

**Minutes**  
**Cross-Party Group on Children and Families**  
**Affected by Imprisonment**  
**3 April 2019**  
**6 – 7.30pm**

**Attendees**

Richard Lyle MSP, Martin Wightman, Nancy Loucks, Kerry Knox, Cara Jardine, Laura Scofield, Dinah Aitken, Dawn Henderson, Cheryl Carroll, Georgina Lyttle, Catriona Gibson, Tracey Thompson, Kirsty Deacon, Chris McCully, Gavin Phillips, Sheila Gordon, Michelle Lloyd, Anne Pinkman, Sean Costello, Alicia Turner, Hannah Dickson, Nadine Sloan, Beth Barnes, Janice McGowan, Daniel Johnson MSP

**Apologies**

Tracey Burns, Lady Rosamond Cullen, Tina Everington, Mary Fee MSP, Jennifer Ferguson, Emily Galloway, Fiona Jamieson, Sam Jelf, Valerie Macniven, Graeme McKerracher, Kate Philbrick, Lexi Smart, Mike Watt, Pete White

**Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising**

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as accurate and all actions completed.

- Anne Pinkman – Mentioned the visit to Hydebank Wood College in Northern Ireland and the use of in-cell phones and Skype via laptops, also in-cell for top end prisoners. Richard Lyle will ask PQ regarding an extension of this to Scotland
- Members noted support for this to allow communication between families but expressed concerns that SPS are opposed to it.
- Cara has written a book regarding experiences of families when someone goes to prison, showing lots of research to show benefits of this contact
- Moved to AOCB, as the speakers had not yet arrived.

**AOCB**

Preparation for release: families of long-term prisoners

- Janice questioned the difference in practice between prisons regarding progression to national top-end. Richard proposed writing a letter to the Cabinet Secretary about this

Nancy noted a number of forthcoming events including:

- COPE conference (Krakow), 31 May 2019
- Not My Crime, Still My Sentence campaign, June 2019
- Children's Voices conference (London), 14 June 2019 (Rosie is fundraising for this)
- NPVCSG conference: 'Coming Home', 19 June 2019
- INCCIP conference (Huddersfield), 12-15 August 2019

A collection of poems written by parents and children affected by imprisonment is now available to order (Raikes & Baldwin - <http://tinyurl.com/y53cv3sv>)

**Presentation and Discussion**

**Presentation from Lillian Dougan, Martin Wightman, and Sean Costello** (PowerPoint attached)

**Notes relating to Presentation:**

- Friendly Mascot – Perth prison working with parents to develop a child friendly mascot for the prison

- HMP Edinburgh football project – inspired by a project in Italy and includes coaching and protected parent/child interaction
- Edinburgh International Book Festival – visits to include families and children
- Cellblock Science – already delivered in six prisons including a Family Science Day, could be a factor in successful parole applications (engagement in positive activity)
- Meals – including the introductions of cold food, which reduced waiting time and led to focus on family time rather than on the food
- SPS working with Families Outside to engage with families in preparation for release
- Health - other options and activities include efforts to raise awareness
  - regarding healthy eating, smoking cessation, fire safety etc.
- Important to note that security will always be a factor

#### **Sean Costello – FCO Castle Huntly**

- Speaks to every person entering Castle Huntly and asks questions regarding family circumstances, plans for release and invites families to attend case conferences (including by video link if necessary)
- He has links with Scottish Welfare Fund if low income is an issue for the family
- Seeks permission to contact family and gives family FCO contact details and information regarding Castle Huntly along with other useful information and contacts
- Tries to tie in home leave with significant family events where possible (birthdays, anniversaries)
- Gifts to the children at Christmas
- Case study of one family supported, the young child had ADHD and ASD and flashcards were used to prepare them for a prison visit

#### **Q & A**

Kerry noted that the SPS Family Strategy goes much wider than family activities but that it can be difficult to get prisons to take this on board. Prisons are supposed to submit a Family Improvement Plan to HQ; how are they assessed/audited? Lillian noted that there is an independent audit (Prison Library Authority), but all prisons are at different starting points, so it will take a while to see consistent improvement.

