

JUSTICE 1 COMMITTEE

Tuesday 3 December 2002
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

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JUSTICE 1 COMMITTEE

41st Meeting 2002, Session 1

CONVENER

*Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Ms Wendy Alexander (Paisley North) (Lab)

*Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con)

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD)

Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)

*Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con)

Kate Maclean (Dundee West) (Lab)

Mrs Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD)

Kay Ullrich (West of Scotland) (SNP)

*attended

WITNESSES

Michael Crossan (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland)

Clive Fairweather

Dr Nancy Loucks

Rod MacCowan (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Alison Taylor

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Claire Menzies Smith

ASSISTANT CLERK

Jenny Goldsmith

LOCATION

Committee Room 3

Scottish Parliament

Justice 1 Committee

Tuesday 3 December 2002

(Afternoon)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 15:32*]

Item in Private

The Convener (Christine Grahame): I convene the 41st meeting this year of the Justice 1 Committee. I seek the committee's agreement to take item 2 in private. The item concerns lines of questioning for this afternoon's witnesses, who will give evidence on prisons and specifically on Her Majesty's inspectorate of prisons' report on Cornton Vale. Taking the item in private will enable us to consider a detailed approach to questioning. Do members agree to take the item in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

15:33

Meeting continued in private.

15:37

Meeting continued in public.

Convener's Report

The Convener: I reconvene the meeting with a request to members, witnesses and members of the public to turn off their mobile phones and pagers. We have received apologies from Wendy Alexander, who is attending a meeting in London in connection with the Scottish Parliament and Business Exchange programme; Donald Gorrie, who is attending the Justice 2 Committee to support his amendment to the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill; and Paul Martin, who has constituency engagements. Moreover, Michael Matheson has to leave at 4 pm to attend another engagement. We usually start much earlier than this. This meeting would obviously win a popularity contest. I should point out to members that we will still be quorate, because I am not going to the conveners liaison group meeting.

As for this agenda item, I have nothing to report, so Mr Matheson will have nothing to question me about.

Michael Matheson (Central Scotland) (SNP): May I raise an issue under this item?

The Convener: Certainly.

Michael Matheson: I understand that the committee has received correspondence from a number of organisations, including Scottish Women's Aid and the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on men's violence against women and children, expressing concerns about the proposed changes to the civil legal aid system. The committee has acknowledged the correspondence. However, when the organisations contacted me, I was not aware that we had received any.

The Convener: Under next week's agenda, we will consider a paper on how to develop the legal aid inquiry and we will deal with the correspondence then. A lot of correspondence that comes to me as convener goes to the clerks and I never answer in my own capacity. Generally, we are content to let you see the answers that are sent out on the committee's behalf, but there is a huge volume of correspondence.

Michael Matheson: I just want to be able to say, "Yes, the committee will be looking at that."

The Convener: Absolutely. It is the volume of correspondence that causes the time delay. The clerks are extremely hard working, as you know.

Subordinate Legislation

Civil Legal Aid (Scotland) Regulations 2002 (SSI 2002/494)

The Convener: Item 4 concerns subordinate legislation. I refer the committee to paper J1/02/41/3, to which a copy of the regulations is attached. I remind members that, at our last meeting, we agreed to write to the Scottish Executive to seek clarification on regulation 11, to which the Subordinate Legislation Committee had drawn our attention in relation to European convention on human rights compatibility. The minister has responded by proposing that he amend the regulations to reflect the committee's concern. Therefore, it is one for the Subordinate Legislation Committee and nil for the minister. Is the committee content to agree to the minister's proposal and to note the regulations?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Prisons

The Convener: I move on, at breakneck speed, to item 5 on the agenda, which is about prisons. I welcome Clive Fairweather to the committee, not for the first, but possibly for the last, time. Before we start, Mr Fairweather, I thank you again for your diligence and performance as Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons for Scotland, for which committee members are all indebted to you. You have been independent minded. You have not always agreed with the committee—why should you?—but we have always felt that your evidence and reports have been robust and determined, particularly in relation to your commitment to women in prisons, a subject that we will address in our questions today.

I also welcome Rod MacCowan, the deputy chief inspector, Michael Crossan, who is also from the prisons inspectorate, and Dr Nancy Loucks, who is an independent criminologist.

I refer members to the report on the intermediate inspection of Cornton Vale of 9 and 10 September. Before I kick off, I must say that the report is utterly depressing for those of us who have been members of the Parliament's justice committees for nearly four years. It tastes and smells as if there has been little progress, especially in certain matters. In answering the questions, I invite the witnesses to comment on that. If progress has been made in certain areas, it has been minuscule. The report makes depressing reading.

In its 1998 review "Women Offenders – A Safer Way", the Scottish Executive stated:

"the number of women offenders who are sent to prison could and should be reduced".

Cornton Vale is still overcrowded, with an average prison population of 261. That was the figure in September 2002. I do not know what the figure is today, although you might be able to tell me.

Michael Crossan (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland): On Friday it was 225.

The Convener: That is with the others being moved, of course. Fifty were moved.

Michael Crossan: That is correct. On Friday there were 19 females in Greenock prison.

Clive Fairweather: Not 50.

The Convener: Were only 19 women moved?

Michael Crossan: Yes.

The Convener: Was I right to understand from speaking to Clive Fairweather that the figure was to be 50?

Clive Fairweather: It may eventually be.

The Convener: But it is only 19 just now.

Clive Fairweather: That is the first number.

The Convener: When were the 19 transferred?

Michael Crossan: They were transferred around mid-November. I can confirm the date for you after the meeting.

The Convener: That would be useful.

Rod MacCowan (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland): The date was 12 November.

The Convener: While I am on that tack, when is the next batch of women to be transferred?

Clive Fairweather: I do not think that we know.

15:45

The Convener: Let us return to the general question. Given the position of the Scottish Executive four years ago—well, it was not the Scottish Executive, as it was the 1998 review—what factors do you think lie behind the numbers of women being sent to prison?

Clive Fairweather: I would like to answer that specifically at the end, but I want to paint a little picture to put the issue in some context. On that inspection—my last—at Cornton Vale, I had a journalist with me from the *Sunday Express*. Having seen things change over the years at Cornton Vale, generally for the better, I was keen that she saw the best.

