

**Cross-Party Group on  
Children and Families Affected by Imprisonment**

**Wednesday 25 April 2018**

**1pm – 2.30pm**

**Attendees:** Mary Fee MSP, Daniel Johnson, Nancy Loucks, Laura Van Der Hoeven, Gavin Callison, Chris McCully, Anne Pinkman, Kerry Knox, Elaine Stalker, Georgina Lyttle, Michelle Lloyd, Dawn Henderson, Margaret Slater, Sheila Gordon, Paula Mitchell, Lorraine McDonald, Dinah Aitken, Tracey Robertson, James Blair, David Abernethy, Lorraine Gillies, Fiona Jamieson, Janice Wilson, Lexi Smart, Helen Tripp, Pete White, Stuart Callison, Lillian Dougan, Teresa Medhurst

**Apologies:** Lorna Dalziel, Valerie Macniven, Sue Maxwell, Karyn McCluskey, Justina Murray

<b>Welcome and apologies</b>	<b>Action</b>
<p>Mary Fee MSP welcomed those in attendance and apologised that she would have to leave the meeting early and would hand over to Nancy Loucks to continue chairing the meeting. She welcomed Daniel Johnson to the meeting.</p> <p>Mary mentioned that it may be time to look at the timing of future meetings to allow greater participation especially from MSPs as the afternoon slot can clash with duties at Parliament.</p>	
<b>Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising</b>	<b>Action</b>
<p>The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as accurate.</p>	
<b>Update on Parliamentary Business</b>	<b>Action</b>
<p>No update given today but Mary Fee will include an update when the minutes of today's meeting are circulated.</p>	<p>DJ to provide an update on PB</p>
<b>Presentation and discussion: The role of IT in promoting family contact</b>	<b>Action</b>
<p>Teresa Medhurst gave a presentation on the importance of keeping contact with families through IT and informed the group that for any questions they cannot answer, she we will get back to us as soon as she has an answer.</p>	

**To put in context the journey that the SPS are on at the moment is**

- An organisational review was launched in 2013 and that set out the vision on how we want prison officers to manage and relate to individuals in custody
- Good progress is being made with the development of more professional qualifications for our staff and we are making progress and improvements on our policies and practice
- One example was the launch last year of our Family Strategy developed in partnership with Families Outside and other organisations
- Some systems and processes have not been progressed as quickly as expected and our in house IT capabilities and capacities is one area that we are particularly concerned about. This has focused us on what we can deliver and the limitations of what we can deliver in house in relation to the use of technology to improve the experience of prisoners and families
- This has led us to working with Scottish Government Digital Strategy Team to review our systems to help us develop our own SPS Digital Strategy
- The report is still being finalised and the decisions will have to be made by our Executive Management Group
- There is no shortage of innovative ideas on we can capitalise and use technology and the advance in technology however there are limitations due to capacity and capability and there is a lot of work to be done going forward
- While IT has got the potential to provide solutions to some of these challenges we have to be realistic about what can be delivered taking into consideration capacity and the challenge around budgets
- Due to these challenges some of desirable outcome may have to be put on hold rather than being prioritised at the moment

**There is also the political aspect of using technology to be considered**

- In March CEO SPS Colin McConnell very positively expressed the desire of SPS to explore questions around improved connectivity in prisons
- Although this was generally positively received by some the committee there was also discussion about the reality of this having had this discussion in the past.
- Previous discussions have included suggestions by CM of in cell telephones however this resulted in press interest that was quite problematic
- Issues are not just around capability, delivery and affordability but also whether there is the support to take develop these ideas and it will be important to get the groups views and perspectives on this

**What has SPS been able to achieve so far:**

- Progress has been fairly limited, but we do now have virtual family visits in Barlinnie, Perth, Polmont, and Grampian

- The Video Conferencing facilities are in either bespoke or part of existing facilities and some partners such as Apex in Aberdeen are providing a local service. However the majority of uptake on this has been in Polmont and Grampian
- We have also had to concentrate on the Justice Agenda and connectivity with other justice partners. This has led to Virtual Conferencing centres which allows agents to contact prisoners to discuss any issues they may have. via the download of an application to a variety of mobile devices, phone, tablet or PC belonging to legal advisors
- The software application used is CISCO and has been developed in conjunction with Scottish Legal Aid.
- A recent snapshot of the uptake of this method versus conventional fact to face contact is only 7% revealing that although there is the capability and connectively using technology take up is initially quite slow
- There is also court video conferencing again using the CISCO system and the take up this is about 30% of cases being legally heard, again not used to it capacity.
- We also have the Integrated Case Management service focusing on long term prisoners which allows community based social workers to be to participate in case management meeting using video links

#### **Challenges**

- There have been some issues using these systems both technical issues and the reliability of equipment. There are also issues around how these services are offered and advertised so should be understood that there are a number of limitations around providing this service
- **Email a Prisoner** still exists but there are only 10 establishments that have the facility to reply to received mails although others are trying to provide that facility. Despite working with partners to try to find solutions to these issues unfortunately it can be problematic finding an fit all IT solution due to the diversity of IT systems already in place

#### **New Learning and Skills Contract/Ehealth**

- There has been some new development in this area, an Intranet system has been introduced within an establishments providing access to standardised education products along with assistance and support.
- There has also been the opportunity of using and EHealth package in some establishments however the uptake was not as high as expected

So while there is an appetite to improve services and support through technology there will always be complex challenges to face as we take this new strategy forward.

