

Cross-Party Group on Children and Families
Affected by Imprisonment
Planning meeting

Wednesday 8 May 2013

1 – 2pm

Attendance: Mary Fee MSP, Nancy Loucks, Margaret McDougall MSP, Gareth Brown, Michelle Martin, Sarah Roberts, Kate Philbrick, Dinah Aitken, Christine Bairn, Kathleen Bryson, Carol Robinson, Maggie Mellon, Valerie MacNiven, Don Millar, Tim Parkinson, Ina Hirshbeger, Nicki Wray, Diane Cairns, Winnie Delaney, Marina Shaw

Apologies: Viv Dickenson, May Chamberlain, Fiona Barlow, Amanda Coia, Evelyn Reid, Hilary Moran, Donald Dickie, Sue Maxwell, Sara Watkin, Justina Murray, Sue Maxwell

Welcome and apologies

Mary Fee MSP welcomed those in attendance. Apologies were noted prior to meeting and were not read out.

Minutes of last meeting

Minutes of previous meeting were agreed unanimously.

Update on Parliamentary Business

Ms Fee informed the group that she continues to participate in Parliamentary debates and has asked a number of Parliamentary questions, which are included at the end of the minutes. The members' debate on utilising prisoners' assets will take place on Thursday 9 May. Ms Fee hopes for a good attendance and support from MSPs from other parties, which would raise the profile of prisoners and help the Parliament to focus on prisoners as individuals and not just offenders. Ms Fee has also arranged a meeting with Mr Colin McConnell on 5 June. Ms Fee suggested she would be raising the issue of Child Impact Assessments and the use of contracts within the prison as well any other issues that were raised from today's meeting.

Nancy highlighted that the Families Outside conference was taking place on 9 May at Hampden Park and that the University of the West of Scotland also had an academic conference on the 31 May focusing on children of prisoners. Sarah Roberts spoke at

Barnardo's conference in Birmingham on 2 May and noted that Barnardo's has a UK-wide campaign on children affected by imprisonment over the course of the year. The EUROCHIPS annual network meeting took place in Paris last week. Some of the focus was on European Prisoners' Children Week, which takes place in the 1st week of June. Nancy suggested one objective of the European Children's week is to raise awareness of the impact of imprisonment on children and to encourage signatures to raise the issue to the European Parliament. The petition will be available for signatures at the Families Outside conference and at two events being hosted during European Prisoners' Children Week. Families Outside is hosting a screening of the film, *Mothers of Bedford*, a documentary on a women's prison in the US where 80% of prisoners are mothers of dependent children, in Glasgow on 5 June and in Edinburgh on 6 June. There will be a question and answer session with the maker of the film and with some family members who have agreed to take part. Further information will be circulated closer to the time. Nancy suggested the EUROCHIPS network was also trying to promote the findings for the COPING project, which should be available in July. The EUROCHIPS network meeting will be hosted in Edinburgh next year from 16-18 May with a conference on 16 May, hopefully in Parliament.

Planning discussion

-evening meeting of the CPG with the Cabinet Secretary for Justice

Ms Fee informed the group that the day's meeting was to focus on topics to raise with Cabinet Secretary for Justice Kenny MacAskill MSP at the next CPG meeting and suggested that members might also like to raise any issue they would like to be raised at the meeting with Mr Colin McConnell the following day. Ms Fee suggested that the group should raise 3 or 4 issues with Mr MacAskill and suggested Child Impact Assessments as one option.

Maggie Mellon suggested that the group think of asking questions under two themes. The first was around why individuals go to prison in the first place, the future in Scotland for the use of prisons, and to what extent it should be used for non-violent crimes. The second theme would be individuals' experiences once they are involved in the criminal justice system. Maggie suggested asking Mr MacAskill to discuss his vision and strategy to get Scotland's prison population down. Nancy queried whether this might be too broad a topic and wondered how to keep it focused. Maggie suggested questions could revolve around parenting in prison, rights of children, the social and economic costs of parents going to prison, and what could we done instead with money currently being invested elsewhere.

Ms Fee said that the Cabinet Secretary is likely to give a brief introduction and would hope many of the issues raised would be covered in this opening address. Ms Fee suggested providing his office with broad headlines on what the group would like to discuss so that Mr MacAskill can address these issues, which would lead into the questions seamlessly.

Marina Shaw highlighted her concern on the debate in Parliament on redesigning community justice and how allegiances that had been previously formed may fall and how this might impact on the voluntary sector. Marina highlighted that it was the voluntary sector that had raised the issue of children affected by imprisonment and suggested asking how the voluntary sector can become more of a focus and how to keep the voluntary sector to the forefront with the redesign of community justice. Ms Fee agreed that this was an important issue to raise with Mr MacAskill and noted the work of voluntary sector is second to none and there should be a proper assessment of the role of the voluntary sector and more support for their work.

Tim Parkinson had previously circulated an email from Lynn Millar regarding the difficulties for women in Inverness linking in with Child Case Conferences. In addition to this, Tim suggested raising the issue of alternative types of custody like temporary detention /weekend custody. Tim highlighted how the concept of temporary detention allows individuals to go to maintain a job, maintain contact with families, is a much cheaper option, and gets individuals to comply with community-based programmes. Nancy suggested that alternatives to custody could be raised alongside the use of Child Impact Assessments and noting the work of Aberlour with women in drug treatment. Nancy suggested that Lynn had raised, in her email, a number of important considerations such as the use of technology. Don Millar suggested asking Mr Colin McConnell about the progress on the planning of the new female units.