We started in Peebles block, which is for long termers. I would have been proud if members of the public had been at the meeting that I had with long-term prisoners. There was no doubt that Cornton Vale was doing, and had done, something for them. The women had all had some benefit from being in Cornton Vale and the conditions were generally much improved from what they had been several years ago.

Just down the corridor was the cherubs unit, which is designed for mothers and babies. On the one hand, the unit was terrific but, on the other hand, I found it slightly depressing, as it contained the largest number of babies that I had ever seen there—four of them, which was a fourfold increase over what I had seen in the past. Nevertheless, what was being done in the unit was good. Women have been discriminated against by not having training for freedom or open places, but at long last there are moves towards freedom, with independent living units outside Cornton Vale. There are also moves to introduce such units in Perth.

We took the journalist round and we talked to the prisoners. I felt reasonably confident that we were showing her all the changes that we wanted

her to see. We went to the remand block, which many of you will have been in. What has been done in that new block is breathtaking when we remember the old remand block.

Then we went to Younger block. I regretted going there almost immediately, because I saw prison officers assailed in every direction by women with needs. We were assailed by women who said that they could not get out to the lavatories. The block reminded me very much of some of the depressing situations that, as the convener said, we do not seem to be getting away from. In Younger block, and in some of the other blocks, there were many women and not enough staff to deal with them, which took me back to 1996.

Perhaps that is the picture that has remained from that inspection, but it would be wrong not to remember that some things have moved on. As we spent the next couple of days looking at the regime, I could not help but be struck by the fact that there had been enormous improvements in some areas of the prison. In other areas, conditions seemed to have regressed, but the overall picture was that, because of the high numbers of prisoners, the prison regime was stalled.

There were huge numbers of women but fewer staff, because of high staff sickness levels. There must be some correlation between the two factors, which coincided. I found that depressing, but I also considered it life threatening in some ways, which is why we have made recommendations in our report. That is unusual; it is only the second time that we have made recommendations in an interim report. There are three recommendations, all of which are designed to reduce the pressure at Cornton Vale, despite the fact that women are being sent to Greenock, which is a real emergency measure.

There have been three suicides since our formal inspection. There are indications in annexe 3 of the report that violence among women is increasing because of the numbers. There are indications of worrying staff sickness levels, also because of the high numbers. We can come back to the three recommendations, but they are all aimed at doing something about what I thought was a pretty intolerable situation.

I turn to the question why there are more women in Cornton Vale despite the fact that we hoped to reduce the numbers, for which there was wide support when it was suggested in our 1998 report. I think that that support remains. However, the reality is, to seize on one area, that numbers of women with damaged backgrounds and backgrounds of drug abuse have increased and have spread further than Strathclyde and the Edinburgh area. When we inspected HMP

Aberdeen earlier in the year, we found that the female unit there had been overwhelmed. The numbers had doubled, so the remainder had been sent to Cornton Vale. When we went to Cornton Vale in September, we heard a lot more voices from Aberdeen, Inverness, the islands and the Borders. The stain has spread to all areas. No particular sheriff is sending more women to Cornton Vale, but penny numbers are coming there from elsewhere in Scotland.

I am still optimistic that that trend can be reversed. Perhaps I was overly optimistic in saying in our joint report that the trend would be reversed by the millennium. We must reverse the trend, because I see no major change in the women coming into Cornton Vale—there is no trend of women beginning to offend in the same way as men do. There are women who need to be sent to Cornton Vale and who need to be kept there for a long time, but a lot of petty offenders are coming through. The offenders used to be predominantly from Strathclyde, but penny numbers are now coming in from elsewhere.

We have to reverse the trend, which is why I suggested that we consider the extension of restriction of liberty orders, not just as an alternative to custody, but in order to give Cornton Vale the mechanisms to release before the end of their sentences women who would not be a danger to the public.

Rod MacCowan was at Cornton Vale yesterday and can update us on the picture, which I think is slightly less depressing. Encouraging things are coming out of Greenock. I am glad that Nancy Loucks is here, because she has been doing research for a long time and since 1998 has been examining the women's backgrounds. She can give her perspective on what she saw in Cornton Vale when we went there in September.

The Convener: I want to ask you a quick question before Dr Loucks says anything. I want to get to the specifics, because we have heard much that we already know about Cornton Vale. You talk about short-term and long-term prisoners on page 36 of your report. You say that people were using sinks as loos and that

"excrement was often thrown out the windows wrapped in clothing."

We are talking about primitive conditions. You then say:

"This was confirmed during our wider inspection. We **recommend** that an immediate review of access to proper toilet facilities during patrol periods is carried out."

We have a ministerial response in our papers, but nothing is said about any change. Has there been a change?

Clive Fairweather: Yes. I am glad to say that there has been a change. The situation was

unacceptable. The change has taken place for two reasons. One is that women are going to Greenock, which reduces the numbers. The other is that there has been a review of the overall policy as a result of our recommendation. I would like to hand over to Rod MacCowan on that issue. I do not think that the problem has entirely gone away, but it has lessened.

Rod MacCowan: I assume that the committee is aware of the design of Cornton Vale—when the prison is locked up at night, prisoners must use an intercom system to access the toilet facilities. If there is more than one prisoner in a room, a staff member must come to the grill gate at the end of the section to observe for security purposes that only one person comes out to go to the toilet. However, a staff member is not required to do that if there is only one person in a room; in that case, the prisoner simply presses the intercom and the door opens.

There are currently 222 prisoners in the prison, which can accommodate 238. Therefore, it is possible for every prisoner to have a cell of their own, which would obviate the need for a staff member to observe as I described. However, some prisoners choose to share cells, which means that a staff member must attend when a prisoner requires toilet access, although that is less of a problem than it was previously. In addition, following the report and until prisoner numbers began to go down, the night shift was augmented in order to reduce the time that prisoners had to wait to go to the toilet.

The Convener: You are saying that that does not happen now.

Rod MacCowan: I am saying that it should not happen because staff are required to attend for prisoners' toilet access far less than previously. However, I cannot guarantee that waiting would never happen.

Clive Fairweather: When we inspected in September, the problem was rife. I am glad to see that we have moved away from that.

The Convener: Dr Loucks, do you want to comment on the factors behind the increased number of women going into Cornton Vale? I think that I speak for the committee when I say that it appears that some of those people should simply not be in prison and should be dealt with by another disposal.

