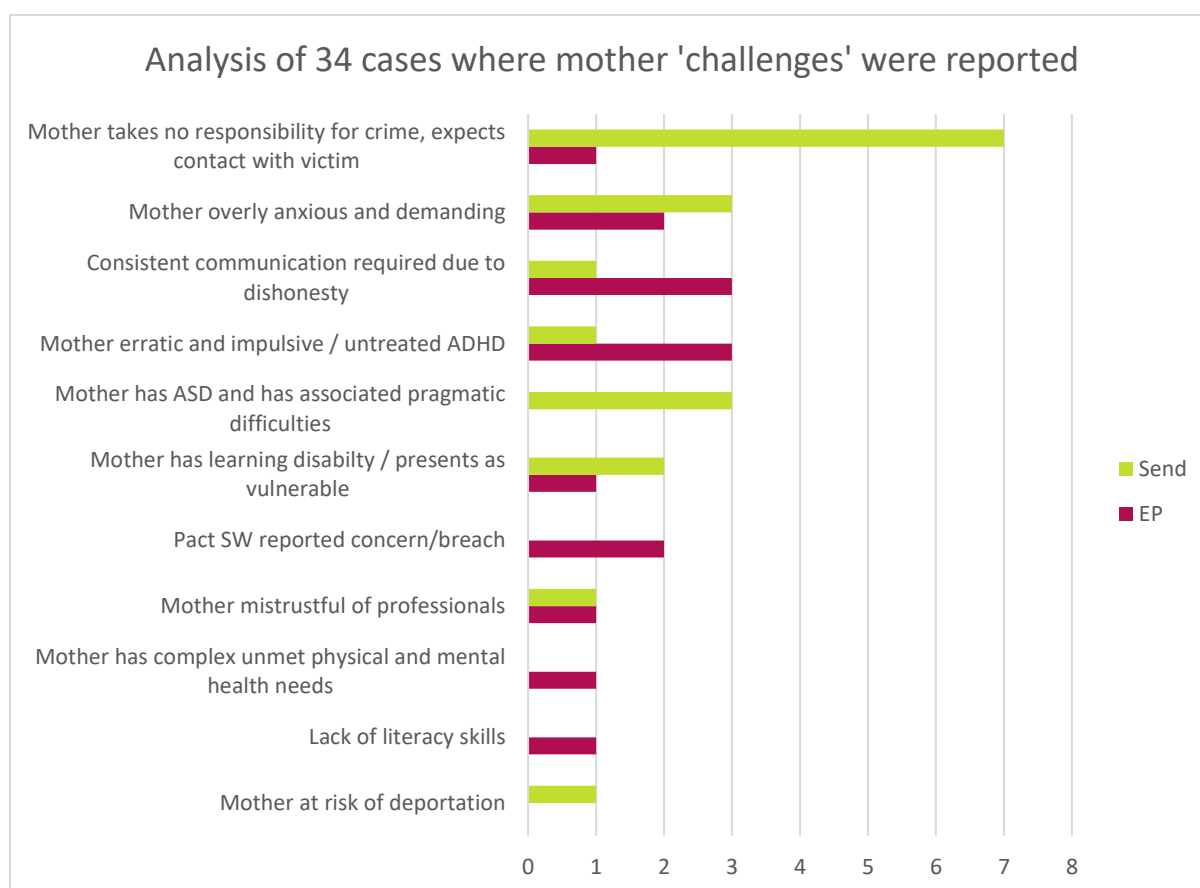


Figure 30: Types of challenges reported in cases where the mother reported as challenging (n=34)

Adjudications

We also asked Pact Social Workers to note down any formal reprimands by the prison system during the intervention. This was reported for only eight women over the course of the evaluation and the nature of the intervention is presented in Table 10.

Table 10: Nature of prison behavioural intervention

Behavioural interventions reported	Eastwood Park	Send	Grand Total
Adjudications for disruptive behaviour	4	2	6
Behaviour contract relating to care of baby	1		1
Loss of privileges due to ROTL breach	1		1
Total	6	2	8

Without comparative data, it is difficult to say whether a mother's engagement in the Together a Chance service encourages positive behaviour. What is clear however, is that mothers want contact with their children and it is common for women supported through ACCT process to be unsettled by events relating to their children, or failure to have contact with them. This will be discussed further in the next section.

Challenges in liaising with local authority Social Workers

Particularly on the tracker reports from HMP Send where cases tended to be long term and Family Proceedings were historical, the challenge of getting hold of Social Workers and 'pinning them down' to virtual meetings that aligned with the prison regime was noted. This invariably resulted in drift and delay. For example, one mother arrived from HMP Eastwood Park and left 6 months later for HMP Downview and within that time, although letterbox contact had been re-kindled for her adopted children and the Pact Social Worker had been able to locate and liaise with the assigned local authority Social Worker for an older child apparently residing with his father, the mother had not been able to progress towards her goal of reestablishing contact:

"extremely difficult to get social services to engage and respond. They have agreed to contact but then disappear and no follow through." (Pact Social Worker, HMP Send)

“Lack of/comparatively limited information sharing from LA to mum (example: not sharing assessment outcomes with mum and only notifying family solicitor pre-hearing, not notifying mum of who has been assessed as able to care for child)” (Pact Social Worker, HMP Eastwood Park)

“Very difficult to engage social services. They appear to have a very negative view of the mother and are painting her very badly. Although some of these observation are true, it appears they are actively trying to work against the mother. A lot of work gone into hopefully mending this relationship or at least. being a positive advocate for the mother and being "on her side".” (Pact Social Worker, HMP Send)

“Lack of clarity from LA with regards to planning for the children - the LA have given mum mixed impressions of their position and view of mum regaining care of/having contact with the children which has increased stress and conflict within the working relationship.” (Pact Social Worker, HMP Eastwood Park)

“LA ended their involvement during active court proceedings having initiated the application themselves - gave impression this would not impact the case but has in fact had huge impact on parties now feeling without guidance and clarity, leading to hearing adjournment and delay.” (Pact Social Worker, HMP Eastwood Park)

Other systemic challenges identified as a barrier to outcomes

Physical barriers such as the lack of a consistent medium for online meetings, the video link not being available or working, and the unavailability of a suitable space for family friendly contact or post-release accommodation were reported by both Pact Social Workers.

“LA insist on using Teams for LAC reviews which cannot be accessed in prison. Have asked this to be ammended but reportedly not possible. Currently mum is giving contribution to social worker before, and being fed back to via video link by social worker and IRO afterwards to promote inclusion.” (Pact Social Worker, HMP Eastwood Park)

“Only improvement would be around prison's accessibility to technology on the outside (virtual calls with professionals Teams meetings...).” (Pact Social Worker, HMP Send)

The Pact Social Workers also both noted challenges in achieving intervention goals during a short-stay incarceration or due to an unexpected plan change, for example, when a mother is released unexpectedly or transferred to another establishment at short notice.

“Was not informed of HDC approval and release so planning was disrupted - was unable to share updates from foster carers or ensure mum had sufficient support ahead of the family court hearing due to take place on the following day.” (Pact Social Worker, HMP Eastwood Park)

“Only challenge was due to the short timeline in having to arrange for the social worker to come in on a tight deadline and ensure all is done before release.” (Pact Social Worker, HMP Send)

In a small number of cases, the Pact Social Workers also reported challenges advocating for mothers in the best interests of their children when other prison personnel or the policies (e.g. Public Protection restrictions) have a fixed viewpoint which appears to be at odds with the healthy prison tests.

“Progress would have been made quicker if prison policies (Public Protection) would be easier to navigate. Difficult to get the mother's restrictions levels lowered.” (Pact Social Worker, HMP Send)

“Prison staff were resistant to the contact being held on the MBU without discussion due to mum's previous behaviour - advocated that this behaviour was more responsive to trauma, which was supported by the peri-natal MH team, and so denying the contact on this basis would only cause further trauma and distress.” (Pact Social Worker, HMP Eastwood Park)

“Difficulty around understanding parole process as she sits with Scottish parole but is in English prison and the rules are different/complicated.” (Pact Social Worker, HMP Send)

“Understanding and management of mum's mental and physical health needs in custody, and how this translated into care and release planning, unprofessional behaviour at times where personal judgement was made about mum which at points felt like bias.” (Pact Social Worker, HMP Eastwood Park)

Planning for release and resettlement were also noted to be challenging in some cases, particular where other agencies were involved.

“Housing not being made available or suitable for a child and this then being a barrier to the child being returned to the care of their mum from perspective of children's services”. (Pact Social Worker, HMP Eastwood Park)

“Lack of involvement from LA until week before release despite requests for involvement from 6 months and routinely as release date got closer. Risk of homelessness with care of a child”. (Pact Social Worker, HMP Eastwood Park)

Analysis of reported outcomes

As this is our final report on the evaluation, we have analysed every case tracked, including the 24 cases that remain open with work ongoing.

Progress towards stated aims

We asked Pact Social Workers to specify aims for the intervention with each mother in the baseline case tracker questionnaire, and also to comment on whether the mother was in agreement with these. We then assessed the work reported against the aims set to give an indication of goal attainment. Whilst this is not an objective measure of success, it does provide an opportunity to assess how well the intervention has been able to meet individual needs and to consider what works well and what should be improved upon as the service develops.

Our analysis of the case tracker reports indicates that aims have so far been achieved with 40 mothers (42%), 25 (52%) at HMP Eastwood Park and 15 (33%) at HMP Send (see Figures 31 and 32). Our data suggests that aims are ongoing with a further 30 mothers (32%) and are partially achieved for a further 15 mothers (16%); this is in part due to the number of open cases, but it also reflects the length of time taken for intervention in complex child welfare cases, particularly those that include court proceedings.

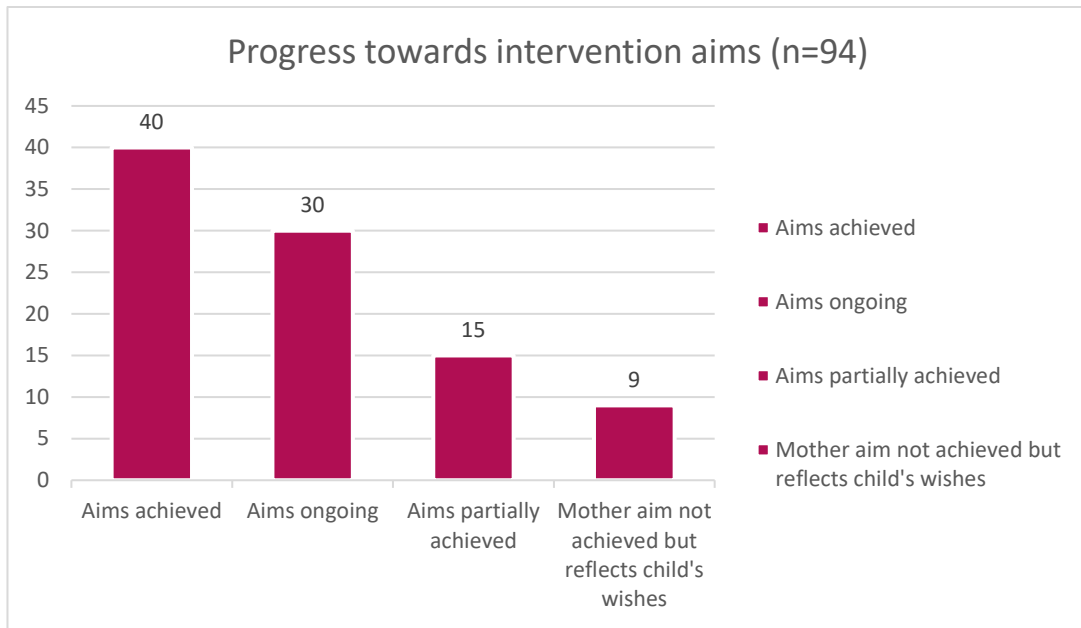


Figure 31: Extent of goal attainment: outcomes compared to initial aims (n=94)

The difference between the prisons (see Figure 32 below) can be attributed to the high number of women sentenced for child-related offences at HMP Send, which also explains the higher proportion of cases where mother's aims were not achieved but reflected the child/ren's wishes.

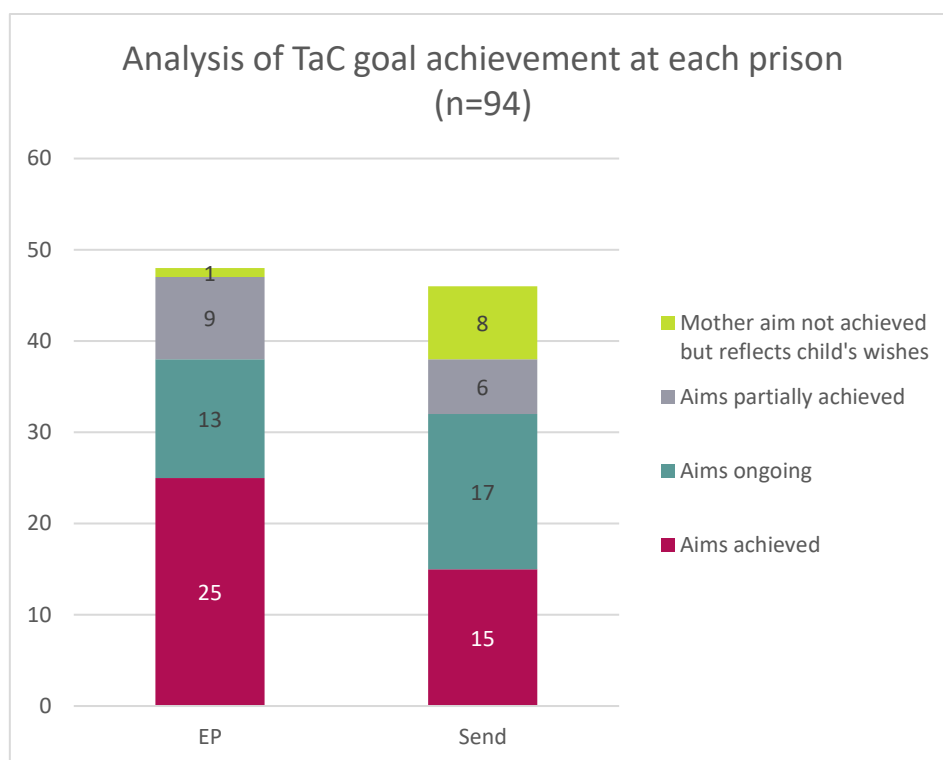


Figure 32: Analysis of outcomes in relation to initial aims at each prison (n=94)

Overview of outcomes reported

The outcomes identified in the narrative accounts of the work undertaken by the Pact Social Workers are presented in Figure 33. The most commonly reported aspect of the work undertaken was the support given to facilitate a relationship between the TaC mother and their child/ren's Social Worker(s). This was reported in 52 cases (55%). Support with the legal process was identified for 28 mothers at HMP Eastwood Park (58%) and 16 mothers at HMP Send (35%). Conversely, acting as a conduit for child updates to the mother was identified for 21 mothers at HMP Send (46%) and 17 mothers at HMP Eastwood Park (35%); this is consistent with the different stages of care proceedings and the higher level of contact restrictions in place for mothers at HMP Send. These outcomes have been grouped into seven key themes and are now evaluated in more detail.

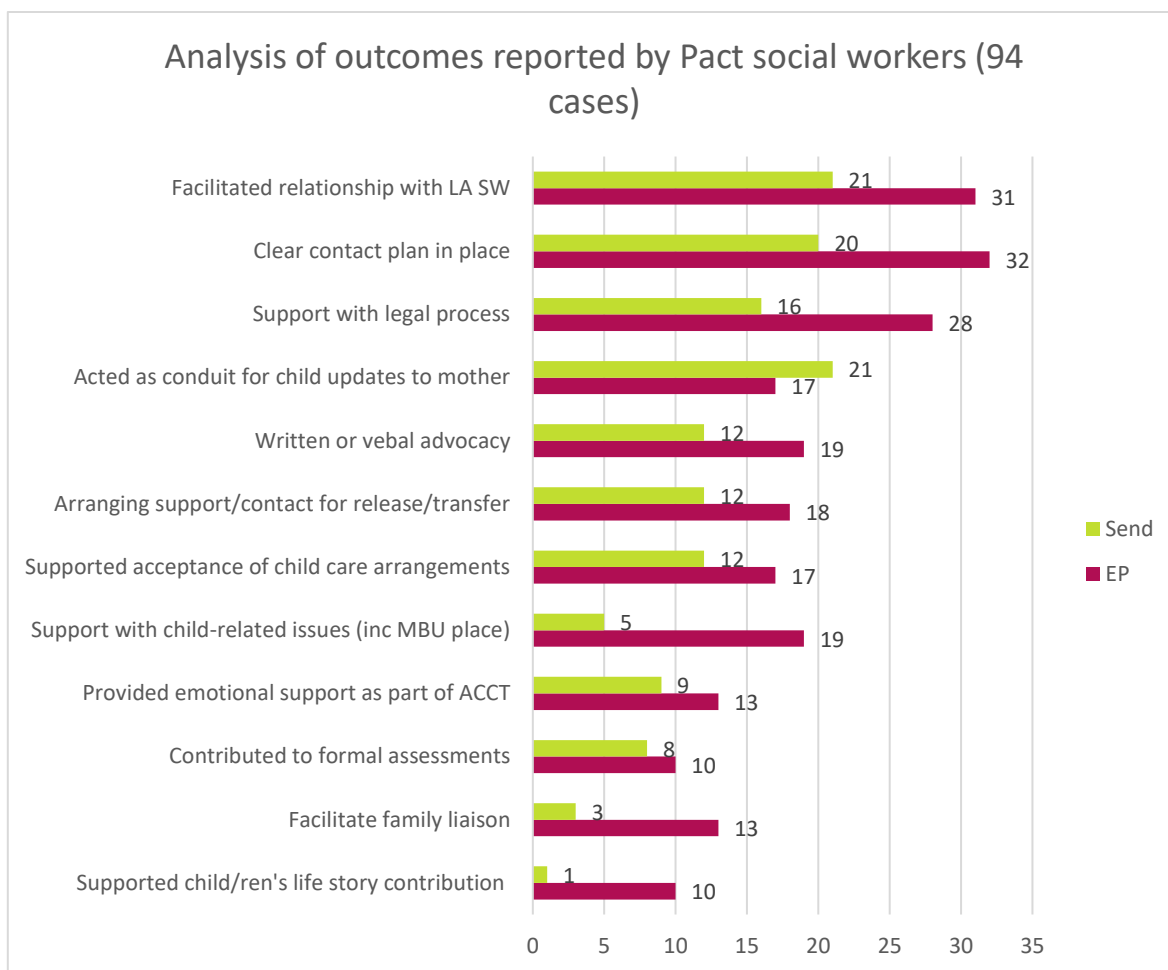


Figure 33: Types of outcomes reported by the Pact Social Workers for each case (n=94)

Key outcome 1: promoting appropriate contact with children

The 164 follow-up questionnaires completed at 6-monthly intervals during the intervention provide narrative records of the Pact Social Workers progressing several outcomes directly related to children. This includes having a contact plan in place for 52 (57%) of mothers (see Table 11).

The Pact Social Workers acted as a conduit, enabling mothers with parental responsibility (PR) to assert their right to updates on their child/ren; this was usually from the children's Social Worker or school but in two cases the Pact Social Worker acted as an intermediary for updates from the child/ren's father where relationships were strained.

In 24 cases (26%), the Pact Social Worker assisted and supported the mother in organising support for her children, both in the MBU within the prison and whilst in the care of other people in the community. This has included safety planning for a child being bullied at school; school transfers;

psychologist support; resolving housing issues; grants for essential items; and places for babies on the MBU.

Table 11: Breakdown of identified reported child-related outcomes

	Eastwood Park	Send	Total
Clear contact plan in place	32	20	52
Acted as conduit for child updates to mother	17	21	38
Arranging support/contact for release/transfer	18	12	30
Supported acceptance of child care arrangements	17	12	29
Support with child-related issues (inc MBU place)	19	5	24
Supported child/ren's life story contribution	10	1	11

Looking more closely at contact in relation to the aims set by the Pact Social Workers at the outset of the intervention (see Table 12), the follow-up reports indicate that for the 60 mothers where a clear contact agreement had been identified as an aim, this had been achieved for 41 mothers (68%) by the end of the evaluation period.

For twelve mothers (20%), direct contact was refused, either on public protection grounds or because the children were victims of the mother's offence and refusing contact; in these cases, this definitive outcome had been communicated to the mother and appropriate support was offered (and in most cases taken up).

Five further cases are being actively progressed through court or with Social Workers and two cases appeared to be awaiting input.

Table 12: Contact outcomes for the 60 mothers where this was identified as an intervention aim

Cases where Pact SW aim includes contact agreement	
Contact agreement achieved as per aim	41
Contact agreement but not for all children	2
Contact but formal plan in progress - Court ongoing	1
Father refuses contact - NBR involved	2
Contact agreement not achieved - child/ren refuse	8
Contact not achieved - restriction in place	4
No change	1
Awaiting follow-up report	1
Total cases	60

Where contact was refused, the Pact Social Workers identified alternative forms of communication to enable mothers to maintain an appropriate link with their children and support the generation of life story artefacts. For example one of the follow-up questionnaires reported:

“mum has continued to write letters to her children despite a lack of response from them and has kept them positive and appropriate, arranged review meeting with children's Social Worker (now sharing 1) and discussed how the children are feeling/views of contact with follow up planned... “

It is clear that organising and facilitating contact for women in prison is not always straight forward. There is a huge range of permutations and complexities requiring social work skills, not just liaising with external professionals, carers and family members but also managing the expectations of mothers and supporting a positive experience for all. The case example below outlines some of the ‘softer’ skills required in supporting mothers in prison.

Mother’s aim: *“To be involved in the kid’s lives as much as they want.”*

Pact SW comment at triage: *“Mother speaks positively about the children and wants to respect their thoughts and wishes. She wants to see them but will wait to see how they feel first. She agrees to the adoption of her baby and feels this is the best for him.”*

At 6 month follow-up: *“Mother very stressed around court case with the children, long term foster care and adoption. We had many long conversations as mother sometimes feel she should leave the children so they can have better lives without them as they are still young. She feels guilty for being in prison for the next 15 years and missing their lives. The girls don't want contact at this time and she struggles to understand the grief they are going through. Mother struggles in regulating her emotions and oftentimes needs to be "talked down a ledge" and to process her emotions.*

At 12 month follow-up: *“Yes - children have suddenly chosen to come and visit mother during a family day. This was the first contact since the children were present on the night of the offence, 3 years ago. ... mother has had to adjust to this news. They changed their minds a few times, where mother was very upset and discouraged. She has had a roller coaster of emotions around the constant change and lack of contact. The recent positive news has been a lot to digest for mother.*

(Pact Social Worker at HMP Send)

Key outcome 2: supporting access to the Mother and Baby Unit at HMP Eastwood Park

Pact Social Worker support for child-related issues is significantly higher at HMP Eastwood Park, and this is attributed in part to the on-site Mother and Baby Unit which is not only used as a place of residence for babies up to 18 months of age, subject to the admissions criteria, but also as a resource for child-friendly contact.

At the time of triage, only two mothers at HMP Eastwood Park were based on the MBU. The Pact Social Worker has supported a further seven mothers in their applications and has been successful in six of these (a success rate of 87%). One place was not needed due to unexpected release and so for TaC mothers, the number living with their baby on the MBU increased from two to seven (see Table 13).

Contact has also been arranged on the MBU for a further five mothers and this means that 14 TaC mothers (29% of the mothers at HMP Eastwood Park) have benefitted from support to access MBU provision.

Table 13: Support for TaC mothers to access the MBU at HMP Eastwood Park

Support for mothers to access the Mother and Baby Unit (MBU) at HMP Eastwood Park	
Baby on MBU at referral	2
Mothers supported to access the MBU:	
MBU application enabled reunification	2
MBU application for unborn - successful	3
MBU application for unborn - not needed	1
MBU application for unborn - unsuccessful	1
Contact on MBU arranged	5
Total mothers supported with MBU access	14

Mother's aim: *"To be treated like a mum by son's school, to have increased contact with children in the community and have unborn stay with her on the MBU after birth. Mum would ultimately like all children to return to/be in her care post-release."*

Pact SW identified need: *"Developing relationship with MGM, unwilling to disclose whereabouts to children at this time (believe she is at work)"*

At 6 month follow-up: *"supported mum's application to mbu which was successful ... Relocated to MBU following admission board and decision to reunify mum and child 3 ... Continuing to see both child 1 and 2 but contact with child 2 has been more challenging due to father obstructing contact at times ... Supported mum to change child 1's school due to child experiencing difficulty and mum equally experiencing difficulty communicating with school about this, supported relationship building with new school which is now more positive ... assisted contact with child 1 and 2 on mbu (activity planning and liaising with children's carers), ..., applied for and was awarded large grant to enable dad of child 3 to visit and spend time with child 3 (doesn't drive and couldn't afford transport) as well as buy necessities to enable him to care for child in the community ... supported mum in housing court when other support workers could not assist."*

(Pact Social Worker at HMP Eastwood Park)

Key outcome 3: facilitating access to legal advice

The Pact Social Workers reported supporting 44 mothers (48%) who were either in legal proceedings relating to their children or needed assistance with legal access. Of these, 64% of these were at HMP Eastwood Park and 36% HMP Send as shown in Figure 34 below.

