

# **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE**

Tuesday 19 May 2009

Session 3

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## **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE**

### **8<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2009, Session 3**

#### **CONVENER**

\*Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con)

#### **DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab)

#### **COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)

\*Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Loudon) (SNP)

\*Bill Kidd (Glasgow) (SNP)

\*Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD)

\*Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)

Bill Wilson (West of Scotland) (SNP)

#### **COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES**

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD)

\*Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP)

\*attended

#### **THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:**

Mary Beglan (218 Centre)

Baroness Corston

Cath Smith (Glasgow City Council)

#### **CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Terry Shevlin

#### **ASSISTANT CLERK**

Rebecca Lamb

#### **LOCATION**

Committee Room 1



## Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee

*Tuesday 19 May 2009*

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:05*]

### Decisions on Taking Business in Private

**The Convener (Margaret Mitchell):** Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the eighth meeting in 2009 of the Equal Opportunities Committee. I remind all those present, including members, that mobile phones and BlackBerrys should be switched off completely, as they interfere with the sound system even when switched to silent.

As this is the first meeting that Shirley-Anne Somerville has attended as a substitute, I welcome her to the committee. She is appearing instead of Bill Wilson, who sends his apologies. I invite her to declare any relevant interests.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP):** I have nothing to add to what has already been published on the register of members' interests.

**The Convener:** Thank you.

Agenda item 1 is a decision on whether to take items 4 and 5 in private. Item 4 will give members the opportunity to review the evidence that we hear today as part of our inquiry into female offenders in the criminal justice system. Item 5 will give the committee the opportunity to consider its work programme. Following that discussion, our website will be updated appropriately.

Are members agreed about that?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** Agenda item 2 is a decision on whether our consideration of the evidence that we hear on the female offenders inquiry should be taken in private at future meetings. Are members content to do that?

**Members indicated agreement.**

## Female Offenders in the Criminal Justice System Inquiry

10:06

**The Convener:** Under agenda item 3, we continue with oral evidence in our inquiry into female offenders in the criminal justice system. I remind members that the remit of the inquiry is to

"assess the prison experience for, and background of, female offenders, particularly the extent to which prison helps to prevent women from re-offending."

It is my pleasure to welcome to the committee today's first witness: Baroness Jean Corston. She conducted a review for the Home Office and produced "The Corston Report: a review of women with particular vulnerabilities in the criminal justice system", which was published in March 2007. The United Kingdom Government published its response later that year.

Given the significant overlap between the work that was carried out by Baroness Corston and our inquiry, we very much look forward to discussing the key messages that arise from her report, which will help to inform our questions to other witnesses, most notably the Cabinet Secretary for Justice. Without further ado, I invite Baroness Corston to make a brief opening statement.

**Baroness Corston:** It is a pleasure to be here to discuss this very important and often much-neglected issue. It is probably best if I start with what prompted the then Home Secretary, Charles Clarke, to invite me to conduct a review that would make practical recommendations rather than engage in theoretical research.

One of the motive forces was a letter that the Home Secretary had received from Nicholas Rheinberg, the coroner for Cheshire, who conducted the inquiries into the self-inflicted deaths of women at HM Prison Styal. Six women died in Styal over an 18-month period, and Mr Rheinberg had the distressing job of conducting all the inquests. He spoke about what happened at those inquests:

"I saw a group of damaged individuals, committing for the most part petty crime for whom imprisonment represented a disproportionate response. That was what particularly struck me with Julie Walsh"—

the last of the six women to die in Styal prison—

"who had spent the majority of her adult life serving at regular intervals short periods of imprisonment for crimes which represented a social nuisance rather than anything that demanded the most extreme form of punishment. I was greatly saddened by the pathetic individuals who came before me as witnesses who no doubt mirrored the pathetic individuals who had died".

Mr Rheinberg went on to call for a far-ranging review. I started with the premise that women and

men are different—I do not think that anyone would argue about that—but that women and men are equal, which I assume would be an aspiration for us all. I drew the obvious conclusion that to treat men and women the same does not guarantee equality of outcome.

Prisons are generally designed by men for men: the security is to prevent men from escaping, and the priorities are the priorities in men's lives. The family responsibilities that are acknowledged are generally the ones that are in men's lives.

Most women in prison are there for crimes that represent a social nuisance, as the coroner I mentioned said. They are troubled as much as troublesome; they make pretty bad neighbours because they lead chaotic lives. They have no life skills and generally they are poor. They are mothers: about 17,000 children a year in England and Wales are affected by their mothers' imprisonment.

Two thirds of the women in prison in England and Wales at any one time are on remand; half of them will get no sentence. They will be in prison awaiting that outcome for an average of 28 days, which is long enough for them to lose both their homes and their children. Frequently, they get neither back: they lose the property because they cannot pay the rent, and the children go into care. They come out of prison and say that they want somewhere to live, and they are told, "Sorry, you're not a priority: first, you've been in prison so you made yourself homeless intentionally"—which is said by some local authorities—"and secondly, you've got no children so we are not responsible for you." The women go to social services and say, "Can I have my children back?" and they are told, "No, you've got nowhere to live."

I found that 70 to 80 per cent of the women have a diagnosable mental condition. A good three quarters of them have a drug problem, and it is often a poly drug problem—prescription drugs, alcohol and classified illegal drugs. They are held a long way from home because there are so few women prisoners that the prisons are widely dispersed. Indeed, having visited Cornton Vale, I know that sending women there is the only custodial disposal available to sentencers in Scotland. Maintaining family ties is almost impossible as women try to bring up their children from the inside. When they are released, they want somewhere to live for them and their children. That was the constant cry when I asked, "What do you want when you're released?" In England and Wales, they said, "Somewhere for me and my kids"; in Scotland they said, "Me and my weans", but it amounts to the same thing.

We are failing those women. I do not say that no woman should be in prison—Rosemary West should be in prison for a very long time—but

prison is a very expensive disposal in every sense of the word. The capital cost of a woman's place in a British prison is £77,000 a year. A place at an absolutely inspirational women's centre in Worcester that I visited is £750. I know which of those options represents better value.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much for that opening statement. We concur with much of what you said in your report, which rings bells with what we have discovered as we have progressed with the inquiry.

I would like you to elaborate on the thinking behind one of your key recommendations—the one that proposes small, multifunctional and geographically dispersed custodial centres. At whom are such custodial centres aimed?

**Baroness Corston:** They are aimed at any woman who is sentenced to, say, less than two years. Most women prisoners serve short sentences, although it might be that a woman who is sentenced to a longer prison term has to be held far from home and that her imprisonment is in the public interest because she is a danger to others or has committed a crime for which prison is the only disposal.

Having small units of 70 to 80 people—70 would be an ideal average—that are closer to home would deal with the family cohesion issues and take into account the fact that big prisons do not work for women and become just bleak and desperate places of self-harm. Women would be able to maintain links not just with their families but with services in their home area. There is one such prison in these islands—the Dóchas centre in Dublin, which I visited last year and thought was marvellous. It is the right size, and the women live in houses and progress through them. I was there for a morning and spoke to many of the staff and women. Its approach makes a lot of sense.

10:15

In the Government here and at Westminster, there is always a hesitation about using small units, which is based on the idea that women do not want to be in them. I suspect that the solution to that was given to me by Sue Brookes, whom some members may know and who was one of the most inspirational prison officers that I came across during my review. At that time, she was the governor of Cornton Vale, although I gather that she has gone on to another role in the Scottish Prison Service. She told me that the two big issues in her prison were that there should be reciprocal respect and no bullying. When men in prison argue, they usually resolve the dispute with some degree of violence, but with women it is verbal—they bully. That is often the basis of the hesitation to introduce small units, but it is possible

to run a place like the Dóchas centre and deal with bullying. That is always the unspoken issue—people say that women do not want to be in small units—but it is not insurmountable.

**The Convener:** Your report makes clear your view that, unless a prison sentence is necessary, women should not be in prison. I want to find out exactly whom you envisage being in such custodial centres. We have heard evidence that some women want to be in prison. That is a pretty shocking statement, but for them being in prison is safer than being outside. It is about protection of the public, but it is also about protection of the women. The last thing that they want to do is escape from the secure unit—they want to be in it. There are alternatives, and I want to tease out who exactly you are talking about for such centres.

**Baroness Corston:** The centres should be for any woman who has committed a crime that warrants imprisonment. The generality of women who are in prison would profit tremendously from sentences in places such as the 218 centre in Glasgow. I met a woman there who had not known how to clean a toilet until she went there—she had never seen a loo brush or a tub of loo cleaner. There are women who lack basic life skills. I propose that women should go to a women's centre. For women who lead chaotic lives and commit petty crime, such as repeat shoplifters or sex workers, a disposal involving a women's centre is much tougher than prison. Women who are in prison and who choose it always have someone else to blame for why they are there.

That was brought home to me by a woman whom I met at the Asha women's centre in Worcester. She was 41 and had been in and out of trouble with the police since she was 13 and in and out of prison since she was 15. I asked her why she was there and what the place had given her. She told me, "I've been in and out of trouble ever since my mum got a new man in her life, and whenever I've been in prison there's always been someone else to blame—I thought, 'If my mother had protected me, if my stepfather hadn't done that to me, if I hadn't run away from home, if I hadn't been pimped, if I hadn't done drugs, if I hadn't got pregnant.'" She said, "This is the first time in my life that I've had to address what I've done, and that's much harder than being in prison." I said, "Do you like yourself now?" She said, "Nobody's ever asked me that before, but yes, I do."