Dr Nancy Loucks: I think that the position is similar to what it was when I did my research five years ago, although, as Mr Fairweather said, women seem to come into the prison from a wider field around Scotland. However, the position is still that more than half the women who go into custody in Cornton Vale in a given year are there on remand. Most of those women do not end up

with a custodial sentence. At any one time, the highest proportion of the prison population there is composed of women serving very short sentences, most of which are less than two years.

Almost half the women in Cornton Vale are in custody for fine defaults. Most of them will not be serving another sentence. Their average sentence is nine days and their average outstanding fine is £214 for adults and £183 for young offenders. Therefore, women go into custody for reasons similar to those of several years ago. There has been very little improvement.

The Convener: One of the appendices in Clive Fairweather's report is a letter in which a prisoner describes her experience in Cornton Vale. She was pregnant and was in for only a few days. She was sick and drank the water in her cell, which was not drinking water. Imprisonment seems to me an outrageous way of dealing with what are very small crimes. I accept that those crimes are crimes against society, but putting people into prison is not the way in which to deal with them. Is that your view, Dr Loucks?

Dr Loucks: Very much so. The concern when I did my research was that fine defaulters are an extremely vulnerable population. When Kate Donegan was governor, she created a regime in Younger house, with specifically trained staff, that was designed particularly to deal with that population. The problem is that, with higher numbers coming in, the staff simply cannot cope with the demands of the vulnerable, short-term population.

The inter-agency forum on women's offending recommended alternative measures to deal with fine defaulters, such as the time-out centre. I do not believe that that has come on board yet, unfortunately, but it was designed specifically to deal with women who need a supportive environment but not necessarily the secure custody of a prison.

The Convener: We might come back to that issue, but I know that Michael Matheson has some questions.

Michael Matheson: Mr Fairweather, I notice on page 9 of your report that some 94 prisoners had sentences of less than one year. Do you have a view on whether such short-term prisoners have specific needs, not only when they are in prison, but perhaps when they leave prison?

Clive Fairweather: We did quite a lot of research but, because the report was short, I did not include in it some of the reasons behind the sentences, for example. I would say that the report does not give me the ability to answer your question specifically. I would have to turn to Nancy Loucks for her general view as a researcher who looked at the reasons behind sentences. I would

not feel comfortable or safe commenting specifically on that matter.

Dr Loucks: I can say generally that, by definition, a short-term population means that women are in Cornton Vale for shorter periods because they committed offences that are less serious.

There is an argument as to whether those women should be in prison the first place. Female offenders often have intensive needs, which is why so many of them return to prison. Women who are, for example, repeat shop-lifters often shop-lift to support drug habits. They do not get the necessary long-term drug treatment while in custody and, for that reason, it is not appropriate to send them to prison. However, they will not necessarily comply with treatment outside custody.

That was a reason behind the proposed creation of time-out centres, which will maintain continuity between custody and the outside world. Other reasons were that the centres would give women a supportive environment and access to outside resources, such as drug treatment and contact with drug counsellors.

16:00

Clive Fairweather: I attended a meeting of the Howard League for Penal Reform a few nights ago, at which Pat Carlen commented on the prison system in England and Wales. It struck me that her comments had some relevance to the system in Scotland. Although I do not have the facts to support this, I get the impression that more women are being sent to Cornton Vale because, ironically, the regime there has been much improved and sheriffs know that the women will receive treatment for their drug problems and relief that they cannot find in their communities. Talking to a lot of the women, I get the impression that, if they have the choice, they volunteer for remand at Cornton Vale because of those improvements. An underlying factor, which could be investigated further, is that sheriffs are perhaps sending women to Cornton Vale because they think that it would be both a punishment and better for them overall.

Michael Matheson: The committee visited Cornton Vale a while ago. Given the previous problems at the prison and the amount of work that had been identified, I left with the impression that progress had been made. Someone in our party referred to the remand unit as a "casualty clearing ward". The prison has moved on significantly since then, but, from what you have said, it appears to be a victim of its own success. It is now used not as a casualty clearing ward, but as a rehabilitation service for people who have

problems that should not really be addressed in prison. Is that what you are implying?

Clive Fairweather: Yes. I cannot prove it, but I have that feeling. That must be guarded against in the future and investigated a bit further.

Dr Loucks: Time-out centres are designed to prevent people from being held in custody unnecessarily. People will be referred to a time-out centre so that they can access the same resources and support services as are available in Cornton Vale. The centres will also provide people with the chance to leave the environments in which they used drugs, without having to go into custody. However, the centres have not come on board yet, so people are still being put in custody.

Clive Fairweather: My evidence is anecdotal, but I believe that we must keep pushing the alternative measures.

Michael Matheson: You mentioned RLOs and the time-out centres, which are still to come on stream. What more needs to be done to ensure that there are adequate alternative provisions in the community for female offenders?

Clive Fairweather: Two years ago, pilot RLOs applied only to East Kilbride, Peterhead and Aberdeen. They are now Scotland wide. We hope that sheriffs throughout Scotland will start to take them up, but that might take a little bit of time. I suggest in the report that, as a new departure, we should not stop there. We should use RLOs as they are used—successfully—in England and Wales. We could use that mechanism to release some, though not all, women from Cornton Vale early. However, the enabling legislation is not in place and that would have to be done quite urgently.

My overall reading of the response is that people are thinking, "Yes, we hear you but we are not going to do much about it until later," which means until after the next election. This is nothing to do with me, but I suspect that there would be problems if it were announced that people would get out of prison on curfew orders. It would sound as though we are being soft on crime. I do not want to push the issue too far, but I hope that we can come back to it.

Drugs courts and all sorts of other things are beginning to be built up. It might just take longer for them to be used. However, I still hope that we will go down that route in future. We have to go down that route otherwise there will be a waste of lives inside Cornton Vale. One way or another, we need to use the alternatives.

It is a question of education. We cannot compel the judiciary—that is the last thing that we want to do—but we need to encourage.

Dr Loucks: It is important to ensure that the judiciary can make informed decisions about the

options. The inter-agency forum on women's offending considered how many sentenced women come into custody with a social inquiry report. One of the courts in Glasgow that was sending the most women to Cornton Vale was sending only 7 per cent of women with a social inquiry report. The minority of sentenced women have the benefit of a social inquiry report being made on them before they are sentenced to custody. In the past, such reports have been considered to be an inexpensive way of considering alternatives to custody and ensuring that the judiciary is aware of them.

