



# Cross Party Group on Women, Families & Justice

## Virtual Meeting

### **Suggestions for change from report included:**

- Better and clearer information for families right at point of sentence, that is specific to the prison the individual is to be sent. This should be given to the family at Court, so they know what they expect and what support is available
- Remove stigma
- Cut Costs for families supporting prisoners, eg the provision of free toiletries for prisoners would remove the demand on families to provide financial support to prisoners, review the ability for families to provide clothing, review cost of food and drinks at visits
- Keep prisoners local to where they live
- Provide more funding for families
- Review Travel and Travel Claiming System
- Prison Wages
- Make Visits Family Friendly
- Reduce Rates of imprisonment
- Support for release.

**Facilitated Discussion:** led by Prof. Nancy Loucks & Toni Groundwater from Families Outside.

The presentation was well received and generated much discussion. The issues and comments raised included:

Anne Pinkman: the report shows an important issue being brought into sharp focus here. Points worth noting are that; women in prison request far fewer visits than their male counterparts, as they are more acutely aware of the financial impact and pressures on family members that support them. What may be helpful is to raise awareness with men in prison men of the realities of the financial pressures on families outwith the prison walls. Canteen and refreshment at visits can be expensive and prices vary from prison to prison.

Nancy Loucks advised that both Theresa Medhurst, Chief Executive, Scottish Prison Service, and Neil Renwick, Director of Justice, Scottish Government, have both received a copy of the report and are very interested in further engagement.

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Kerry Knox: For the families we support this is about removing barriers that are there for no reason.

Collette Stevenson: This is an excellent report- I am quite taken aback that only 20% of virtual visits were taken up by prisoners . My question is how are virtual visits promoted and supported.

Stephen Sandham advised that there are many issues that HMIP have witnessed regarding virtual visits. In HMP Addiewell, for example, lots of issues were identified. A recurring issue related to officers bringing people in prison to the visits late, thus reducing length of visit. Another issue is that much of the prison estate is very old, the infrastructure does not support the use of technology. This will change as new prisons are built, however, this will take a considerable amount of time.

Georgina Little: This report and its findings does indeed strike hard. The main issue for me is just how isolated these families are and feel. If change is to be made then we have to start seeing families as a unit, despite being separated.

Rona Mackay: updated the group that that the Bail & Early Release Bill is progressing . It is anticipated that the Bill will receive judicial pushback.

Anne Pinkman: advised that the numbers of women being remanded into custody continues to rise. Currently 37% of the women in prison are on Remand.

Briege Nugent: Remand is a significant problem in Scotland, As a direct consequence of the Covid pandemic there remains a huge backlog in cases coming before the courts. There are some individuals who have spent 2 years on remand. Does this exceed legislative requirements? Are human rights being breached?

Nancy Loucks: If the SPS had an email mailing list of families/next of kin then they could communicate directly, meaning that families would feel more included and informed in processes and decisions.

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Stephen Sandham: there is an issue within the SPS, whereby many prisoners require to be transferred from one Prison to another to access the programs that are necessary for them to progress through the system. This can create additional pressures on families who may have to travel considerable distances to visit their family members.

Rona Mackay: The issues identified in this report makes absolute sense. It is now our responsibility as a cross-party group to do what we can to address many of these issues. I am willing to support a members motion to secure a debate in the Scottish Parliament.

Collette Stevenson: I would be more than happy to provide support in that.

All group members supported Rona Mackay's proposal which she will now take forward.

A copy of the report will be sent to the Judicial Institute for Scotland.

### **Agenda item 4**

The CPG Workplan was approved. Going forward Anne Pinkman and Ashley Cameron will update the Workplan in advance of each CPG meeting.

### **Agenda item 5**

Agency Updates

**HMIP** - The Programme for Inspection for 2023 is just being finalised and will feature assessment of the 2 new women's CCUs.

All inspections will include a thematic review of the prison transport service.

### **Agenda item 6**

AOCB

Anne Pinkman to poll all CPG members re whether future meetings should continue as virtual, revert to in person at the Scottish Parliament, or a mixture of both.

**Date of next meeting** - 21st February 2023, 6pm – 7.30 pm