It is true that prison can sometimes seem like a lifestyle choice, but it is not a solution because, when these women come out of prison, they still lead chaotic lives and they still do not know how to work with other people, hold a civilised conversation or cook a healthy meal. It is in their interests, and all our interests, to give them the

opportunity to develop self-esteem and self-respect in a place that has a woman-centred approach, where someone considers the woman and her needs rather than saying, "Go here for this and go there for that." That woman-centred approach works.

**The Convener:** Other members have questions about the 218 centre but, for the avoidance of doubt, you would not expect remand prisoners to be referred to custodial units unless they were expecting a custodial sentence.

**Baroness Corston:** I would not. Furthermore, I find the notion of sending a woman to prison for her own good or as a place of safety utterly abhorrent.

**The Convener:** I wanted to clarify that, because we have alternatives that could be considered for prisoners who would be on remand.

I also want to clarify the point about families' access to legal aid. It seems clear that they should get legal aid. Did you raise the matter specifically to bring it to the authorities' attention?

**Baroness Corston:** Are you talking about legal representation—

**The Convener:** When there has been a self-harm incident and maybe an inquest.

**Baroness Corston:** When a family is bereaved by a death in custody, it is arguable—indeed, in many respects, it is irrefutable—that article 2 of the European convention on human rights, on the right to life, is engaged. If the state deprives somebody of their liberty, it has an obligation to preserve their life. The state is always represented at inquests, usually by senior counsel, through recourse to public funds, but legal representation for the family of the person who has died is usually means tested.

I do not know whether the committee will meet bereaved families of prisoners who have died, but I certainly did that when I chaired the Joint Committee on Human Rights and we did an inquiry into deaths in custody. It is a most humbling experience. I met people who had to contemplate selling their homes in order to be represented just to find out what happened. I had a constituent who died in Dartmoor because a prison officer sat on him and his kidneys failed. It took years to find out that that had happened.

Whether we are talking about continental civil law or the common law that we share in the United Kingdom, equality of arms is a basic principle. It is desperately unfair to say, "The state will have a team of lawyers. If you're lucky, you might have a solicitor." I have argued, and I continue to argue, that bereaved families should be given access to legal representation irrespective of their means. I am still trying to persuade the Westminster

Government about that, but I feel strongly that it should be done. I understand about floodgates and all the rest of it, but I think the matter is a priority.

**Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab):** Where would you put the dividing line between residential women's centres and small custodial units? In discussing small custodial units, are you are talking about a relatively small percentage of the population? Do you envisage that many women who currently get prison sentences of one or two years would go to residential women's centres?

**Baroness Corston:** The disposal for most women could and should be attendance at a women's centre—that means that they stay at home and go to the women's centre. That happens in some places, and I have seen evidence of women's lives being turned around and their developing skills and self-esteem. They end up making quite decent neighbours and they get jobs.

I was listening to "Woman's Hour" a few weeks ago—it was a Saturday, it was cold and I was working indoors—when a reference was suddenly made to Baroness Corston's report. That was a bit of a shock. There was an interview with two women who had been to a women's centre as a disposal because it struck the court that that might be a good idea. They had been in and out of prison beforehand. They said that the first thing that they had to do was write down a wish list—I met a woman at the 218 centre who had had a similar experience—of what they were, what they thought their children thought of them, what they would like to be and what they thought they could be. They both said that they thought that that was utterly ridiculous—they wondered why the hell they were sitting there, doing that, and considered it a waste of time. However, when the interviewer asked where their wish lists were now, one said that it was on the door of the fridge and the other said that it was hanging on the wall by her bed. They both said that they now worked and that their children respected them.

That is a much saner way to treat people than locking them up, which costs a fortune and leaves them no better off when they come out again—things are just the same and there is a revolving door.

**Malcolm Chisholm:** You propose a category of residential women's centres. Would that be part of the disposal? Have I picked that up wrongly?

**Baroness Corston:** No. There would be a small, local prison in every county, area or whatever, which would be for women who deserve a prison sentence—of whom there are a number. The others would go to a women's centre. At the

moment, in Yorkshire and Humberside, there is a new conditional caution scheme whereby women who could—if they went before the courts—face a short custodial sentence can be cautioned by the police on the condition that they attend a women's centre for an assessment. That started in September, and all the evidence is that it is going very well in addressing those women's offending behaviour. So there are two options: attendance at a centre or going to a custodial unit, which is another name for a small prison.

**Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab):** Thank you for coming to give evidence. It has been really interesting so far.

I want to ask about the section in your report about who is in charge. Before I do that, I would like to pursue further what Malcolm Chisholm has been exploring. When the committee's inquiry was first proposed, Marlyn Glen and I discussed whether prison is ever appropriate for women. As you have said, prison is designed by men for men. You say that a prison sentence is appropriate in some cases for some women but that the type of prison needs to be very different. The argument has been put forward that there are advantages to Cornton Vale being the one prison in Scotland for women, as that enables the provision of appropriate services. What is your view on that?

**Baroness Corston:** The services that are provided are generally needed by and available to people in the general population, so I am mystified by the suggestion that we have to go to great lengths to ensure a conglomeration of them in a particular area. I know that there is the capacity for change.

Early on, when I asked why routine strip searching is carried out, someone in the prison service told me that that will never change. However, one of the things of which I am most proud is the fact that, from 1 April, routine strip searching in women's prisons in England and Wales has been discontinued. People are searched when they arrive, and strip searching is then done on an intelligence basis.

10:30

Most of the women have been victims of abuse and lots of them—I do not know how many, but I reckon at least half of them—have suffered childhood sexual abuse. The routine strip searching of such women by strangers is a dreadful thing. I accept the fact that it might be required once, when they first go into prison, but women do not conceal weapons on their person in order to commit violence. I do not know whether routine strip searching still happens in Scotland, but it does not happen in England and Wales any more.



There are differences, but when an institution says that it cannot do something or provide something, it is not beyond the wit of human beings to unpick it and say, "Yes, you can."

**Elaine Smith:** Let us turn to the issue of who is in charge. You have talked about there being a yawning gap in the existing structures for meeting the needs of women who offend or who are at risk of offending. You recognise that there is seemingly no one person in overall charge, and your report is clear about the need for strategic and co-ordinated leadership across government better to meet the needs of female offenders. Do you consider that the UK Government's response to your recommendation will provide the leadership that is required?

**Baroness Corston:** I am pleased that some strong women politicians are taking the matter forward. I was concerned, initially, because I thought that the interministerial group on reducing reoffending would have it on its agenda. I started as a women's organiser in 1974 and knew that, if a meeting had a crowded agenda and there was an item about women, that item would usually be number 15 on the agenda and most people would have left by then. I was determined that that would not be the case.

The interministerial group on reducing reoffending now has a sub-group of, generally, five or six people—there are three core people on the group. Maria Eagle MP, the minister with responsibility for equalities at the Ministry of Justice, is the champion, and she has a sub-group of ministers from the departments that I list in my report and an official who works for that group. The fact that there is a group of officials in the Home Office that is drawn from all those departments is staggering. When we first went into government, in 1997, the idea of Whitehall departments talking to each other much was a bit foreign. Now, we have a criminal justice women's unit, which has people from the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, the Department of Health and the Department for Work and Pensions all working together on that agenda.

There is the beginning of some strong leadership from the centre, and the regional offender managers now have an absolute obligation, in commissioning services for women, to recognise what a woman-sensitive service should and could be. The other thing that bothered me was the fact that lots of people who work in women's prisons have never been in a women's prison before, often including the governors. I do not know the man, but I know that Sue Brookes was replaced by the former governor of HMP Peterhead, who had never worked in a women's prison. It can be difficult for someone like that suddenly to have to work under a different regime.

However, the agenda seems to be being driven forward in ways that might not go far enough for me but which go further than some critics said would be the case.

We are beginning to get a drive from the centre and an understanding. At the same time, there is a new women awareness staff programme, which staff throughout the prison service are encouraged to undertake to help them to understand the issues around families and self-harm and how emotional literacy and relationship problems tend to be much more important to women. It also addresses the whole issue of children and mothering. The response has been diverse, but the prison service is huge and it will take some time to turn it around. Nevertheless, talking to governors, I have been quite encouraged by the gradual acceptance of the differences of women. In any event, the Equality Act 2006 places an obligation on public authorities to be gender specific.

**Elaine Smith:** Maria Eagle has been identified as the champion. What would happen if she were promoted elsewhere? I presume that the champion would be the person who replaced her in that ministerial post. From what you have said, a good, settled structure seems to be in place.

**Baroness Corston:** I understand what you say about Maria Eagle because, when I worked with David Blunkett in the then Department for Education and Employment, I used to tell him to remember that the civil service mantra is the refrain from Tennyson's "The Brook":

"men may come and men may go,  
But I go on for ever".

I used to tell him to remember that, as minister, he was just a bird of passage.

My experience was that we needed to embed institutional change that could stand irrespective of a change of minister. I maintain quite a lot of contact with civil servants who were working on the agenda, whom I had never met before but who became personal friends while I was conducting my review. They are very encouraged because they tell me that they think that the system would be very hard to unscramble now. I am not saying that what is there now will be there forever, but it will be harder to dismantle than it might have been.

**The Convener:** We have taken evidence from Sue Brookes and Ian Gunn, who is the new governor of Cornton Vale. We were certainly impressed with Ian Gunn's take on Cornton Vale.

**Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD):** Perhaps Baroness Corston is aware that there have been various debates about short-term sentences in prisons in Scotland. Have you had

any approaches from the Scottish Government about your report? Have you had the opportunity to discuss with it any salient points that might be relevant to the situation in Scotland?