Michael Matheson: You will be aware that the committee started its inquiry into alternatives to custody specifically to consider those issues and to try and move the issue beyond yah-boo politics. I hope that a parliamentary cross-party group would be able to push the issue forward.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): Was the panel concerned about women keeping babies in the prison for up to a year before the babies are returned to their families?

Clive Fairweather: We read some horror stories about women in custody in England and Wales going to hospital and being handcuffed. We read frightening stories about babies being taken away. The impression that I got at Cornton Vale is that, overall, we seem to deal with the situation in a much more civilised way.

In some ways, the way in which the cherubs unit is run is very encouraging. I would be more than happy to show anyone the unit and say that it is a civilised way of doing things. On the other hand, when I first went there, I had the passing thought that there were rarely any babies in custody, and now there are four. I felt terribly sad that the situation had come to that. No doubt when my successor visits Cornton Vale in one or two years' time, if the numbers carry on going up, there will be six or eight babies in the unit and, of course, they should not be there at all.

Generally, the way in which the unit is run is good, and none of the women said that they were disturbed by the rule that meant that they could only keep their babies for a year.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Were most of the mothers who had their babies in prison with them in for a relatively short period of time?

Clive Fairweather: I honestly do not know. I did not get the impression that any of them were long-term prisoners, but I might be wrong. None of them said that there was a problem.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Is not it the case that they are only allowed to keep the baby for a year?

Clive Fairweather: Yes, they are only allowed to keep the baby for a year.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: After that, the baby has to go to relatives.

Clive Fairweather: I did not get the impression that that would happen to any of the babies that were there. I do not know whether Nancy Loucks had a different impression.

Dr Loucks: By definition, most of the women who go into Cornton Vale will be there for only a very short period of time. Longer-term prisoners having children there would be the exception rather than the rule.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Only a small number of women are affected by that unusual set of circumstances.

The Convener: I want to pick up on Dr Loucks's startling statistic that 7 per cent of women who are on remand have come in with a social inquiry report.

Dr Loucks: It is not 7 per cent of the women on remand; it is 7 per cent of those who were sentenced to custody from one particular—

The Convener: Only 7 per cent had a social inquiry report. Has that got worse? Do you have statistics for previous years?

Dr Loucks: I have statistics from previous years, but I collected the statistics for the inter-agency forum, which last met about two years ago. I can certainly get statistics again. Cornton Vale is able to collect the statistics readily through the social work office.

The Convener: The committee seems to keep hitting against a lack of social workers in the criminal justice system. Everything seems to bump into that, whether it is drugs courts or, in this case, women who perhaps could have been disposed of through other disposals. Without a social inquiry report, that will not happen; they will just be put through the sausage machine—court then prison. I am concerned about that.

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Dr Loucks mentioned another aspect: the fact that women who are on remand often are not sentenced but are in prison while a social inquiry report is carried out. That is the information that I have from procurators fiscal. They say that women are often put into custody on remand while a social inquiry report is carried out because there is no other support for their chaotic lifestyles outside. Do you have any idea what percentage of women who are on remand while a social inquiry report is carried out are then released?

Dr Loucks: The most recent statistics that the Scottish Court Service could give me are for 1998.

Maureen Macmillan: That is going far back.

Dr Loucks: It is fairly far back. The statistics show that then, only 42 per cent of the women who were remanded in custody ended up serving a custodial sentence.

Maureen Macmillan: The whole system seems to be back to front. I am interested in how we might sort that out. We talked about the time-out centres, but I am also interested in how restriction of liberty orders might be used. At the moment, they seem to be used most of the time to keep people at home without any other support, such as a probation order or intensive support. They are not used for remand and they are not used for early release, as Clive Fairweather said. For them to be used for early release would require primary legislation, for which there would not be time before the Scottish election, although we might consider that for the future. Do you consider the use of RLOs with some kind of support to be a possible solution to putting women on remand?

Dr Loucks: That has been done elsewhere. The orders tend to be more successful when they are used for early release rather than for remand, because, according to research, people who are on remand feel that they have less to lose, because they think that they will end up with a custodial sentence anyway. For women, that might be the case less often, because they are less likely to end up in custody. Different alternatives exist, such as bail hostels—Safeguarding Communities Reducing Offending runs supported bail accommodation—conditional bail and the time-out centre, which would be the ideal solution, if it was set up.

Maureen Macmillan: RLOs are probably flexible and could be used imaginatively. I was concerned when I discovered the statistics on where RLOs are used. For example, in Edinburgh and Glasgow, they are hardly used at all, whereas in Aberdeen, the Highlands and Dundee, they are being used more and more.

Clive Fairweather: I refer to RLOs in my formal report of 2001 and in the intermediate report on Cornton Vale. I felt that there was no point in talking about them without going to see them in use. If the committee has not done so, I encourage it to go and see what an RLO comes down to. I went with the somewhat cynical view that an RLO is a soft option. Most of the public think that as well. In fact, RLOs are a hard option, because they shift the responsibility on to the individual. When individuals go to a prison, such as Cornton Vale, they have no responsibility at all—they do what is required. Their liberty is taken away from them and they just get through the day. When someone is sitting in their house in Airdrie, Motherwell, Coatbridge or wherever, they have a choice: they can break the restriction and carry on

doing what they like—they will eventually get caught, but they can make that choice—or they can stay at home, where the responsibility shifts on to them and their family.

I do not think that RLOs are an option for everybody—they are not a panacea—but they are a better option for some women, especially those with families or with a connection to employment.

After my first visit, I began to realise that I was perhaps getting a bit doe-eyed about RLOs, so I took with me a girl called Sandra Gregory, which caused me all sorts of problems in the press. She had done a lot of time in jail abroad, in Thailand, as well as in Cookham Wood, Holloway and Durham. She had been around. Without giving her any remit, I asked her to comment on what she thought of RLOs. She took the same view as I did: that in some cases, they were a tougher sanction. She also said that they were no good on their own, and needed to be used with work to address drugs or offending behaviour. Nonetheless, as an ex-offender, she said that RLOs could be tougher sanctions—perhaps that point can be picked up on later.

There is still more to be explored and a lot more work that could be done on using RLOs for women.

16:15

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Is there an element of discrimination? We are told that 7 per cent of those sentenced had social inquiry reports. Is not that percentage higher for male prisoners?

Dr Loucks: I was not able to access the figures for male prisoners, so I am not sure.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Would it be possible for you to send that information to us?