#### **New proposals**

- One of the new proposals on our wish list which could be considered as a demonstration project is the electronic transfer of money into accounts which would be beneficial for both families and staff
- Another pilot which is under discussion is locked down tablets which would allow online communications between those in custody with families, but again no decision has been made on this proposal
- We have also been trying to improve connectivity to more rural areas, this would alleviate some issues that support organisations have in being able to visit those in custody within a reasonable time scale. Depending on logistics this type of system could support virtual family visits but again this will have to be investigated as to the viability of having this system in place

So in conclusion we have a developing Digital Strategy which has not been signed off yet nor have we prioritised any part of the strategy as such. To do this we need to be aware of costing and try to use existing resources. We have to ensure that we have appropriate controls and safeguards in place to avoid any type of exploitation and that we do not fall foul of the law.

### **Visitors' Centres**

They have been working well with some still establishing their services and are just about on every site although the accessibility of them differs from establishment to establishment. We are looking at internal solutions to allow for better connectivity to the prisons from visitors' centres.

Under the new Family Strategy every establishment has a plan they have to submit as part of their business improvement plan. Through their local family strategy groups they work with multi-disciplinary and multi-agencies allowing us to share innovative practice and ideas.

There are obviously still some complex issues both logistical and technological which will have to be overcome but Teresa would welcome any views or perspectives you have that may feed into supporting some of the pilots we would like to run not only in the Digital Strategy but also the broader work the SPS requires support in.

### **Questions:**

Laura Van Der Hoeven (Families Outside) raised concerns that if virtual visits were introduced to visitor centres then these could replace face to face visits. As is the case in some American prisons they have ended contact visits and replaced them with virtual visits as they are considered advantageous due to security reasons and also advantageous to the technology companies who can provide the technology, this being a cost that is passed onto the visitors.

Teresa said she has been informed that SPS has been approached by some companies who have this technology but it would come as a cost to the families and not the SPS. MT horrified and states categorically this SPS no intentions of replacing face to face visits with virtual visits. This type of visit is intended to enhance the visitors experience and not replace it.

Helen Tripp (Apex) agreed that the families that currently use virtual visits use them in addition to face to face visits. The system that has been put in place by SPS is of great quality and really gives you the feel that you are sitting next to the person you are talking to . This system is proving very helpful for families that just cannot face the thought of visiting loved one in the prison environment and this allows them to maintain very regular contact without having to enter the prison itself. This system certainly has its pros and cons but it is proving to be a very successful in her experience.

Teresa said this is really heartening to hear and to know that this type of technology is fit for purpose and be a positive experience and allows options to families who might find prison visits stressful.

Lorraine Gillies (Scottish Community Safety Network) asked about allowing phones in cells – how do we get the public on board with us and how do we create the conditions where we can deliver the solution to what we know is the right thing. Anne Pinkman (Prison Reform Trust) raised the same point: Justice Strategy is very clear about the benefits of family contact. In relation to in cell telephones they are involved in a project which has highlighted the difficulties around using prison phones.

Teresa is aware that in cell phones would allow better communication between families as not dictated by time slots, costs would be less as less people have land lines and privacy for conversations. There has been very negative press coverage from the Daily Mail affecting public opinion, but if we can provide evidence of the positive side of these issues, then the stronger and louder our voice can be in getting the support we need.

Sheila Gordon (Crossreach) asked whether we have any communication available on existing as well a future technology that we can share to encourage take up. Teresa suggested that using networks and partner agencies to ensure that the message is getting across in the way that it will land well with people who will be involved in using the systems.

Kerry Knox (Families Outside) asked about the message going to the prisons where there is not a contact in place with Apex, is the message not to use any virtual visits or is it to use anything that is available. Teresa said that, due to the fact SPS have been working on the new Digital Strategy we have put a hold on any local initiatives taking place however going forward if there any initiatives that come at minimum costs and resources then we will certainly look at sharing them as good practice.

Lillian Dougan (SPS) commented that we need to ensure that we don't use any of the companies that are offering solutions at no cost to partners or SPS however there will always be a cost implication. We should try to have a coordinated approach to this.

Anne Pinkman (Prison Reform Trust) asked whether the SPS could ensure that there will not be any cost implication to families for any new initiatives or solutions that are put in place. Theresa said she would prefer that there would not be any additional cost to families, families already have costs for travelling. I certainly would like to think that we would not introduce something that would provide facilities that would come at a cost and where possible we would prefer not to put families under any more financial pressure than they are at the moment.