**Baroness Corston:** No. I have had no approaches or contacts from Scotland at all. I was quite surprised by that, because I had immediate responses from Ireland and from women who were determined not to have a women's prison in Wales—I am pleased to say that we succeeded in that. People in Connecticut, Venezuela, New Zealand and I do not know how many other places all got in touch to say that what I had written was amazing because it could apply just as much to prisons in their country. I do not think that that is very surprising, because women's lives are pretty much the same all over the world, although their personal situations might be different. I have had no contact from Scotland. However, I suspect that there has probably been contact with officials.

**Hugh O'Donnell:** I am sure that we will try to find out whether that is the case.

At the beginning of your opening remarks, you referred specifically to mental health issues. I was interested in the phrase "diagnosable conditions". What is the distinction between diagnosable conditions and diagnosed conditions in the context of your contact with these individuals?

**Baroness Corston:** I suppose that I was talking about the thorny issue of personality disorder, which some people do not think is diagnosable. That is where the distinction lies. I met very few prisoners who could have a conversation or who had any idea of what having a conversation meant. That could be disturbing. If I went to a women's prison and told the governor that I wanted to speak to a group of women prisoners, I would end up in a room with seven women and, when I asked for their names, they would all start talking at once. If I asked them to talk one at a time, they would take their turn around the table, but they had no idea about the interplay of ideas and discussions and not interrupting. A lot of personality disorders are evidenced by individuals' not understanding other people's situations, space, emotions or anything else.

The figure that I gave for diagnosable conditions is the one that is generally used by health care professionals in relation to women who are in prison.

I am pleased to say that there is a growing understanding that personality disorder can be addressed. The Westminster Government has greatly increased counselling services because it has recognised that personality disorder can sometimes be alleviated if someone is given the opportunity to be listened to.

**Hugh O'Donnell:** I was keen to get that distinction on the record, so thank you for co-operating.

**Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab):** Good morning. Some of your recommendations have been accepted, and it sounds as though progress has been made, given that gender equality schemes have been in place in the UK for more than a year. The idea of justice being gender specific is really important because, too often, we still talk about justice having to be gender neutral, which I find difficult.

One of the committee's focuses is on how to cut reoffending. What impact will your recommendations have on the rate of offending and on the way in which female offenders are treated in the criminal justice system?

**Baroness Corston:** I do not want to claim anything personally in all that, except to say that I have thrown a little torch light on to an area of darkness. However, the women's prison population in England and Wales has gone down by 4 per cent in the past year, so perhaps a gradual reversal is taking place.

Sorry—I cannot remember the rest of your question.

**Marlyn Glen:** It was about there being gender-specific justice, as opposed to gender-neutral justice, which is what you have been talking about.

**Baroness Corston:** That is about recognising that men and women are different and have different needs. For example, most men who go into prison can switch off because there is generally someone to keep the home fires burning and there is always someone to look after the children. Only 9 per cent of the children of women prisoners are looked after by the father. The remaining children go into care and the mothers never get them back—well, occasionally they do, but generally they do not.

Such issues are not addressed in the male prison population, so it is no surprise that prison staff do not think about them. I met a woman who was a lifer and I got the impression that she was a battered woman who had finally killed. She was very aware of her situation and told me that when she went into prison, the first thing that the prison officer said to her was, "Listen, Alison, you've got your sentence, you've got to do your time, you've got to get on with it, you've got to put your head down, you've got to forget your family in the outside world and you've got to forget your little girl." Her little girl was four. I thought that that was an extraordinary thing to say to her. Then I was told by somebody in my reference group who had been the governor of a women's prison that that is what is said routinely to male prisoners. Men can switch off, but women cannot.

When men come out of prison, what they want is a job so the Prison Service's focus is on jobs—that is the biggest priority. Women do not want jobs; they want somewhere to live and they want life skills. It is no good trying to teach them to be employable if they cannot even organise their lives. Those are the issues that arise if you are talking about the differences between imprisoning men and imprisoning women. I hope that understanding that will lead eventually to better outcomes.

I have been terribly encouraged by the first six months of the conditional cautions pilot in Yorkshire and Humberside. Somebody recently sent me the first evaluation of the pilot and photocopies of what the women have written, from which you get an idea of the level of literacy. The evaluation shows that all those women have realised that they could do something and perhaps be someone. That sounds ridiculous, but the pilot is transforming many lives that started to unravel perhaps when the women started truanting at the age of 12.

**Marlyn Glen:** We talk about the cost of prison, which is perhaps unquantifiable, but the cost to women, men, their families and the public is massive.

**Baroness Corston:** It is. The Home Office figures that have been quoted to me—I would be amazed if the situation was different in Scotland—show that about half the children of women prisoners end up in prison. I met a woman in Styal prison who had just given birth and who herself had been born in Styal.

10:45

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP):** You made an interesting remark that the women's prison population has dropped in the past year in England and Wales by about 4 per cent. Taking the trend over the past 10 years, is it still fair to say, as your report does, that notwithstanding the encouraging figures from the past year, there has been a "disproportionate increase" in the female prison population? Why is that happening? Are prison disposals being used as a matter of routine for women, even when it seems that such disposals are entirely inappropriate? What has been the impact on public opinion of some of the messages that you have given us today, which are shared by others who have recently given evidence to the committee? Are the public ready for the alternative and challenging ways of dealing with women that you have suggested?

**Baroness Corston:** It is amazing how often people say that they will take the final question first, but I will do that, if you do not mind. It is an

interesting question. An organisation called smart justice commissioned a UK-wide opinion poll towards the end of my review. The poll's results were broken down by region or country. One question was whether women who have committed petty crime should be sent to prison, in the context of repeat offending rather than, for example, someone stealing a croissant from Tesco. The question was, "Do you think these women should be sent to prison, or should they be sent to women's community centres where the causes of their offending can be addressed?" Eighty-one per cent of people in the UK said that such women should not go to prison. There was a disparity between regions: the figure was 95 per cent in some areas and 78 per cent in others. However, there was no area in which it was less than 70 per cent.

I do not think that we know where the public is on that question, but there is more sensitivity and understanding than some of our red-top newspapers would believe: their own readership thinks that those women should not go to prison. I found it encouraging that people are not necessarily punitive. I am not saying that that attitude necessarily applies to men at the moment, although there must be many vulnerable men in prison. However, that was not in my purview.

Sentencers do not like to hear this, but they have been giving women harsher sentences for less serious crimes. The reasons for that are hard to unpick. I realised as a young woman that something was happening with attitudes to unnatural and criminal behaviour. When Ian Brady and Myra Hindley were arrested for the moors murders, I was a young woman with small children. Obviously, all the newspapers were saying what terrible, heinous crimes those were, but there was an absolute focus on Myra Hindley. It was as if people had somehow accepted that Ian Brady, whom everybody knew had coerced Myra Hindley, had done the crimes, but they could not understand why a woman would do such crimes. The newspapers were full of it, with photographs of her. You have all seen photographs of Myra Hindley and you know what she looked like, but I bet you do not know what Ian Brady looks like. It suddenly struck me that everybody was saying, "Why would a woman do that?" I remember saying to a friend at the time, "That's the wrong question. The question is, 'Why would a human being do that?'" However, somehow it was worse that a woman had done those crimes.

After I published my report, I received a letter from a magistrate of my acquaintance who said that he was delighted to see it and that, having been on the bench for 30 years, he had reached the conclusion that our society has an unspoken and ingrained attitude to women whose behaviour does not fit into or conform with what is expected

of them. He also suggested that a man and a woman who are convicted of the same crime will receive different disposals, with the woman being treated more harshly.

I met sentencers while I was carrying out my review. I once sat next to a very senior judge who, as it happened, was evidently younger than me and who vehemently disagreed with me when I tried to propound this very view. I told him that one of the women who had taken her life at Durham had been serving life for a first offence of wounding with intent and asked him how many times in his career he had come across a man who had been similarly sentenced. He simply patted me on the hand and said, "You must be mistaken, my dear". I know that I was not mistaken. There is something in all this that we must be brave enough to recognise and understand.

I am not saying that any criminal or antisocial behaviour is acceptable; all I am saying is that at the moment we do not judge people by the same standard. If you or I watched a television programme about drunkenness in Edinburgh city centre on Saturday night, we would be likely to look at the young women and think, "What a terrible way to behave."

**Willie Coffey:** That is a very disturbing message. As a new committee member, I do not know whether the committee has already heard about this inherent tendency to impose harsher sentences on women—even, as you have pointed out, for petty crimes. I am sure that we will take the point into account in our reflections on the matter.

**Baroness Corston:** You should try to talk to sentencers in a way that does not make them feel that they are on the spot. After all, it is very difficult for them; they will say that they do not know about all the options, for example. However, something in all of this is probably ingrained in us all, and women at the sharp end of the criminal justice system can pay a heavy price.

**The Convener:** We have arranged to meet sentencers in private and to take a note of that meeting that we are both satisfied with.

**Baroness Corston:** Good.

**The Convener:** As well as the ingrained attitude, of which you have just given us a succinct example, can harsher sentences be handed down by default? For example, sentencers might think that they are doing the best thing by giving a woman a community service order, but if she has a chaotic life, she might not be able to comply with the order and might then end up in prison. We have also heard that sentencers decide to send women to prison because they feel that they will be able to access all the necessary services there,

which I have to say is a strange way of thinking. Have you found the same?

**Baroness Corston:** Yes. Magistrates have told me that they have sent women to prison who they did not think should have gone there because there was nowhere else they could have sent them. The trouble with some community sentences is that, although the intention behind them is great, they generally require women to attend meetings with many different institutions and organisations. Generally those women are not capable of doing that, because they lead chaotic, disorganised lives. The sentencers tell them to go to this place for debt advice, that place for housing advice and another place to talk about their children. These women distrust many of the statutory services. I have never met a woman prisoner who—rightly or wrongly—has had a good word to say about social services.