Dr Loucks: I can certainly try to find it out. It was easy to get the figures for Cornton Vale, as I was dealing with only one social work office.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Added to the fact that there is no training for freedom, which there is for male prisoners, it seems to me—

Clive Fairweather: At long last, the situation has changed, and there is now some training for freedom or open conditions.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Nevertheless, 7 per cent is a startling figure.

Dr Loucks: The figure is for one particular court in Glasgow. There was variation between courts, but in no case was the figure more than 30 per cent.

The Convener: I see. As we are all interested in social inquiry reports, it would be helpful if you could provide us with the overall percentage of

women who are in custody who have had social inquiry reports. Do you have that figure?

Dr Loucks: Yes, I have that figure.

The Convener: You might also provide the percentage of those who are on remand awaiting the preparation of a social inquiry report, if you have it. If you do not have that figure, we will pursue the matter with the minister.

Dr Loucks: I can follow that up.

The Convener: There seems to be a cut-off point where other things could be done.

Clive Fairweather: We have some statistics with us today, which we will leave with you.

The Convener: If you provide us with the figures, they will be in the public domain. We are doing two things today: we are considering your report on Cornton Vale; and we are linking it to our inquiry into alternatives to custody. The information will be fed into the inquiry. If Dr Loucks has any other evidence from elsewhere in Europe or other jurisdictions that would help us to consider alternatives to custody for women, we would be interested to receive it.

Let us consider Greenock prison. I understand that 19 women were decanted to Greenock prison in mid-November in response to prison numbers. Michael Crossan and Rod MacCowan should feel free to comment.

Clive Fairweather: They are about to talk about that. I am not up to date on the issue.

The Convener: What category of prisoner was moved? Do you have any concerns regarding their medical care and the potential effect that the change of prison environment might have on them? By medical care, I mean not only physical care but psychological care, psychiatric care, and so on.

Michael Crossan: I visited Greenock on 22 November with the current chief inspector of prisons, Andrew McLellan. The intention was not to inspect Greenock prison; we were there as part of his familiarisation programme.

Although it was extremely limited, we used the opportunity to visit Darroch hall, which had 20 females at the time. It is too early to make rash judgments. We had the opportunity to speak to a group of about six females who had been transferred there. They were short-term prisoners—in other words, prisoners who were serving sentences of less than four years. None of them was considered vulnerable in the context of self-harm. The governor informed us that if any prisoner showed any indication of self-harm or required additional support, they would be returned to Cornton Vale. We were assured that that would even happen during the night, should that be necessary.

The females to whom we spoke gave us the impression that they were relatively content with how they were being treated at Greenock. They had no specific complaints, although there were one or two issues about the regime allowing equity of access to education, for example. Management assured us that those problems were not insurmountable. We must emphasise that our visit was on 22 November, which was in about the second week after the creation of the female unit at Greenock. We left with the impression that there were no major problems.

There was quite a bit of investment in manpower and other resources at Greenock, to ensure that the transfer was successful. As I said, our visit took place very early on and it was not an official inspection. We used the opportunity simply to gauge feelings. We were left with the impression that the position at that time, which is similar to the present position, was satisfactory. There were no complaints about medical treatment. We spoke to the acting health centre manager. At the time, the female group at Greenock presented no particular problems. I must emphasise that our visit took place early on in the venture.

Clive Fairweather: I want to add some perspective, then I will stay out of the discussion. On the one hand, I want to be positive about Greenock. That has been going through my mind ever since I finished with the inspectorate. If I fish back through all the reports, I find that one good thing has always been reported about Greenock—the staff are very wilco.

The Convener: I am sorry—what does “wilco” mean?

Clive Fairweather: It means helpful and friendly. The staff at Greenock are highly positive, whereas the attitude of the staff at Cornton Vale is patchier. The Greenock staff have no baggage in dealing with women offenders. That must be worked on as a positive factor.

On the other hand, we must not get away from the big picture, which I tried to paint in my report on Cornton Vale. In August of this year, we had one women's prison in Scotland. Now we have two, one of which has been created by stealth. The numbers issue forced that on us. Forget the three that were on the periphery. If one is dealing with 10 or 15 women, that is a wing. When one gets to 50 or 60 female prisoners, one has a women's prison. We have two women's prisons in Scotland. I must emphasise that it was bad enough getting things right at one women's prison; trying to do it at two will push the resources too far. Eventually, we must get back to having one women's prison.

The Convener: I hear what you say.

I have some quick points to put to Michael Crossan. How long were you at the prison for?

Michael Crossan: We were there for only half a day. We did not visit the prison specifically to examine the situation for females.

The Convener: Is the cell accommodation single-cell accommodation?

Michael Crossan: Yes, it is single-cell accommodation with integral sanitation.

The Convener: What about the capacity of Darroch hall?

Michael Crossan: I believe that it is in the region of 50, but Rod MacCowan has been governor there.

Rod MacCowan: I cannot recall what the capacity is.

The Convener: You have been put on the spot.

Michael Crossan: My understanding is that Darroch hall has been designed for 50 females.

Rod MacCowan: Its capacity is in the order of 50 to 60. It is a small hall.

The Convener: So the fears about immediate treatment might be justified. There is the possibility of creating a prison by stealth if we do not reverse the trend in imprisoning women.

Rod MacCowan: The management teams at Cornton Vale and Greenock have drawn up a set of criteria for any woman who goes to Greenock. No one goes there unless they have had a multidisciplinary case conference. The selection process for prisoners who go to Greenock is clear. Yesterday, the governor at Cornton Vale told me that there are no immediate plans to increase markedly the number of prisoners who are transferred to Greenock and that people who came into Cornton Vale who meet the criteria will be eligible to go to Greenock. There is no immediate pressure to increase the numbers to 50.

The Convener: How many female prison officers are there at Greenock?

Michael Crossan: I cannot confirm that figure.

The Convener: The matter is important. When we visited Cornton Vale, male prison officers told us that it was difficult for them to deal with some of the questions that they were asked by women in the prison and that it would be better to have female officers. I believe that Kate Donegan, the previous governor of Cornton Vale, took the view that the environment at Cornton Vale is different from that at other prisons. I hope that I am not misquoting her. We will find out how many of the staff at Cornton Vale are female.

Should we visit Greenock prison?