Anne noted for the record that the existing Prison Visit Scheme does not meet the cost of traditional visits, it is not a generous scheme and there is no help for families on benefits or low income.

Nancy Loucks (Families Outside) noted Teresa's comment that there is a halt on individual /local innovation until the Digital Strategy report is released so asked when is the Digital Strategy report to be released and whether the development of looking at secure tablets in Inverness had been put on hold. Teresa said that secure tablets are not a local initiative but part of the National Digital Strategy and is considered a pilot programme. If this proves successful and doesn't come at any significant cost it could be piloted at other places and an efficacy of a roll out could be considered.

Teresa did not have a date for the release of the Digital Strategy report. They have been working on it for a year and it is in its final stages so she would anticipate it will come to the Executive Management Group hopefully in the next couple of months - definitely 2018.

Pete White (Positive Prisons) asked to what extent the SPS has been liaising with Community Justice Scotland about plans regarding the new IT approach from the SPS. With regard to the phones in cells he thought it would be a very helpful if CJS were involved in supporting Lorraine's idea of how do we do something about it and combining resources would be a very good thing to do.

Teresa said she could not cannot answer this as she has been working on the periphery and in discussion with them regarding the areas of policies she is involved in but she is not part of the Digital Strategy Group so will take that back and ask the question. There does have to be connectivity between us and Community Justice Scotland to enable us to support people in the community.

Dinah Aitken asked about any thoughts about expanding the strategy so the parents who are in prison could be more active so for example virtually attend family meetings in schools where they would normally not be able to participate. Teresa said they had not got as far as that yet as they are presently thinking of the connectivity more in terms of contact to support the individual in custody. She will however take note of it.

Kerry Knox noted that this has been done before, using video conferencing with schools and social work. Lillian Dougan said this is very dependent on if the systems can talk to each other as not all systems are compatible. The Working Group is in discussion about how they can expand the options for

<p>video conferencing. Teresa said that, for children who would benefit from that parental support, it is a very valid point.</p> <p>Lillian suggested that it would be a good idea to hear how some of the partners could help on ideas of how to deliver secure and safe environments where virtual visits take place and how the SPS can achieve that to help avoid any bad publicity. One comment was that it is quite easy to do, checking ID and watching the visit to ensure that nothing untoward is happening. Lillian appreciated that it does happen at the moment but going forward in order to achieve this it relies on finding community partners who will support us or finding the finances to pay for it.</p> <p>Kerry Knox commented that it is really important for young people to access to virtual visits, Face Time for example, as it is a more natural way of communicating for young people. If we were looking virtual visits then schools may come on board with this as they would see the benefits of interaction between a parent and child.</p> <p>Laura Van Der Hoeven noted with regard to room or in cell solutions that these needed to be within the scope of the new digital strategy in light of the adverse reaction to the 'Daily Mail test'. Teresa said there is an ambition that they would move towards that, and there is the capacity in some of the newer establishments to do that but again it will be about cost and resource affordability and looking at whether or not there are other solutions that are not so resource intensive. This would allow them to open it up to the wider population as they don't want other establishments to feel disadvantaged.</p>	
AOB	Action
<p><b>Greater Glasgow &amp; Clyde NHS</b> will be launching they findings on the research by the NHS commissioned in relation to the experience of the children of a parent in the Justice System. The event on 15 May and is aimed at practitioners and the event on 22 May is aimed at managers and supervisors. If anyone is interested in attending please contact Nancy for details.</p> <p><b>The Children of Prisoners Europe (COPE) conference</b> is on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> June in Manchester and will look at the progress being made with children of parents that are in the justice system and the future role of technology in supporting child/parent relationships.</p> <p><b>National Prison Visitors Centre conference – 20th June 2018</b> will be held at SPS College Polmont and registration for the event is on Eventbrite. The title for the conference is Supporting Prisoners' Families Conference 2018.</p> <p><b>Speakers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizens Theatre Family Sentence project</li> <li>• Michael Mathieson - Cabinet Secretary for Justice</li> <li>• Colin McConnell - CEO Scottish Prison Service</li> <li>• Tim Lloyd – Head of the APVU</li> </ul>	

<p><b>Workshops from:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SPS Women Strategy Team</li> <li>• Barnardos Child Exploitation team</li> </ul> <p>The rest of the programme still being developed.</p> <p><b>Families Outside National Conference – 21 November 2018</b> will be held in Glasgow and more details will be circulated in the next few months.</p> <p><b>Send your MSP to Prison</b> campaign was discussed at the last meeting and was to take place this Spring however it will now take place early Autumn. More details will be circulated when there is more information. The aim of this campaign is to allow MSP's to experience what it is like for families to visit a prison. They will be asked to travel by public transport and we are asking people to write to their MSP to request that they take part.</p>	<p>Laura to provide a full programme next month</p>
---	---

**Date of next meeting:** TBC, and as Mary touched on it can be very complicated to timetable but a date will be circulated as soon as possible