I was struck by the work that was being carried out at women's centres partly because it was based on a woman-centred approach. The people working in those centres did not tell the women to go to one place for one thing and another place for another thing; instead, they said, "Sit down with us. We'll look at your needs and bring in the people you need to talk to in order to turn your life around—but you have to come here." As a result, the women went to one place and got to know the staff. They usually had a key worker, who was emotionally supported by other staff. In other words, the services initially came to the women, and the whole thing was not difficult to organise.

I do not see why women have to go to prison to get that support. After all, there are not many instances of very short prison sentences turning anyone's life around; in any case, it is far more cost effective to do all that work in the community.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Earlier, you made the sad but true statement that larger prisons were "bleak and desperate places of self-harm".

However, you also say that there is still a place for custodial sentences, albeit served in smaller units. Is there any good practice that we can learn about what can be done in custodial units—in Cornton Vale or wherever—to ensure that women who are put into such institutions get the most out of them? Can there ever be a benefit to prison?

**Baroness Corston:** I have not seen the benefit, but there might well be one. Earlier, I talked about the woman who had been told to switch off from her little girl because she was going to be in prison for a long time. A course of therapeutic treatment that she had been on made a big difference to her. When I asked her whether she liked herself, she told me that she did, but she was utterly astonished by my question because no one had ever asked her that before. She told me that she

had known for years what had been wrong in her life, but there had been nowhere for her to go to deal with it. We need to find somewhere for these women to go and deal with their situation before they kill someone or commit an offence that puts them in prison.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Even with your proposal of having smaller custodial units with better services, the women will be released at some point and will go back into their community. Is there anything that we can learn about what women need while they are in prison that we are not providing in a gender-sensitive manner?

**Baroness Corston:** Aside from emotional literacy and life skills, the big priority for most women coming out of prison is accommodation. However, that is a very thorny issue. I am no longer an elected politician, but I was one for 13 years and, like most of the people in the room, I know that there is huge pressure on local councils' waiting lists and that women who are released from prison simply do not come at the top. However, such matters are hugely important if we are to try to turn these women away from their chaotic lifestyles and help them to rebuild their lives.

The women often told me that they did not want to go back to their home area when they left prison because they would then be back among the very people whose company helped to put them in prison. However, you should try asking for accommodation in a local authority area where you have never lived—you would have no chance. Dealing with such community issues can be more difficult than dealing with prison issues. I discovered that the Department of Communities and Local Government found it hardest to address the issues in my report. Of course, my report was not just about women in prison, but about women who were at risk of offending, many of whom were already serving community sentences. I said that the department had such a big responsibility in this area because those women are still at large.

I took a masterclass in Yorkshire about a year ago with local authority chief executives. I told them that those women were going to come out of prison and would be antisocial neighbours and that MPs, councillors, MSPs and others would have people coming to their surgeries, saying, "There's this awful woman living next door." It seems to me that there is a lot that we could do about that.

11:00

**The Convener:** I said that this evidence session would last for about 50 minutes to an hour, but we have three more questions. Would it be all right if we continued for another 15 minutes?

**Baroness Corston:** Yes. As long as I can get to the airport by half past 12, that is fine.

**The Convener:** Okay. We will be brief.

**Bill Kidd (Glasgow) (SNP):** No pressure, then.

Thank you for your evidence so far. A lot of it has been about alternatives to custody, but avoiding women getting into that position in the first place would be the best route. As your report emphasises, many of the women are damaged and have mental illnesses, with many self-harming and persistently self-mutilating. Some of those problems may be caused by the women being imprisoned wrongly or unnecessarily, but many of them should be identified prior to the women having to go to prison. It is possible that the national health service and local authority social work departments are failing in that respect. Might the Government leave itself open to costly legal challenges under the gender equality legislation if those women do not receive interventions prior to being taken into custody?

**Baroness Corston:** I have not thought about the Government being open to challenge; I would need to think about the implications of that. It might be hard to pursue such an argument.

It is certainly true that a lot of health authorities have not necessarily engaged with the issue. It can be difficult for them to do so. Styal prison is in Cheshire. I do not want to categorise and impugn the people who live in that part of Cheshire, but it is evident that the local authorities there are much more used to dealing with older people who might need zimmer frames. A woman in Styal prison with a chaotic lifestyle and a personality disorder, who has a history of sexual abuse, self-harm and drug abuse, is not generally the type of person whom the health authority there deals with. In Holloway prison, by contrast, although such a person is not exactly the norm, the authorities are used to dealing with them. So, there is a challenge for health authorities.

Sometimes, the centres do the health authorities' work for them. The Asha centre in Worcester, for example, does wonderful work with women who are mentally ill, and I am pleased to say that the local primary care trust has begun to recognise that it needs to support the centre financially. So, local connections are being made.

If you wanted to speak to one person who could say to you, "This is how the women's centre model can work and this is the evidence," you should speak to Clare Hyde, who runs the Calderdale women's centre in Halifax. She is an entirely inspirational woman. Going there and talking to women whose lives have been turned around is truly jaw-dropping. She could give you chapter and verse far better than I could.

**Bill Kidd:** Thanks very much.

**Malcolm Chisholm:** You have said quite a lot about women's centres, which are central to your report, and you cited the example of a centre in Halifax. How developed are women's centres? Are there still just one or two centres in England, or are there quite a lot? In my earlier point, I was not entirely clear about the residential element. Chapter 8 of your report has a section about women's centres and then a section about residential women's centres. Are they the same thing? Do some women stay in the centres, or are you talking about different kinds of centre?

**Baroness Corston:** That can happen. It happens at the 218 centre, does it not? Some women are resident on the first floor and some women come into the centre on the ground floor and in the basement. I will not be prescriptive about it—I am saying that there are different categories of women prisoner, some of whom need an element of custodial disposal while others jolly well do not. A women's centre can provide for both but, by and large, I see women's centres as being for women who stay at home and attend the centre for assessment and to start to turn their lives around. It is a community disposal. The other women will receive a term of custodial imprisonment in an entirely different setting.

**Malcolm Chisholm:** Are there quite a lot of centres in England like the one in Halifax, or are they in their early stages?

**Baroness Corston:** There are quite a lot. Some work was done to show that there are about 127 such centres, but the levels of funding, expertise and services vary considerably. The centre in Halifax is certainly not the only one; it is just one of the biggest and best funded. It is independent, but it is well funded and it is key to the Yorkshire and Humberside together women programme, which has been amazingly successful. There are centres in Plymouth, London and Cardiff—there are a lot.

**Malcolm Chisholm:** I presume that they are quite a recent development. Notwithstanding what you have said about public opinion, it would be useful if some research had been done about the outcomes for women who had been to the centres. Do you have any sense of how those outcomes would compare with the outcomes for women who have come through the prison system?

**Baroness Corston:** Quite a lot of evaluations have been done of the effectiveness of the centres. I read one recently that was based on the provision in Yorkshire and Humberside, which, on the face of it, seems to have been very successful. For some centres, it is very early days. Regional offender managers generally did not think about women's imprisonment; women's prisons were a kind of add-on. I was told that the reason that the

women's prison service was disbanded in the United Kingdom was that women's prisons were separate and old-fashioned, with the governor being called "Ma'am". I was told that by someone in a prison where the governor was called "Sir", but I bit my tongue and did not point out that it amounted to the same thing.

Women's centres are not a new concept; the idea has been around for quite a long time. One of the people involved, Jenny Roberts, was the chief officer of probation for Hereford and Worcester. She realised that the women who were sent to prison came out in a worse state. If they had been cutting themselves a bit before they went in, they came out having cut themselves everywhere or having opened up old operation scars—among some of the unspeakable things that I would not want to mention. That is why the Asha centre was set up in Worcester. A lot of it has grown out of professional experience.

**The Convener:** Can you say a little more about your reference to supported accommodation—your recommendation on throughcare?

**Baroness Corston:** I must be honest. It is a thick report and I cannot remember everything that I said in it. That would be impossible. The report took nine months and it is thicker than some people expected it to be.

**The Convener:** My understanding—I could be wrong—is that you recommend accommodation once women have left prison and some support outside with things such as housing.

**Baroness Corston:** Well, yes. There are some places where women can go—hostels and so on—but they generally do not like going there. First, there is no women-only provision; secondly, they say that those places are full of drugs. That is another challenge. Not only does bail support need to be better—there is a real push for that now in England and Wales—but the quality of the move-on supported accommodation needs to be improved. There must be much more understanding of women's needs. Those places—approved premises, as they are called—exist, but they are not always brilliant.

**Elaine Smith:** Some housing associations specialise in providing support for specific groups. Housing associations could specialise in women who have come out of prison—they could provide temporary accommodation and perhaps also permanent accommodation, so that women could get their children back. That might be done without some of the issues that councillors face, which you spoke about earlier.

**Baroness Corston:** My report refers to Stonham housing association, which provides accommodation for women who have come out of prison, with a particular focus on Askham Grange

prison in Yorkshire. I met some of the prisoners there. Technically, they were still serving their sentences, but they were right at the end—they had moved on and were in separate accommodation. They were learning to live what we think of as an ordinary life and were finding out about all those things that we think are innate, but which we have learned. That sort of work happens in some places, but it is patchy.

**Hugh O'Donnell:** You recommend a review of the sentencing framework. Do you have a timeframe in mind for such a review, and what likely obstacles would there be to establishing a separate framework for women's sentencing?