Clive Fairweather: Yes. I felt that we could not produce a report on Cornton Vale without commenting on what we had found out at Greenock. I advise the committee to visit Greenock prison.

The Convener: We plan to visit Cornton Vale on Friday 13 December. We may be able to visit Greenock prison before the recess, by which time the issue should have resolved itself to some extent.

Clive Fairweather: Greenock prison may not be inspected for some time—we may have to wait at least a year. We owe it to the women at Greenock, as citizens, to examine the situation there briefly, as I did in my report.

The Convener: Would it be suitable for us to visit with a representative of the inspectorate, as well as of the Scottish Prison Service?

Michael Crossan: We discussed our programme today. We have penned in an intermediate inspection of Greenock for February.

The Convener: I will discuss our plans with committee members.

Maureen Macmillan: I want to ask about the criteria that are used when deciding whether to transfer women to Greenock. Is it more difficult for families to visit some of the women there? Was that issue taken into account when the decision was made to move women to Greenock?

Michael Crossan: My answer is based purely on the information that we were given by the small group to which we spoke. With one exception, the prisoners were very content with the visit arrangements. One prisoner from Aberdeen volunteered to go down to Greenock. There appeared to be no problem with visit arrangements. One or two prisoners suggested that being in Greenock was much more suitable than being in Cornton Vale. The women were complimentary about how the staff at Greenock treated them—they were full of praise for staff.

The Convener: Lord James Douglas-Hamilton wants to ask about drugs strategies.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The recent intermediate inspection report on Cornton Vale states that the prison does not have a co-ordinated and sustained drugs strategy, although the need for such a strategy was highlighted six years ago in a previous formal inspection. What factors have delayed the introduction of a drugs strategy?

Clive Fairweather: The prison has been extremely busy. Inspectors have noted that the drugs strategy has not progressed as we would have liked. However, the prison authorities have been preoccupied with safety and improving

conditions. Only in recent years have they been able to turn their minds to offending behaviour programmes and the like.

On this occasion, I felt that it was time to move beyond safety issues. A year after my formal inspection of 2001 and almost six years after saying that the prison needed a proper drugs strategy, we felt that we must draw a line in the sand. When we arrived at Cornton Vale, we discovered that the recently appointed deputy governor of the prison has been given the task of producing a properly co-ordinated drugs strategy. I am sure that she will do so. I have made the recommendation just in case there is further vacillation.

I am sure that in due course the issue will be tackled. If it is not, some of the fundamental reasons why the women are in prison will never be addressed. They will leave Cornton Vale with drug problems. If the issue is not addressed, there will be problems in the health centre and other areas of the prison. The time is right to do that, as Cranstoun Drug Services Scotland is now represented in Cornton Vale. Rod MacCowan, who visited the prison yesterday, has identified one or two improvements that have been made. An addictions nurse has been appointed.

The situation has moved on. In my recommendation, I was saying that the prison had had time to implement a drugs strategy. I was trying to give impetus to the process.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Would you regard the recommendation as being important and strong?

Clive Fairweather: Yes. Let us update you on the situation based on what we saw yesterday.

Rod MacCowan: The strategy is being implemented and senior management and the deputy governor at the prison are responsible for its delivery. Referral groups—the multidisciplinary teams that will case conference each referral—have been set up.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: So work is being taken forward.

16:30

Rod MacCowan: Yes. People to fill the two addictions officer posts have been identified; one has already been appointed. An addictions nurse has been employed since the inspection and a further first-line manager has been identified. Part of that manager's job will be to audit the delivery of the strategy.

In addition to its complement of nursing staff, the prison is funding an additional mental health nurse until March 2003, and social work activity has

been reconfigured in order to free up more time for social workers to do addiction work. The prison has moved the strategy on quite significantly in a number of areas since the inspection.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In its submission to the committee's inquiry into alternatives to custody, the Scottish Drug Enforcement Agency referred to the fact that a significant reduction in drug use and offending has been reported among those who have positive experiences of drug treatment and supervision. Have you collected any evidence on whether the drugs courts have had an impact on prisoner numbers at Cornton Vale? In the long term, would drug treatment and testing orders be more effective than prison?

Clive Fairweather: It would be wrong of any of us to answer that question, as we have not collected that evidence.

The Convener: Would Dr Loucks be able to answer the question?

Clive Fairweather: She might, but we would be out of our depth. My instinctive feeling is that drug treatment and testing orders would be more effective than prison in the long term, but I have no direct evidence to support that.

The Convener: You said that funding had been provided for an additional mental health nurse. When does that funding run out?

Rod MacCowan: The temporary contract for the post runs until March next year.

The Convener: Paragraph 9.3 of the report, which relates to the anti-suicide strategy, reads:

"One of the psychiatrists told us that women were still being transferred into the prison from other establishments when they were considered at risk, whereas last year we had suggested that this practice should be re-examined to assess whether an alternative approach could be adopted."

I noted that none of the women who are sent to Greenock prison are in that category. Is Cornton Vale being used as a place to send women who have chronic mental health problems?

Clive Fairweather: Let me give an example. If a woman in Aberdeen prison has mental health problems that suggest that she might commit suicide, she is in the van and on the way to Cornton Vale as soon as that is noticed.

The Convener: You recommended that that situation should change. What alternative approach should be taken?

Clive Fairweather: It might be better if such women were not transferred. However, to use my example, that would mean that Aberdeen prison would have to increase its resources to look after women who were potentially suicidal.

The Convener: Has the temporary mental health nurse been taken on to deal with the pressures that are being placed on the system? Is the fact that suicidal women are transferred to Cornton Vale another reason for overcrowding?

Clive Fairweather: I can answer only your first question. I suspect that the additional mental health nurse is dealing with the increased number of women who are in Cornton Vale, some of whom will have come from the outlying prisons.

Rod MacCowan: My understanding is that the prison management took the view that mental health was a priority area and decided to use additional funds that it had identified this year to provide an additional mental health nurse.

Clive Fairweather: I do not wish to sound too complacent but when I first went to Cornton Vale in 1995, I think that there was only one mental health nurse. A change has taken place at Cornton Vale, because that has increased to about six or seven. We are tinkering round the edges but my overall feeling is that a commensurate increase in the mental health response has taken place over the years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The report highlights concerns about the limited number of appropriate interventions on offer to which Cranstoun Drug Services Scotland can refer prisoners. Would you say a word about that?