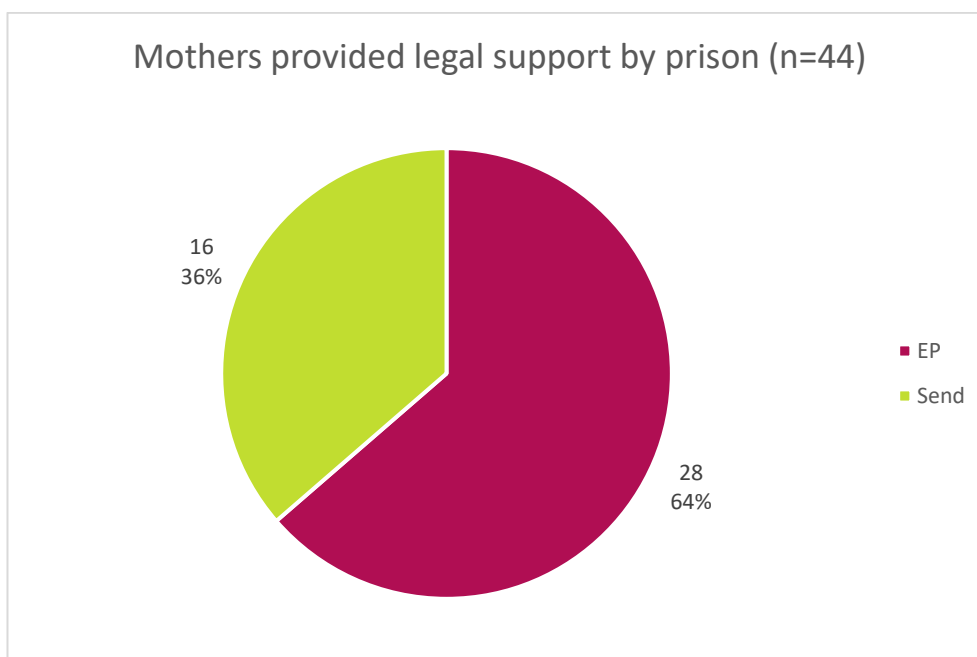


Figure 34: Mothers where legal advice or supported was needed, by prison (n=44)

It seems that there are three main legal routes that the Pact Social Worker has supported mothers to engage with:

- Many mothers that are legally represented as part of care proceedings relating to their children. This was reported for 26 mothers (28%); however, five of these mothers were supported to gain initial access to a solicitor in response to the local authority instigating care proceedings in the Family Court. There is also evidence of mothers failing to engage at the point of referral and then the mother re-engaging with the Pact Social Worker's support. There are two prominent cases in the dataset where the local authority's plan was adoption and although the overall plan for the child remained the same, there is evidence of the mother being supported to have a voice in the proceedings, which is regarded as beneficial for the child's life story and also for the mother acknowledging and coming to terms with her loss of parental responsibility.
- For mothers who are not in public law proceedings and therefore do not have legal representation, there seemed to be three ways in which the Pact Social Workers supported

them, and these are detailed for each prison in Table 14 below. The most (and increasingly common as the evaluation progressed) was to refer to Not Beyond Redemption, another third sector organisation providing pro bono support to prisoners, and there was evidence of this in eleven cases (12% of mothers). At HMP Eastwood Park, the Pact Social Worker provided direct support with statement writing and self-advocacy letters in nine cases (19%), and in four of these cases it was reported that she acted as a McKenzie friend in Court.

- There is also evidence of the Pact Social Worker at HMP Send liaising with immigration lawyers for two of the three mothers at risk of deportation to support the mother in submitting an appeal to avoid being permanently estranged from her children.

Table 14: Type of support offered for mothers that required legal assistance (n=44)

	Eastwood Park	Send	Total
<i>Public law proceedings:</i>			
Supported engagement with legal team and Court presentation	14	7	21
Direct support with legal papers before/after legal representation	5		5
<i>Private law proceedings:</i>			
Facilitated access to Not Beyond Redemption	4	7	11
Acted as McKenzie friend for unrepresented mother	4		4
Facilitated access to Pact legal advice		2	2
Facilitated access to LA funded legal advice	1		1
Total	28	16	44

Mother's aims: "1 = Find more information around letterbox contact 2, 3, 4 = Reestablish contact with the children"

At 6-month follow-up: "I was able to build a "dossier" from prison to give to solicitors to outline all the hard work she has done whilst in prison - hoping this will speak to her growth in court in February ..."

At 12-month follow-up: "...Mother is currently involved in court procedures. This will be a long road but she is well supported. Mother has blossomed over the last few months and can advocate for herself. She is really finding her place.."

At 18-month follow-up: "...plan for transfer and arrange court case. Not Beyond Redemption continue their active support. ... father is refusing access despite mother still holding PR. ... News came that father started and then stopped engaging with professionals so work done around this. ... As mother is being transferred to another prison where Pact SW are not present, questions around show current social worker continue to hold the case or not. Mother asked SW to be present at court. We look at options to see how this can be done."

(Pact Social Worker at HMP Send)

Key outcome 4: supporting mothers at risk of self-harm and suicide

We have previously reported that a considerable proportion of the mothers who have accessed Together a Chance have been identified as at risk of self-harm and suicide, with responsive support being provided through ACCT processes. Since the evaluation commenced in April 2021, at least 32 of the 92 mothers (35%) have been supported through ACCT processes at some point. For many mothers, this was reported in the baseline questionnaire but for others it was reported in one of the 6-monthly follow-up questionnaires and often associated with a 'trigger date' (such as an adoption date or child's birthday), or receiving unwelcome news relating to contact restrictions.

"Has been on and off ACCT due to acts of self harm in response to distress surrounding separation from children and current family court proceedings" (HMP Eastwood Park)

For these 32 mothers, there is clear evidence of the Pact Social Worker being directly involved in supporting this as part of the multi-disciplinary team within the prison in 53% of the cases (see

Table 15). The following extract gives an indication of the Pact Social Worker’s involvement in these cases:

“working very hard towards closing the acct for her to be considered and accepted to open condition. Attending weekly acct reviews, working closely with mother to reduce anxiety over the move and linking her with the new prison ahead of time.” (HMP Send)

Table 15: Mothers reported to be on an ACCT process at any point in the intervention

	Eastwood Park	Send	Total	%
Mothers reported to be on ACCT	17	15	32	35%
For mothers reported to be on ACCT:				
Pact Social Worker directly involved in ACCT process	9	8	17	53%

Both the prevalence and involvement rates were consistent across both prisons (see Figure 35).

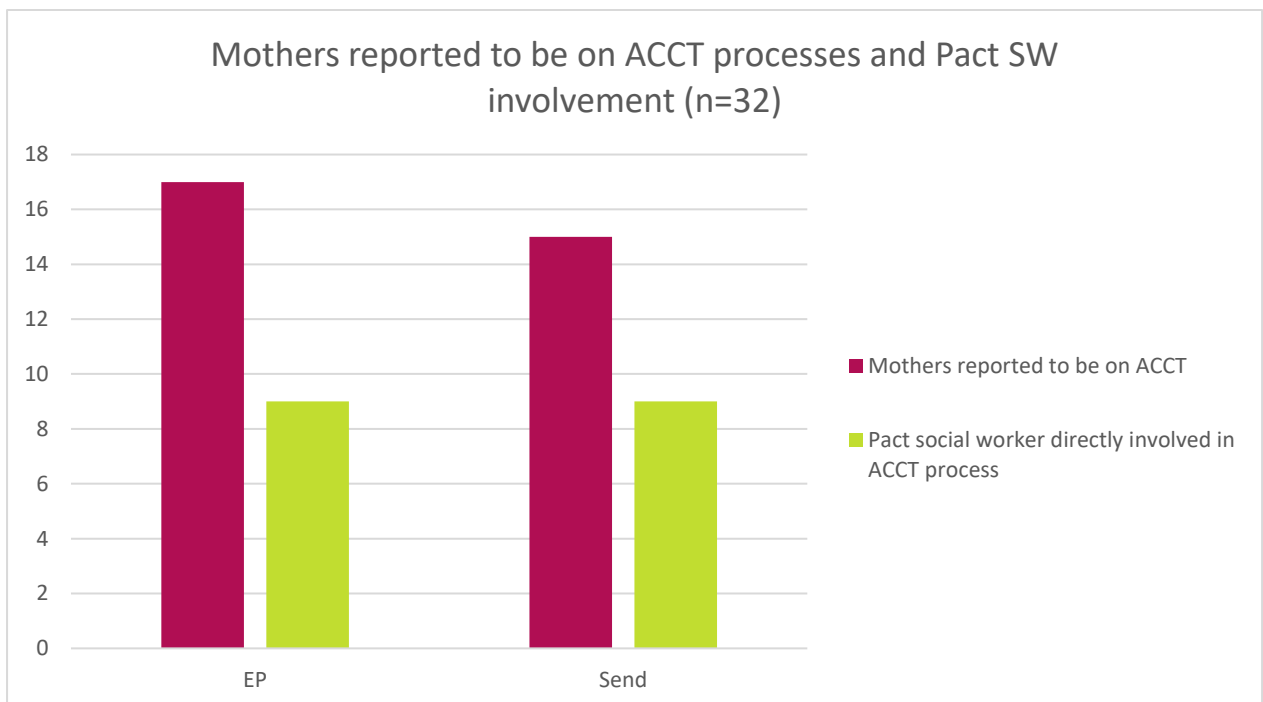


Figure 35: Prison comparison of ACCT process involvement

The narrative in the case tracker follow-up questionnaires suggests that the Pact Social Worker's involvement has been beneficial, and this is consistent with that reported by prison staff. For example:

“Mother stated she would commit suicide on a specific day because she is under the impression she would be getting a lifetime ban on her children. In hearing this information from the prison, I contacted social services to confirm this and was told this was not the case. This was shared with the prison team and a plan was agreed in how this would be shared with mother. Meeting was held with mother which lead to her not wanting to kill herself because of the positive news.” (Pact Social Worker at HMP Send)

Key outcome 5: contributing to internal and external assessments

Contribution to external assessments was reported in eighteen cases (19%), ten at HMP Eastwood Park and eight at HMP Send. The vignette below provides an example of a mother that transferred from HMP Eastwood Park to HMP Send following sentencing, where a parenting assessment was completed in non-contested proceedings in the Family Court. The data suggests that the Pact Social Workers have routinely contributed to assessments being undertaken by children's Social Workers, for example, through observing contact with children, parenting and contributing to risk assessments. They have also contributed to other internal and external assessments including those related to reassessment of risk for public protection; ACCT weekly meetings and grant applications.

Mother aims at HMP Eastwood Park: “For child 1 to be supported following the death of his father”

2 months later, before prison transfer: “Made referral to LA (MASH team) to raise concerns regarding child 1 following the death of his father (primary caregiver) and nobody in the community therefore having PR, liaised with LA about options moving forward and explained this to mum, assessments pending at the point that mum transferred to HMP Send

Mother aims on arrival at Send: “1- support in putting in place permanent placement of eldest child after his father passed away 2-letterbox contact with adopted child”

6 months after arrival at HMP Send: “Child has recently stated he wanted to receive letters from his mother. He is unsure if he wants to write back yet but letters have started again ...so - social services are going through court to finalise the SGO however, no solicitors need to be involved as everyone is consenting of the plan ... we completed parenting assessment for mother and sent to social services. We are waiting for the conclusion of the documents to be sent to court in hopes to get the final order and have a permanent plan for child. ...things are going smoothly - social services have included mother in discussion. No changes seem to be needed at this time. Very helpful to have the SW in prison to facilitate these conversations with social services and ensure the child’s wishes are heard and contact is at his pace .”

(Both Pact Social Workers reporting on a mother who transferred between prisons)

Key outcome 6: Connecting ‘the dots’ between services

There is clear evidence in the tracker data, supported by other sources, that the Pact Social Workers act as a conduit between local authority children’s services, mothers and the prison regime. In our analysis of the case tracker questionnaires this ‘theme’ was identified in 38 cases (40%), 21 (46%) at HMP Send and 17 (35%) at HMP Eastwood Park.

The prison-based Social Workers seem to be in a unique position to share knowledge of the prison regime and translate the Public Protection risk assessment framework to help children’s Social Workers understand restrictions, and to overcoming obstacles to mothers asserting their parental responsibility. Within the prison, there is evidence that the Pact Social Worker plays a key role in

presenting a children's best interest viewpoint and acting pragmatically in reviews of public protection restrictions.

Mother's aims: *To have letterbox contact with adopted children and for youngest to return to her care following release. To continue to manage contact herself with child 1 and 2 through maternal grandmother.*

6 month follow-up: *"Responding to last minute notifications of mother not being presented at court hearings or able to attend child in care meetings, video contact not being arranged for mother by the LA social worker ... Plan remains unchanged due to social workers having changed, therefore new relationships needing to be built and supported and family proceedings still ongoing. Supporting mum to go through and process court documents and statements, advocating for participation in CIN meetings and access to information (assessments, updates), supporting mum to share concerns and poor experiences with IRO directly, planning child contact for December*

6 months later: *"Continued to support mum with family court proceedings, supported mum to process and reflect on her thoughts, feelings and concerns and then communicate these to professionals involved (example: initial contact recommendation post release was 1 x monthly - supported mum to liaise through writing and video links with social worker and Cafcass guardian and a new recommendation was made of 1 x bi-weekly), ensured mum was kept up to date via information sharing and expressed professional concern where this did not happen re: child 5, supervised Christmas contact between mum and child 5, assisted mum in re-establishing letterbox contact with child 3 and 4 and processing relationship status with child 1 and 2 (not wanting contact at present), encouraged consideration of mediation/FGC with Dad/family of child 5, assisted release planning with women's centre"*

(Pact Social Worker at HMP Eastwood Park)

Key outcome 7: enabling parenting from inside prison

The array of tasks listed by the Pact Social Workers enable those parents that want to, and where it is in the best interests of the child, to engage as a parent from within the prison. For some children, it seems that parenting can be effective despite the restrictions. In this long-running case example, an application for the daughter's secondary school transfer was completed by a mother with the support of the Pact Social Worker. As in three other cases, a safeguarding concern was also raised with children's social care, and this resulted in additional support and protection for her daughter.

Mother's aims at outset: *"Want increased contact with daughter and help around working with social services for their newly opened case."*

6 months later: *"The youngest child was made subject to Child Protection Plan. ... Core groups and RCPC approx every 4 to 6 weeks. ... Not Beyond Redemption clinic took place [for] advice and information around her rights with her daughter who resides with the father. ... Mother was able to take part in all professional meetings where her daughter was discussed. Mother is feeling more and more comfortable with the meetings and their format. ... Practically, it has been difficult for SW to support mother (ie. Organising video link, conference call) where social services not flexible around technology."*

12 months later: *"Facilitated applications to school for the child and she was admitted at a new secondary school. Will need to ensure a good handover between current school and new school to ensure they keep mother as involved as she currently is ... Mother takes active part in all core group meetings. ... Things at home seem to be doing well and her daughter appears to be well taken care of. We have managed to get video calls with social services and this is running more smoothly than before."*

2 years later: *"Social services closed their case to reopen it quite quickly, mother raised concerns for her daughter [to social services] which led to father with-holding contact, child is not interested in school so Mum speaks with school to find out how to prevent this."*

2 years, 6 months later: *"The concerns for her daughter are still active. This has been raised with social services however, mother still manages to have contact with the children. We managed to get her to come for a family day for quality time ... contact with school to arrange for video between Mum and school where she shares her concerns for her daughter lack of engagement with school, emails to social services trying to get updates."*

(Pact Social Worker at HMP Send)

Key messages from the tracker data

Our overall reflection on analysing the case tracker questionnaires completed by the Pact Social Workers is that the work of two suitably experienced and motivated prison-based Social Workers is making a significant qualitative difference to mothers, children and families, and other professionals. It seems to us that the Together a Chance pilot scheme has, in essence, kept children alive in hearts and minds, not only for mothers in prison, but also for other professionals within the prison and in interfacing services such as the local authority and lawyers. This manifests itself in many ways and is consistent with data collected from other sources and reported in other sections of this report.

...keeping children alive in hearts and minds...

It is notoriously difficult to assess outcomes in the child protection arena (La Valle et al. 2016; Forrester 2017) and we are mainly seeing what could be described as ‘process outcomes’. We have highlighted seven key ways in which the Pact social workers are making a positive difference for TaC mothers:

1. promoting appropriate contact with children;
2. supporting access to the Mother and Baby Unit at HMP Eastwood Park;
3. facilitating access to legal advice;
4. supporting mothers at risk of self-harm and suicide;
5. contributing to internal and external assessments;
6. connecting ‘the dots’ between services;
7. enabling parenting from inside prison.

Contribution to healthy prison tests

It is worth concluding the presentation of case tracker findings by considering how the work reported by the Pact Social Workers has the potential to contribute to the four tests of a healthy prison:

- **Safety** – given that the criteria for access to the Together a Chance service is involvement with local authority Children’s Social Care, it is unsurprising that so many of the mothers are struggling to keep themselves safe, as seen by the high number of mothers on an ACCT. There is evidence in the tracker data that the involvement of the Pact Social Worker is making a difference to self-harm and suicide rates as they work across the prison.
- **Respect** – helping women feel understood. Mothers welcome the emotional support offered by the Pact Social Worker, and this is evidenced throughout the reports, one example being a mother asking the Pact Social Worker to be a birthing partner. Consistent with data collected from mothers directly, the case tracker data reveals reports of mothers commenting to their Pact Social Worker that they ‘feel listened to’ when supportive documents are prepared for court proceedings and when local authority children’s services are held to account.
- **Purposeful activity** – it is clear that the work mothers have undertaken with their Pact Social Worker varies across cases, from daily sessions during periods of high activity to ad hoc task-focused meetings or “check-ins” around the prison.
 - In almost all cases, the mother’s engagement with the Pact Social Worker was reported as high, as measured by attendance at booked sessions. This is something to be celebrated given the challenges of parental engagement in this context. Whilst the tracker data is not explicit on this point, it does seem from our analysis that the model adopted for this pilot - a non-confrontational third sector organisation making a skilled Social Worker available and approachable within the prison – is a significant factor in this achievement.
 - There are also reports of mothers being referred on to other programmes in the prison, for example a parenting course in the MBU, although perhaps not as much as we would have expected. Often a “history of DV” has been reported and the evidence suggests that the Pact Social Worker has focused on the immediate actions associated with resolving the directly child-related issues, quite understandably. Given the level of engagement from mothers, there may have been missed opportunities to support with domestic abuse awareness and remediation for longer term benefit.

-
- the number of TaC mothers living with their baby on the MBU has increased from two to seven. Five other TaC mothers now have contact with the children on the MBU.
 - **Resettlement** – there is evidence throughout the reports, though in some cases more than others, of the Pact Social Workers helping mothers plan their ‘future family’ and learning to accept that this may look different to what might have been envisaged without support.

It seems appropriate to end this section by turning to the families supported by Together a Chance during the period under evaluation. Although this intervention is primarily directed at mothers, it is clear that the real focus has been on the children, and the evidence from the tracker data is consistent, both in the ethos and content of the work reported, that children’s best interests are central to the work. It seems that what the Pact Social Workers have achieved, that statutory children’s Social Workers are perhaps less well-positioned for, is supporting mothers in prison to accept that in some cases direct contact cannot happen and to come to terms with either indirect or one-way contact or, in a very few cases, no contact at all.

Interviews with mothers, carers, children and community practitioners

The data in this section of our findings is drawn from analysis of twenty-six qualitative interviews from people who have direct experience of the Together a Chance service. We have also interviewed eight prison staff, although their views are summarised later in this report. We have interviewed eight mothers in prison and six women one month after release. We have also interviewed seven practitioners in the community who have worked with the Pact Social Workers, these are five local authority children's Social Workers, one fostering Social Worker and one safeguarding lead from a primary school who was interviewed twice. We have interviewed three carers, two fathers and one sister. We have interviewed one child. They gave a varied view of the Pact Social Work role and what it offers. Many of the themes reiterate those voiced by mothers and a synthesis of the findings is therefore presented based on the themes identified. All names used in this report are pseudonyms.

Sentencing

All of the women said the court had been aware of their status as mothers when sentencing. Amy who only served a short sentence of four months noted,

“So, prior to my sentencing, the judge was aware that Honey was in my full-time care, and he sentenced me regardless.... I've been her sole carer since she's been born.”
(Amy in the community)

Mothers are often noted to be given short sentences (Jones 2018; Clinks 2019)) which causes huge disruption to the lives of children (Corston 2007; Baldwin and Epstein 2017; MoJ 2018). Little discussion or mention of children was made in court, which led to little planning,

“I didn't really let the court, they knew that I had a baby recently, but they didn't ask me any questions.” (Karen in the community)

Community practitioners recognised that mothers are particularly anxious about the welfare of their children at the beginning of a sentence (Rees et al. 2017; Rees et al. 2022) and recognised how important the role of the Pact Social Worker would be at this point,

“Yeah, and I suspect from mum's perspective, again that, you know, that the, the high level of anxiety, not knowing the system, the process, knowing that there was so many people involved in making decisions...so I, I imagine from mum's perspective, she

would have felt quite supported in terms of navigating and understanding what's, what's happening.”(Community Practitioner)

Mothers talked about the stress and anxiety of not knowing what was happening to their children when they were first sentenced, when they had no means of contacting children or family. Given there had been no planning, this was extremely difficult for mothers.

‘So in the first week, you're just paralysed, you don't know what's going on. You're a wreck. And I saw that few times with different ladies as well. Sort of going through the same thing. And it's always the same thing, they're not able to get hold of their loved ones, their family, to find out if their children are okay. Or if social services had taken their children because of their sentence, they didn't know what the statuses with their, with the children. And that is the most distressing thing. And honestly, just not knowing what was happening, not knowing what was going on. Because even though I have family members there that were willing and able to take care of Honey..... And then I found that news out, I think two weeks after I was sentenced,... And they didn't have to give me updates as to what was going on.’