**Baroness Corston:** That suggestion is predicated on the assumption that a conversation can be had with sentencers about the disparities in the sentencing of men and women. It is possible to have that argument. We have had a few debates in the House of Lords about my report and I am pleased that only one of them was initiated by me. Members of various parties or no party have raised the issue, and some of them are or have been judges. The Lord Chief Justice, in a lecture that he gave a couple of years ago, said things that were in some respects not very different from what I have said. For example, he talked about a woman who was involved in what is called a crime of passion. There was a dispute between two women over a man in a pub and one woman attacked her rival with a broken glass. She was sentenced to working in the pub washing and drying glasses for six months. That was a good idea, as it made a huge difference—it sorted her out and I think that the pub employed her afterwards. However, the Lord Chief Justice talked about how much trouble he got into with a certain tabloid newspaper for that.

There is some understanding, but we have a long way to go before we can have talks about a separate sentencing framework. We are certainly nowhere near that yet. I want people to understand that there are possible alternatives and that, first off, we should try to treat men and women on a more equal basis in sentencing and disposal.

**The Convener:** That completes our questioning. Would you like to make any closing remarks?

**Baroness Corston:** There is one point. The 218 centre is funded by the Scottish Executive, although I do not know what evaluation has been done of it. When I was there, I talked to some of the women and I saw what a huge difference it had made to them. I will give one example. There was a woman who was in her 40s and who had been in and out of Cornton Vale all her life. She had children, although I did not ask whether her children were with her anymore. During lunch, she was absolutely energised and bubbling over, and

she talked about a tree that they had made. I found that a bit puzzling, but when we were shown round the building, in one room there was a collage of a tree. On each of the branches of the tree, the women had been asked to hang what they thought they could be. That was all that she was talking about, but it was evident that the idea that she could do some of those things had opened up a whole area of thought, possibility and opportunity to her. It had never crossed her mind before. I remember thinking that that woman had taken the first few steps on what would be a long journey, but at least she had taken the first few steps, and she would never have done that without the 218 centre.

**The Convener:** Our next witnesses are Mary Beglan, who is the manager of the 218 centre, and Cath Smith, who is from Glasgow City Council's social work department and is very much involved with the centre. I am sure that they will be gratified to hear your positive comments about the centre. Thank you for making the journey to give evidence to the committee. All members have found the session fantastically worth while. It has brought to life a report that was already valuable to our inquiry. On behalf of the committee, I thank you again for giving evidence and I wish you a safe journey home.

**Baroness Corston:** It is a pleasure. I was told by somebody that my report was too passionate, but I do not apologise for that.

**The Convener:** We like passion in the Scottish Parliament.

I suspend the meeting briefly to allow for the changeover of witnesses.

11:16

*Meeting suspended.*

11:21

*On resuming—*

**The Convener:** The theme for our second panel of witnesses is whether the existing range of alternatives to custody is appropriate to deal with the specific profiles of female offenders and whether those alternatives are used effectively throughout Scotland. I am pleased to welcome Mary Beglan, manager of the 218 centre, and Cath Smith, principal officer with criminal justice social work services in Glasgow City Council. Some committee members had a very worthwhile visit to the 218 centre in March this year, which provided an excellent opportunity to meet staff and service users and to tour the facilities.

Does Glasgow City Council provide a gender-sensitive option for all female offenders who receive a community penalty?

**Cath Smith (Glasgow City Council):** That is a difficult one. There are no specific community penalties that are deemed appropriate for women but not for men. The range of community penalties from the courts in Glasgow is given to males and females. One example that might be helpful comes from the drug court. With a woman who is pretty high tariff and who requires an alternative to custody, there might be reservations about how the woman would comply, given the chaotic nature of her life. There is certainly no desire to set up such a woman to fail.

I was in the drug court a few weeks ago listening to some of the pre-reviews that the drug court has with our staff and the reviews of offenders who are on drug court orders. Two women were involved. Sentencing can be innovative. One of the women, who was not staying in the 218 centre but who attended it three days a week and was in another women's residential unit in Glasgow, was on a structured deferred sentence. We introduced that type of sentence into the drug court a couple of years ago, because not many women were coming before the court. We thought that structured deferred sentences could be used to find out whether women and men who were not ready for a drug court order could comply with the testing that would be part of it.

The woman had been on her structured deferred sentence for some time and was doing well. She was able to have a dialogue with the sentencer, which is powerful in the sentencing process. The sheriff asked how she was doing and what her plans were. She said that she felt that she was doing well and she hoped to enrol full time in further education. At the end she was told that she was doing well by reducing her methadone intake, and she was asked about the future and how she felt about a drug treatment and testing order, which had been discussed. The woman's view was that she was not ready for that. She thought that she was doing really well and wanted to consider it at her next review, which is what happened.

I am not sure that every sentencer has the time for such innovative practice, in which the needs of the individual are brought before them. Social work has to do the job of informing sentencers of the reality for these women in the community and of the fact that some of the structures of court are extremely difficult for them. Perhaps we have to test that motivation.

**The Convener:** Have the existing women-only work teams been independently evaluated?

**Cath Smith:** No. Our community supervisors, who supervise our offenders undertaking work in the community in Glasgow, have been taking industrial action since the beginning of January. We have had a women-only team in Glasgow,

which worked well, but we have not evaluated it. It is not just about having a women-only team; it is about ensuring that the women who access community services as an alternative to custody do not face barriers such as the hours involved, or lack of child care. All that is difficult for women. Sometimes, women will say that they have child care, but that can be chaotic. We as a council have to sort that out from the beginning.

**The Convener:** To what extent do councils throughout Scotland share best practice?

**Cath Smith:** They do not all have the practice that we have. Our women-only team has not been working very well for some time, because of what is going on in Glasgow. New standards for community service provide a huge opportunity for us to think outside the box a bit. We could have someone undertaking community service and doing work around employability. The challenge for community service throughout Scotland is to use the positive opportunity to pull our offenders who are doing unpaid work into the employment stream. At that stage, it might be about aspirations for employment, rather than about jobs. It might be about working with offenders and asking what they would like to do, where they would like to be in six months, a year or 10 years and how we can assist in that process. That goes back to the comment that Baroness Corston made about the tree collage. In Glasgow, we have experience of offenders who have secured jobs from the companies or charities where they have done unpaid work.

**The Convener:** As things stand, there is no mechanism for other councils to share good practice or to learn from what has happened in the 218 centre, for example.

**Cath Smith:** We are in the middle of doing the interviews for the research on 218; I hope that the evaluation will be completed within a couple of months. I am sure that Mary Beglan would agree that we expect a toolkit to come out of the evaluation of 218. It is not always about the building of 218-type centres, but how we work with women, taking a care manager approach.

If I am the supervising officer in a social work team in Glasgow, I have to be held accountable for identifying the needs of an individual woman offender—the criminogenic needs and the root causes of offending. We have to deal with the addiction, self-harm, mental health issues and homelessness and identify the appropriate resources. There is a way of doing that. I hope that the learning from the evaluation of 218 will be about how we work with women and how we ensure that we do not victimise them, which is not at all helpful. Our women tell us that that is not what they want; they want to be given



opportunities at the times when they are ready to change.

**The Convener:** I direct my next question to Mary Beglan. When you work with female offenders who are undertaking community penalties, can you take into account their individual circumstances? Cath Smith has covered that to an extent.

11:30

**Mary Beglan (218 Centre):** I think that we do. What we do at the 218 centre is not magic, but something magical can happen for the individual woman. We can work on the premise of addressing needs, while not forgetting the deeds that we also need to address, given that the women who come to 218 have all offended in the community. We are clear that part of what we must do is to deal with that aspect of the women's lives. To do that, we sometimes need to address more basic individual needs.

We talk to the women frequently, and people who visit the service get the opportunity to talk to them. The women tell us that 218 is not an easy option. Many of them have been in custody in Cornton Vale, which is an easier option for them, particularly if they are serving a short-term sentence. Their view is that they can go to Cornton Vale, put their head down, do their sentence and come out, with nothing having changed for them. The women who come to 218 report that, as well as the tight structure of our day—particularly in the residential setting, which has a structure from 8 o'clock in the morning to 10 o'clock at night—something is asked of them at all times; sometimes it is as simple as just staying there. Some women come on a bail order from the courts, but we have an open door that allows the women to walk out the door. However, each day, they choose to stay, which is a positive choice that they make for themselves. It is empowering for the women that they make those choices and that we do not enforce their stay in, or involvement with, 218.

We do individual assessments with the women when they come in. We look at their needs regarding housing, their children or their drug and alcohol addiction, and we prioritise what comes first. An individual care package is made up for each woman. When we talk to the women, they tell us that most of what we do challenges not only their self-belief, but some of the actions that they have taken in their lives.

**Malcolm Chisholm:** I will move on to the issue of community sentences, or community payback orders, as they are called in the bill that we will consider in the Parliament soon. In your experience, what factors are most likely to lead to a female offender completing or failing to complete

a community penalty? Will the proposed legislative changes be more successful in taking into account the particular characteristics of female offenders?

**Cath Smith:** In many ways, the issues are the same for male and female offenders in terms of their inability to do, or lack of commitment to, community sentences. The consistent, big issues for offenders in Glasgow are homelessness and addiction. A huge number of women in Glasgow who are involved with probation and the courts have co-existing addiction issues. What we require for any community sentence are services at a local level that will tackle the root causes, which often means addressing accommodation problems and trying to find something that is safe and secure. Every offender, but especially a woman, will say that, in order to focus on their offending behaviour and related issues, they need to be in a safe environment. Women talk a lot about feeling safe. The 218 centre is a good example of a place where women feel safe, but it is not the only example: women can feel safe in a residential setting or in their own home.