Clive Fairweather: I will ask Mick Crossan to expand on that. We found a mixed response to Cranstoun when we went round different jails. In general terms, we were pleased with what we found but there is quite often no follow-on from what Cranstoun does. Mick Crossan can comment on the situation in Cornton Vale.

Michael Crossan: During our recent inspections, we found that, although Cranstoun was delivering the appropriate assessment and the referrals system was working reasonably well, the resources were not always available following assessment to respond to the need that had been identified. That is an issue not only in Cornton Vale but in some other establishments.

It must be remembered that Cranstoun Drug Services Scotland is a relatively new organisation. It works extremely well in some prisons but does not work so well in others that have a high turnover. I think that we found out that Aberdeen has a high turnover of Cranstoun workers.

There are also issues about throughcare. Cranstoun provides a seamless process that looks at needs within the prison, particularly those of short-term prisoners. If the intervention or programme that is offered in prison is unsuitable—on most occasions, that will be because of the programme's duration—attempts are made to

follow that through once the prisoner is liberated. We are also discovering that, in some areas, there are problems finding resources outside prison to deal with the needs that have been identified.

Therefore, there is an issue about internal resources not matching the needs identified through the Cranstoun assessment process. Likewise, there is an issue about external resources in certain regions not meeting the needs identified in prison. Does that answer the question?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Yes. Thank you.

The Convener: I have a short question on young offenders, whom we tend to miss out. Last week, the committee heard evidence from Colin Quinn, who is an ex-offender. He was of the view that service providers such as the Apex Trust Scotland and SACRO would be more likely to produce more positive results for young offenders than a short-term prison sentence. Would targeted programmes be more beneficial for the young offenders at Cornton Vale?

Dr Loucks: I know of an intensive probation project in Glasgow that is available only to young men. The project has the resources and the staff to provide programmes for young women offenders, but such programmes are not part of its remit at present, although they could easily become part of its remit if the demand was identified. I believe that the project is allowed to accept referrals only from sheriff courts, but it could easily deal with other types of offender, such as those who have been dealt with by the district courts.

The Convener: Why can referrals be made only from the sheriff court?

Dr Loucks: I am not entirely sure whether that is due to the project's funding or to the availability of the sentencing option.

The Convener: Would fine defaulters come via the district court rather than the sheriff court?

Dr Loucks: The project is an intensive probation project that deals with high-tariff, non-custodial penalties. It has the resources to deal with young women, but young women are not referred to it.

The Convener: If I may try to unscramble that—the fault is not yours but completely mine—referrals must come from the sheriff courts.

Dr Loucks: For that project, yes.

The Convener: Are young offenders in Cornton Vale denied that option because they come via the district court?

Dr Loucks: That is part of the problem. Young women are likely to come through the district

courts, but at the moment the project is not a sentencing option for them. However, it could become an option, because it was set up to be able to deal with young women.

The Convener: It is interesting that people tend to talk about women offenders as if they were one lump or category, whereas they comprise the same diversity and range as male offenders.

If no one else wants to contribute on that subject, we will move on. Maureen Macmillan has a question, but I may have caught her on the hop.

Maureen Macmillan: I wanted to add a comment about the previous subject. I am not sure that I understood what Dr Loucks was saying about women not being referred to the probation project in Glasgow. If women go through the sheriff court, can they be referred to that project?

Dr Loucks: Apparently not. The project is not a sentencing option for women. Although staff are available, there is no programme.

Maureen Macmillan: I just wanted to be clear about that.

The Convener: Should we pursue that matter with the minister?

Maureen Macmillan: Yes, we should.

The committee's inquiry into alternatives to custody highlighted the isolating effect of short-term sentences on offenders and the consequential problems for an offender's relationships with family and friends and with employment and housing, all of which could have a detrimental effect on their life, post release. What throughcare is available to prisoners in Cornton Vale, and now in Greenock prison, to enable offenders to cope with release?

Clive Fairweather: Throughcare at Cornton Vale has come on a tiny bit, but it is still a big area of concern. This is a very general statement, but not much is done to connect prisoners who are given short-term sentences in Cornton Vale with wider society when they are released. More is done for longer-term prisoners.

Michael Crossan: I apologise for not having the information to hand. Independent living units have recently been opened at Cornton Vale, but they are more for preparing long-term prisoners for release. It would not be fair to anyone to speculate, and I apologise for being unable to give accurate information about that. Perhaps we could find out.

Clive Fairweather: I imagine that not very much, if anything, is done.

Maureen Macmillan: I do not think that much is done for short-term prisoners, whether male or female, in any prison.

I want to talk about health and safety and staffing issues. Annexe 3 of your report mentions that assaults and fighting have increased year on year, although they decreased last year. Is the pattern one of an increase, or does last year's decrease make you think that the problem is on its way to being solved?

Clive Fairweather: The amount of disorder seems to have risen as the number of inmates has risen. Those statistics were taken from the orderly room adjudications of people appearing before the governor, to which Dr Loucks drew our attention. I have no reason to think that that trend will reverse itself—there is no evidence to suggest that that will happen. I imagine that the one thing that would probably reduce disorder is a return to previous inmate numbers.

Dr Loucks: There is a strong correlation between the number of prisoners and the number of assaults and incidents of violence. It is also a common theme in men's prisons that, when the population increases—particularly if there is overcrowding—there will be much more tension generally and much more conflict between prisoners and between prisoners and staff. Staff are physically unable to be in several places at once.

Maureen Macmillan: Are you saying that the number of prisoners is the important factor, not the different types of prisoner?

Clive Fairweather: Yes. It is about numbers.

The Convener: I have a supplementary question. On the anti-bullying strategy, your report states:

"While there is reasonable intelligence which allows bullies to be identified, there is little in place to deal with them or their victims beyond use of the disciplinary procedure."

That relates to identified assaults, but there is also a concern about bullying below the surface, which does not show up in reports. You mentioned pressure—this is where the lid on the pressure cooker blows off. What can you tell us about bullying that we do not know?

Dr Loucks: One of the most significant patterns that emerged from the original research in Cornton Vale was that most bullying was not physical; it was usually psychological, through the ostracism or isolation of vulnerable women. That was the biggest problem. If there is a rise in the number of physical assaults and conflict, it can be guaranteed that there will be at least an equal increase in more subtle forms of bullying, which are not necessarily punishable or detectable.