Amy in the community

This led to mothers becoming acutely anxious and desperate,

“I was self-harming, I was taking drugs, I wasn't coping at all.” (Karen in the community)

“It was really hard. Not gonna lie. I felt kinda suicidal a lot, but I would never have acted on it, because at the end of the day I need to be there for him when I get out. I need to, here still.”(Kim)

“About killing herself, and... and harm herself... harm... so, yeah, self-harm... probably that’s the right word.” (Simon, carer)

Conduit of information

Negotiating contact and access to a prison is extremely difficult for community practitioners, as it is for mothers to contact community practitioners. If mothers are to be involved in decision-making around their children, then community practitioners need to be able to gain access to them and vice versa. Social Workers in the community struggle with making contact with those in prison and in some circumstances may not even know which prison a mother is in,

“I didn’t even know what prison she was in.” (Community Practitioner)

The old Social Worker, kind of left and I’ve not managed to get anywhere and I say ohh fantastic because I know how difficult it can be to find somebody in prisons when you’ve got somebody there. So she ..managed to track me down, which was really helpful because then that gave me a link into mum.” (Community Practitioner)

A major benefit of the Social Worker role is as a conduit of information and the means to make contact with a mother in prison,

“I’ve worked with families before, where a parents in prison, you don’t have that named person to contact.” (Community Practitioner)

Relating to other prisons,

” so you’re just going to have to struggle through the normal route. I’ve been trying to contact this particular parent in prison for four months, got nowhere. I sent emails, and they haven’t been returned, but no response... I’ve got the address, and I’ve got the prison number, write to the prisoner directly, and the parent directly and say “look, you’ve got my contact details, can you write back and inform me of the person that I need to contact in order to facilitate a visit? because it’s the only way through.” (Community Practitioner)

For busy practitioners navigating the prison system is extremely frustrating. The community Social Workers commented favourably on the Pact Social Worker’ role, in contrast to those prisons without such a worker. They also noted how time consuming the process is,

“In addition to those sort of practicalities, you know, in terms of arranging contact, or getting the {dates} sorted, those are seemingly little but very time-consuming thing to do.” (Community Practitioner)

The Pact Social Worker role helped alleviate pressure on busy practitioners in the community, who may be trying to facilitate children visiting the prison, and the practical difficulties that this entails,

“So if it was a prison visit, are the foster carers happy to support the child there, and go through the protocols to take the child in? If they aren’t, can we organise an escort? And if there’s a video link sort of like capacity, who do we have to get in contact to get that sort of up and running? That would be my role normally in this.” (Community Practitioner)

Making contact with the Pact worker resulted in a speedy response, rather than the more routine and slow workings of the penal institution,

“I did expect that I’d send an email off and hear nothing for weeks and weeks. But she responded I think the same day, and gave really detailed information.” (Community Practitioner)

“She managed to track me down, which was really helpful because then that gave me a link into mum. And so we had some emails to start with and then she arranged a telephone call with the mum.” (Community Practitioner)

As well as helping the community practitioner, the Pact Social Worker also supported mothers to make contact with others in the outside world, including solicitors, schools and other services in the community,

“The prison is... yeah, it’s, it’s disorganised because they don’t have anybody on reception full time.” (Belinda in the community)

“{Pact Social Worker’s} made that easier, she’s took that stress away from me, because I... it, it, it makes me ill. I have had mental breakdowns over court processes with my children, I’ve tried to commit suicide over it. So that’s, on a personal level that’s how, how hard it is for a parent.” (Paula)

The involvement by the Pact Social Worker reduced anxiety and feelings of helplessness for mothers. Once the Pact Social Worker was involved, mothers were able to make contact with social services to find out what was happening to their children. Mothers in prison do not have access to

emails and can only access a phone erratically and for limited amounts of time, it is therefore impossible to speak to staff in busy social services offices, and mothers were therefore reliant on sending letters in and out of the institution,

“We don’t have access to email, you can send stuff through the post, but you risk it getting lost and she, with the email, she {Pact Social Worker} then has a thread of everything, of all the conversations. That’s things we don’t have, they can’t say, we sent you a letter when... and they didn’t, because, you know, I don’t wanna paint a bad view of social services, but they, they do make mistakes, but they won’t own them.” (Paula)

The Pact Social Workers have a good knowledge of the penal institution and explain the processes to other professionals outside of the prison,

“Yeah, she gets the process. Whereas like my son’s Social Worker never got the process at all. She didn’t understand, like, I don’t just get my mail the same day they send it, I don’t just get my mail, like, the day after, I can’t just make a phone call out of the blue to them, but they had no understanding of that. But, like, if there was a meeting and I didn’t know about it, that’s not my fault but they were, like, “Well you knew.” But no, I didn’t ‘cos I never got no correspondence in regards to it.” (Sandra in the community)

The Pact Social Worker was able to speedily find out information and advocate on behalf of mothers,

“{Pact worker} has been in touch with the Director of Social Services and all sorts of people. I don’t even know who. Social Services haven’t wanted to get involved while I’m here... We have only really gotten somewhere this week. We had a phone call to say probation have had a MASH meeting and they are going to do an assessment.” (Chris)

Some mothers felt they had been cut out of decision making for their children, but having a line of communication with community practitioners allowed mothers to be kept in the picture,

“So before, before {Pact worker}, like, I didn’t even get a report, I didn’t even find out anything. But now, I can give my questions to {Pact worker}, and she will forward them to his Social Worker.” (Jen)

“If Mum can phone you up at any point and just s’y I’m really unhappy about this, I don’t like this, then it keeps them in the looping kind of parenting their child while you’re proceeding {court}, even if maybe the long term thing, {it} isn’t that ‘hey’ll keep their child, it means you’re not excluding them an alienating them.” (Community Practitioner)

It was particularly difficult if mother had several children who were living in separate local authorities,

“Because I thought... specifically, I have two lots of Social Workers. So, I live in Leicester and my youngest live in Leeds, but my oldest two are in Liverpool.” (Kim)

We can see how vital this conduit for both community practitioners and mothers. It is to contact with the child we now move.

Contact with children

An important aspect of the Pact Social Worker role is facilitating contact with children, this occurred in a myriad of ways, including sending of photographs, helping to write letters, virtual contact and face to face meetings. It is important for children to keep in contact with mothers, if they are to come to terms with the situation, understand what has happened, be assured of her welfare and be able to return to her care or have contact with her in the future, should that be appropriate. For some contact is restricted and helping mothers with this was an important part of the role.

“We, we correspond each year –And {Pact Social Worker} helped to get a photograph... So, I’ve always had letterbox contact with...” (Sophie)

“Like my youngest daughter has got disabilities and ... it’s really important for me for her to remember me, and my way of doing that is photographs, because I don’t have direct contact.” (Paula)

“I now get regular updates every few months with photos, and an update on what Craig’s doing, and that’s down to TaC worker.... She’s also helped me write my sorta life story and Craig’s life story and what happened the night of the crime. She helped me through that, which was really hard to do.” (Jen)

It is particularly difficult for a mother where she has more than one child and they have been separated, so not only does she have to liaise with different Social Workers, the mother also has to try and track several family members or carers,

“No, because I didn’t know... they split them up {two younger children} and put them in two different foster carers.” (Miriam in the community)

The Pact Social Workers also helped facilitate meaningful contact between mothers and their children by arranging child friendly visiting rooms with toys and space for the mother and child to be together, as well as longer visits. These were compared very favourably with the normal prison visiting arrangements, which could have a negative impact on children,

“... for children, you wanna, you wanna be able to hug them, you know, or, you know, just, just move about with them, but when you're literally, you feel like, just stuck to the chair, they don't understand that and they can see that as a, an, a rejection of them, as you don't want to hug them and you don't want to be tactile, you don't want to, like, you know, get up or anything.” (Belinda in the community)

The flexibility and intimacy of visiting arrangement which allowed for physical reassurance was hugely valued,

“My son, my son, he's got autism and he's got learning difficulties, and visits are quite difficult for him, like, being in such a hall, like, big hall and stuff. But {Pact Social Worker} was able to arrange us to have the family room, so it was a quiet room.... Oh, it was lovely, it made such a difference, yeah. My son was more at ease and he felt - I, I knew he just felt calmer, and, and it was nice, because I got to sit on the sofa with him and, like, give him a cuddle properly, rather than having to, like, talk over a table. So it was nice, it just felt more relaxed and more, more natural than, than a normal visit, yeah.” (Sian in the community)

“I think 10 times better, I couldn't have imagined... so it's all our own private space to see each other. And yeah, it went, unexpectedly really well, really, it sort of, it was very heartfelt. And just, yeah, it was I was really anxious about how my daughter would feel.... But actually, it sort of it took a bit of the pressure and a bit of a burden off, not being in with everyone else. And sort of just being us really, and it kind of just made it feel a bit more natural.... and the toys and everything so we could play.” (Amy in the community)

The longer visits were seen as much more useful, especially when children had to travel for many hours to get to the prison,

“... because Eastwood Park, the visits are so short, it's, it's one hour, and so he'd obviously travelled for two-and-a-half hours to get there and then have another two-and-a-half hour journey back to the... back to London for that one hour in the middle.” (Belinda in the community)

This was particularly important for young babies who would also need changing during the hour visit, and this could not be done by the mother,

“when I was in Eastwood Park, and so the time that they took after he’d been changed – I wish I could have changed him myself, I can’t – the time that was taken for him to be changed was long, because you only had, you know, 59 minutes with him. And then the guards searching him after that, they took so long, and that just was taking away more of the time that I had with him. And so something needs to be done there as well because it’s...” (Belinda in the community)

It is difficult to imagine a child travelling for five hours only to spend around 45 minutes with their mother.

Team around the child

The team around the child is a way of working where all those supporting the child and involved in their life (including the parent and foster carer) come together to safeguard their welfare and ensure that the child’s needs are paramount in welfare decisions. The Pact Social Worker was able to facilitate the mother joining this multi-agency team, and there is also evidence of them *creating* this team around a specific issue, such as day-to-day care arrangements for the child,

“She contacted myself who is the allocated Social Worker for the child of the prisoner that she’s working with, and she spoke to me, and also the supervisor and Social Worker of the foster carers. So she created a sort of like group around this meeting and contact, which was really good and informative, and all the professionals had to be there, yeah, that was good.” (Community Practitioner)

Here we can see how the Pact worker initiated the team coming together, each member working with a different party. Currently there is no person who supports and advocates on behalf of a mother in relation to her child when in prison, although the Social Worker for the child is supposed to advocate for the child and all relevant family members and supporters of child, whilst keeping the needs of the child paramount, in accordance with the Children Act 1989 and ‘working together’ statutory guidance (HM Government 2018; now superseded by HM Government 2023).

“I do believe {Pact Social Worker} would be doing that work with the mother, and I would be doing that work with the child, and my colleague would be doing the work with the foster parents.” (Community Practitioner)

“it was a three-way communication, you know? It was Chloe myself and {Pact Social Worker} because Chloe brought the perspectives of the foster carer and she’s worked with them for like five years.” (Community Practitioner)

Communication between mothers, social services and carers is vital, as Kim explains when relevant information was not being shared, to the detriment of her son,

“Now, the first three foster carers had no knowledge of my son having ADHD. Social worker, social services didn’t tell them that he has ADHD.”

Without the Pact Social Worker, mothers are routinely left out of meetings because they are in prison, and it would seem that an assumption is made that they have ‘chosen’ to forgo their mothering role.

Attending meetings

As women in prison cannot readily make contact with the outside world or attend meetings, it is the Pact Social Worker who ensures they can attend or at the very least can bring their perspective, such as to a ‘child in need’, ‘core group’ or ‘looked after child’ review,

“So the children were on a child in need plan and the TAC worker has attended every challenging meeting, every review, sometimes when the mum wasn’t able to make it to the review meeting, because of whatever connection issues, etc. she would be the voice of the mum in the, in the meetings.” (Community Practitioner)

It was noted that mothers in prison are easily forgotten, and the Pact Social Worker ensured that this was not the case,

“I think that was, that kept us on our toes. Let us not, sometimes it often becomes the fact that once you’re out of sight, you become out of mind, but the Pact Social Worker did not let that happen.” (Community Practitioner)

They also ensure mothers were kept in the picture,

“When mum felt that she didn’t understand things, or needed some extra help and support, {Pact Social Worker} had organised for a three-way meeting.” (Community Practitioner)

There were many barriers put in place to mothers in prison (and sometimes even the Pact Social Workers) attending meetings, which made it virtually impossible for mothers to retain any foothold in decision making,

“So when we first had the child protection meeting, she wasn't invited. And you know, I had to really advocate for the mum and for this {Pact} Social Worker to be included and Carmel Council, you know, hadn't really had this situation before where a mother was able to join their system and they made it very difficult for her to join it, you know, they put it on a Teams meeting and we're quite rigid in saying no, we only have Teams meetings. That's it. We won't do anything else.” (Community Practitioner)

Thus, we can see that systems are set up that do not allow mothers to remain involved in decision making around their children. Where it was possible, mothers appreciated the support offered to enable them to attend meetings,

“She sits with me on, like core, core group meetings and conference meetings, which is a massive, like, support for me, ‘cos obviously I, I get quite nervous.” (Sian in the community)

When reports are written to assist with decision making, the Pact Social Worker helps mothers to process the information,

“You know, as soon as I got the report she {Pact worker} sat with me, with, with the report and stuff, you know.” (Sophie)

The Pact Social Worker also facilitated community practitioners coming into the prison to undertake parenting assessments, so that mothers (and children) were not left waiting until they were released before decisions can be made,

“But she definitely helped with the independent Social Worker coming to the prison. ... If it wasn't for that ...it would have had to take place when I got home and my daughter would probably still be in the care of her dad until that had been completed, so yes, that was a huge, huge help.” (Amy in the community)

In this particular case as a result of the parenting assessment it was arranged for the child to live with her mother on release.

A human rights-based approach

A human rights-based approach is about empowering people to know and claim their rights thus increasing the accountability of individuals and institutions who are responsible for respecting, protecting and fulfilling rights (Harms-Smith et al. 2019; Forrester 2024). Much of the work of the Pact Social Worker is about ensuring that mothers are aware of their rights, this is an approach that has long been embedded within social work practice (Healy 2008). The Pact Social Worker ensured that both community practitioners and mothers became aware of these, as previously many did not seem to be cognisant that mothers in prison still have parental rights,

“Because she {mother} had parental responsibilities. So that was the 1st. So the contact that I had came directly from the prison itself, asking me if I would facilitate parents evenings for the mother.” (Community Practitioner)

“It’s like, for instance, I thought that the Tring council had PR over, of my son. She {Pact worker} told me, she was like, ‘No’. She says it is shared PR, parental responsibility.” (Kim)

Once practitioners had taken this on board, they too were able to advocate (as should be their role) for the mothers they had contact with,

“So I kind of am always reminding them {team around the child} that there’s another person in this family who should be involved and just because she’s in prison doesn’t mean that she can’t participate in what’s the decisions about her child.” (Community Practitioner)

This enacting and operationalising of rights allowed decisions by the team around the child to be considered more thoughtfully,

“Our initial care plan, that was before I became involved, was for the child to be permanently removed from of the family to be, to be placed in, in care. So that was a very stressful time for, for mum.” (Community Practitioner)

Once the Pact Social Worker became involved, decisions were reviewed and on occasion overturned,

“... so {Pact Social Worker} did kind of advocate, not advocate, that’s not the right word, she supported mum to kind of make sure she’s got the right information and she’s involved..... Which was granted by the court, which is when the ISW came in completed another assessment, just prior to her release, and that a balanced assessment, you know, with, it wasn’t without concern, but it was, it had quite a few positive aspects. Based on that assessment, we changed our care plan. So our care

*plan was for the child to be placed in mum's care subject to a care order.”
(Community Practitioner)*

There is clear evidence that the Pact Social Worker's involvement changed the trajectory of this case. Her involvement removed the barriers to access in prison – this included facilitating access to the mother for assessment, and also the sharing of data about her behaviour in the prison as it pertained to the safeguarding and welfare of the child.

All of the women we spoke to were aware of their rights but had only become aware of these as a result of the Pact Social Worker.

“Knowing my rights, what I'm allowed. Like, I didn't even know I had parental rights anymore until she told me, and I was like, “Oh, oh right.” So yeah, that was nice. ... Yeah, it was amazing, yeah. Like, being able to have an input into the LAC reviews, getting the reports, his school reports, everything like that. I didn't know I could do any of that until TaC worker told me.” (Amy in the community)

“Cos before it was just like the initial, what, what rights do I have as, as a mother in prison.” (Sian in the community)

Mothers became aware of what these rights entitled them to, and this can be seen as a rights-based approach to Social Work (Holland and Scourfield 2003; Ife 2012).

“And if we have parental responsibility, like I do, I, I should have copies of those. And it's things that I haven't been getting, I have been kept out of the loop because I'm in prison. She's {Pact worker} like, ‘but they have a duty to give you that, it's, it's part of, part of their service is to'.... She's just like lifted me up, she's made me feel validated, like my rights as a parent are real.”

“When {Pact Social Worker} got involved, I felt more, I felt I had more of a right to know what's going on, like school reports and things like that.” (Karen in the community)

The mothers had not previously been included in any meetings and had thus been excluded from decision making, as being in custody was usually seen as having forfeited all parental rights. The Pact Social Workers helped women wrest back some control, and ensured that at the very least information was being shared with them,

“And really my, because she was a bit, like my backbone there because I kind of felt like I did lose that control and I had lost all that, that privilege of that information. And I kind of thought, well, that’s it now, I, I’ve lost her and I, that was just, because when you’re there, and they’re not giving you any of that information, and they’re not making you party to any health or anything like that, you kind of think well, I’ve lost my rights then, even though I hadn’t, at my core was just because, it wasn’t, information wasn’t being shared with me.” (Amy in the community)

This helped mothers feel re-engaged and involved in their child’s lives and helped preserve their mothering identities,

“I feel like I’m part of my son’s life, even though physically I’m not. I’m able to put my input in meetings. They ask me, like, for permission for stuff. Like, my, my son’s been booked in for the vaccine because he’s 12 on Tuesday, and – but they – or they asked {Pact Social Worker} to ask me for my permission, sorta thing, and I was like, wow, I felt like a mum for the first time in years.” (Jen)

Mothers were thus able to identify when their rights were not being observed by Social Workers even after release,

“Yesterday morning the Social Worker just sent me an email saying that Henry’s got a school trip coming up. It’s £245, how much am I willing to contribute? And I just go, what? And that... I just feel like where... shouldn’t they ask me for my consent, because I have parental responsibility, if he can go? And why is it the first I’m hearing about this trip, and where is it, when is it? They didn’t give me any information whatsoever.” (Claire in the community)

Mothers were very relieved to have someone listening to them and ‘fighting their corner’ for their rights to be observed, as previously they had been ‘forgotten’ and ‘overlooked’,

“... it’s, it’s nice to have someone - I feel like she fights my corner for me, when, when you feel like the whole world’s against you, and like, it’s nice to have someone in your corner.” (Sian in community)

“You know, without her, I think a lot of women here would struggle. They would just give up. But knowing you have that one person in your corner helping you fight it is a big help, a big, big help.” (Felicity)

“Because there’s so many women and children who have got access {rights} to their children but because there’s no-one fighting for the mum, the Social Workers are just not facilitating contact between children, and it’s heart-breaking.” (Karen in the community)

The Pact Social Workers fought for mother's rights in a range of circumstances, including matters of right to remain and deportation,

"to fight {deportation}, is to... observe and to highlight the impact with the children.....Now, you... you won't get that with the traditional Social Worker, I wouldn't say so... I've been instructed by Home Office, is, yes, you can say the mum is really important to the... the children, but you need to prove it... She {Pact Social Worker} can have a conversation with the children, and she understand how important my wife is to them." (Steve, Carer)

Community practitioners recognised the need for mothers to be supported too,

"But no, I was really hopeful because they do seem to be able to, like, provide the support that mums need on the inside. So they're saying, actually, yeah, we can help you navigate through all this, but also be somebody who's a bit on their side when everything's going on." (Community Practitioner)

Even if nothing could be done, mothers were appreciative of someone trying to help them, which made mothers feel they had tried their best, which made their sentences more bearable,

"Yeah, you just feel safe when you're around her, and you know that she'll do everything in her power to help, even if at the end of it there's nothing she could have done, but she will try her hardest, yeah." (Jen)

Mothers' desire to be involved was also important as the children could be informed of this,

"I know I'm not gonna be able to see them, but I still want them to know that I care and I still want them to know that I want to be involved in that everywhere I can."

Respect as mothers

Many mothers felt they had previously been denied not only their rights, but any acknowledgement of their mothering status,

"When I came to prison, I kind of felt like I lost that status, like, their mum.... I feel like I'm part of, rather than just like an outsider looking in." (Sian in the community)

Once the Pact Social Workers became involved this mothering identity began to be reinstated and helped empower the mother, this is especially important in retaining a meaningful relationship with their children, which will help facilitate mothers taking up the mantle of parenting on their release,

“But like I was included in things, like my voice mattered as a mum.” (Karen in the community)

Mothers noted that the Pact Social Workers treat them respectfully, as mothers, rather than as offenders, which understandably is usually their overriding status in a prison establishment,

“We’re viewed as parents, not prisoners, and that’s the important thing in this project, is that we are still parents.” (Paula)

It is to the relationship with community Social Workers that we now move.

Relationship with Community Social Worker

Many mothers had had negative relationships with the children’s Social Worker in the community and felt very distrustful of them, as the practitioners themselves recognised,

“So in our first meeting, there was a lot of, she wasn’t antagonistic, but she was making the point that as far as she’s concerned, Social Workers were not really good, we’re not good, you know, we make excuses, we don’t do what we’re going to say.” (Community Practitioner)

“Because I know she wouldn’t have spoken to Social Workers from (home area), you know.” (Community Practitioner)

An important aspect of the role of the Pact Social Worker is promoting effective working relationships between mothers and community Social Workers. This helped the community-based Social Workers to work more productively and co-operatively with mothers,

“... we wouldn’t have got this depth of information, and I don’t know she would have been so willing to meet with us, and to share what she has, so I think its definitely made the role a lot easier.” (Community Practitioner)

It also led to mothers’ surprisingly requesting to meet with community practitioners,

“Tim’s mum had asked to meet with myself and Tim’s new Social Worker –Which in itself was quite a big thing because she didn’t want to meet any Social Workers

before. And she'd thought through why she wanted to meet us, and the questions she wanted to ask." (Community Practitioner)

This was facilitated by the home Social Worker for the new Social Worker, the Pact Social Worker and the mother to attend,

"... so she'll now be included on, invited to look after reviews and any other meetings that will take place about Tim, {Pact Social Worker} will be included." (Community Practitioner)

The previous hostile contact with some mothers, combined with the difficulty in access, made working together difficult for community practitioners, if not impossible. The Pact Social Worker having built a good working relationship, greatly facilitated the work of community practitioners, and gave them a clearer understanding of the mother and her strengths. It also helped community practitioners to feel more empathetic,

"I think it really challenged my views on people who are in prison, you know, obviously I see the mother in a completely different light and it's quite strange." (Community Practitioner)

"... and it's not sort of like, what would it be, a review of case notes to get an impression, an actual physical meeting of this person, and being able to say I spoke to her, and this is what she said, this is what she looks like, this is how she responded. It's a real... it's given that humanity in a way ...she was, to all intents and purposes, on paper for me, you know?" (Community Practitioner)

For the safeguarding lead in the school, she noted that although they invariably have around three children at any one time with a parent in prison, they have never before had contact with parents in any penal institution,

"We were aware that mother was in prison quite a while after the child had joined the school, but we didn't know any of the details or any of the situation behind it, so the family hadn't disclosed this to us. So then I was contacted by...Somebody obviously who worked in the prison and they asked us if we would do a piece of work and in terms of supporting the child using a book called Pact and then they also wanted to know if we could facilitate the mother having parents evening appointments." Community Practitioner

The opening up of this channel of communication made a huge difference for this child and enabled the school to provide daily support to the child.

The relationship mothers have with the Pact Social Workers is separate from any previous more antagonistic relationship they may have had with community practitioners,

“...she’s really good and I, I have a really mistrust of Social Workers, it... I, I’ve, I’ve had a lot of them in my life and probably only like one in five I’ve managed to have positive relationships with.” Paula

“Everyone was a bit sceptical ‘cos I don’t like social services, take a while to warm up to people.” (Sandra in the community)

“But with the social services outside, they just.. do not give me the information that I’m entitled to. I’ve still got - I’ve still got parental rights over my boy, you know, and I just feel like I’m fighting them all the time.” (Jen)

Here we can see Jen feeling she is still battling with the Social Workers in the community. Whilst mothers may not get to the point of completely trusting Social Workers in the community, feeling confident enough to work together and feeling included in decision-making is a realistic goal for Pact Social Workers (Forrester et al. 2008b).