We need to consider not only what social work services and councils can do but what our colleagues in health, education and the voluntary sector can do. We need to make demands at a local level if, for example, a woman needs access to psychological services because of trauma that she has experienced. There is a unique situation in Glasgow of women who are involved in street prostitution who seem to become very damaged when they get involved in that activity, so that it can sometimes take a number of years for them to deal with the trauma.

The challenge for the new bill is to tailor the community penalty to the individual, while holding them accountable. It is encouraging that the new draft national standards for social work services in the criminal justice system talk much more about community integration. Those services should be available locally, and they do not always have to be residential. There needs to be a structure—which the new community sentences can provide—in which the orders are quite specific. I would expect that a worker who is carrying out a social inquiry report on a woman for the court should be clear in informing the sentencer about what the root causes are and how those will be dealt with in order to reduce reoffending.

Employability is important: Glasgow has bought into that in a big way, and has made demands on workers by telling them that they need to talk about employability in a wider sense at the first interface with the service user or the offender, and that they need to raise the woman's aspirations and talk to her about where she wants to be in the future.

I am not sure whether that answers your question.

**Mary Beglan:** Sometimes we forget that, by the time women arrive at 218, their lives are already chaotic and difficult, and they often need help to manage even a small aspect of any part of their lives. However, the same women who may at that time appear to be vulnerable are actually very resourceful.

I have brought two case studies with me. In preparing for the meeting, I asked two women to tell me their life story. Interestingly, both women had previous lives in which they worked, held down jobs and had ambitions. Their lives changed due to different circumstances. One of the women had a house and a husband and child, but she experienced postnatal depression, which she could not cope with. She got in with the wrong kind of company and started taking class A drugs, and her life got out of control. She has the resources—as she has proved before—to cope with different aspects of life. The 218 centre is, at this point, acting as a vehicle to enable her to work on certain aspects of her life. She is currently—to pick up on the issue of employability to which Cath Smith referred—re-engaging with college, and is about to complete a hairdressing course that she started during the previous stage of her life, before things got bad.

Sometimes we just have to tap into the resources that women have. Even in the most chaotic periods of their life, they are able to manage certain things—although perhaps not in the way in which you or I might do—and we need to encourage them to use those resources.

**Malcolm Chisholm:** I am sorry that I could not come on the visit to the 218 centre.

I have another question for Mary Beglan. The idea of women's centres was central to what Baroness Corston told us in her evidence. Is the centre in Glasgow similar to the women's centre model that she was talking about? I do not know whether you were in the room to hear that part of her evidence.

**Mary Beglan:** Sorry, we were not in the room at that point.

**Malcolm Chisholm:** It was an important part of her evidence, so I am interested to know whether that model already exists in effect, or whether there are differences between your approach and hers. We can probably pursue that question in other ways.

My other question is on the theme of legislation. To what extent has the gender equality duty had an influence on the issues that we are talking about, particularly in relation to provision for female offenders? Has the duty been influential, or

has the provision been going on irrespective of the duty?

**Cath Smith:** The equalities agenda is certainly a high priority for Glasgow City Council. The challenge is to bring that agenda into practice and integrate it much more, with regard to the awareness of workers at the coal face who work directly with women. That is always an issue; I managed the prostitution services in Glasgow—Routes Out of Prostitution and Base 75—for a number of years, and it was always a challenge to mainstream the equalities agenda and ensure that everyone understood what it was about.

There are difficulties for women in their recovery and reintegration into society. The word “shame” is used frequently to describe how those women feel. Mary Beglan and I have talked a great deal about what the behaviour of those women has meant for their families and their children, and about how they are able to return to their past and their communities and face that. It is important to understand that that shame is significant for them, and workers have to take that on board.

**Elaine Smith:** Further to what Malcolm Chisholm said, Baroness Corston was very complimentary about the 218 centre.

I will be interested in the outcome of the evaluation. Cath Smith said that the work is not necessarily about the building, but the building is the focus for the services. It allows women to physically make the choice to come and stay. I accept that the services could be delivered in the community in other ways—that might be mentioned in the evaluation—but I think that the committee would like to know whether there is justification for another 218 centre elsewhere in Scotland.

**Cath Smith:** I am sure that we could easily justify another 218 centre anywhere. I was fortunate to be involved from the very beginning, before we even had the building, when the centre was nothing more than some ideas that came from the Scottish Executive's report “Women Offenders—A Safer Way” and the number of women in Cornton Vale who were self-harming. The aim was to create a safe haven that would address offending behaviour, make a difference to women's lives and allow them to reintegrate into their communities.

In Glasgow, we are fortunate to have a homelessness partnership that has dealt very well with accommodation issues. There are other options for women, who need not necessarily go into residential rehab but can go to other small, residential units that are run by the voluntary sector. The 218 centre is not the only place women can go. There will always be women who do not require or want to go into the 218 centre but

choose to stay in their communities. Mary Beglan has figures on the significant number of women who came through the service last year.

**Mary Beglan:** Last year, we had 428 referrals and we worked with 147 women. We are concerned that a high number of women do not engage with us. With Glasgow City Council, we did a wee bit of research—it was very small—on women who were referred continually but did not engage. We discovered that they were not engaging with any service, including the probation service. They were the least likely to be connected to any other worker or service. It made a small difference if a worker was able to accompany them to the service. One or two of the women attended an appointment for an initial assessment, but they were accompanied by a worker. These are women who lead chaotic lives.

I will be interested to read the evaluation that is about to take place. Aspects of the 218 centre can be replicated throughout the country. We do not necessarily need a certain number of buildings in towns throughout Scotland, but there are aspects that we can duplicate. That is probably happening already. We are constantly opening our doors to enable people from throughout the country and beyond it to come and share the practice and take bits away with them.

**Elaine Smith:** Have other local authorities taken an interest in the 218 centre?

**Mary Beglan:** Edinburgh has been interested, and we have had a lot of interest from Belfast and Dublin. I have been at the centre for about two years, and in that time one or two local authorities have shown an interest and come along.

**Elaine Smith:** What you said about different ways of delivering services is right, but I think that physical buildings and staff are needed in order to do community outreach and give people choices.

**Cath Smith:** That is a valid point. Women say that they feel safe at the 218 centre. When they come through the door, most of them are in a chaotic state and they feel scared, but they say that the staff at the centre treat them with a lot of respect. They get given basic things in the centre, such as toiletries, slippers—very cheap ones—and pyjamas, because those are the sort of things that are important for someone to have when they go into a unit after being homeless and having nothing. Women are good at helping each other, and the centre encourages and supports the process of women talking to each other and assisting each other to problem solve, along with other staff members.

11:45

**Elaine Smith:** At a previous committee meeting, Sue Brookes said:

“If centres were not limited to offenders but were community resources more generally, we might reduce the stigma that is associated with women approaching and accessing services.”—[*Official Report, Equal Opportunities Committee*, 5 May 2009; c 1002.]

Do you think that there are imaginative ways of providing services to those who might be at risk of offending?

**Cath Smith:** Yes. We have talked for years about women who are at risk of becoming involved in offending behaviour. Children and families staff in all councils say that they could quite accurately predict which individuals might well become offenders, which is quite concerning.

The other challenge for the community justice service in Glasgow involves young people in transition between the children’s hearings system and the criminal justice system. We need to focus on those people, who are at an early stage of offending and whose offending behaviour is pretty low level, to ensure that we can put in place resources that will, hopefully, divert them.

Glasgow has just started a new structured deferred sentence pilot—I think that we are the last council to do so. One key group that it is involved with is young people in transition—male and female—and part of the work is being done by Glasgow community safety services, as they have a lot more experience of working with young people than other relevant bodies do, and the police are feeding in a lot of good intelligence.

The other key group that the pilot is involved with is women. The emphasis is on stopping low-level offending in its tracks before that behaviour escalates, the women’s drug habit escalates and they become involved in abusive relationships.

**Bill Kidd:** There has been growing criticism of short-term sentences as a means of reducing reoffending. However, the number of women who are remanded in custody has doubled in the past 10 years or so. Why has the female prison population continued to rise in that period?

**Cath Smith:** Bail supervision is an important issue in that regard. We always hoped that sentencers would use 218 as an alternative to remanding women in custody.

When sheriffs and stipendiary magistrates visit the centre and talk directly to the women, that can have an impact on the sheriffs’ and magistrates’ thinking. It can also have an impact on the women, as they can talk to the people in authority who have sentenced them and can explain why they do what they do and why they are in these situations. Mary and I are talking about arranging another

such visit because they are useful. Following such visits, there seems to be an increase in bail being used constructively as opposed to women being remanded. It is important that there should be regular awareness-raising contact both with 218 and with other services. In Glasgow, my head of service meets with the sheriff principal regularly in order to raise awareness.

Before the structured deferred sentence pilot became operational, we held a half-hour lunch time briefing that was attended by 12 sheriffs. At that event, I asked whether those sheriffs would consider having reviews in court because of powerful evidence from the drug court. Some of them were openly uncomfortable about that, saying that it was not really what they had been trained in. I could absolutely take that on board.

The dialogue between the sentencers and people such as the staff who produce reports and, more important, those who work in Glasgow sheriff court's bail team is useful with regard to finding more imaginative ways of using supervised bail. Through supervised bail, we can offer quite a lot of support to men and women, but it is not being used as often as it should be.

**Mary Beglan:** Sheriffs who have visited the service have said that they are reluctant to remand women but that, realistically, they often come to a point at which they must, because the women have not complied with orders or instructions from the court.