Janice asked how many families are involved in the Family Strategy Groups, emphasising that it was crucial for families to be include in this. Lillian noted that in some prisons families take part, in some they don't, and some hold separate focus groups for families.

Giving an example of a private prison, Nadine was concerned that Family Strategy Groups were up and running but have sometimes fallen the wayside; how do we get this back on track? Martin said he has had contact with Addiewell and hopes to do the same with Kilmarnock so will look into this. Richard asked whether private prisons need to comply with SPS strategies. Apparently this depends on their contract, but they will have received the SPS Family Strategy Group guidelines.

Dawn noted that families are involved in groups at HMP Addiewell but that Family Strategy Groups are few and far between. Martin said he would share best practice between prisons on family attendance.

Laura said the mascot being designed at Perth Prison included an autism-friendly audit of the visit experience, but again there is a lack of consistency between prisons, which causes stress for families. Chris underlined the inconsistency and asked how this might be shared more consistently between establishments. Lillian said this can be tricky due to different local authorities and different population groups, and Martin added that funding can also be an issue.

Anne applauded the SPS for the range of things now available for families but emphasised the need minimum standards. Special activities are great, for example, but what about regular visits? Lillian

said the prison population is higher now, and they try to keep visits full, but there is a real risk of contraband coming in.

Anne also said the SPS still does not have accurate numbers of children affected by imprisonment, though this is required by the UN Minimum Standards for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules 2015). Sean said he asks this at Castle Huntly, but this is kept on a local spreadsheet, and circumstances at Castle Huntly are not the same as elsewhere. Lillian said there are reasons why people do not want to say whether they have children, that the SPS Prisoner Survey asks, and that everyone is asked about concerns over child care.

Richard asked why we need to know this information. Anne explained that this is for planning for services and for provision of support. Rosie added that there are issues of isolation and that children and families of people in prison often feel alone. Knowing how many people feel that way would provide a huge comfort as well as informing wider society.

Lillian said you have to be careful what questions you ask, as many do not have contact with their children, so this will only ever be indicative. May be better doing this through visits? Laura said we can get an idea of numbers through family learning sessions, which need specific numbers for funding purposes, but this would not provide overall figures.

Catriona noted that The Croft at Barlinnie was working with a lot of older family members and asked whether this is being included in the conversation regarding family strategy/support to ensure this is not lost through the focus on children.

Richard asked what the SPS concerns were regarding Skype visits. Lillian said this was about issues such as organised crime and offences against children. SPS is presently piloting virtual visits in Inverness with the support of Action for Children, but they need to address the issue of security on the other side, and steps are being taken to explore this. SPS Family Strategy is being shared with Northern Ireland.

Richard asked how many home leaves there are per year. Sean replied that prisoners are allowed one per month, though they may not start out with full home visits immediately. This helps test out the visits and gets both the prisoner and the families used to the visits.

Shirley (CJSW) said there shouldn't be a problem moving one person from the top end of one prison to another, as they will all have risk management plans. She believed the SPS was doing a great job and that she had not heard any complaints about the contact prisoners have had with their children. There can be issues when there is a disagreement of the level of risk, which is why it is important when making decisions regarding home leave that these are done at multi-agency level. Skype and even landlines can be abused with organised crime, so we need to be cautious. We are doing well collectively, but there is more we could do. Richard said he would welcome a presentation from Shirley at a future CPG.

#### **Date of next meeting**

TBC

#### **Actions**

Richard Lyle	Ask PQ regarding an extension of in-cell telephones and skype to prisons in Scotland
Richard Lyle	Write a letter to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice regarding difference in practice between prisons in terms of progression to national top-end facilities
Martin Wightman	Contact Addiewell and Kilmarnock regarding keeping the Family Strategy on track
Nancy Loucks	Forward link to the Crest Report