Mothers commented favourably on their relationships with the Pact Social Workers,

“Yeah, so she’s really positive, a really good support, she is, she is everything I could wish for in a Social Worker.” (Paula)

“{Pact worker}, like, {is} the most positive one I’ve ever met.” (Sophie)

“And it doesn’t matter, she doesn’t judge me. And she’s like... I don’t know if you’ve ever met her, but sometimes I think she may get mistaken for a prisoner, because she’s just like, like funky in the way she dresses, like she’s just, she just fits, she fits, she’s approachable... I think maybe she must have extensive knowledge of how prisons can be, and even surrounding the mental health aspect.” (Paula)

“Having Pact Social Worker... is a relief and that there is still a bit of humanity in the world.” (Felicity)

“I have a good relationship with her, and she has a great relationship with {name of child}. She has a great relationship with all the babies on the unit to be fair.” (Chris)

This rebuilding of trust provided mothers the opportunity to build relationships with Social Workers in the community,

“It’s helped me to communicate with Social Workers and get new relationships off to a good start. ... I’ve achieved already the stigma of Social Worker title, that’s gone.” (Paula)

“So yeah, I do worry, they’re my, my main worries is, is the lack of... with my son, the care system as a whole, but now he’s got this good Social Worker and we have a good relationship, that worry is alleviated a bit” (Paula)

The Pact Social Workers help mothers in their decision making, but also to moderate and reconsider their responses to community Social Workers and other officials,

“when it comes down to making decisions, obviously {she} will come to me and say, like, “You’ve got a decision to make” type thing and she’ll sit down with me and explain them to me. So she’ll explain, like, the different options that I’ve got and we’ll go through the pros and cons of each decision that I had to make and which one’s the best one to make, but she’ll go through it with me and go at my pace. ...You’ve just got to show the difference, so you reacting in a way that’s going to prove them right isn’t going to do nothing...So she’ll kind of put me in my place but in a good way.” (Lesley)

Staff turnover amongst community practitioners

The relationship with community practitioners is often short-lived and therefore less trusting because of the turnover of Social Work staff in particular, as noted in the literature (House of Commons Education Committee 2016; Simpson 2022; Foster 2023; Samuel 2023) and also noted in the interviews with mothers, carers and community practitioners,

“Since then we’ve had eight Social Workers (over 18 months)... Yeah, the first Social Worker, they sent an email saying that {they} had neither time nor the capacity to speak to Hilary, and so that email got forwarded to her manager and they got taken off the case and they apologised.... The longest {community} Social Worker we had was four months” (Steve, carer)

“{We} waited six months to meet community Social Worker.” (Steve)

“This will be the sixth time that he’s {son} changed Social Workers.” (Kim)

Community practitioners also note this difficulty,

“... he’s had a lot of changes of Social Worker.. And he didn’t have anyone, sort of... to because there was such a high turnover of staff.” (Community Practitioner)

“Because the previous worker, had, had some long period of sickness so there’d been a change in the team.” (Community Practitioner)

This chopping and changing makes it very difficult for mothers to keep track of their child's Social Worker, as Jen comments,

"...but I, I think I've had three or four Social Workers since me and Pact worker started working together, 'cos they were all, like, part time, or - I can't remember what they call them now - like agency workers, is it?" (Jen)

Similarly, Paula was unaware of whether there were Social Workers for some of her children,

"And then that same Social Worker... so the middle two, as far as I know they don't have a Social Worker. I think sometimes it's voluntary input... But, as far as I know again, she hasn't got a Social Worker at the moment, which surprises me because she's disabled. " (Paula)

Given the often-changing personnel, the Pact Social Worker can be a consistent figure who retains the information about the case and continues to keep the community practitioner and mother in the picture. New practitioners may not have met the mother before and can be reliant on the knowledge of the Pact Social Worker,

"I've come in, not having met this mum in person, and having to, you know, sort of make some important decisions. So having somebody obviously, who's a qualified Social Worker with sort of eyes on this mum in terms of the relationship, a working relationship and the work that she's doing, it's just been really helpful insight to have." (Community Practitioner)

Here we can see the importance of the Pact worker being a qualified Social Worker. It is very helpful to have a colleague who has more in-depth information, especially when community practitioners may be tasked with undertaking a parent assessment,

"... detailed records, which was very, very welcomed by everybody, including, you know, kind of the parties within the proceedings, which also added to mum's sort of parenting assessment... Liaised with, with the independent Social Worker, who was completing an assessment of mum. So again, that, that was very helpful." (Community Practitioner)

Cautionary approach

The community practitioners rightly have a commitment and overriding concern for the child, with their welfare being paramount (*Children Act 1989*),

“My responsibility is to that young person.” (Community Practitioner)

There will be occasions when it is not in the interests of the child to have contact with their mother in prison, depending on the history of the relationship and nature of offence. If it is decided that contact cannot happen, then there is also the issue of sharing information,

“See, that's a balance for us because actually she's done some horrific things to these children and they need to know that they're safe and we need to safeguard them a bit in terms of how much information are we giving her because in a few in a like 10 years later, if they turn around, say, well, actually, my mom {xx} abused me and then you're giving me all this information, giving her all this information about me. So it's a real kind of balancing act there.” (Community Practitioner)

Community practitioners are rightly cautious about the impact that contact with mothers might have on children, especially if they anticipate this might be detrimental,

“It would be getting, where possible, the views of the child and the wants and wishes so they want to see their parent,... assessing that contact and its impact on that child's behaviour, because a lot of times, children say “yeah, yeah, I want to, and yes I'm happy to” and then they finish the contact, and they come back and their unease or their anxiety is reflected in their behaviour, so they're not sleeping properly, they're acting out, they're breaking stuff, they're depressed.” (Community Practitioner)

Community practitioners want to ensure that the mother's need to see her son or daughter does not override the needs of the child,

“it's like trying to get her to recognise the impact of her incarceration and that contact on her child, and going forward, like if she's successful in parole, what's that impact going to be on him?” (Community Practitioner)

This often makes community Social Workers cautious in supporting contact. The Pact Social Workers helped mothers prepare for contact ensuring the focus was on the welfare of the children. Some mothers were so desperate for information and contact that they did not always think of the impact of their approach on the child,

“Whilst we met, giving his mum like clues, like have a conversation with him. It's not an interrogation, what you done, you know, share things about you that he can't find out from anyone else but you.” (Community Practitioner)

The Pact Social Workers helped advise mothers about constructively communicating with their children, without bombarding them, and in ways that were mutually enjoyable and beneficial,

“I think his mum didn’t know what she was meant to say when she went, that... When he came to see her, and yeah it just wasn’t very helpful for either of them. But {Pact worker} done work with his mum around topics she could discuss when he comes in, and the types of things they could talk about, and she’s helped her to write some letters to him which have been really nice, and they’ve really helped him.” (Community Practitioner)

There were numerous ways in which the Pact Social Workers helped mothers prepare for contact,

“And all the extra bits she did as well, like she’d helped his mum provide a load of bits for his life story work, and ...Sort of, spoken to her about her background and her heritage, things we didn’t know at all before, that have really helped her son, and he’s loved hearing all these, like, little stories about her first job.” (Community Practitioner)

The Pact Social Worker took things slowly, gradually helping to build the level of contact mothers were having with their children,

“And then, sort of, developed that into some letterbox contact –And now he’s having video contact with his mum....Yeah, and, and positive contact as well because before it really wasn’t very positive.” (Community Practitioner)

“And I’ve also just approved something saying it’s okay for the children to spend an overnight in prison with the mum.” (Community Practitioner)

The quality of the contact improved and had a beneficial impact on children.

“... they were both interested in like art and, and then following the video contact she sent him some pictures she’d drawn.. And about two weeks ago she sent over some paintings that she’d done for Tim, so I passed those on. And when I visited end of last week they were up on his wall, he’d framed them – So that’s a huge thing because before he didn’t want any mention of his mum.” (Community Practitioner)

The Pact Social Workers were seen by mothers as being able to consider the needs of the child **and** the mother, in what has been referred to as a child-focused plus approach (Forrester et al. 2008a), this is a theme we come back to in our conclusion,

“Well, I would say that my relationship with the London Social Worker is, is not bad, but my... the Social Worker is about my children, not about me and the Social Workers in prison are about me and my children.” (Claire, following release)

“And I could trust her and if I needed help, she’d give me the help, or I needed advice she’d give me the honest opinion. Whereas my Social Worker, she’s only out for one thing, it’s not about me, it was about my son.” (Sandra in the community)

When contact is not possible

For some mothers they realised and came to terms with the fact that the children were not ready for contact,

“But that’s because my children aren’t ready and I’ve realised that now. And having {Pact Social Worker} to help support me and coach me through that is a really big thing.” (Paula)

For others the Pact Social Worker worked with mothers to help them accept that contact would not happen, as discussed by a community practitioner,

“{Mother says} I’m not gonna be able to see them, but I still want them to know that I care and I still want them to know that I want to be involved in that everywhere I can”. (Community Practitioner)

Where this is the case, it is important that children know that their mothers wanted to be involved and tried to contribute in any way possible. The work to support mothers in these circumstances, to help them come to terms with the situation and minimise the risk of self-harm or suicide was a large part of the Pact Social Worker role.

Children’s welfare

Many of the difficulties for children occur when they do not fully understand the background situation and what their mothers have done to be incarcerated. Parents often hide the truth from children which is not helpful (Raikes and Lockwood 2015). When they are separated from their mothers, they sometimes blame themselves,

“And, sort of, helping him to make sense of why he’s in foster care and what happened. Cos, I think he had a tendency and he still does, but to blame himself for a lot of that, because he didn’t know what happened, and his family had moved about all over, so we didn’t really have a clear picture of things.....” (Community Practitioner)

The confusion and anxiety is often exacerbated by high profile media reports

“I think there's been a huge impact because not only have we been able to sort of allow her to understand her parents' situation, particularly her mother's....the child wasn't aware of the circumstances behind her mother's imprisonment at first and it, it's sort of been a bit of a rumour around the school and it was in the local press, I think, was in the national press, actually, what had happened as well.” (Community Practitioner)

This naturally instils fear and shame into the child, especially when no-one is discussing it directly with them, it becomes a 'dirty' secret,

“So, I think for this young person, he had very negative view of his mum and he'd googled her and read some newspaper articles on her and –And he had a really negative view.And he's conflicted with these things that he's read and these images he's got of her, and things he's heard about her from his brothers.” (Community Practitioner)

“And I was worried for her...as my face was all over the papers, because it was, it was a, sort of like a bigger, bigger case. I wouldn't say high profile, but from the area that I live in it, it is small.” (Paula)

Children are often left with a gap in their knowledge about their family history, especially those looked after, with no-one talking about their mother, who is erased from their landscape.

The Pact Social Workers have increased contact between mothers and community practitioners, and between mothers and children, this has been of great help, allowing mothers and practitioners to talk to children honestly and openly about the situation that led to incarceration,

“Now, she broached it with her child and she was able to do that with the support of the prison and in a very controlled way to enable her child to understand the reason behind her going to prison. What had actually happened before. It was told to her. You know in a different way, which I think would have been very damaging, so I think those two things mainly the contact and the fact that her child was able to hear first-hand from her mother, the reason why she was put into prison and what happened.” (Community Practitioner)

Rather than viewing their mothers only in terms of their imprisonment, children have had the opportunity to learn about their own background and family story, with interest and commonality,

“So, it's been nice, it's given him a lot of pride now I think in his background and he was saying how he's gonna... His mum's gone to Scotland and he's recently said, “Oh next time Scotland are playing, that's who I'm gonna support now, because I'm half

Scottish” and yeah, its nice, I think its really helped his, sort of, sense of identity....So, my role was to try and support his foster carers to, you know, give him a more positive view of his family and his identity. ... Lot of it was wrong but he’d, sort of, given himself this narrative.” (Community Practitioner)

Having openly discussed the situation with the child, the safeguarding lead in the school, in particular, was able to provide a very supportive environment and safe space for the child. She was able to arrange school parent’ meetings virtually with the mother and contact between mother and child for special events,

“I’m happy to do it whenever it’s suggested. So if it’s her birthday or if it’s coming up to Christmas or there’s a special sort of occasion that, that kind of thing, you know we, we would facilitate it at any time, really.”

Community practitioners saw great benefit for the children as a result of this, by reducing some of the shame,

“I don’t feel he’s got that embarrassment anymore with talking about his mum, I think he’s got a more realistic picture of who his mum is and what she’s like, and its helping to fill in some of those gaps he has about his early life.” (Community Practitioner)

This allowed for some children to be honest with their peers about the situation,

“I think she’s confided in a couple of friends about what’s happened to her mum and you know she will often see me in the corridor and she’ll be with a group of friends and she’s able to say to me, oh, I I spoke to mum last night or I’m seeing mum at the weekend and it’s not this big, you know, dirty, awful secret.” (Community Practitioner)

It has also allowed community practitioners to offer more support to children,

“in some kind of way as surrogate mother that I can explain to her and support her and feedback to her mum and I can contact her mum for her so I can speak to her mum and speak through her mum and I think she really values that.” (Community Practitioner)

The Pact Social Workers have also created a resource for community practitioners to use to help explain to children that their mothers are in prison and what this means.

Mother and Baby Unit

Very few of the mothers had experience of Mother and Baby Units, and the unit in HMP Eastwood Park was not filled to capacity for the duration of this study. However, Sonia did have a baby with her in a mother and baby unit at HMP Styal. Sonia informs that her baby was placed with her in prison after six days,

“She was born. So she joined me six days after I come to prison....She was seven months old then when I came {to prison}. We were on mother and baby until she was 16 months old and then, obviously, that’s when she had to leave and she’s been with my sister for the last four years.”

Sonia had been in Styal prison at the time and describes the set up in that establishment, although a separation plan was in place, this was not implemented,

“So it’s not actually prison officers that run mother and baby in Styal. It’s Action for Children. So we had to do like a separation plan and obviously set that up so it’s gradual for Daisy leaving. She’ll spend the weekend and then, the next week, it will be the weekend and a Monday and then Tuesday and Wednesday and so on until she’s there permanently but that’s how it normally is. So, we had all that set up but, obviously, that didn’t happen in my case. We went to court on the Thursday, and she had to leave on the Saturday.” (Sonia)

Belinda talks about trying to access the MBU just for her baby visiting the prison (as he was living with family) but was not able to,

“So, I, like, the thing that I was asking (Pact Social Worker) to have a visit in the mother and baby group ... unit, because Carl obviously was a baby and it was really difficult. But the waiting list is so long and I don’t know... I really don’t know what the issue is, but I think that it would have helped in so many different ways, because, you know, people treat mothers of young children slightly differently in prison. And I wasn’t obviously able to go live in the mother and baby unit because I didn’t have him with me, but just to have my children around other children of a similar age would have made such a difference to Carl because he would have seen other, like... Obviously, when he came to see me he’s got all these adults around and it’s not child-friendly and there was no, there was no play area, there was no toys, there was nothing for him, so it was quite... “ (Belinda in the community)

Although the MBU is not at capacity, it seems difficult for mothers with babies to access the Unit for visiting purposes. It is to domestic abuse that we now move.

Domestic abuse

One of the major things impacting contact is domestic abuse. This was not much mentioned by community practitioners but was captured in the interviews with the Pact Social Workers and mothers. Six out of the eight mothers interviewed talked about experiencing domestic abuse, this is perhaps not surprising as this issue was noted by Baroness Corston (as far back as 2007) by Farmer (in 2019) and O'Brien and King (in 2023).

“When you’ve been through domestic violence twice and it’s happened to the children, that’s when I know that I’ve let them down, because I couldn’t protect them.” (Miriam in the community)

“..but me losing care of my youngest child because of domestic abuse.” (Paula)

“... we didn’t have nothing, we left in bad circumstances, the police had to escort me {out of} there.” (Sophie)

Here we see the failure to protect mantle often ascribed to mothers (Hester 2011). We did not discuss offending with mothers, and so we do not know whether their criminal behaviour was as a result of, or related to, being abused. Mothers were particularly anxious when the children were then placed with their abusive fathers during their incarceration,

“My six-year-old is living with their Dad. I do have concerns because me and his Dad were in a really abusive relationship and I’m not sure what sort of life he is having.” (Chris)

One mother was anxious that the Social Worker had been promoting that the children be placed with their father,

“Like, I still had managed to get away from him with the kids, like, and she’s {community Social Worker} saying, “I’ll give kid out... {to} Steve to take your kids.” I’m, like, I just didn’t get it.” (Sophie)

Community practitioners might find themselves in a difficult situation, as under the legislative framework, they have to keep children with their birth families wherever possible, rather than placing children with foster carers. Practitioners are unlikely to be fully aware of issues of domestic abuse, given that it is often hidden from agencies, in part to avoid blame ‘failure to protect’ (Hester 2011). Given that women had been in abusive relationships, it was perhaps not surprising that if children were placed with male partners, those carers were then undermining and controlling with regard to contact with their mothers,

“... because my, my middle two children, their dad isn't very workable and he's painted a very, very negative picture of me. So his view of me has gone onto the children and, and they then don't wanna have any contact with me.” (Paula)

Some mothers were aware of parental alienation (Harman et al. 2018),

“Plus, he was controlling in our relationship, he's used the kids as a weapon then.... Like, he's, he's told the kids that I'm this big bad person and, and, do you know...he's not told them the truth about everything – So, the kids don't know, they don't know no different, they're just hearing what he's saying.... So, she saw {barrister} through that, that he basically primed them to talk, to say things –Yeah, my barrister {said it was} a clear case of parent alienation ...they don't see none of my family, they've been turned against us all.” (Sophie)

This meant that mothers had to tread very delicately if they wanted the father of the child to facilitate access,

“... don't wanna, like, upset him in a way where he, he makes contact difficult for me. So I feel like I'm kind of - not so much now, but at the time, like, I kinda felt like I'm walking on eggshells.” (Sian in the community)

“So it's a bit more tricky, but she, her dad is a professional manipulator and she couldn't see it and it was sort of turned around on me.” (Paula)

The Pact Social Worker was supportive in these circumstances and was able to contact the father to arrange for the children to visit (taking the heat out of the situation), liaise with community Social Workers where the father was blocking contact, and could also sit in on visits, so women were not left alone with ex-partners,

“He just wouldn't let me speak with her. And {Pact worker} then she could liaise that back with the Social Worker as well and say, look, these are the times that we've tried to call Carl together..... Because before that it was my word against his.... And she helped me, she'd speak to my ex-partner as well, on my behalf,... And also she sat in, in the, in the, in the room with us so I wasn't alone with my ex-partner as well... So I didn't have to talk to him or engage with him, and I didn't have to sort out the visit with him, as such, she sorted all of that for me. So it took that pressure off of me.” (Amy in the community)

Here we can see not only how difficult it is for mothers who are incarcerated to make contact with the outside world, but doubly difficult when ex-partners are further controlling access to children.

There may be a place for family group conferencing (Holland and O'Neill 2006) to be considered for certain mothers, to mobilise wider family members who have a deeper understanding of the dynamics and can challenge others for the benefit of the child. It is to birth family and carers that we now move.

Contact with birth family/carer

As already highlighted, mothers in prison can only have access to their children if the foster carer or family member brings the child to the prison or facilitates contact. Family members often struggle when taking on the additional responsibilities of caring for the child. Several mothers commented on how the Pact Social Worker had supported the carers of their children,

“Because my sister was ringing social services and they weren’t ringing her back, so when {Pact Social Worker} rang them, like people started to move.” (Karen in the community)

“She even is in touch with my mum, like, emails my mum about stuff as well. So that’s good that she’s in touch with my family as well.” (Jen)

Here again we can see the Pact Social Worker being a conduit of information between carers, family members and Social Workers in the community. We have interviewed two fathers and one carer. The latter is the sister of a prisoner and had taken on the care of three children; she was previously living alone. The Pact Social Worker has provided immense support to the carer, helping her secure new accommodation (the sister was previously living in a one-bedroom flat) in a different local authority and when the carer was due to move into the new home, providing her with vouchers to buy food for the children, whilst her benefits were being transferred.

The carer moved home just before Christmas which coincided with the children being due to visit their mother in prison. In these circumstances the Pact Social Worker arranged for the children to be taken to visit their mother, so they did not miss out on the Christmas visit. The carer was incredibly appreciative, saying the service the Pact Social Worker provided was ‘fantastic’ (Bev, carer).

Similarly, the mother of the children commented how the Pact Social Worker had made her feel less guilty about the stress caused to her sister,

“And, it gave my sister a sense of security knowing that we’ve got, like I’m getting people on her side as well. So it’s not just her on her own, like, I’m doing my bit.” (Karen in the community)

Here we can see how TaC support helped the three children (providing food and housing), it is to training that we now move.

Training

Mothers commented positively on the training they received from the Pact Social Workers. This helped them think about their children as well as their parenting style,

“It taught me a lot of things like what kind of child I have. So there's the very sort of, outspoken child, the child that's not that bothered by that many things and then you have sort of the child that is very sensitive, and lots of things can upset your child. And it was like all these different things that you kind of, like, oh my God, yeah, that's, that is my child. ... A lot of was brushing up, but it was sort of, it was nice to do that because it gives you, you take, you take away certain things, and you think I'm gonna use that in my day-to-day life.” (Amy in the community)

Others commented on training around relationships,

“Building stronger relationships, anger management and other stuff with {Pact Social Worker} that I did.... I did a parenting course as well with {Pact Social Worker}.” (Miriam in the community)

Some mothers noted that because of COVID they were receiving training in smaller groups, and this was preferable,

“And I think normally it's more than that, but because of Covid, it had to be smaller groups. No, but actually, I quite preferred the smaller groups, because then it doesn't feel so intrusive on yourself.” (Amy in the community)

Others commented that because of COVID they had just undertaken workbooks alone in their cells,

“Just the PACT workbooks. That's because of Covid. We're on Level 3 here at the moment which is like a lockdown because of the number of cases. I'm going to take the workbooks with me to the next place so they've can see the work that I've done.” (Chris)

This mother noted that no-one went through the workbooks with them, and they would have preferred this follow-up to consolidate learning,

“It would have been good to go through them with someone. They were given out by TaC worker but there was someone else, I don’t know their name, who was going to go through them afterwards. That was supposed to happen via video link, but it never happened.” (Chris)

Another mother would have liked to access more training, even if it was on-line,

“I just... you know what? One... the one thing I would have liked is if I’d done, done some courses or something before, before I’d left prison because they... what, what the courts like to hear is that I’ve done something whilst I was inside, but it’s like they don’t really understand that because of COVID, that really, really limited everything. So, if there were some, like, courses, like, that could have been, like... So the courses that I’m doing now with, with {Name of a member of staff }, they’re online, so I don’t know if it was a possibility for some online courses to be done where, like, maybe we could have gone into the office and done the course there with, like, the Social Worker watching, and then... and then that way I will have completed it.” (Stella in the community)

On release

The mothers interviewed who had been released talked about struggling with accommodation; Karen was living in a probation hostel as she did not have a guarantor for rent. Miriam was working in a charity shop with associated lodgings as she did not have sufficient money for a private rental. Neither Miriam or Karen had their children living with them. Amy did have her daughter come to live with her on release, and the Pact Social Worker was very instrumental in helping her prepare some of the practicalities,

“I mean, she done nearly all of it, really. Yeah, she, she sort of set everything up for me and got everything ready, I explained that I was worried because I needed a bed for my daughter coming home, otherwise she wouldn’t be allowed overnight stays.....And {Pact Social worker} organised getting me some vouchers for Argos and Asda to pay for a new bed, which was amazing and it helped massively. ... “Obviously, things like benefits and things like that don’t start for sort of five weeks after you get home... And that massively helped, and it helped me get my first week’s food shopping when my daughter was back with me.” (Amy in the community)

It is difficult to see how children can return to live with their mothers without this financial and practical support. Otherwise, they would be without food and heating, which would be damaging to child and mother. The Pact Social Workers make contact with the mothers, a short time after release, to follow up on progress,

*“...That she called me. ... it was just... just a general check-in to see how I’m doing.”
(Miriam in the community)*

One mother noted that although she was living in a probation hostel, things were going well and her engagement with services had led to her more positive attitude and an increase in the confidence her family has in her,

“I’ve come out, and I haven’t gone back to drugs, I haven’t committed no more crimes, I haven’t, I’m doing everything that I’m supposed to be doing, I’ve gained a lot more trust with my family.” (Karen in the community)

Mothers in prison noted how difficult it would be to find accommodation before they could have their children back to live with them,

“Cos I don’t have an address. So, first that and then getting my son back and then just sorting my life out.” (Kim)

Losing accommodation due to incarceration, and then not being able to have children back on release because of lack of housing is major barrier. Mothers released will not be allocated accommodation for their families, because they are not living with them, and this then becomes a vicious circle.

Summary and improvements suggested by those who have experienced the TaC service

Overall, both mothers and community practitioners were hugely positive about the work undertaken by the Pact Social Workers. However, they were aware that this is a pilot scheme which is being evaluated and offered a few suggestions for improvements to the service. One was the need to increase awareness of the service, especially amongst schools. There may be an increasing need for more publicity of the scheme. The other suggestion was the need for the Pact Social Worker to become involved at an earlier stage so that the start of contact was not delayed,

“... And obviously happened very quickly. So this child had grown up with her mum, you know, her mum's care as the sole carer, and then all of a sudden, you know, everything was turned upside down and mum went to prison. So it was a very sudden loss for her. So the ability to have contact was extremely important. So the first, so mum went to prison on 24th June (to another prison), and then the first contact I don't believe occurred until November, so there was no...” (Community Practitioner)

There was a suggestion that the process could even start in the court setting,

“It would be really good if it could be involved from sentencing, you know, so that parents who want to have contact with their children or at least, yeah, contact, whether it be letter, phone call, video call or visit, can start to be looked at in the very beginning. So for the children, they don’t get that gap in sort of knowing what’s going on with their mum and stuff, and the parents don’t have that unknowing in between... And so I think, yeah, the organisation, the earlier you could get involved, the better. Obviously, you know, there are loads of checks and balances, some people will not be able to have contact. But for the ones that care, yeah, if it’s possible, make it possible, because it’s good for the kids, even if it’s a letter in a card.” (Community Practitioner)

There were few suggestions for improvements of the TaC service made by mothers, other than following up on the training workbooks,

“There’s nothing really. I appreciate the work she has done for me and I’m a Pact orderly so I know how busy they are and the work that goes on behind the scenes.” (Chris)

One mother also mentioned parenting training could cover Special Guardians and it may be that the development of training to understand the role of foster carers, kinship carers and Special Guardians and how to work with them, especially when only limited contact is allowed by mothers would be helpful.