I do not know, therefore, whether the increase in the figures that you referred to is to do with an increase in criminality on the part of women or whether it involves a lack of understanding of some of the issues that we have spoken about, such as the chaotic nature of some women's lives and the inability that some of them have to follow community structures until other needs have been attended to.

**Bill Kidd:** The submission from the Cornton Vale over-21s visiting committee states:

"We have even heard a sheriff state openly and unselfconsciously, at a criminal justice conference, that when acting as a temporary sheriff in a rural area, he had not acquainted himself with the alternatives available, before presiding over the court!"

Do you think that, in order to become a sheriff, people should avail themselves or be availed of knowledge of the alternatives?

**Cath Smith:** Yes. I meet the drug court sheriffs every month. It is clear that that court has a good understanding of resources and how to use them and will quite rightly make demands on the council for more of one thing or another. The court has a good professional relationship with social work staff.

No one who sits on the bench—whether a stipendiary magistrate or a sheriff—should pass sentence without understanding what has brought the person before them to court. If the root causes—I hate to have to use that phrase again—of the offending behaviour are clear, the sentencing process should take into account how to cease the offending behaviour or, certainly, reduce it in some way. That cannot be done without taking a much broader view of the individual who has come to court.

**Mary Beglan:** In a previous job, I worked in the youth courts in Hamilton. Their strength derived not only from the fact that the small group of sheriffs were informed about alternatives such as the project that I was involved with but from the fact that the process allowed for dialogue. Around the time when a sheriff was due to pass sentence, he would speak to us about what was going on as well as reading the report, and might even suspend proceedings in order to get further information. That had an impact on the young people who appeared at the court, as did the immediacy of appearing at court and having regular reviews. A model similar to that would be beneficial to some of the women with whom we are dealing.

**Bill Kidd:** It will be interesting to raise your points with the sentencers.

**The Convener:** Yes, that is very helpful.

**Hugh O'Donnell:** In an ideal world in which an increasing number of sentencers are aware of the disposals and the benefits of 218 and alternative sentences, which require supervision, what happens to your service? Can you cope with an exponential increase in numbers? You mentioned quite a high number of referrals. What would the impact be? To use the vernacular, would it be the squeaky wheel that got the oil?

**Mary Beglan:** I would like to be in the position to find out. As we look forward to the review of 218, one of my questions is about the women whom we do not reach, whom we talked about earlier: who is working with them and how can we reach them? I would like the centre to be stretched to capacity and to know that we are targeting the most vulnerable women and those who are most likely to take advantage of the service. An issue that we have not talked about is the women's own motivation. In our experience, without personal motivation, all the resources in the world will not make it work.

It is hard to say what we would do, but I would like the 218 centre to be completely stretched and to have a waiting list. I would also like to know that sentences were operating in a way that meant that more and more women were coming to 218. We work in partnership with the health teams and with

Glasgow City Council, and we continue to talk about partnership working and group work. There are opportunities for us to work in a more imaginative way if we are forced to do so.

**Cath Smith:** As Mary Beglan says, it would be great if a much larger number of women were in the community instead of being remanded in Cornton Vale. That is a huge challenge for us. Sentencers will say that they have seen the women in court five, 10 or 15 times and have tried probation or that they have issued warrants because the women have failed to turn up at court. There comes a time when they have to ask what else is out there. That is when we must be quite powerful.

Not all the women in the criminal justice system have complex needs. The majority do, but we sometimes hide behind the word “complex”. Lots of the women who come to us will not deal with their past abuse and trauma for years—some will never do that. However, they will engage with us to put some structure in their lives, begin to think about themselves and begin to regain some self-respect. That is a major feature of our work with women. When they come to court, they are mostly ashamed and embarrassed about it. If we could just deal with the remand situation, that would change things significantly. If we could manage to bail just one woman—whether to 218 or on bail supervision—instead of remanding her at Cornton Vale, that would be a huge achievement.

Most of our women would tell you that remanding a woman achieves very little. It is not that they do not feel relatively safe in Cornton Vale; they do, but all that they do is get their heads down, survive and come back out again. We have been meeting Cornton Vale to get our heads round how we can assist women who are released on home detention curfew but who may not have an address. If they do not have an address, it is sometimes hard to get them released. Perhaps the 218 centre could be used by those women as well as by women who are serving longer sentences and do not have an address to go to during home leave. We must close that circle with the prison population and have a much better working relationship with Cornton Vale, although that relationship is currently very good.

If we could solve the remand situation, that would be wonderful. We all know that the majority of women who are held on remand do not present a risk to society in terms of community safety. It is about getting the resources and, more important, making sentencers aware of the issues and the disposal options that exist for women in the community.

**Mary Beglan:** I should add that the average occupancy rate for our residential unit has been

just over 90 per cent for the past 18 months, so we are full enough just now.

12:00

**Willie Coffey:** Let us turn briefly to female prisoners with mental health problems. We know that, at the social inquiry stage, social workers will include details of whether an offender has mental health issues. Nevertheless, sentencers still seem to impose custodial sentences on women who obviously have mental health difficulties. Why is that happening?

If we proceed down the route of community payback orders, will that place a greater burden on community mental health services, which will have to deal with female offenders who have mental health issues? How should we try to make the system work if that is the direction in which we proceed?

**Cath Smith:** In Glasgow, we are fortunate to have the Glasgow addiction service. In each community health and care partnership—our new huge teams in Glasgow—there is a community addiction team. Through the community addiction team, there is access to psychological and mental health services as well as community psychiatric nurses. Through our partnership working with the national health service and the Glasgow addiction service, women can access those services locally.

The issue of mental health is a real challenge for us. However, the vulnerable adults procedure may offer us a real opportunity, as a system is now in place to deal with women with mental health issues. We must try to raise awareness of those women and bring them into that forum. We have a similar forum for multi-agency public protection arrangements, but the vulnerable adults procedure is about helping people to live independently with appropriate supports. At the social inquiry stage, it is extremely difficult for social workers to assess mental health. In my view, if a social worker is unsure or needs a specialist assessment—a psychological assessment or a CPN assessment—they should ask the court for an extension to give them another three weeks to get that. That is best practice.

The mental health problems suffered by women in Cornton Vale range from depression to bipolar disorder. For some women who present as having mental health problems, the issue is their anger and aggression. It is easy to forget that women's anger is often legitimate—it is anger about the past, about what has happened to them, about where they are and about themselves. For a lot of women, that anger does not go away for many years, and many women who are angry in that way present at general practitioners' surgeries, at hospitals and at social work offices as being just

women who are aggressive, who will not listen and who will not co-operate, although the real issue is how they are dealing with what has happened to them in the past. It is relatively complex.

We had experience of that with a woman recently. We are carrying out work on employability with the Marriott hotel in Glasgow, which delivers what we call a pre-employability programme for women offenders. There were 18 women on the most recent programme. The programme lasts for four days and involves the equal access partnership, us, employability services and the Marriott. One of the women who finished the course has now got a job at the Marriott. She has been there for seven months and loves it. We made a DVD of her story, as she was happy for us to do so. She drank for 10 years and was in a very abusive relationship. She did not turn up for her first appointment at the Marriott to talk about her job, so the Marriott phoned her to ask why she had not arrived. She explained that she had nothing to wear and was embarrassed—she wore tracksuits. Through the Benefits Agency, the hotel managed to get her some work clothes. That was the first barrier that was challenged.

That woman is now doing very well, although the Marriott hotel says on the DVD that she still comes across as quite angry. However, she has managed to get out of her abusive relationship, she has moved into her own accommodation in the city centre and she has bought Christmas presents for the first time in her life. In the past, some people would have said that that woman had mental health problems, and she would perhaps have been labelled as having a personality disorder. That still happens, and the label can stay with women for many years. However, the label “personality disorder” tells us that there is no diagnosis of a mental health problem but that the way in which a woman presents or communicates is different, difficult or challenging. For most of our women, the issue is their anger and how they are dealing with their past.

**Willie Coffey:** That is very interesting. I would not mind hearing Mary Beglan's thoughts on the wider implications for community mental health services of their having to deal with women who do not get a custodial sentence.

**Mary Beglan:** We are fortunate in 218 in that we have a full mental health team in-house, which includes weekly access to a psychiatrist, a full-time psychologist and four mental health nurses, who are employed through the Glasgow addiction service. All our women have access to all those services.

With my unqualified eye, I am aware that some women present with mental health problems. However, when they are given a proper

assessment, we can get beyond that diagnosis and identify other factors, such as anger, to which Cath Smith referred. One of the women whose record I looked at before coming here today had a year's probation order prior to coming to 218 and was not far away from a custodial sentence. Her offences were all ones of self-harm and attempted suicide: no other victim was involved in that offending. Alcohol was a big feature in her life, and all her offences were related to alcohol. When she came to 218, we were able to identify that what lay beyond or underneath all that was anger. The woman has participated in anger management and is just coming to the end of a six-month stay in 218. With reference to employability, she has enrolled on a course in order to finish her higher national certificate in social care.

However, we have also had a number of women with significant mental health problems with whom it is difficult to work in 218, because their mental health comes before any other work that we can do. It is important that we have the assistance of psychiatric services to stabilise those women with medication, therapy or whatever, before we begin to look at their offending.

There is perhaps a concern that women are sometimes sent to Cornton Vale for their own safety simply because their behaviour is so extreme. I call to mind another woman with whom we worked in 218 who has been in and out of custody and continually tries to take her own life. The sheriffs have to deal with that at some point. The mental health sector is sometimes reluctant to take on some of the more complex women—perhaps it would be better to say that there is a lack of resources. For some women, there is no place to go, but they basically need to be detained and kept safe. That is not an answer in this day and age, but there is a shortage of appropriate services for people with acute mental health problems and offending behaviour.