The Convener: Therefore, if it is possible to measure identified assaults, one could make parallel assumptions about non-reported cases and insidious bullying.

Dr Loucks: They cannot be measured in any way, but that is a fairly safe assumption.

Maureen Macmillan: Non-physical bullying is much more difficult to address than physical bullying. Although people realise that it is happening, they cannot always put their finger on it and yet it can be just as destructive.

Dr Loucks: It is a particular issue in women's prisons.

Maureen Macmillan: Absolutely. In your recent report, you state that Cornton Vale still has the highest level of self-harm in the SPS, although the number of cases of self-harm has reduced since 1999. An ex-offender suggested that that might result from inadequate provision of facilities such as gym and art classes. Why are suicide rates high and how could they be reduced?

16:45

Clive Fairweather: We are getting into speculation, although the committee will find partially anecdotal evidence in the report. There is no doubt that if there are fewer staff to deal with a higher number of women, the result is a reduction in the interaction between staff and the women. We heard from several angles that, although relationships are pretty good, if staff do not have time to talk or listen to the women as a result of lower staff numbers, they can begin to drift.

One result of a fading away in the quality of interaction might be unheard cries for help or suicides, but we will never know for certain. A number of factors could be involved. However, I would point to a higher number of women and fewer staff leading to a lower quality of interaction. It is worth remembering that about 2,500 women go through Cornton Vale each year. If there are fewer staff to interact with those women, staff will not be able to pick up on everything. Staff do their best when women arrive and are inducted, but I suspect that the interaction gets lost later on. That is my layman's interpretation of the situation.

Maureen Macmillan: What about the ex-offender's suggestion that there are not enough diversions such as gym or art classes and other creative activities?

Clive Fairweather: There could always be a lot more activities. The women might agree with that, but a lot of them will not go to the gym—it is not in their nature to do so and they do not want to bother going. We always tried to encourage more such activities in our reports. That said, if the SPS were to offer all those activities, it would need more staff.

High levels of staff sickness mean that, even with the best will in the world, the staff who are left to deal with everything do less. That makes those

staff feel even more frustrated and, if the situation is not handled carefully, they could go off sick next, which could lead to a vicious circle. At the time covered by the report, levels of staff sickness at Cornton Vale were the highest in the Prison Service. I have checked the situation and although it is a bit better now, it is still high—indeed, I would say that it is still worryingly high.

The Convener: I refer you to the prisoner survey, which I ask you to put into context for us. I will focus on section 11, which relates to drug use. In answer to the question, “Do you regularly use drugs in the community?” 75 per cent of respondents responded yes. In answer to the question, “Is your drug use a problem for you?” 76 per cent responded yes. To the question, “Have you ever committed a crime to get drugs?” 82 per cent responded yes, and 86 per cent responded that they had committed a crime while on drugs. Do you think that the percentages are reliable, given that prisoners completed those questionnaires?

Clive Fairweather: I will answer before handing over to Nancy Loucks. In one of my formal reports, we included statistics that showed that perhaps 94 per cent of the women had a drug problem at some stage. Although I am speaking generally, I found that women were much more forthcoming about their drug problems than men were. There is no question in my mind but that, in addition to the huge alcohol problems that some of the women have, most of them have a drug problem of some sort or another when they arrive at Cornton Vale.

It is interesting to note that, despite the fact that there are drugs in the prison, random mandatory drug testing indicates that usage falls away quite considerably once the women have been inside for some time. That said, the further, frightening correlation is that, when women leave Cornton Vale, they return to drugs and die as a result. Again, that is anecdotal evidence, but the major connection with both prescription and illegal drugs underlies everything.

The Convener: So you cannot track the number of women who return to drugs after discharge and die as a result.

Clive Fairweather: Unfortunately, I cannot. The last word on the matter should come from Nancy Loucks.

The Convener: I will come to Dr Loucks, but I want to highlight other matters first. According to the survey, 51 per cent of the women think that they will continue to take, or restart taking, drugs on release and 79 per cent have tried to stop taking them. There is a 50:50 split on whether drug taking can be stopped in jail. I want to put on record the kind of people with whom we are dealing in case people think that we are going soft

on women offenders. We must make it clear that there are many kinds of women offender. According to section 5 of the survey, 36 per cent of the women thought that their life had been a failure, 41 per cent felt lonely and 39 per cent felt unhappy. That is a poor bunch of people.

I ask Dr Loucks to comment on where we go from here. The time-out centre that was announced has not happened. Clive Fairweather and others have been beating away about why we put women in prison and the other measures that we should take, but it seems to me that nothing is changing—or if things are changing, they are doing so very slowly. What issues should we consider in our alternatives to custody inquiry?

Dr Loucks: The figures for women who go into custody at Cornton Vale are consistent with international figures. There is a pattern of a high rate of drug problems that seems to be increasing; mental health problems, such as psychological distress, depression and anxiety; and problems with poverty, housing and a lack of education—the list goes on. That pattern is consistent throughout the world. As well as asking the same questions that the prison survey asked, my research involved psychometric tests that provided clinical measures. Again, the picture was consistent.

Drug use is central to the lives of the vast majority of women who end up in Cornton Vale. That issue must be addressed or those women will continue to go into Cornton Vale. Matters must be dealt with holistically. After people have been taken into custody, they often return to abuse, unemployment or drug use. Custody might exacerbate the problems because women who go into custody are more likely than men are to lose their housing, and custody certainly does not help people with mental health issues such as depression. Women are also likely to lose custody of their children. We must break that continuous cycle or pattern by ensuring that support is available outside prison.

The Convener: Do members have any other questions?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: If it is in order, I would like to stress my appreciation of the contribution of the former chief inspector and his team to the Prison Service and the Parliament.

The Convener: I mentioned our appreciation at the beginning, but you are welcome to do so again.

Maureen Macmillan: I also appreciate the chief inspector's work. The interesting prison visits with him and his team opened our eyes and showed us what to look for.

Clive Fairweather: We have started a process that, I hope, will continue and expand.

The Convener: Thank you and good luck in the future.

Meeting closed at 16:53.

Our next meeting will be in the chamber on 10 December at 1.30 pm, when—members will be delighted to hear—we will consider the Title Conditions (Scotland) Bill at stage 2. I am sure that there will be a crowded house and that members will be waiting with bated breath. We will also consider the first draft of our stage 1 report on the Council of the Law Society of Scotland Bill.

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