Many of those interviewed highlighted how hard pressed the Pact Social Workers are,

“The only thing that I was confused about was how was {The Pact Social Worker} supposed to manage the, the, the... all of us, because being a women’s prison, most of us had children. It was, kind of, it was less likely that people didn’t have children and, yeah, that was a lot of work for one person. So, it was really difficult because I was obviously going through family court, so I had a lot of stuff going on and I could have done with a lot more of, of {her} time, but obviously she’s got 400 women to look after, so it’s not always possible that you can get her when you need her.” (Stella in the community)

“There needs to be more of them, so women aren’t, like feeling like they’re so alone. And it probably needs to be really pushed out there, like the options and the choices women have, because there’s a lot of women in the jails that don’t believe they got the right help or the right choice, and they’re not... their kids are going, like, they’re losing their children.” (Sandra in the community)

Carers too noted how over worked the Pact Social Workers are,

“The more the better... here’s one {Pact Social Worker}, and then, about... hundreds of people in there.” (Steve, Carer)

One mother suggested that utilising the expertise of women who have experienced the prison system might help encourage mothers to use the service,

“Yeah, or even just somebody that has gone through the prison system and is willing to go back in there and be, like, “Right girls, I get it, I’ve been through exactly...” ‘Cos I know {The Pact Social Worker} and other Social Workers will come up with a lot of {resistance to} social services, “Leave me alone, Social Worker leave me alone.” I just think it definitely needs to get looked at into maybe sending like an ex-offender in that understands it,” (Sandra in the community)

The use of mothers who have accessed the TaC service could be developed to promote the service, once capacity issues have been addressed.

Case study: Tamia

Tamia was pregnant with her seventh child and due to have an imminent, planned caesarean, at 36 weeks. Due to previous experiences Tamia was very mistrusting of professionals and at times presents as hostile and abrupt.

The Pact Social Worker contacted the home local authority, where Tamia was residing prior to coming into custody, they had started the pre-birth assessment however decided to transfer the case to the local authority where Tamia is currently located as a result of her custodial sentence. After a period of pursuing both the Pact Social Worker was eventually able to secure case allocation within the home local authority three weeks before Tamia's scheduled delivery date and supported the arrangement of a visit to complete the assessment.

The Social Worker very quickly advised the Pact Social Worker and MBU liaison officers of the outcome of her assessment which was that the local authority would look to commence care proceedings and remove the baby once born. Little reason was shared for this decision aside from Tamia's fifth child being adopted in 2019. The Social Worker intended to share her decision via letter and after the Pact Social Worker queried this, citing that Tamia cannot read, she subsequently asked that those who work closely with Tamia in custody read the letter to her. The Pact Social Worker challenged this request as she felt the Social Worker should be sharing their assessment outcome directly with the mother both for practical reasons, such as answering questions, and as an act of respect. However, as the Tamia was due to give birth in five days' time, the Pact Social Worker made the decision to share the assessment outcome herself due to feeling that the delay up to this point had already been unacceptable.

Following this the Pact Social Worker supported Tamia to obtain legal representation from a family solicitor. The Pact Social Worker arranged for the solicitor to attend the MBU admission board and confirmed she would attend herself. Tamia also decided to attend the admission board. The Social Worker had not completed her assessment in time for the board and so a short summary was shared in its place. The local authority Social Worker cited substance misuse and domestic violence as primary concerns, as well as the adoption of child five, however the board ultimately concluded that Tamia should be given a place on the MBU due to these risks being minimised in prison and on the understanding that she submits a negative drug test and agrees to engage with support to address the identified areas of concern.

Following the birth of Child seven in hospital the local authority submitted an application to the family court to remove the child and place her in foster care. The Judge sought further information from HMP Eastwood Park's Governor, which involved consultation with the Head of Women's health, Perinatal Care and Safeguarding and the Pact Social Worker. The Judge ultimately directed that Child seven should remain in the care of her mother, citing similar reasons to the MBU admission board.

Tamia moved onto the MBU with Child seven on her return from the hospital and parented her daughter on the unit until her release. A Child in Need Plan was in place to enable the local authority to monitor parenting and the child's welfare. The Pact Social Worker helped mediate this relationship to ensure positive developments.

As the relationship between the Pact Social Worker and Tamia progressed a sense of trust developed, such that Tamia sought further support in relation to her four eldest children. Tamia wanted to seek updates about the children's welfare to inform the possibility of re-establishing contact; she knew children were residing with their father but their exact whereabouts were unknown. The Pact Social Worker initially liaised with known maternal family members and sought legal support to assist with this matter.

The Pact Social Worker worked collaboratively with the home Social Worker and Housing Services to secure accommodation and community-based support following resettlement. In addition to this the Pact Social Worker liaised with various custody and community-based agencies to access funding and resources which would ensure that Tamia was able to meet the needs of child seven upon release. This included a mobile phone, cot, highchair, toys and a Pact grant to purchase food and other necessities. Following Tamia's release the Pact Social Worker attended an Initial Child Protection Conference via Teams and contributed towards the decision to step the Child in Need Plan up to a Child Protection Plan. This was done to increase the level of supervision and support provided to Tamia and Child 7 considering the substantial change that had taken place, both to the environment and support network, and was responsive to some concerns, such as drug use, being more prevalent upon Tamia's re-integration into the community. While Tamia did not agree that risk had increased, she could understand the professionals' reasoning for the decision made and felt confident that the plan would be stepped down once she had "proven herself."

Visits to both prisons

We have visited both prison establishments, we visited HMP Eastwood Park on 8th February, and HMP Send on 14th February.

The Pact Social Workers in HMP Eastwood Park were based in a room with another third sector provider, being situated at some distance from the Prison Offender Managers (POMs). Many of the women were locked down because of staff shortages. Whilst in HMP Eastwood Park we interviewed four members of staff, a Governor with responsibility for women's health, perinatal care and safeguarding, a perinatal worker, a prison offender manager (POM - prison) and a member of staff from the Visiting Mum scheme. We also observed the Pact Social Worker and a mother participating in a Team around the Child meeting hosted by a child's school. The family engagement manager (FEM) post was vacant at the time of our visit and there was no family engagement worker (FEW) in post.

Whilst in HMP Send we held semi-structured interviews with a manager with responsibility for public protection, a family engagement worker (FEW), a POM (prison). We also visited the wing staff and held an informal interview with a Senior Officer. During the lunchtime lockdown, we toured the prison and were able to informally interview a professional in the Therapeutic Community and met mothers who had accessed TaC on the wings.

Findings from interviews with prison staff

Value of the role

Staff recognised the difficulties mothers faced when entering prison and the difficulties in contacting and finding out information about their children,

"I think they're so disempowered and they're so out of control and, you know, they're finding out that things are going on in their kids' lives and they don't... they can't just pick up the phone to sort that out, they need people to advocate for them... yeah, I very much feel that {she} will come in and she's really knowledgeable." (Perinatal worker)

All staff interviewed saw great value in the Pact Social Worker role, and those new to their position found it difficult to believe that this was a pilot project.

“And I was incredulous about that because the work that she does here is - has such an impact that I couldn't understand how this isn't already - I mean, her work is exemplary.... it just beggars' belief that it's not already rolled out and everybody has this opportunity.” (POM)

“I don't think I realised when I started here that it was not a trial but like a bit of a period, but I think the thought of that support not being here for women is quite a daunting thing for them because they will just think, ‘Who can I go to that actually knows what's going on?’ and I think because they, like, invest so much time in obviously coming to these meetings with her and sharing all their family information with her, it is a trusted person they've got within the prison and being that Social Worker, it's just a massive help to them.” (OMU)

The perinatal staff member notes how the Pact Social Worker could help advise and build trust with mothers, because of the time and care taken in nurturing the relationship. Similarly, others highlighted the importance of building rapport to support mothers, and ensuring they are aware of their rights,

“I think {she} really, really fights for these women...but I really feel she goes in and she's very clear on what their rights are and how they need to be supported, and she's... kind of understands she's got to build that rapport with them, she's got to build that relationship with them because, like I say, she comes in as a Social Worker.” (Perinatal worker)

Others noted that not having the Pact Social Worker role could lead to more distress for mothers, potentially more self-harm and may also have a longer-term impact of breakdown of the family unit,

“I think if we didn't have that, then the repercussions would be that we would have more self-harm. We would have less engagement from women who were worried about their family, their children. It would cause more problems on the wings, with wing staff managing women who were in that situation.And ultimately, further down the line, it would cause a breakdown in the family unit, which would far exceed the period of time that they're in custody for. So, yeah. It's absolutely essential, in my opinion.” (POM)

“And if that distress is... that reduced stress is coming because they have some kind of support... {mothers} feel they have some kind of control or knowledge or understanding of what's happening with their other children, then that's {really helpful}.” (Perinatal worker)

Communication, information sharing and go-between

Prison staff identified that one of the major roles played by the Pact Social Worker is sharing difficult information with mothers,

“I think, especially with her background, she can give, and I've seen her do it, quite... not blunt. Being honest with people. Not saying, 'I'm sure it'll be okay, it'll work itself out', and just say realistically, 'This is unlikely to happen', or 'We'll try'. You know, I've seen her do that a few times. Which, long-term, is much, much, much better for everybody concerned. There's no point...” (Governor)

This honesty was seen as vital as a FEW told us ‘Because we don’t want to give them {mothers} false hope’, only to be dashed later. The Pact Social Workers have been involved in final meetings with children prior to adoption, and have played a role in ensuring both that these meetings happen, and are handled sensitively, identifying issues of increased distress and risk to the mother,

“Like, and we both worked together in putting it to the prison staff, the impact it would potentially have on this mum if she wasn’t to have her final contact which feels really... we understand that effect, She... we understand that really well, but sometimes other people don’t kind of see the long-term potential of on that... on mum and the child. So, that... yeah, so we... so around risk assessment.” (Perinatal worker)

Here we can see the Pact Social Worker working jointly with the perinatal worker to facilitate the meeting as sensitively as possible. The types of open and frank conversations that the Pact Social Workers have with mothers about their children can be distressing, and passing on information to other staff about distress and risk was seen as vital,

“I think that’s a big focus that we’re pushing now is kind of keeping all staff in the loop. I’m... we’re quite lucky here in the sense that the prison staff, the operation staff, they want to help these women, they want to know what’s going on; so, if for example, we’ve delivered bad news, we’ll ensure that the prison knows.” (FEW)

“But if we’d met with a woman and we thought she was at risk of self-harming or we thought she was really emotional and someone should be aware of it, we would either get someone to radio Oscar 1 and get them to call us.” (FEW)

This aligns with HMPPS healthy prison test increasing safety by reducing incidents of self-harm and respecting family relationships.

"{Pact Social Worker} is able to kind of relay that to the women and because she meets with them and they trust her, like she's kind of got that relationship with them to be able to make them understand it from our point of view." (OMU manager)

Again, we see how the time invested by the Pact Social Worker helps to build a more trusting relationship and they also helpfully explain and convey the perspectives of prison staff as a 'go between'. Some difficulties were mentioned in communicating and updating the POMs in HMP Eastwood Park,

"Like, I think there needs to be more people doing the role because, if I'm honest with you, I think communication is quite poor...it would be nice to get like updates if they speak to one of our caseloads...But I probably think they agree that there's a lack of communication, probably... But that's an issue with the whole prison, to be honest." (POM)

Communication barriers

When we observed the Pact Social Worker and a mother participating in a Team around the Child (TAC) meeting (whilst visiting HMP Eastwood Park) hosted by a child's school, there were numerous communication difficulties. The barrier with the video system reported in the first interim report was observed. The prison video system was unavailable, and the Pact Social Worker carried her office phone with her to the wing. Staff on the wing seemed unaware of the planned meeting and there was some uncertainty and delay in agreement for the women to be unlocked from her room during further regime restriction attributed to short-staffing. The meeting had therefore started when the mother and Pact Social Worker were able to dial in. There was a sound issue when the phone was on speaker phone, and we observed the Pact Social Worker and mother taking it in turns to hold the phone to an ear. These are not ideal circumstances to facilitate or enhance a mother's participation in meetings about her children.

Expertise and professional knowledge

All staff interviewed in both prisons saw the importance of the Social Worker role within the prison, noting that no-one else in the institution had their particular knowledge base or skill set. All eight interviewees felt that the TaC worker needed to be a qualified Social Worker and saw this as a seam of expertise otherwise missing from the institution. Mindful that the Pact Social Worker acted as the gatekeeper for the staff interviews, we purposefully sought detailed accounts of co-working experiences. All the staff interviewed reported that they had sought out the Pact Social Worker for advice on matters to do with mothers and their rights, and regularly drew upon their expertise, including issues on safeguarding,

“... because if I’ve got any questions about anything, the way children’s services might work or you know, how they assess things, she will come and help me with that and that’s massive.” (OMU manager)

“I know... you know, if I have a woman that comes in, and I pick up doing the BCST, which is the interview that we do when they first come in, that she’s got children, she’s like asking questions like, ‘How am I going to see them?’ Or ‘What support am I going to get?’ Or, ‘What’s going to happen?’ Straight away I’ll email {Pact Social Worker}.” (POM)

Similarly, the FEWs felt that it helped them in their role, as they often just learnt on the job,

“It’s made a massive difference because I guess to be kind of in this role (FEW) you don’t have to have any social work qualifications, anything like that, so you learn on the job essentially.”

None of the staff we spoke to felt they had a knowledge of children’s social services and their procedures regarding child protection,

“... but that’s kind of as far as it goes for staff because they might have spoken to a Social Worker but they don’t know the, including me, they don’t know the processes and the ins and outs and how things, how it works in foster care, how the adoption process works and obviously she has that knowledge from when she did the role in the community, so that’s made a massive difference.” (FEW)

“I think without her they’d be quite lost if I’m honest... I think as well as the prisoners the staff really like to rely on her.” (OMU manager)

Even for POMs (probation) they have had basic safeguarding training, but still did not feel they had the detailed, requisite knowledge,

“I have a quite basic understanding of child safeguarding because I’ve been trained in that. But the actual mechanics of child safeguarding that are done by outside services, I don’t have an awful lot of knowledge. So, it complements me when I’ve got a prisoner who is in front of me crying her eyes out saying, ‘I can’t see my children’, that I’ve got somebody that I can go to that can answer the questions that are specific to her. Or find those answers for her where I would struggle, and it would take a considerable amount of my time to actually locate that information.” (POM)

There was some question about whether the probation POMs might have more knowledge (we did not interview any probation POMs),

“I don't think the POMs are qualified to pick it up, and I don't think - maybe the probation ones, but not the prison-employed ones. We don't - we're quite new, and I don't think we would have the experience or expertise to pick up what (she) does. And I 100% think it's needed. I don't think we'd have the expertise, and I don't think we'd have the time to do the amount of work that she does.” (POM)

Staff noted that locating information from social services was time consuming, and they were not always able to secure it,

“And due to us not being trained with children's services, that work would be a lot more difficult and a lot more cumbersome, and we may not always get the right information, although we would try very hard to do so.” (POM)

Even those who worked in allied professions noted the lack of Social Work knowledge,

“PMBLOs, like the pregnancy mother and baby liaison officers, they actually don't have that kind of knowledge.” (Perinatal worker)

The Pact Social Worker was seen to bridge the gap between the prison and local authority social services,

“I think it really fills the gap of being that step between outside children's services and inside.” (OMU manager)

Pact Social Workers were able to understand and explain the childcare processes and proceedings of core group meetings to other staff, and explain prison procedures to those professionals outside,

“And so, she's good because obviously she can relay it in Social Worker terms to outside but then change it around prison terms.” (OMU manager)

Social Work uses a lot of discipline specific terms, including numerous acronyms such as CIN (Child in Need) and LAC (Looked after Child); the prison Social Workers were also able to translate and explain some of the language and terminology of social work to prison staff,

“For example, she has explained what 'twin tracking means', I didn't know that before.” (FEW)

Qualified Social Worker

We drilled down further in our interviews to ask whether the TaC worker needed to be Social Work qualified and all interviewed felt this should be the case. Being a qualified Social Worker inculcated trust in the mothers,

“And it’s just I think being there, they welcome having that Social Worker, qualified person, because then they believe that she knows what the process is rather than us just blindly saying, ‘Oh, this could happen. This might not.’” (OMU manager)

The OMU manager felt that the Pact Social Worker could help explain to mothers why social services did things and understand their approach,

“I think it really helps in fact because I think the women kind of really respect what she says and her knowledge on that because, you know, I think being a Social Worker sometimes they have a negative view of children’s service and such and Social Workers on the outside, so I think (she) being a Social Worker in here kind of she can give them their point of view on it and where they’re coming from and it helps them understand a bit better.” (OMU manager)

There was also a view that local authority Social Workers would be more collaborative with another Social Worker, and could persist in seeking them out,

“I think children’s services see that she’s a Social Worker and they kind of respect that... But actually you can’t really chase a Social Worker perhaps unless you are a Social Worker.” (OMU manager)

Many of the prison staff noted how many of the mothers have a negative relationship with social services, and believed the Pact Social Worker could help rebuild these, which is helpful, particularly on release,

“I really like the side of her role that she’s a Social Worker, and a lot of our women have really difficult relationships with the Social Workers, and I think that can really help, and rebuild and repair that kind of relationship that I think bodes well for when women then link up with new Social Workers, or they... they go out when they’re released.” (Perinatal worker)

This was particularly important towards the end of sentence,

“because this woman had a really negative relationship with social services; she didn’t trust them, she didn’t like them, and I was struggling to kind of make her understand, you know, their thought process, why they’re doing what they’re doing, so

{Pact Social Worker}... especially towards the end, just before her release, because obviously she was going to have to go on and do this by herself, {she} came and sat in a couple of appointments and explained her side of things, why social services is, you know, doing what they're doing, and she sat in a few social services appointments.... So, that was really helpful because it's almost like a different perspective." (FEW)

It is helpful for mothers to understand that processes are the same for everyone in their situation,

"I think once she understood that actually it wasn't just her and actually, you know, the processes that were in place for every mum that's got kids under social services, I think that did kind of potentially make her feel a bit better about things." (FEW)

Understanding more about social services processes and building a relationship with the Pact Social Worker helped mothers feel more confident when working with community Social Workers on release. Prison staff described how they utilised the positive relationship to effect change in the attitudes of mothers,

"{I said to the mother} you've had a good relationship with {Pact Social Worker}. She's done what she said she was going to do. You know, why can't you give people in the community a chance as well?' And she was actually a little bit happier. But - or she stated to me she was happier to actually be released and work with children's services." (POM)

In addition, The Pact Social Workers have developed resources to assist local authority Social Workers in working with both mothers in prison and their children,

"I know {they} have made quite a few resources to help ATP staff and also to help educate social services about prisons." FEW

In particular, we have had sight of a resource for Social Workers to explain to children what the prison environment is like and something of their mother's daily routines.

Prison-based role

Staff felt that it was important that the role is based in the prison as it helped them understand the barriers mothers were facing,

“... that knowledge of how it works in the kind of wider system as well as being for the women, just really, she’s here, she gets prison, she understands prison; you quite often may have, you know, other clinicians on the outside that don’t quite understand and don’t quite understand that just because a mum is in prison it doesn’t mean to say she can’t be at these meetings.” (POM)

Being based in prison ensured the Pact Social Worker understood the prison institution, its requirements and restrictions, and could therefore be a conduit and moderating force between the prison and community agencies. Being based in prison also meant that the Social Workers could access prison recording systems, which was seen as vital for keeping people in the loop,

“Every interaction that an officer has with a prisoner is put on DPS so we would usually just read through it before we met with someone to find out what’s been on...” (FEW)

“NOMIS has helped, because my gang put a lot of things on NOMIS; and {she’s} looking on NOMIS now which is really good, so she knows what has been dealt with and what hasn’t.” (OMU manager)

It is important to remember that communication systems are different in private prisons, and this would need to be factored in, if rolling out the Social Worker role across all institutions,

“we’re quite fortunate in the public sector in that we have one system, which is called DPS. Digital Prison System....Other prisons that are in the private sector such as Bronzefield, they do have two separate systems.” (POM)

It was noted that Social Workers in the community rarely initiated or set up meetings with mothers, as not being based in the prison perhaps makes mothers more ‘out of sight and out of mind’, and it is more difficult to arrange from the outside. In the main, this was done by the Social Worker based in the prison,

“not a lot of Social Workers go through our case admins to set up video link or anything like that. It’s all mostly through TaC.” (OMU manager)

Along with the benefits of being based in the prison, there were varied views about who should employ the Social Workers, as it was also noted that not being part of the prison establishment could be helpful and aid the Pact Social Worker’s control over her work,

“But I like the fact, and I’m not sure whether {she} feels the same way, that she is outside of the... shall we say chain of command? And I think if you mix the - if you

changed it to a Prison Service direction, it might take away some of the control that (she) has over her work.” (POM)

Whereas others felt that they should be employed by the Ministry of Justice,

“But she shouldn't be doing the role for children's services. Really, you know, going forward or the Ministry of Justice or, you know, but that would be the route.” (Governor)

Duplication of the role in prison

We asked all staff interviewed about duplication of the new role and where they thought this happened, there were varied responses to this,

“Sometimes in terms of like what the POMs are doing because, for example, we've got the childcare resettlement license so they could go out on that temporary release to go and see their children. They'll often talk to {her} if they want to pursue that and {she} will go and relay that to the POMs and then they'll work together to kind of get the evidence.” (OMU manager)

It would seem that some aspects of the POM role overlap but this can lead to collaborative working. Others felt the role was clearly stand alone.

“I think it is a standalone... it is - it... it doesn't duplicate work that's done with the therapeutic community, it doesn't duplicate work that is done with (us). It is an essential piece of work that is done on its own, and it is (clear) where responsibility for that piece of work lies.” (POM)

There were some difficulties when a new role was introduced within the mother and baby unit in HMP Eastwood Park,

“Yeah, so, it hasn't all been plain sailing. I've got PMBLO officers. They're Pregnancy and Mother and Baby Liaison Officers. So, they've repeated work sometimes, which is never a positive thing. And also, because they're coming from two different approaches, sometimes messages have got a little bit blurred. And we've had to deal with a couple of occasions like that.” (Governor)

Thus, we can see where roles overlap, or new roles are introduced, clear communication is required to ensure that work is not duplicated.

Service development suggestions from prison staff

We asked all prison staff interviewed about the changes they would like to see to the Pact Social Worker role, and all said the role should be extended across the women's prison estate,

"Well, you say extend the role; from my point of view, it should be in place in every prison." (POM)

Most suggested that the prison would benefit from more Social Workers,

"... perhaps having two people doing that same role and reducing the workload." (POM)

"I think she's got so much demand; I think often there's not enough of her to go around like." (Perinatal staff)

"I think they're just so thin on the ground. 'I don't know how she's going to get around and see all these people'. Because I just think there needs to be more people." (POM)

There was a suggestion that mothers are well supported within the prison, but less so once released and this might be an area for further work,

"... while in custody, they are getting huge amount of support {but on release very little}". (POM)

In HMP Eastwood Park there was limited communication between POMs (this was noted in the tracker data as there were fewer referrals from POMs) and it was felt that the Pact Social Worker could be situated nearer the POMs and mention was made of new, larger rooms becoming available where staff could be situated together, so that clearer understanding of roles could develop, and further co-operation take place. It was also felt that more signposting and information could be made available to advertise the role,

"I'd say more work probably needs to be done, it's just - like I said, I think communication always helps because the more you communicate with people, the more you get to know like different departments and what they do and what offer they can support, to you as well what you can offer to them." (POM)

This could involve presenting to different teams within the prison, putting posters up or sending email and PowerPoint information around to staff,

"{Could present at} the functional meetings and present about the role. Probably all staff briefings, but that would be absolutely terrifying... Or even just sending like a little PowerPoint round would be helpful, just to say like what they do, what they can help with, and how to contact them." (POM)

It was noted however that this signposting might create more demand which probably could not be accommodated,

"Might just help people know it was there, and then I guess there'd be more signposting but then she'd be more under pressure." (POM)

In addition, at HMP Eastwood Park there was some suggestion that the Pact Social Worker might help upskill other management staff, particularly in relation to safeguarding,

A final issue was noted that when staff made referrals, they did not always get updated on developments or the outcome of involvement. It was felt that staff should be updated at least via the recording systems,

"On cases, and perhaps adding to recording notes." (POM)

Observational findings from prison visits

It must be remembered the difficult circumstances that HMP Eastwood Park are facing (see comments from inspection report earlier in this report) and they did not have a FEW and had a vacancy for a family engagement manager (FEM).

Publicity

Not surprisingly staff did not seem as aware of the Together a Chance programme in HMP Eastwood Park, this was especially the case among the POMs.