**Marlyn Glen:** The committee inquiry's remit is about how much prison helps to prevent women from reoffending. I am glad to hear that people are in discussion with Cornton Vale in that regard. There is a growing awareness among everybody that connections need to be made with services while people are still in prison. What changes to prison would improve reoffending rates?

**Cath Smith:** The most frustrating aspect for community social workers is the number of times that women are remanded to prison, because they can achieve almost nothing with women in that situation. Those remands interrupt women's often quite good progress. Some women tell us that by the time they get back to Glasgow after leaving Cornton Vale, they have already negotiated where they will get their fix and thought about stealing to get enough money to buy their drugs.

Years ago, Turning Point Scotland used to provide a service called liberation day lifts. Funding for the transport involved came from businesses in Glasgow. Staff would go to Cornton Vale when the women were released and take them to Glasgow. We would take homeless women to the Benefits Agency and to homeless accommodation; we would then follow up with them the next day. It was pragmatic and important work. Unfortunately, we do not have the resources to provide that service at present.

Nevertheless, it is important to maintain the links between the prisoner on a short-term sentence and their community social worker, whoever that may be—it may be an addiction worker, a children and families worker or a supervising officer. We did some work around the prostitution agenda when we got some moneys from a voluntary organisation for a six-month pilot. We placed a worker in Cornton Vale to raise awareness of prostitution issues in Glasgow and to start some work around the interface between the community and the custodial setting. However, we did not have long enough to come to any significant judgment about how effective that pilot was.

The other issue for me is the need to develop women's programmes and deliver them in prison. Currently, we have only the constructs programme, which is the only accredited male programme for criminal justice in Scotland. It is a very good programme, which we are delivering in the community—Glasgow currently has five programmes running. The programme is also delivered in male prisons. A male prisoner can do one to three sessions in prison and then, if he comes out into the community, he can complete the other sessions in the community. We need something similar for women. Constructs is not a women's programme, although I understand that Cornton Vale has run it. We must have something similar for women that makes sense to them when there is that break—whether short or long—between being in the community and being in the custodial setting, so that we can continue that work with them.

I am not sure whether that helps you.

**Marlyn Glen:** It does. I am interested in what you said about prostitution. We asked about that, but it is seemingly not dealt with in Cornton Vale. I can understand that, given the lack of resources, but there is a cost to society of not addressing such issues.

My other question is about data. Given the nature of offenders' lives, I am interested in the concept that you mentioned of legitimate anger. It is difficult to establish a measure of success for any criminal justice intervention. The committee was told that the difficulty is in tracking data on prisoners across the boundaries from prison into

communities and, I presume, back again. Is it possible to produce definitive evidence to show whether community disposals or prison sentences are more effective in reducing the rate of reoffending?

**Cath Smith:** There is a way of doing it, certainly. Recently, the police have given data to the drug court—the police sit on the management group with the drug court sheriffs and me. They were able to pull out information for the drug court about levels of reoffending. Not a lot of women were involved, but the police were able to extract the data on women. I am not sure whether I remember correctly, but the reoffending rate among women was something like minus 62 per cent.

The Scottish Government published some drug court data, according to which the reoffending rates were pretty high. However, when we looked at the information that the police in Glasgow provided for us, which was based on court data on offences that occurred from the introduction of the new drug treatment and testing order, we managed to track those offenders two years after their order. We did not take on board cases that were pending and which resulted in an order, as they did not give a true picture of reoffending during that time. That is what we must do for all our statutory orders—we must have that data collection built in from day one.

Our client information system can tell us quite a lot about our basic key performance indicators—first appointments, reviews and all that. However, getting the qualitative information is the real challenge for us. At the 218 centre, we have been trying to back up a lot of our information with case studies and actual examples of where women are. We conducted some interviews with women—Beth McMasters, who worked for me, did them with Mary Beglan—which were very interesting. A relatively small group of about six women was involved, but the interviews told us a lot about the quality of the service and their view of the service and what had to be changed. If you had the hard data about reoffending and could identify at which stage some part of the intervention worked and what it was, that would be useful.

12:15

**Mary Beglan:** At 218, a constant challenge is how we can know whether we are successful and, indeed, what success is. As a voluntary agency, although we work closely in partnership with Glasgow City Council, we have difficulty tracking data, as we do not have access to a lot of systems. However, we have our own measurements in the service. For example, one of the tools that we use is called the Christo tool, which has 10 components, including social function, general health, psychology, occupation,

criminal involvement, drug and alcohol use, compliance and working relationships. We give the women a score from 1 to 2 when they first come in and every six weeks after that. That helps us to show that there has been improvement in all areas over a period of time. We can do that on an individual basis, but we have also done it collectively in order to come up with a score for the service.

Interestingly, the latest information that we pulled out before coming here shows that the area with the greatest improvement is occupation. That is not about people getting jobs; it is about engaging women in the possibilities, developing social skills, getting people on information technology courses and so on. We run some day service groups around money matters, creativity, IT skills and creating a curriculum vitae. All of that is designed to ensure that, at some point in the future, the women can be gainfully employed in an area of their choosing.

We recently introduced psychological measurements, which we are unable to report on just now. I hope that, through the evaluation process, we will get constructive feedback on what else we need to measure.

One of the most successful aspects of our work is our emphasis on the women's stories and their ability to identify for themselves what works. The two women I spoke to before coming here made it clear that accountability, structure and expectation are important. If we put those aspects in place, women will rise to that challenge. Their own hard work is the most important factor, of course. They do most of the work; we just facilitate it.

It is important to remember that, while people are looking for employment or training opportunities, they are not offending. In the history of 218, all our women have had an addiction issue and all their offending has been related to their addiction. Once some of those needs are met, the offending ceases. Although we do direct work on offending, such as victim awareness work, that goes hand-in-hand with work on their addiction issues. Women are not offending for the thrill of offending or for some of the reasons that I have come across in my experience of working with male offenders.

**Marlyn Glen:** It is good to hear positive feedback on aspects of your work that are underpinned with data. To what extent is that data shared with other local authorities?

**Cath Smith:** Generally, it is not widely shared with other local authorities. Information from the drug court is shared with the Scottish Government, however. I think that all local authorities will have their own data systems, some of which will be like Glasgow's.

There are a number of criminal justice champion groups across Scotland. The one on female offenders provides us with a good opportunity to talk about the profile of women in Glasgow and the challenges that we face, and to think about whether those are different from the challenges in other areas, such as Ayrshire.

Other champion groups, such as the one on high-risk offenders and the one on throughcare, also provide opportunities for practitioners and managers to share that information at that level.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** A local authority can touch on an offender's behaviour in a variety of ways, through education, social work or whatever. Has Glasgow City Council considered and evaluated its spending to determine whether it is having as much impact as it can on offending? Are we using resources as effectively as possible? If not, do we need to target the money at different areas?

**Cath Smith:** Our budget is clear about what is core and non-core spend. For the non-core element, Glasgow City Council commissions a number of services, including residential and alcohol services. We must update the allocation of core and non-core spend every year and consider how we distribute our resources across the city in terms of staffing. The core funding covers staffing levels in each community health and care partnership in Glasgow, but how we use the non-core funding is important.

Glasgow has got it right. The head of service in Glasgow has been in post for about three years. He came to Glasgow from a much smaller local authority and one of his biggest challenges was having a clear head and being able to say, "These are the resources that the Scottish Government gives us. This is the new structure in Glasgow"—there is always a new structure in Glasgow—"but how do we make it work for criminal justice?"

We have just implemented another new structure in Glasgow that we are using effectively. Commissioning is part of my agenda in my current post, so I hold services to account for what is and is not effective and consider whether anything needs to be changed. For example, over the years, we have looked at certain voluntary sector services and said that, because what they were doing was five or 10 years out of date, we had to consider how we wanted to use them in the future.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** A significant number of females who are at risk of offending share the same background as offenders. You talked about how you can spot the people you will see two to five years down the line. What lessons can be learned from people who share the same background as offenders but do not go on to offend? Are there areas in the interventions in their



lives that we need to pick up on, learn from and perhaps expand?

**Cath Smith:** Yes—you are right. However, I am not sure that a study has been done on that. It would be quite a challenge to take two young women with similar backgrounds—perhaps both were in the care of the local authority or experienced abuse or homelessness—and consider whether one young woman had taken a different route from that taken by the other. We have a young women's project in Glasgow that might be a good place for me to visit—or contact again—in considering that question. We have some contact with the project, but I am not sure that we have done a study that would show which women survived and did very well, which women did not do well, and what made the difference.

**Mary Beglan:** On that point, some of our women have siblings who have the same family experience but who have taken other routes. The difference is addiction: somebody has chosen or fallen into a pattern of addiction. It is difficult for families to understand that. We work with women in their 40s whose sisters are relatively successful—in relationships and work and financially—but who have this black sheep in the family. The women ask themselves, "Why did this happen to me?" The only thread that seems to be different is that addiction has featured in their lives.

**The Convener:** Thank you. That completes our questions. Is there anything else that the witnesses would like to say by way of summing up?

**Cath Smith:** No. We are fine. I am sure that we have said more than enough. I do not want to prolong it for you, so thank you for inviting us.

**The Convener:** Not at all.

**Mary Beglan:** If other members would find a visit to 218 helpful, they are always welcome.

**The Convener:** Thank you. I know that the members who went to 218 got an awful lot out of that. We have all got a tremendous amount out of your evidence, so thank you very much for appearing before the committee.

As agreed at the start of the meeting, we move into private session for our final two agenda items.

12:24

*Meeting continued in private until 13:07.*



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