"And I think if we made the prisoners and staff a little bit more aware of what TaC can offer, she'll certainly get more referrals, she'll get more conversations; it's like with the Prison Offender Managers; they'd, I think, worked with her a bit more perhaps if they

knew a bit more about what role she does. She's busy enough, I'm not saying she's not... with all the different units that she could pop along to and say hello, just explain who she is and what she does. Because you got so many different agencies, you're not sure where to go to so you don't go to anybody.” (Governor)

Similarly, the POM interviewed in HMP Eastwood Park seemed to know less about the scheme and felt that more advertising might help,

“Might just help people know it was there, and then I guess there'd be more signposting but then she'd be more under pressure.” (POM)

In HMP Send Pact staff had made a concerted effort to put posters and leaflets all around the prison which we saw on numerous notice boards during our visit. The Pact staff in HMP Send have also managed to attend morning staff meetings to talk about the work of TaC,

“... so we've done posters which are on every single wing, we went to the staff morning meeting, so... because obviously one of the main issues is staff didn't – at the start – know who we were, so when the women were coming to them, they didn't know where to refer them to, so we made a point of kind of focusing on the staffing and raising our profile with staff, so we did a morning meeting with them; there's a weekly bulletin that goes out to all staff, and we were in that for several months, just the poster; we've got posters in the visit centre.” (FEW)

The Pact staff in HMP Send also focussed on letting staff know about the different roles of the FEW and the Pact Social Worker,

“It was quite slow because no-one really knew about PACT as a whole, they definitely didn't know the difference between our roles, so that's a big thing we focused on as we made posters with a little kind of brief about how our roles differ.” (FEW)

It seemed that the role of the Pact Social Worker was more widely understood within the smaller institution of HMP Send,

“Very well respected, very well-known, very well integrated into our working systems. With the prisoners that she's working with, yeah, absolutely. They're all over that. The wing staff have knowledge of Pact. They know what Pact is. They will have seen her around; she's not shy about walking around and getting out and seeing people.” (POM)

Differences between the prisons

Several major differences were noted between the two prisons which impacted on the role of the Pact Social Worker. The mothers in HMP Eastwood Park were serving shorter sentences for less serious offences, this means a lot more through put of cases, in shorter time frames, and more involvement with the family courts. The mothers in HMP have larger families and more contact with children. In HMP Send the seriousness of the offences committed often means that many mothers would not be able to see their children or have only limited contact. Much of the role was therefore about explaining this to mothers and helping women to manage their expectations and cope with grief and loss of their mothering role.

The difference in size of the two institutions with HMP Send being significantly smaller and longer sentences being served, means that the Pact Social Worker in HMP Send has a longer period to be involved with mothers. In a smaller institution (HMP Send houses 200 women), it easier for staff to become known to each other and be aware of all the services operating within the institution.

In HMP Eastwood Park there is less established Pact team, which was carrying vacancies at the time of our visit, and as per the inspection report is a prison facing multiple challenges.

Mother and baby unit

HMP Eastwood Park have a mother and baby unit (MBU) and the Pact Social Worker has been able to contribute to their work,

“... but sometimes women's children are going into care. ...they're going into care because we're waiting on a report for a place on the mother and baby unit because it's so heavily weighted on that report, as it should be. It means a huge amount. {She has been able to} push that, so it's just been helpful having her around... she'll come along to the actual boards. They're independently chaired video link. If she's been working with that person. But she'll always give advice to us on the cases that we have.” (Governor)

The Pact Social Worker has added to reports for the MBU, and advised with regard to children visiting,

“With a formal board for mums coming onto the unit. Then she'll add to reports, or she'll clarify points raised by, say, the nursery manager for ongoing care of a child, ...so she's helped with that.... She has written reports, yeah. ... if there a mum here with a child in the community, getting that child in, the interactions and how she believes she would settle on here. And also, for the more complex women on how we can better engage them here. Especially if contacts limited. Because we do all day visits on here.” (Governor)

The member of staff noted that the mother and baby unit is not at full capacity. *'On here we can hold a maximum of 12, but tops we normally hold about six'*. The Governor noted that they would like the unit to be busier, *'Yeah, we want to be busier. We want more people on here'*.

The mother and baby unit has a varied team, but cannot provide parenting assessments,

"We got nursery, we got a big nursery team, we got our PMBLO staff... Nursery manager and three nursery workers and....So the big - and the big negative mark we get against us is we're not a parenting unit, we don't teach people how to become parents.... I can say we've got a really experienced team; we've got a really good nursery team; we have midwifery care every week - which we want more of - but we have it once a week. Healthcare visitors and everything else. But when they say, 'Are you a parenting unit?' 'Well, no, we're not'." (Governor)

We queried why the local authority could not commission an independent parenting assessment, and this potentially be done by staff based in the prison, as this would be an ideal opportunity to assess and strengthen parenting. Interestingly, it seems that women on the MBU can go to work while their children are looked after by the nursery (the working day is between 9.30-11.45 and 2.30- 4.45pm). The children are also taken out by nursery staff for socialisation reasons, to go swimming etc around four times per week, but their mothers cannot accompany them, so they cannot spend all of the time with them children,

"They do loads of stuff [inaudible] but they go out four days a week. And I want to work towards ROTLing the women to go out with the nursery staff with babies; because we take them swimming, we take them to other nurseries... but swimming and some of the visits like train rides and all stuff like that, they could do." (Governor)

It would seem to be vital that ROTL be utilised to enable women to go out with their children, to learn how to integrate and grow confidence in accessing community resources together with their child. The MBU do not provide parenting programmes, although we believe several nurturing courses have been run post Covid-19 lockdown. In the main mothers are assessed as suitable to go onto the MBU and upskilling their parenting is not a major focus. There will of course be cases where there are grey areas, for example, where professionals are unsure of a mother's capabilities, and whether she is suitable to access the unit, however if there is some doubt they could be assessed within the unit, so mothers may benefit from an opportunity to receive more of a structured plan and input. Should this be able to be facilitated it may increase occupancy of the MBU. If the MBU could undertake parenting assessments, this would help the meaningfulness and reliability of assessments undertaken and indeed support mothers in their parenting.

Survey completed by prison staff

Introduction

A questionnaire was created to explore the views of prison staff who were willing to participate in the evaluation but who were unavailable to share their views directly during our prison visits in February 2023. The Pact Social Workers were asked to circulate the Participant Information Sheet and a link to the online questionnaire. This allowed the questionnaire to be submitted independently of the Pact Social Workers, respecting the anonymity of respondents.

This report is based on responses (n=11), which were all received between February and April 2023. One additional response was completed by a community-based Social Worker and has therefore been included in the analysis of practitioner surveys. Whilst a dataset of this does not easily lend itself to a robust and meaningful analysis, the findings are aligned with data from other sources and we are therefore reporting them, as we did in our second interim report.

Profile of respondents

The respondents worked at HMP Send (n=4) and HMP Eastwood Park (n=7) and represent both leadership and direct case-holding roles (see Table 16). They also represent a cross-section across the departments which exist in both prisons (see Figure 36).

Table 16: Profile of prison staff who submitted a valid questionnaire

	HMP Send	HMP Eastwood Park	Total
Management/leadership role	2	1	3
Frontline role	2	6	8
Total respondents	4	7	11

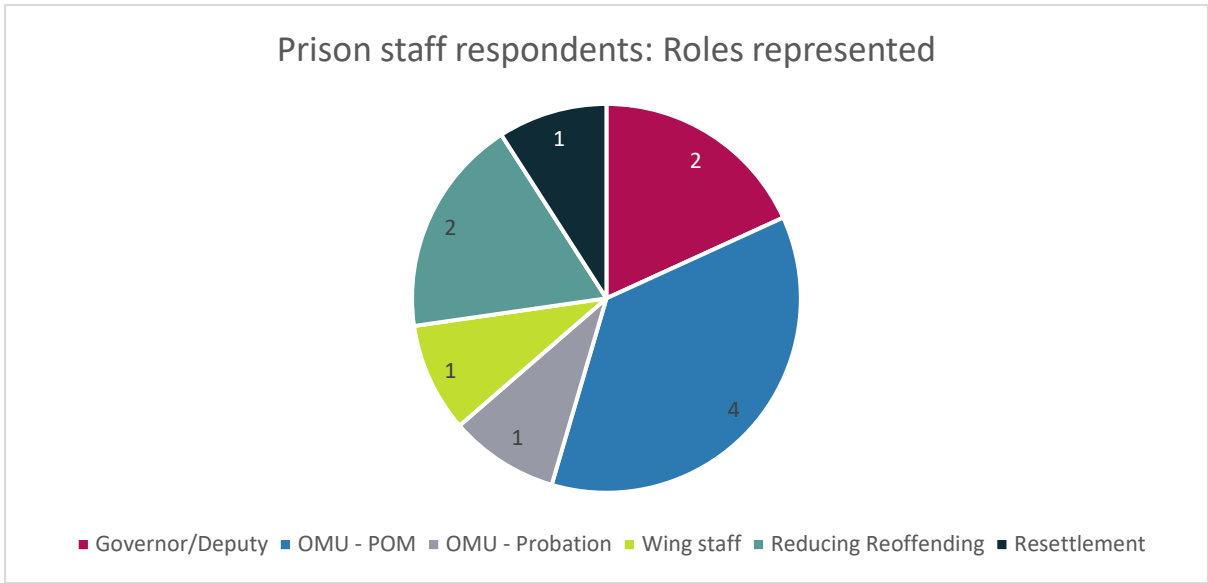


Figure 36: Current department of respondents

Frequency and purpose of contact with the Pact Social Worker

Respondents were asked about their frequency of contact with the Pact Social Worker. Weekly contact was most commonly reported at both HMP Send (n=2) and HMP Eastwood Park (n=2). As expected, those in frontline case holding roles tended to report more frequent contact with the Pact Social Worker (see Table 17).

Table 17: Reported contact frequency between prison staff and the Pact Social Worker

	Frontline post	Management / leadership post	Total	%
Daily	1	0	1	9%
Weekly	5	1	6	55%
Monthly	2	1	3	27%
Less than monthly	0	1	1	9%
Total			11	100%

Respondents were also asked about the purpose of their contact with the Pact Social Worker and this was analysed by prison (see Table 18). The data received suggests that the Pact Social Worker at HMP Send is more routinely contacted for ad hoc advice, and this aligns to the observation during our visit in February 2023 that being closely located to the Prisoner Offender Managers (POMs) within the prison made her more visible and easily accessible.

Table 18: Purpose of contact frequency between prison staff and the Pact Social Worker

	HMP Send (n=4)	HMP Eastwood Park (n=7)	Total (n=11)
Sent referral for a mother	2	5	7
Received general information/advice	4	5	9
Service updates	2	1	3
One-off case discussion	2	4	6
Co-worked a case	1	3	4

Nature of the work undertaken

Broader questions were also presented to prison staff to explore their perspective on the nature of the work undertaken by the Pact Social Worker:

- *In your view, what gaps within the prison does the role of the the Pact Social Worker fill?*
- *How does the Pact Social Worker support mothers directly?*
- *How does the Pact Social Worker support a mother's relationships with her children and their carers?*
- *How does the Pact Social Worker support a mother's relationships with professionals in the community?*
- *How does the TaC service support rehabilitation and release planning?*
- *How does the Pact Social Worker's professional knowledge help other prison staff?*
- *How does the Pact Social Worker's prison knowledge support liaison with professionals in the community?*

The data produced from these responses was analysed thematically, and 22 themes were identified which grouped into four key, crosscutting themes: specialist knowledge and expertise; breaking down barriers for mothers in prison; important and trusted professional within the prison; direct support mothers in prison.

Specialist knowledge and expertise

When asked about the gaps filled within the prison by the Pact Social Worker, the most prominent theme (n=10, 91%) emerging was specialist knowledge and expertise. Linked to this, several respondents (n=7, 64%) cited the ability of the Pact Social Worker to navigate multiple systems, leading to improved multiagency and multidisciplinary liaison.

Knowledge of services available in the community on release (n=6) and a “different perspective” on the mother in prison (n=7) were highlighted as valuable in contributing to MDT’s within the prison, where it was noted that the Pact Social Worker advocates for a woman’s rights and responsibilities.

The value to community professionals of having a ‘peer’ with knowledge of the prison was also noted (n=4), in terms of supporting community professionals to understand prison processes and how to overcome them.

“Specialist knowledge, advice, support, liaison and intervention for parents in prison. Expert advice, guidance and co-working for staff. The ability to navigate community and custodial services and improve multi-agency and multi-disciplinary communications.” (Staff member, HMP Send)

“The role of TaC Social Worker allows staff and prisoners the chance to ask questions with quicker replies... The role also allows for another voice to be heard coming from a different angle.” (Staff member, HMP Send)

“Social Workers have valuable knowledge in their respective field which assists POMs with completion of OASys.” (Staff member, HMP Eastwood Park)

“{Pact Social Worker} has the expertise of social services. This is invaluable as I do not have the underpinning knowledge of the process and legality in which social services abide by.” (Staff member, HMP Send)

“It's a good point of contact in the prison to answer questions about social services or better understand the processes that the women are involved in.” (Staff member, HMP Eastwood Park)

“Breaking down barriers” for mothers

Almost all respondents (n=10, 91%) shared their view that the Pact Social Worker helped to address the power imbalance for mothers in prison by acting as a “go-between.”

It was noted that this is a two-way process - respondents reported that the Pact Social Worker advocates for mothers in the professional arena (n=7, 64%), but also helps mothers to understand complex reasoning relating to their children (n=8, 73%).

“They set up professional meetings and act as a go between on occasions which helps the prisoners in difficult circumstances.” (Staff member, HMP Send)

“... a point of contact for advice regarding social care matters, a point of contact for the women and their rights as a parent, a qualified Social Worker that can represent the mother and therefore be able to effectively challenge community social care teams.” (Staff member, HMP Eastwood Park)

“Previously there was very little or no support for mothers in the prison who are going through the trauma of family courts and the separation from their children. Having the on-site Social Worker gives an advocate for the woman. The support that has been offered has been invaluable.” (Staff member, HMP Eastwood Park)

“Providing support, advice and guidance. Helping navigate the legal restrictions around child contact. Ensuring parents know their legal entitlements and the appropriate actions to take. Explaining complex situations and decisions in an accessible way.” (Staff member, HMP Send)

“There are often MASSIVE gaps in communication between community children's services and the women in custody. It is very difficult for women to involve themselves in processes. the TaC Social Worker is a vital part of ensuring women understand what is happening and are getting access to the things they are entitled to (e.g. court directed contact arrangements).” (Staff member, HMP Eastwood Park)

Important and trusted professional within the prison

A third key theme relates to the value attributed to the Pact Social Worker as an important and trusted professional within the prison (n=9, 82%). It was reported that they were the “single” or “key” point of contact for prison staff in relation to children and family issues (n=5, 45%).

Respondents noted that the Pact Social Worker’s knowledge and expertise directly benefited professionals across the prison by upskilling staff in the “legal landscape” and led to improved planning for mothers in prison.

Some of the responses also reported wider benefit, beyond mothers on the Pact Social Worker's caseload, explaining that improved safeguarding across the prison supports offenders more generally, and this was attributed to explaining "complex stuff" and "highlighting issues" to POMs (n=5, 45%).

Respondents also referred to the value of professional within the prison who could "appropriately challenge" community Social Workers (n=4, 36%), as well as provide an effective community handover on release (n=4, 36%).

"They are invaluable . I have gone to TaC many times asking advice on a matter or voicing concerns . They have been a real asset in providing stability for my function."
(Staff member, HMP Send)

"These roles are SO important! Although I have received safeguard training, actually having a trained Social Worker helps not only myself in my role, but the prisoners. I go to {Pact Social Worker} and her team for advice and guidance and we co-work on cases. The only gap is that there is not enough trained Social Workers at HMP Eastwood Park." (Staff member, HMP Eastwood Park]

"The Social Worker works closely with the PMBLO's and assists with the Prison Offender managers. She has become an integral and important part of the team."
(Staff member, HMP Eastwood Park)

"With the limited and current poor training model for prison POM's in child safeguarding having a staff member with this knowledge is invaluable to helping offenders understand their legal rights and responsibilities." (Staff member, HMP Send)

"{Pact Social Worker} often gives us advice and talks to the women about things that we are not qualified to/don't know enough about to feel confident having those discussions. She has shared her knowledge with us about risk assessment and safeguarding. She has been able to work with some really challenging prisoners and helped them to engage better by explaining to us how to approach/work with them."
(Staff member, HMP Eastwood Park)

"... a qualified Social Worker that can represent the mother and therefore be able to effectively challenge community social care teams." (Staff member, HMP Eastwood Park)

"At times it has been essential for me to get a better understanding of the processes and how these are impacting the women. It can be difficult (or slow) to get hold of

Social Worker contact information, so {Pact Social Worker} provides a quick and effective way to get update and information.” (Staff member, HMP Eastwood Park)

Direct support to mothers in prison

The final key theme identified in the questionnaire relates to the extent of the direct support to mothers in prison and the value of this (n=8, 73%). It was noted that the Pact Social Worker helps to “remove the prison barrier” by facilitating access to relevant professionals in relation to their children (n=6, 55%) and helps to resolve court issues, including enabling access to legal aid and explaining complex issues in an accessible way (n=8, 73%).

Being based in the prison, they were able to promote the rights of incarcerated mothers by facilitating professional liaison with statutory services (n=6, 55%). Prison staff also commented on direct emotional and practical support (n=8, 73%), the creative way in which the Pact Social Worker managed contact between families appropriate to the offending history and family circumstances (n=6, 55%) and the support given to strengthen the bond with children and build parenting and communication skills with both children and their carers (n=5. 45%).

“Our TaC worker holds meetings with our offenders daily to help and support mothers maintain contact with fostered children by arranging the video link that maintain this. Supporting mother by contacting children's schools for progression reports. Liaises with social services in the community to ensure that letter box contact for mothers who have had children removed is enforced. Arranges family days for mothers that provide a longer, more relaxed environment where mothers can have better interaction with their children and families.” (Staff member, HMP Send)

“... supporting women to access legal aid for family court matters. Providing advice as a qualified Social Worker. Emotional support. Representation at multi agency meetings.” (Staff member, HMP Eastwood Park)

“There are a number of ways that the Social Worker supports the mothers. I think by far the most important of those is the support directly for the mother in the cases of family court.” (Staff member, HMP Eastwood Park)

“They make it [relationship with child] stronger and build on the bond already create, They don't allow prison to be a barrier to making a successful relationship.” (Staff member, HMP Send)

Outcomes: the role of the Pact Social Worker in relation to the healthy establishment tests

Although prison staff were not asked to comment specifically on the impact of the work undertaken by Pact Social Workers, detailed responses to the qualitative questions indicate that the role adopted in the pilot model acts as an enabler to positive outcomes for mothers in prison, as defined by the four tests defined in the framework for the inspection of prisons: safety, respect, purposeful activity and resettlement (HM Inspectorate of Prisons 2022, p.18).

In relation to safety, prison staff were specifically asked about whether their contact with the Pact Social Worker had included any involvement with the ACCT process, for mothers identified as being at risk of suicide or self-harm. In relation to the impact of the Pact Social Worker role on other outcomes, a further stage of analysis was undertaken to map the narrative responses to the healthy establishment tests.

Safety - ACCT process involvement

The responses indicated that the Pact Social Worker's involvement in the ACCT process for mothers identified being at risk of suicide or self-harm is a more common occurrence at HMP Send (n=3, 75%) than HMP Eastwood Park (n=4, 57%), as shown in Table 19. This highlights a possible difference in attitudes and multi-agency working practices at the two prisons and reinforces our findings from observational data and interviews at both prisons.

Having them at an ACCT review can be crucial to help relieve worries and stress which could cause them to self-harm. (Prison leader, HMP Send)

Table 19: Reported involvement of the Pact Social Worker in the ACCT process

Has your contact with the Pact Social Worker included any involvement with the ACCT process, for mothers identified at being at risk of suicide or self-harm?	Yes	No
Management/leadership roles:		
HMP Send	2	
HMP Eastwood Park	1	
Frontline roles:		
HMP Send	1	1
HMP Eastwood Park	3	3
Total	7	4

Narrative responses from those that reported that the Pact Social Worker was involved in the ACCT process were overwhelmingly positive:

“Our TaC worker attends my case reviews when necessary and is always helpful with explain [sic] the situations of the mother clearly and concisely which enables me to better identify potential risk factors that the offender could be suffering with, which they are unable to verbalise with uniformed staff. This knowledge of the offenders she works with and the rapport she has built aid in keeping offenders safe from themselves.” (Prison Offender Manager, HMP Send)

“Answered questions, provided clarity, appropriately inspired hope and supported staff knowledge and understanding of the case.” (Prison leader, HMP Send)

“Mum’s situation with her children is usually linked to self-harm, {Pact Social Worker} helps with risk assessment and management, works as part of team to come up up with solutions and reassures mum. {Pact Social Worker} is always able to share

updates from community professionals like social services which helps us with our planning as well.” (Prison officer, HMP Eastwood Park)

“I have attended ACCT reviews where the TaC Social Worker has been present. Particularly relevant when self-harm has been following issues around mother's contact with her children. In that case it has been helpful to advise staff of the ongoing situation so support can be offered to the woman.” (OMU Probation officer, HMP Eastwood Park)

Reports of contributing to the safety of mothers in prison was not restricted to those prison staff who had been involved with the Pact Social Worker on the ACCT process. Other respondents have noted that the Pact Social Worker is ‘another pair of eyes’ in the prison:

“By assisting with maintaining contact and highlighting issues to POM/OMU.” (Prison Offender Manager, HMP Eastwood Park)

Respect/care

The responses indicated that both the direct support given to mothers and the Pact Social Workers’ ability to communicate complex professional ‘jargon’ in a way that is accessible to mothers and non-social work prison staff is highly valued and contributes to reduced stress and anxiety for mothers in prison. It was also clear from the responses that the support and creativity of the Pact Social Worker in facilitating contact in some form promotes family ties.

“I have witnessed {Pact Social Worker} build on contact, calls, video links with children, work with the community, contact centres, ROTLs, you name it, shes done it.” (Staff member, HMP Send)

“Providing emotional support to build relationships.” (Staff member, HMP Send)

“When a woman enters prison, it is incredibly difficult to get the advice and support they need. For them trying to make the appropriate contacts and to understand the system is almost impossible. I think the pilot has absolutely shown the value of have a Social Worker in the prison.” (Staff member, HMP Eastwood Park)

Purposeful activity

Although only one respondent referred to “group work” specifically, suggesting that this is not a regular occurrence, numerous others referred to greater engagement of mothers in prison when describing their observations of the work of the Pact Social Worker.

“... group work to help support mothers in custody and give them tools to be better parents, strength and knowledge in the community.” (Staff member, HMP Send)

Rehabilitation and release planning/resettlement

Prison staff were asked directly how the role of the Pact Social Worker supports rehabilitation and release planning.

It should be noted once again that the offender profile is quite different across the two prisons included in the pilot: sentences tended to be significantly longer at HMP Send, with a higher incidence of contact restriction due to offences against children. Additionally, the specialist services offered at each prison (a Therapeutic Community at HMP Send and a Mother and Baby Unit at HMP Eastwood Park) are likely to lead to a different role for the Pact Social Workers in terms of rehabilitation and release planning.

The responses given suggest that for those mothers who are approaching their release date, the role of the Pact Social Worker contributes to a ‘positive release’ due to knowledge of appropriate services in the community and professional links with statutory children’s services.

For those mothers for whom the focus is rehabilitation, the data collected suggests that the maintenance of links with children offers hope and a goal to work towards.

Respondents have also commented on the Pact Social Workers helping mothers in prison to look at things differently, and this aligns with both direct observations of ‘positive challenge’ during prison visits and also feedback from mothers in interviews.

“From my experience the TAC service has been a key role in release planning for some of the clients I have worked with. They have provided detailed handovers for the professionals working with the clients in community. Engaging and supporting the clients to be ready for release - whether this is providing emotional support or advice about the clients next steps in community.” (Staff member, HMP Eastwood Park)

“By providing hope and support for building positive relationships with children whilst the offender is in custody.” (Staff member, HMP Send)

“{The Pact Social Worker} does a lot of work with the women that gives them hope and something good to work towards, and this is really important when it comes to reducing reoffending. {The Pact Social Worker} helps the women to look at things differently to how they may have in the past, and work with professionals who can support them to continue to make progress by building these relationships while they are in prison.” (Staff member, HMP Eastwood Park)

Views on the role going forward

Finally, respondents were asked questions relating to what the role may look like going forward, specifically, their opinion on the attributes of the current model, namely having a qualified Social Worker allocated to and based in the prison.

What level of staff knowledge and expertise is important if the TaC service were to roll out to other prisons?

Respondents had mixed views about whether the role should be undertaken by a qualified Social Worker (n=8) or whether the level and type of qualifications is unimportant (n=3). Whilst 75% of all respondents in each prison thought that having a qualified Social Worker in the role was important, there seemed to be variation across job roles and departments (see Table 20).

Respondents at a more senior job role (n=3) all reported that a qualified Social Worker in the role is important.

At HMP Eastwood Park, staff in the Offender Management Unit had mixed views with only 50% recommending that the role must be filled by a qualified Social Worker; in contrast, whilst the questionnaire was only completed by one member of staff in the OMU at HMP Send, we interviewed other staff during our visit and all staff who have staff consulted are of the opinion that the role should be fulfilled by a qualified Social Worker .

Table 20: Prison staff responses about the level of qualification needed for the role

	Qualified Social Worker	Qualification does not matter
HMP Send:		
Leader/manager	2	
OMU staff	1	
Other frontline role		1
HMP Eastwood Park:		
Leader/manager	1	
OMU staff	2	2
Other frontline role	2	
Total	8	3

Raynor and Vanstone (2016) notes the different skill level between probation and Social Workers, especially in building relationships. Those that had specified qualified Social Worker were asked why they thought this was beneficial to outcomes and they highlighted the importance of their knowledge, skills and understanding of social work processes for achieving credibility and building trust with mothers in prison.

“Knowledge and understanding of the processes is key for building the trust and developing rapport with offenders who can be extremely complex. If the role was held by a staff member without this then it would be counter productive as the offenders respect the work output as they know that it is based on knowledge, truth and experience.” (Prison Offender Manager, HMP Send)

“Having dealt with many Social Workers over the years, I can see the benefits of having one all the time at HMP Send. Their knowledge and skill sets work well within OMU and also in department of children and families.” (Manager/leader, HMP Send)

“The knowledge and training gives the role more credibility. It is important that both the woman and professionals know they are working with someone who fully understands the processes and how social work is carried out in the community. That link is really important to our mothers in prison.” (Manager/leader, HMP Eastwood Park)

For those that did not think qualification was important, responses included “not seen evidence” and “provide a link with outside agencies.”

Is it important that the Pact Social Worker is based at the prison?

Respondents were overwhelmingly of the view that the Pact Social Worker should be based at the prison (n=10).

In addition to highlighting the importance of understanding the prison regime, respondents stated the importance of building effective relationships with both staff and prisoners, stating that “helping daily” ensures “a smoother process for all.”

“...The knowledge and understanding of how a prison operates is vital to setting realistic expectations to the offenders. Having a staff member on sight [sic] is a great resource as she is always available and quick to respond to the questions posed as they have the understanding of the complexities of the offenders and how the prison regime can be impactful to maintaining family ties ... i believe that having staff available on a phone or email without the knowledge of the prison setting would be detrimental to building the rapport with the offender who engage with the TaC worker.” (Prison offender manager, HMP Send)

“The dynamic of Eastwood Park is that things change so frequently that being based in the prison is essential to the role.” (Resettlement worker, HMP Eastwood Park)

Survey completed by community practitioners

Over the duration of the evaluation, fourteen community practitioners completed an online survey about their experience of the Together a Chance scheme. These professionals include children’s and supervising Social Workers, family support workers, a children’s guardian, a solicitor, a parent advocate, a school safeguarding lead and a foster carer (see Table 21). The responses have been combined for the three years and are discussed in this section.

Table 21: Survey of community practitioners

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Children’s guardian	1			1
Parent advocate		1		1
School safeguarding lead	1			1
Children’s Social Worker	2	2	2	6
Family support worker			2	2
Supervising (placement) Social Worker	1			1
Solicitor		1		1
Foster carer			1	1
Total	5	4	5	14

The majority of respondents (73%) reported that only one mother they worked with had accessed the Together a Chance scheme. Two Social Workers, however, at different local authorities in the Greater London area, reported having that at least 4 women that they worked with having accessed the Together a Chance Scheme: it is not clear whether this is due to an error in completing the online survey, or whether the local authority has a specialist practitioner in post to lead on supporting families where a parent is in prison.

Access to the TaC service

The majority of respondents reported hearing about the Together a Chance service through the prison-based Social Worker. Only one respondent (a Children’s Guardian) reported making contact with the prison and being given the name of the Together a Chance Social Worker; and one was referred by a colleague (see Table 22).

Table 22: Route of referral to the Pact Social Worker

	n
Approached by Tac Social Worker	10
Already in contact with mother in prison	2
Self-referral via prison	1
Referral via local authority colleague	1
Total	14

Nature of practitioner contact with the prison-based Social Worker

Respondents reported various working arrangements with the prison-based Social Workers. Emails and phone calls were most commonly cited for setting up and discussing arrangements and sharing information and updates and almost all respondents referred to “regular” contact on an “as needed basis”, ranging from “several times a week” to “every 4 to 6 weeks.”

Practitioners also reported having virtual or physical meetings with the mother present. This included both meetings as part of child protection procedures and family law proceedings; and “family time” contact sessions supported by the prison-based Social Worker. Virtual or direct contact was reported as occurring “four weekly” or “one meeting every 4 to 6 weeks”.

“For the last two months, I have had regular contact with a worker several times a week to assist my client in ensuring information is shared with her and instructions can be taken. I have met with the worker remotely alongside my client.” (Solicitor, HMP Eastwood Park)

“Her support has been invaluable, she has acted as a link between children’s services and the mother in prison. She has supported our contact workers going into prison, gone out of her way to talk to the mother when I have been unable to go in. She organised a baptism for the baby who is sadly going to be adopted. She has responded always to short notice hearings.” (Social Worker, mother at SEND)

Overview of support given by the prison-based Social Worker

The practitioner survey asked about a number of possible forms of support. Twelve respondents (86%) stated that the prison-based Social Worker helped with supported visits for children.

Practitioners also reported that the support offered by the Together a Chance services had included facilitating Family Group Conferences (n = 4) and parenting courses (n = 4).

Nine practitioners stated that other forms of support had been offered and this included supporting the mother to understand and come to terms with decisions made by the family court in respect of their children (n = 2); supported the mother’s attendance and engagement at child welfare meetings and in family court proceedings (n = 4); and support with housing once released (n = 1).

“ Building trust. Having straight up and honest conversations. Breaking down myths and also explaining complex information. Voiced mother’s views and opinions and consulted with her about important issues. Sometimes contact with solicitors are limited, so whilst there was never a request about legal matters, the TAC Social Worker was able to get mothers views so she felt heard and this helps make her be on board with care planning. Raising worries and things she is not sure about.” (Social Worker, mother at HMP Eastwood Park)

“... taken elements of my role when I haven’t been able to she has been able to spend time with mum and explain things to her. She has responded when I have said that I need to give bad news to the mother.” (Social Worker, mother at HMP Send).

The practitioners’ views on the impact of the support provided to the mothers, children, carers, and professionals are outlined below.

Impact on mothers

All practitioners agreed that the role of the Pact Social Worker had been important in contributing to providing more support to mothers in prison. They also agreed that mothers had been more involved in decision making about their children (n = 13), better represented in key meetings (n = 11) and more empowered to receive regular family visits because of the service (n = 10).

“The Together a Chance scheme has made it far easier to make arrangements to meet with the client remotely, to share information, to ensure that advice can be given in a private and timely way. It has made it easier to ensure the client is informed of the court process and ensure their attendance. valuable information has also been provided with regards to the support that the worker could offer the home Social Worker to facilitate contact visits although the response from the home Social Worker has been limited. The benefits of this service also include ensuring the mother feels as though she is receiving fair treatment within the court proceedings and is fully involved which is often a cause for concern for a parent in prison.” (Solicitor)

Some practitioners highlighted benefits in terms of mother’s safety and wellbeing. It seems that the prison-based Social Worker gave community-based practitioners a greater level of confidence that they could liaise with mothers on emotionally challenging issues related to their children, and that they would be appropriately supported.

“In my professional experience it is very hard to speak to/contact mothers in prison The TAC scheme has facilitated this. Also the TAC worker was able to support the mother to process very difficult information about her children (eg that she will likely be unable to see them before the age of 18) and help her understand the reasoning of the family court. This in turn will feed into the children’s life story. There were concerns about the mother’s wellbeing and I would have felt uncomfortable discussing such topics with her if she had not had support within the prison- she would likely have been a suicide risk.” (Children’s Guardian)

Practitioners also shared their view that the prison-based Social Worker supported mothers to exercise their rights and enabled them to maintain a family relationship.

“The scheme made the mother and children feel more connected to each other even though they were geographically apart.” (Social Worker, mother at HMP Eastwood Park)

“It enabled more positive telephone/indirect contact between mother and child. The home LA were unfortunately very opposed to direct contact in the prison setting, but the scheme enabled evidence to be provided to support mother as to how the contact could be managed in a child friendly way.” (Solicitor)

“The worker that I have had contact with has been exceptionally helpful and engaging, it has greatly improved the experience in dealing with the mother in the lead up to a contested hearing whereby serious issues around the child will be determined. It has provided reassurance and confidence that the mother has additional assistance once the remote interviews with her solicitor have concluded. It has ensured the mother has evidence given to her and someone to help her go through it rather than it just being received in the post some weeks later. This enabled mother to feel more involved and have a stronger voice to advocate for her child.” (Solicitor)

Impact on children and their placements

Most practitioners reported that the TaC service had improved the relationship between the child and mother (n = 11) and that it had made visiting easier (n = 10).

“The scheme has supported contact to become re-established between the child and his mother ... It eased some of the anxieties that the child had around seeing his mum in prison ... Improved understanding for the child on his cultural background/ heritage ... and has been a very positive thing for him ...” (Supervising Social Worker, Greater London).

“We could have the child's baptism in the prison which was an important moment for mother and child and it was brilliant that this could be facilitated.” (Social worker, mother at HMP Send)

“The experience of our foster child and his mother was much improved following a very disrupted period of contact. Regular, extended periods of contact have meant that a strong bond has been formed, both mother and child have gained much from their time together.” (Foster carer, mother at HMP Send)

We specifically asked practitioners about children's placements, and whether the Together a Chance service had any impact. Some practitioners agreed that the child was more settled in their placement because of the service (n = 6). None of the practitioners reported any child had become less settled in their placement and all stated that there had been no negative effects of the service for the children involved. One Social Worker specifically stated that when the mother was at a previous prison (without the Together a Chance pilot scheme) the baby's placement was at risk of breakdown:

"She prevented the baby having to move placements by arranging the move, communicating with all in the network and doing everything she could to support contact for this family... the previous prison was so unhelpful about contact, and they did not care. She did." (Social Worker, mother moved to HMP Send)

"I have been really impressed by Her approach. She works hard to create special moments and memories between our foster child and his mother. Our child is much more settled since attending family time arranged by the Pact Social Worker." (Foster Carer, mother at HMP Send)

The impact of TaC on life story work was also highlighted:

"The TAC Social Worker has enabled the mother's voice to be heard. This is vital for the children and will feed into their life story work in years to come.... I was able to seek the mother's views on the plans for the children and she was able to feed into these. For the children, in years to come they will be able to access this information in their files: without this input the mother's voice would have been lost." (Children's Guardian)

Overall, practitioners reported positively on the impact of children now and in the future.

"This case was unusual in that due to the serious nature of the mother's crimes she is not allowed contact with her children; however, this does not mean that she loses all rights to participate in the family court process. The children will now be able to look back and know that their mother was consulted on their plans and that she expressed a view (which in fact was a view that was supportive of the carers and was also remorseful of her crimes-things which can only be positive for the children to know in future). Without this they would not have known this." (Children's Guardian)

Impact on carers

Practitioners completing the survey were asked to consider the impact of the Together a Chance service on family carers and foster carers. Almost all noted that the Together a Chance scheme had made visiting easier for carers (n = 11). Eight participants agreed that the service had improved the relationship between the carer and mother and practitioners also reported that the TaC service had improved the relationship between the carer and child (n = 6).

"The service has been so vital and is the bridge between parent, child, LA social workers and the family courts. In addition, the service has helped build contact up via indirect so preparing the children to the reality their mother is in prison, and has been a check and balance about messaging and supporting prisoner to write appropriate things..." (Social worker)

Notably, almost all participants also agreed that the Pact Social Worker had helped the carer responsible for the child/ren liaise with the 'home' Social Worker (n = 10).

"Given the complexities of the mothers situation and her three children, I do not envision that we could have achieved what we did without TAC social worker involvement. Not only did the TAC social worker supply us with information to share, she also attended initial family times, had great ongoing communication with LA and also had conversations with mother about what was realistic expectations. She also liaised directly with mother's family who were caring for the children. All this made sure that family time was smooth, safe and in children's best interests."

Multi-agency working

The majority of participants reported that the Pact Social Worker had been a useful resource for practitioners in the community (n = 12); that they had liaised closely with professionals in the home community (n = 11); and that they had become a valued member of the team around the family (n = 10).

"... has been fantastic joint working with the TAC social worker and myself in email, phone and in person contact. It has meant there have been no mess ups as we have worked so closely in the interest of the children." (Social worker)

"More information obtained regarding mother's parenting capacity during prison visits with the children" (Social Worker, London Borough)

"It allowed for a clear stream of conversation between mother and professionals, the scheme has allowed for important meetings to take place with mother and various services including therapeutic advisory services, CP conferences, Core groups etc"
(Family Support Worker, mother at HMP Send)

A high proportion of respondents (86%) noted that the Pact Social Worker had helped to improve the relationship between the mother and the 'home' Social Worker.

"... the scheme has improved the relationship between the mother and her child's social worker and provided reassurance for her on the foster placement for her son."
(Supervising Social Worker)

They were asked whether the Pact Social Worker had made links to support agencies in the home community to help garner support on release and several stated that this had happened with the mothers they worked with (n = 6).

Overall, practitioners reported that the presence of the prison-based Social Worker to support mother in prison contributed well to multi-agency working and supported "better outcomes."

"More support for Mother ... Helps improve parents' self-confidence and having a safe person to talk to, and be supported by ..." (Consultant Social Worker, Mother at HMP Eastwood Park)

Upskilling the social care workforce

Eleven participants agreed that the Pact Social Worker had provided advice to practitioners in the community. Two participants reported that the Pact Social Worker had provided training for workers in the community about mothers in prison.

"Enabled and supported social worker to stay in touch with the mother so that she can be involved in decisions made about her children. The mother's voice would have been lost otherwise. Also educating social care workforce about what actually happens to mothers in prison" (Children's Guardian)

"It has broken down barriers that prisons are hard to contact, hard to share information and made family time arrangements very well planned so mother and children fully prepared making it a success, meaning that the placement and school life not being impacted in negative way." (Social Worker, mother in HMP Eastwood Park)

One respondent (a Social Worker) also articulated the value of the Pact Social Worker in terms of upskilling prison staff:

“ We need more SWs in prison and ensuring that prison staff know what their role is. My experiences of the two previous prisons were shocking they knew nothing about my role or what care proceedings were.” (Social Worker, London Borough, Mother at HMP Send)

Impact on rehabilitation and release planning

Practitioners were asked their views about whether the Together a Chance scheme supported mothers to settle back into the community as a result of being supported by Together a Chance in prison.

All practitioners agreed that mothers either had or would be more able to settle back into the community. Twelve participants stated that the mother would be able to settle back into her family. Asked about the likelihood of reoffending, eleven participants stated their view the mother will be less likely to re-offend after release as a result of being involved with the scheme, whilst two did not think this would be the case.

Ideas about future development

Whilst not a criticism of the Together a Chance scheme, a Consultant Social Worker in a London Borough commented that whilst the prison-based Social Worker had supported with housing on release from prison, there was “not this level of support when released from prison” and that there should be “support for longer once released.”

Several practitioners (n=6) also recommended increasing the number of prison-based Social Workers and also rolling out the pilot to make it a “national scheme.”

Aside from extending the support into the post-release period, practitioners wanted to see more prison-based Social Workers to allow them to allocate “greater time to each mother and child” and enable the Social Workers to “join mothers during family court hearings.”

One practitioner highlighted a need for wider publicity:

“Wider publicity as to the scheme as I was not aware of it until the worker contacted me regarding my client.”

Practitioners referred to the importance of the Social Workers being based in the prison:

“I think is important to have this professional in the prison to make sure we provide of enough opportunities to mothers in custody.” (Family Support Worker).

“The TaC social worker being based in the prison is important because the complexity of the lives of the mothers in prison, the children left behind, the excellent communication with wider services, and the need to keep the mothers as an emotional resource for their children despite the separation and the crime.” (Social worker, South Gloucestershire)

The community practitioners' highlighted how mothers had been able to become more involved and present in the court arena, as well as their voice being heard in all aspects of their children's care, even when the decision for adoption was made.

Case Study: Susan

Susan was transferred HMP Send, she had recently given birth but was denied a place on a mother baby unit due to concerns around her parenting capacities. There was a requirement for bi-weekly court ordered visits that could not be changed. The case was going through court proceedings and the local authority (LA) was seeking an adoption order; the mother required sensitive emotional and practical support. Susan has a history of drug and alcohol use, has been in prison in and out for much of her adult life and has learning difficulties.

Since being transferred to HMP Send, the communication between the prison Social Worker and the community Social Worker has been regular and extremely open. It was important for everyone to share information and communicate well, to help Susan understand her situation, and to provide her with support.

Practically, the prison Social Worker arranged for the baby to be taken to the visits and ensured the supervising worker knew where to go and how the visits worked. Pictures were arranged to be taken during most visits and the family room was booked. She ensured Susan was part of all looked after child meetings and provided her with the minutes after each meeting. The Pact Social Worker reached out to the solicitor to set up regular video calls between the mother and her solicitor. The Pact Social Worker attended each of these calls as there were many concerns around what Susan was understanding and her general feelings towards the information she was given. It became more and more obvious that she had difficulties in understanding and processing information fully. The Pact Social Worker further attended court for the same reasons.

The Pact Social Worker helped to monitor the risk of self-harm and suicide, and ensured Susan had the same key staff members available if she needed to talk at any time.

The court process has since ended, and the judges have decided for the child to be adopted. The Pact Social Worker has continued to support Susan around the decreasing of contact and towards final contact. Since the final decision, the mother has struggled to engage with social services and the Pact Social Worker has stepped in to provide that support for the mother.

In terms of the ACCT process, Susan has been on an ACCT throughout this process. She has her core group of support staff which includes the Pact Social Worker, POM, key-worker and her mental health worker. The Pact Social Worker has attended every ACCT review and continues to provide information in the lead up to final contact. The Pact Social Worker has acted as the link between all the professionals so everyone is aware of the plan and can support the mother in their respective roles.

Survey completed by mothers

Mothers were invited to complete a baseline questionnaire when they started to work with their Pact Social Worker and a follow-up questionnaire approximately six months later. The distribution and collection of questionnaires was overseen by the prison-based Pact Social Worker. Over the period of the evaluation, we received completed questionnaires from 41 mothers in total, 22 from HMP Eastwood Park and 19 from HMP Send. Of the 39 mothers who submitted baseline questionnaires at the outset of the intervention, 22 also completed a follow-up questionnaire. Given the challenges of the prison context, this 54% follow-up rate is seen as positive. Additionally, two follow-up (T2) questionnaires were received from mothers who had not completed a baseline (T1) questionnaire, and so whilst their responses were included, we were not able to include this data in comparative analyses between T1 and T2. This section of the report first summarises the responses from all of the mothers who completed the questionnaires at each timepoint in the intervention, and, where relevant, looks more closely at the changes reported by the mothers who submitted questionnaires at both time points.

Hopes for the Together a Chance service

At T1, mothers were asked what they hoped to achieve with the support of their Pact Social Worker. Many mothers wanted help to improve their relationship and communication with Children's Social Services:

"More help and better communication with children's services. To be included more and feel heard on my needs and opinions. Sometimes I struggle to feel involved or heard. Just need extra support and be more involved"

Mothers were also frequently looking for support to access updates about their children and arrange contact and visits, where possible:

"To carry on with my updates and to eventually see if social services will give me more contact"

"Hope to have regular contact with my daughter and hopefully a visit at some point"

Some mothers were focused on working towards their release from prison and looking for help in planning for their future:

“I hope to achieve with the support of {Pact Social Worker} a plan going forward that contains the steps I need to take upon my release so that I can hopefully start to get some form of contact with my children and support around that and anything else that needs to be done within the family.”

Views on Children’s Social Services

Over 80% of mothers reported that they were willing to engage with children’s social services at both the outset of the intervention and at follow-up (see Table 23). Whilst we reported a slight increase in the proportion of mothers who could feel they could trust Children’s Social Services over the duration of the intervention in our second interim report, the final analysis shows no change in the proportion of mothers that feel they can trust social services, and it continues to be low at both time points (36% vs 35%) with the median response being “not sure.” There is, however, a subtle improvement in the reported level of confidence in working with Children’s Social Services: at the outset 39% of mothers reported that they did not feel confident working with children’s services and this reduced to 33% at follow-up.

Table 23: Mother's perceptions of Children's Social Services

	Baseline		Follow-up	
	n	%	n	%
I am willing to engage with social services				
Strongly agree or agree	33	85%	17	81%
Not sure	4	10%	2	10%
Disagree or strongly disagree	2	5%	2	10%
Total	39	100%	21	100%
I can trust social services to help my family				
Strongly agree or agree	14	36%	8	35%
Not sure	10	26%	6	26%
Disagree or strongly disagree	15	38%	9	39%
Total	39	100%	23	100%
I feel confident working with social services				
Strongly agree or agree	13	34%	7	33%
Not sure	10	26%	7	33%
Disagree or strongly disagree	15	39%	7	33%
Total	38	100%	21	1

The smaller longitudinal data set of mothers that completed two questionnaires (a baseline questionnaire at the outset of the intervention and a second follow-up questionnaire after working with Together a Chance for at least 6 months) reports a similar picture.

Of the 20 mothers that responded to the question "I can trust Social Services to help my family", there was no change in the median response of "not sure"; however, there was variability within

the response with 30% reporting an increased trust of children’s social services and 25% reporting decreased trust after engaging with Together a Chance (see Table 24).

Table 24: Change in views of Children’s Social Services from mothers that completed questionnaires at two time points

	n	Proportion of sample
I am willing to engage with social services		
Positive change	3	16%
No change	12	63%
Negative change	4	21%
Total	19	100%
I can trust social services to help my family		
Positive change	6	30%
No change	9	45%
Negative change	5	25%
Total	20	100%
I feel confident working with social services		
Positive change	6	32%
No change	7	37%
Negative change	6	32%
Total	19	100%

Support from professionals

The mothers in prison who completed the follow-up questionnaire reported feeling more positively supported by professionals within the prison following their engagement with the Together a Chance service (see Table 25).

Of the 22 mothers that responded to this question in the follow-up questionnaires, 91% reported feeling either extremely or moderately supported within the prison; yet only 18% of these mothers felt supported by professionals outside the prison.

Table 25: the extent to which mothers felt supported from professionals

	Baseline		Follow-up	
	n	%	n	%
I feel supported as a mother by professionals inside the prison				
Extremely or moderately	28	76%	20	91%
Somewhat	5	14%	0	0%
Slightly or not at all	4	11%	2	9%
Total	37	100%	22	100%
I feel supported as a mother by professionals outside the prison				
Extremely or moderately	8	21%	4	18%
Somewhat	5	13%	1	5%
Slightly or not at all	25	66%	17	77%
Total	38	100%	22	100%

The longitudinal data for mothers that completed two questionnaires (baseline and follow-up) revealed that mothers did report a slight positive change in feeling supported by professionals outside the prison after engaging with Together a Chance, with the median moving from “not at all” supported to “slightly” supported (see Table 26).

Table 26: Longitudinal change in feeling supported by professionals outside the prison

	n	Proportion of sample
I feel supported as a mother by professionals outside the prison		
Positive change	4	20%
No change	12	60%
Negative change	4	20%
Total	20	100%

Involvement in decisions about children’s care arrangements

Mothers were asked how involved they felt in decisions about their children’s care and also about how often they were able to share their views in meetings (in person or virtually) and the extent to which they felt that their views about their children’s care arrangements were listened to by professionals.

Rating their involvement in decision-making on a scale of 1-10, the median response from the 37 mothers who completed the baseline survey was 3 (not that involved) and for the 22 mothers that completed the follow-up survey, this increased to a median rating of 4 (somewhat involved). Responses are presented in Table 27 below.

In relation to being able to share views and feeling listened to by professionals about their children’s care arrangements, the responses suggested little change between the outset of the intervention and follow-up. This is different to the data reported part-way through the evaluation and it should be noted that we have a smaller sample of follow-up data as only 22 mothers reported after their engagement with Together a Chance, and this can skew the results.

Table 27: Mothers' involvement in decision-making about their children

	Baseline (n)	%	Follow-up (n)	%
How often able to share views in meetings about your child/ren's care?				
Always or often	11	30%	7	32%
Sometimes	7	19%	2	9%
Rarely or never	19	51%	13	59%
Total	37	100%	22	100%
How often do you feel your views about your child/ren's care are listened to by professionals?				
Always or often	9	24%	5	23%
Sometimes	9	24%	5	23%
Rarely or never	19	51%	12	55%
Total	37	100%	22	100%

Focusing on the smaller longitudinal dataset of responses from mothers that completed questionnaires at two timepoints, there was an increase in the proportion of mothers that reported being able to share their view “always” or “often” (35% versus 24% at the outset), though there was little change in the extent to which they felt that their views were listened to with over 50% feeling that they were “rarely” or “never” listed to at both time points. Looking at individual changes, there was variability across the sample, some mothers reported increased involvement and some reporting reduced involvements since engaging with their Pact Social Worker (see Table 28).

Table 28: Changes in involvement in decision-making across the longitudinal sample

	n	Proportion of longitudinal sample
How often able to share views in meetings about your child/ren's care?		
Positive change	9	45%
No change	6	30%
Negative change	5	25%
Total	20	100%
How often do you feel your views about your child/ren's care are listened to by professionals?		
Positive change	6	30%
No change	8	40%
Negative change	6	30%
Total	20	100%

Relationship with children's Social Worker

Mothers were asked to rate their relationship with their children's Social Worker. In the baseline questionnaire at the outset of the intervention, 37 mothers responded to this question and the baseline rating was 4 which is interpreted as 'less than okay'.

For the 22 mothers that completed a follow-up questionnaire, the median rating reported was 2.5, interpreted as 'poor', and this perhaps provides some context for the other responses. We did include the Working Alliance Inventory (Horvath and Greenberg 1989) as it is a validated scale for assessing engagement in child protection services (Forrester et al. 2018; Forrester et al. 2019) but it was not completed in full and so we are not able to report this data.

Some mothers reported that they had more than one Social Worker and others reported “not applicable” as they were waiting for a Social Worker to be allocated or had not had any direct contact.

Views on the Together a Chance services

All mothers completing a follow-up questionnaire from both HMP Send and HMP Eastwood Park (n=23) reported being “very satisfied” with the Pact Social Worker. When asked about aspects of the support provided, the mothers completing the follow-up survey were extremely positive.

All mothers reported that they had felt listened to and received practical support; and over 90% of mothers reported that they had been supported emotionally and had been helped to feel more confident in planning for their family’s future (see Table 29).

Table 29: Views on the Together a Chance service

	Follow-up	
	n	%
I have felt listened to by my Pact Social Worker		
Strongly agree or agree	23	100%
Not sure	0	0%
Disagree or strongly disagree	0	0%
Total	23	100%
My Pact Social Worker has supported with practical things		
Strongly agree or agree	23	100%
Not sure	0	0%
Disagree or strongly disagree	0	0%
Total	23	100%
My Pact Social Worker has supported me emotionally		
Strongly agree or agree	21	91%
Not sure	1	4%
Disagree or strongly disagree	1	4%
Total	23	100%
My Pact Social Worker has helped me feel more confident in planning my family's future		
Strongly agree or agree	21	91%
Not sure	2	9%
Disagree or strongly disagree	0	0%
Total	23	100%

In addition to providing ratings, mothers provided extensive narrative about their experiences of the Together a Chance service and what they had achieved with the help of the Pact Social Worker and this was overwhelmingly positive. Mothers regarded the Pact Social Worker as a trusted professional within the prison that was non-judgemental and could listen to them, help them make sense of the situation with their children and, most importantly it seems, someone who delivered on their promises.

“She always delivers. If she says something she follows through. She’s amazing and helped me so much and impacted my life greatly in a good way. She’s the best social worker help I’ve ever had. I’d not have coped without her at all.” (Mother at HMP Eastwood Park,)

“Always friendly, approachable and supportive. If she doesn’t know or not sure about something she will look into it till she knows for sure. Very supportive to my sister.” (Mother at HMP Send)

When asked what they have *been able to achieve with the support of the Pact Social Worker*, the array of responses encompassed parenting advice and guidance; practical support as a parent; help to understand ‘the system’ and make sense of decisions about child arrangements; and support to engage with professionals and/or prove themselves as a parent.

Practical parenting guidance was reported by mothers at both prisons.

“How to be consistent with telephone contact with my children. How to look at my situation and take my children’s wants and needs into consideration. Supportive communication with the children’s Dad. Setting up telephone contact with the children’s schools.” (HMP Eastwood Park mother)

“A better relationship with my sister (who has my kids). A better understanding of the effects my actions have on my kids.” (HMP Send mother)

Some mother reported that the Pact Social worker had enabled them to have direct contact with their children.

“Keeping my child with me and getting onto the MBU!! Getting birth certificate, keeping in touch with solicitor and LA social worker, got me a pushchair and clothes for my baby, keeping me involved in meetings and helping me to read and write, helping to get accommodation for me and my daughter.” (HMP Eastwood Park mother)

“She has helped me have video link with my daughter and has built my confidence up.” (HMP Eastwood Park mother)

Many of the responses from mothers commented that the Pact Social Worker had helped them to understand the system and decisions that had or were being made regarding their children.

“Her knowledge helps me massively to understand things. Emotional support and so dedicated and gets things done so fast.” (HMP Send mother)

“She has helped me understand a lot of things that were never properly explained to me. She has helped me with absolutely everything from setting up apps and video calls to getting back on track with letterbox contact. She has helped me through everything she’s great support has helped me reconnect with my eldest. She’s a god send.” (HMP Eastwood Park mother)

“To build a relationship with her, understanding of social services and it’s made me feel more confident with the way court was dealt with.” (HMP Eastwood Park mother)

“I have now been given monthly updates and I can have photos and she is always emailing or phoning to find out things for me. She also has contact with my mum and she does video links with social services and I have never been hopeful about being involved or seeing my son, I have now more input than ever before.” (HMP Send mother)

In relation to court processes and engaging with other professionals, mothers reported assistance to enable them to engage and also the Pact Social Workers advocating on their behalf.

“Visits. Contact. Finding and getting hold of child social outside and arranging very important meetings and visits – letting solicitors know of my whereabouts for family court hearings.” (HMP Eastwood Park mother)

“Supporting me with my court paperwork and giving my confidence and advice on how to respond to social services and court.” (HMP Eastwood Park mother)

“Liaising with the professionals outside and presenting my ideas and thoughts to them.” (HMP Send mother)

In addition to the practical aspects of assistance provided, it was clear that some of the mother who responded to the questionnaire experienced the support from the Pact Social Workers as an opportunity for self-development, promoting rehabilitation.

“Helping me to arrange letterbox contact... Helping with my decisions ... Letting me know of any apps or court date my social worker conveniently doesn't ... Helping me with forms/letters/photos ... Just generally helped me want to be better ... Understanding where I went wrong ...Helped me to realise I can change and that I want to and that its never to late” (HMP Eastwood Park mother)

Mothers were asked to suggest improvements to the service. Almost all reported complete satisfaction and were unable to suggest improvements with comments such as:

“No, she is amazing and this service is amazing. The mums here at [HMP] Send don't know where they would be without the PACT team.” (HMP Send mother)

“No. She goes above and beyond. Just hope she knows how much we appreciate the help and support of the pact team and me appreciating her. Thank you {Pact Social Worker} x!” (HMP Eastwood Park mother)

A suggestion was made that about contacted Pact which mothers have to do through the 'App' process:

“It's not her fault but I dislike the APP process as it takes time and I worry about other staff (e.g. reading what I have wrote) as it is private. Maybe there could be a specific form to get a message to PACT (which isn't general so can't be read by officers).” (HMP Eastwood Park mother)

There was also a request for more courses in the prison context:

“With social worker in prison, it's important to have mandatory courses topped with other courses e.g., domestic violence, as this 9/10 times it affects parenting. I would have loved to enrich myself and learn through a course.” (HMP Send mother)

Interviews with key informants

We undertook two interviews with key informants who work in prison policy and management.

Benefits of Together a Chance (TaC)

Both key informants noted a range of benefits from the new pilot project. Both noted how the TaC service has been well received within the prison setting,

“It's been really welcomed by prison staff. I think there's broadly been a real recognition that the prison social workers bring knowledge and expertise that we didn't have and enable us to support women in a way that we couldn't do, I think.”

“TaC has been an opportunity to test something which I think we inherently believe is the right thing to do...We think this is a good idea and I think the feedback from teams so, so the prison teams is positive and particularly in terms of support for those individual women on the caseload.”

Both key informants noted how the Pact Social Workers became quickly embedded, working alongside existing FEMs and FEWs.

“The fact that Pact are already embedded, it's sort of smoothed, smoothed things. You know, we've already had relationships in place. It meant that in a positive way, it sort of enabled close working between the existing family engagement workers and the prison based social workers, and they weren't sort of puzzling over, you know, information sharing agreements and that sort of thing.”

“And I think you know being a sort of a well-known and sort of regarded provider enabled the role I think to find its feet really, really quickly and become an important part of the prison team.”

Both key informants believed the role should be based within the prison to be very accessible to mothers and so they could fully understand the workings of the prison,

“And the prison based social workers can develop a specialist knowledge to challenge and influence some of that stuff and to really focus people on what is in the best interest of the child {access to MBU} as opposed to what are their prejudices against

prisons and their anxieties about working with people in prison and so on and so forth.”

Similarly, they recognised the importance of the Pact Social Workers bridging the gap between the prison and social services, having an understanding of both sets of processes, language and culture,

“Having the prison based social worker can be really helpful from a local authority perspective. They can have someone who speaks their language, who gets them, who can tell them how to interface with the person, not just here's the switchboard. But actually, in a sort of much more sort of effective manner and related to any individual case.”

Mothers

Both Key informants saw huge benefits of the Social Work role for the mothers,

“Yeah. And I and I think there are cases of women and children where it's made a really clear material difference either to outcomes for the child or for women's overall engagement, because their role as a mother is so important that that has become a sort of key around which other things have started to fall together, so I think it's really significant.”

“And I think that's not to be underestimated in terms of the sort of the personal support to the those individuals.”

Risks of distress and suicide by mothers were mentioned by both key informants,

“So in terms of safety, I think there are definitely some cases where women's anxieties around family ties are a contributor to suicide and self-harm risks. And I think there've been cases where the prison-based social workers have been able to get directly involved in that support - ACCT case management. And just offer a much more holistic approach to addressing, you know, women's like social needs.”

Qualified practitioner

Both key informants noted the importance of being a qualified Social Worker which added value to the role,

“I think the knowledge and experience that goes with credibility, {of} being a social worker, the understanding of social work services and how to navigate them adds clear additional value.”

“And I think having a role such as a social worker brings in a different dimension but brings in professionalism and expertise that actually the operational realms don’t have actually.”

Challenges

Whilst Pact being already established in both prisons was helpful for being able to quickly embed the new Social Worker role, there were concerns by both key informants about the blurring of boundaries when an organisation provides a range of services,

“On the other hand, it did risk blurring the lines between the work of the family engagement worker and the prison-based Social Worker, which you know, there’s a balance between the really close partnership working and then from a policy perspective, clear lines of accountability and distinctions between what money is going where and why.”

One key informant noted that when there are vacancies for FEMs or FEWS the Social Worker might feel obliged to cover their work.

“Prison Social Workers and the work of the family engagement workers and the sort of very clear government expectations around funding being used for what it’s supposed to be used, and when people very helpfully support one another that can sort of lead to difficulties in terms of contract management and accountability.”

Both highlighted the need for clear role boundaries.

Funding and models

There was some discussion and differing views as to whether the Social Workers should be employed by the third sector, or by a local authority. Key informants noted the benefits of being a holistic family engagement service,

“Overall, I think there’s an enhancement to the family ties work. I think the very presence of the prison-based Social Worker enables the family engagement workers to ask questions when they get a bit stuck, you know, to upskill themselves. So, I think there’s added value there to the whole -family engagement work service.”

In addition, one key informant noted the benefit to mothers of being third sector in terms of building relationships and trust,

“Sometimes {women} don’t have good experiences of Social Workers, so there’s perhaps a bit more of a distance and a sort of, you know, actually {saying} I’m from Pact to rather than I’m being a sort of a local authority Social Worker. And I think that part does have potential benefits in terms of that building of trust and relationships.”

There were varying views of how the role might operate and be funded in the future,

“But money needs to follow and that exists in the context of really tight public finances and competing agendas, and I think that’s one of the biggest strategic challenges to the whole, whole thing, yeah.”

Suggestions for funding were

“Philanthropic, local authority, central government. These are the key ones. And everybody wants someone else to pay.”

Both key informants mentioned another pilot project which had recently started in 2023 with a Social Worker being seconded to the prison from a local authority, and stated that they are keen to compare the two models. One key informant wondered whether there might be more flexibility with information sharing across agencies if the Social Worker is seconded from a local authority,

“So that data sharing - so some of the thoughts around testing a local authority approach was around seeing actually if that {data sharing} would be easier.”

Key informants were clear that it needed to be a national service.

“And I think having a role such as a social worker brings in a different dimension but brings in professionalism and expertise that actually the operational realms don’t have actually.”

(Key informant with policy oversight)

Discussion: models of service

As stated in the literature review, Lord Farmer promoted the prison Social Worker role in the Farmer Review for Women (Farmer 2019). He noted that creating such posts and employing more family engagement workers as part of multi-disciplinary teams obviously carries a cost to the Ministry of Justice and he put forward ways to manage this. First, he suggested that joint funding models with local authorities could be considered as part of the more joined up services. Second, that if there was flexibility in how the Offender Management in Custody (OMIC) model is implemented so that governors who wanted the more diverse staffing structure were willing to have fewer prison officers to fund it, this could be more cost-neutral. He concluded following consultation, however, that “social workers and family engagement workers should not be imposed upon establishments as an alternative to prison officers and that there should be flexibility” (Farmer 2019, pp.101–102).

In terms of the two prisons where this pilot is being trialled, the workload and flow are very different. HMP Send is a training prison where the capacity is 282 (although has been operating at 191 for most of the pilot) and women are serving long-term sentences. In this prison the Pact Social Worker has been able to undertake in-depth and complex work but has been working at full capacity. HMP Eastwood Park is a local prison where many women are on remand and many are serving short sentences, there is also an MBU. The capacity in HMP Eastwood Park is 442, and, despite evidence of excellent work with mothers, the Pact Social Worker here has struggled to meet the demands placed on her at times. Many of those interviewed noted that there would need to be more than one Social Worker in post. We conclude from this that local reception prisons will require a higher Social Worker-mother ratio. A detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this report, but we suggest that a ball-park ratio of 1:150 would be appropriate for those in the first six months of their sentence. In longer term prisons the ratio of 1:200 would be more appropriate. If there are 200 women or less, one Social Worker should suffice. If the prison holds more than 200 women, two Social Workers should be allocated. For working with mothers who are serving longer periods of imprisonment this comes with its own challenges, managing life sentences and subsequent upset and despair. This ratio will become clearer with further evaluative work of other prison-based Social Work models.

There is no doubt that the Social Worker needs to be based in the prison. However, whether the Social Worker is employed by the third sector or seconded from the local authority is unclear. There are advantages to the Social Worker being employed by the third sector in that they are more readily received by mothers, have more of a track record of building trust with mothers, and have a more parent focused way of working, whilst still maintaining a clear focus on the best interests of the child. A Birth Companions report (2023) calls for Social Workers based in prisons to be employed by the third sector for these reasons. Third sector Social Workers may feel more able to challenge poor practice in the local authority which has been a feature of the work undertaken by Pact Social Workers. In addition, in a third sector organisation the staff are appointed on the basis of having a passion for the work and have experience of the prison environment. Thus, they come

with a strong knowledge base. If the model was to be third sector, clear role boundaries would need to be established and maintained between FEWs, FEMS and Social Workers. It is important to acknowledge that a significant number of cases are being stepped down to FEWs when they no longer require Social Work intervention and this is a model that we see as beneficial for managing throughput.

Currently the Pact Social Workers are receiving supervision from a member of staff within Pact who is not social work qualified but report feeling well supported. Our understanding is that external clinical supervision was in place early in the evaluation period but the supervisor did not have prison experience and was therefore deemed to be of limited value to the Pact Social Workers. Ideally, they should also receive clinical supervision from someone with relevant experience of the field.

The secondment route would need for staff to have a significant period of immersion and training before they understood the rules and regulations of prison establishments and were able to work independently. The secondments would thus need to be for lengthy periods of two to three years so that relationships can be established, and there would need to be a long handover period (of at least three months) with the new Social Worker shadowing the existing post holder and learning about the expectations of the regime. Although seconded by a specific local authority the prison Social Worker would need to work across all local authorities from where mother's originate. Information-sharing protocols between the different agencies would have to be followed, as for all multi-agency working. It is therefore seen as unlikely that there would be an easier flow of data as a result of the secondment.

Conclusion

The data collected for the evaluation of the Together a Chance pilot scheme highlights the complex nature of parental rights and responsibilities, and the tension that exists between the rights of mothers and children. Support for contact with children was the most common need identified for obvious reasons. It is common practice for parents to cite Article 8 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child when seeking contact of a non-resident child, highlighting family relations as important in establishing and preserving a child's identity. The Children Act 1989, which continues to form the mainstay of child welfare decision-making in England and Wales, is clear that the welfare of the child is paramount, yet it also based on the principle of partnership working and promoting family life. A mother automatically acquires parental responsibility (PR) at birth for her child, and whilst the evidence suggests that this is shared (typically with the local authority or a kinship carer) for many of the mothers who have participated in the evaluation so far, parental responsibility is only lost if a child is adopted. For mothers in prison, capacity to exercise parental responsibility is hampered by a lack of capacity to protect and maintain a child not in their everyday care, and therefore legal rights and responsibilities are limited. The case tracker data reported by the Pact Social Workers consistently identified the need to educate mothers about their parental rights and responsibilities, and the limits of these whilst incarcerated. In addition, data, both from mothers at the outset of the intervention and interviews with community practitioners, revealed barriers for mothers being involved in decisions relating to their children whilst in prison. A key reason cited by the children's Social Workers interviewed is the logistical challenge of contacting parents in the prison system, but the data also revealed a sense that, once an order had been granted, the local authority exert parental responsibility to make child welfare decisions as the corporate parent, without the mother's input. Previous research has highlighted the low likelihood of a 'standard local authority case management approach' being successful with birth mothers that have been through recurrent care proceedings and have persistent difficulties rooted in early childhood (Broadhurst et al. 2017).

One of the highlights of our evaluation was recognition from community practitioners that working alongside the Pact Social Workers had changed practice for children subject to child protection procedures and care proceedings. This pilot has demonstrated that mothers can, with the right support, continue to play a role in their children's lives and be involved in decisions relating to their welfare where it is in the best interests of the children. For those children where ongoing contact is not appropriate due to the nature of the mother's offence, the data suggests that skilled support in educating and being transparent with mothers is having a positive impact on wellbeing. The Pact Social Worker role is also contributing to development of the child's identity through sensitive life story work (Salaman 2019).

The findings from community practitioners surveyed suggest that it is beneficial for children's Social Workers to adopt a more collaborative and respectful approach where a mother (or even a father with parental responsibility) is in prison. Indeed, it would seem that the outcomes for child and parent can be positive when the Pact Social Worker is able to facilitate access and contribute to the local authority's assessment as part of care proceedings. There is support for this

professional collaboration as a model of good practice in other research studies. Forrester and colleagues (2008a) found that Social Workers that demonstrated empathy in child protection conversations were less likely to face resistance and suggested that, whilst voluntary sector practitioners have a tendency to be parent-focused and fail to raise concerns with parents, statutory Social Workers have a tendency to be simplistically child-focused; the aim should be a 'child-focused plus' approach. Similarly, as evaluation of the Family Drug and Alcohol Court has consistently reported, collaborative, transparent and timely support, underpinned by a belief that parental change is possible, is necessary when working with parents in care proceedings (Harwin et al. 2011; Harwin et al. 2014; Roberts et al. 2017).

As highlighted above, children's local authority Social Workers are often child-focused (Forrester et al. 2008a) with a case management approach (Broadhurst et al. 2017) and there would need to be a cultural transition. It may be that having a Social Worker employed by an independent charity, based in the prison, is more likely to allow for a new type of mother-Social Worker relationship to be forged.

If the role was to be filled by a Social Worker seconded from a local authority, they would need to be in place for a lengthy period of time (two to three years) to help build relationships with mothers and staff, and there would need to be a significant overlap to allow a handover period between each seconded Social Worker so that the 'institutional knowledge' is transferred. Alternatively, Social Workers who have previously specialised in statutory child and family work could be employed by HMPPS.

The evidence collected suggests that the prison-based Social Worker role is invaluable to the prison institution. It provides specialist knowledge of safeguarding and of social services' processes, priorities, culture, language, and terminology which is of assistance both to mothers and to prison staff. The Social Worker acts as a conduit of information between local authority practitioners and the prison establishment, as well as between mothers and community practitioners.

The Social Workers' knowledge base does not seem to be held elsewhere within the institution and so there is little, if any, duplication of work between roles. Probation Prison Offender Managers have a similar knowledge base, but it is reported they have insufficient understanding of the statutory children's social care context to meet the needs and demands of mothers in prison. The vast majority of respondents felt that the prison Social Worker should be social work qualified.

Pact Social Workers are acting as mediators for mothers to promote and support their engagement with social services, advocating for contact with children appropriate to the circumstance, and ensuring that, wherever possible, relationships are maintained. This instils hope in mothers who have goals to work towards.

The Pact Social Workers are providing information and education to community practitioners and have developed a resource for them to help support professionals in explaining to children where their mothers are.

Where a mother has more than one child, 63% of siblings are separated whilst their mother is in prison. The Pact Social Workers have connected with 56 local authorities in total, with only three 'overlapping' local authorities so far: Devon; Bridgend; and Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole. At a prison level, the Pact Social Worker at HMP Eastwood Park has linked with 27 local authorities and the Pact Social Worker at HMP Send with 32 local authorities. This diverse coverage would make it difficult for a Social Worker to be based in any one local authority; as this evaluation has shown, it is feasible for a Social Worker based within the prison to work across local authorities.

It is notable how many siblings are separated, and the importance of sibling support is recognised (Alisic 2022). Placement of children is an issue for local authorities and fractured families add a layer of complexity to an already difficult situation when a mother is incarcerated. Moving forward, consideration could be given to how the prison-based Social Worker may be able to support family relationships when siblings are separated, both in an advocacy role in care planning and through contact between siblings during prison visits.

There are still some difficulties in incarcerated mothers attending virtual meetings with social services. Local authorities routinely use Microsoft Teams for review and planning meetings, often involving numerous professionals and other family members, and the prison is limited to secure video calls through the Prison Video app which is only available on a mobile phone or tablet.

It is felt by prison staff that the nature of the trusting and supportive relationship that the Pact Social Worker builds with imprisoned mothers serves to reduce suspicion and regain trust in Social Workers in the community, increasing the likelihood of an improved working alliance in the future. Whilst we reported a slight increase in the proportion of mothers who felt they could trust Children's Social Services in our second interim report, the final analysis shows no change in the level of trust from mothers, and it continues to be low at both time points (only 35% of mothers agreed that they could trust social services) with the median response being "not sure." There is, however, a subtle improvement in the reported level of confidence in working with Children's Social Services.

In contrast, the levels of engagement with Pact Social Workers were a highlight of the evaluation, given the high level of parental resistance often found in the child protection arena and the low working alliance reported in other studies (Forrester et al. 2018). Over 90% of mothers never missed an appointment with the Pact Social Worker, except for those attributed to the prison regime. All mothers that completed a follow-up questionnaire were "very satisfied" with the Pact Social Worker and the vast majority (over 90%) reported feeling supported within the prison. As well as feeling listened to and receiving practical support from the Pact Social Worker, these mothers reported that they had had been supported emotionally and had been helped to feel more confident in planning for their family's future. In contrast, only 18% of these mothers felt supported by professionals outside the prison. Given the moderate increase in confidence in working with Children's Social Services, and the high level of engagement with the Pact Social Worker, it is possible that there is a lag in building trust and that, with more time, there would be less uncertainty about trusting children's Social Workers in the community.

The nature of the work in each prison differs with women in HMP Send having committed more serious offences and being less likely to have contact or have children live with them in the future, and thus the focus is often on supporting women to manage expectations and their feelings of loss and despair, with risk management around child contact playing a significant role.

In both prisons, the Pact Social Workers play a significant role in managing self-harm and risk of suicide through the ACCT process, again a focus of the healthy prison tests. The overriding view was that the Social Workers should be based within the prison, although there were differing views about who should employ them, the Ministry of Justice, secondment from local authorities or a third sector organisation.

It is right that the mothers that volunteered to participate in the evaluation of the Together a Chance pilot scheme should have the final words and they had three recommendations regarding improvement. First, more emphasis placed on strengthening the links between women and services in their community, so that mothers have more support once released from prison. Second, one mother mentioned parenting training could cover Special Guardians and it may be that the development of training to understand the role of foster carers, kinship carers and Special Guardians and how to engage with them, especially when only limited contact is allowed would be helpful. Lastly, one mother suggested utilising the expertise of mothers who had already worked with the Pact Social Workers, to help encourage others to use the service.

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