Kathleen Bryson informed the group that she had attended a meeting in North Ayrshire where Aberlour Child Care Trust had presented on the residential unit in Glasgow for women and families. Kathleen fed back that the support was funded through Social Work. Kathleen suggested asking how we can ensure that families continue receive this kind of support to help rebuild relationships with their children. Diane Cairns noted the difficulties for mothers being released on Home Detention Curfew and being recalled for breaching their licence conditions without support for rehabilitation. Nancy highlighted that this related to Marina's point of the redesigning of community justice and not wanting support to be a postcode lottery with gaps where local authorities aren't willing to pay.

Maggie highlighted that the Christie commission had estimated that 40% of public expenditure is wasted and the criminal justice system creates a large part of this waste. Maggie suggested that this needed to be raised at a higher level, noting the social cost of separating women from children and the impact this has on children and the lifetime cost for them. Maggie suggested asking where justice policy ties in with the Early Years strategy, the National Parenting Strategy, and Getting It Right for Every Child. Nancy highlighted the need for clearer understanding of how the criminal justice system is linking in actively with children and young people, community safety, health, and infrastructure such as travel and transport.

Tim suggested the Cabinet Secretary might be able to give a more focused answer if the group suggested a focus on where public sector funding could be better spent. Ms Fee suggested that, if the group could have a broad idea of the topics to be covered at the day's meeting, then they could focus on the more specific questions at later date. Ms Fee suggested that she had raised the issue of the lack of meaningful throughcare in Parliament a number of times. Ms Fee suggested asking Mr MacAskill what he thinks throughcare should look like and whether it should start from the moment a prisoner is first received in custody.

Marina highlighted that the number of children affected by imprisonment was still an unknown quantity and asked why no statistics are being collated when an individual is sent to prison. Marina suggested that if prisoners were asked how many children they have and what their dates of birth were, then they could start to track how many families are being affected. Marina highlighted that one of the SPS long-term outcomes is to stop the children of prisoners going to prison, yet there is no information on who these children are. Marina highlighted that one woman had recently been released on a tag from prison where no one was aware that she had five children, with the oldest looking after the younger siblings. Marina suggested that, when a parent goes to prison, it should be incumbent upon community to know that the children left on the outside are OK. Gareth suggested that a number of questions had been asked in Parliament where the response was that no central information was held. Gareth informed the group that he was going to collate these questions and then ask why this information is not being collated.

Maggie highlighted that prisoners might not want to share this information, and the children might not want this information being shared either. Tim also noted there might be an issue for claiming benefits where prisoners wouldn't share this information. Sarah suggested that there must be a corresponding commitment between statutory and voluntary organisations about what we do with that information. Maggie highlighted that what is wanted is a teacher talking with a child at school about their parent being in prison. Tim highlighted that this information should also be collated in the Social Enquiry Report [now CJSW reports] however noted that not every person sent to prison undergoes a Social Enquiry Report, which is where the child impact assessments come in.

Valerie suggested raising the issue of the sentencing council.

Sarah suggested that she had discussed with the prison technology service in Birmingham about a secure payments service and might like to raise this in the meeting with Mr McConnell but could ask a wider question regarding the use of technology to support prisoners and their families. Sarah said she had some evidence of secure payments being used in HMP Parc, which she would pass to Ms Fee's office. Ms Fee suggested that it might also be useful to ask Mr Colin McConnell about rehabilitation programmes in prison and how they are assessed and evaluated. Ms Fee suggested that she was also concerned that there was less financial compensation for doing an Education course. When Ms Fee had raised this in Parliament, she was informed that there should be no financial incentive for any rehabilitation course. Ms Fee suggested that a prisoner might be interested in the financial gain in attending purposeful activity over what is best for them in the long run and suggested the issue of rehabilitation in prison should be raised. Gareth informed the group that he had learned from a recent Freedom of Information request that there were seven rehabilitation programmes specifically designed to reduce reoffending, however most prisons only used two of them. Gareth said that annual funding for the Female Offending Behaviour programme is £91,902 a year and only provides 14 places. The substance related offending programme costs £491,015 providing 173 places, with the actual cost per prison place at £2,838.24. Maggie highlighted how this compares to the cost of initiatives such as the Aberlour residential unit. Ms Fee said that she would collate information that has come from Parliamentary questions and Freedom of Information requests to back up any questions to be posited to the Cabinet Secretary.

Carol suggested that prisoners on short sentences don't access rehabilitation programmes and that this linked back to the future use of prisons. Ms Fee suggested a number of questions could be raised under the heading 'the future use of prisons'. Ms Fee suggested touching on rehabilitation with Mr MacAskill but noted the need for the focus to be on issues relevant to prisoners' families. Sarah highlighted a programme in Perth, Australia where the parent in prison is able work towards school lunches and school trips for their children by participating in programmes. Sarah suggested the programmes can be detached from their family life.

Margaret McDougall suggested raising the issues of the removal of bonding visits as a punishment. Ms Fee informed the group that she has indeed informed Colin McConnell's office that she would be raising this at the meeting. Nancy informed the group that the Scottish Government was pulling together information on the interim report on the Universal Periodic Review on Human Rights and noted that visiting rights, Visitors' Centres, and Impact Assessments were part of this. Nancy said that the SPS had done a review of visitation rights, but they hadn't reported on this yet. Ms Fee suggested it was worth raising this issue with the Cabinet Secretary, and Nancy suggested also raising that the UK is the only jurisdiction that doesn't have some form of private family visits.

Maggie cautioned not to have much focus on what prison can do to stop individuals offending, as she highlighted that there is a large lobby, supported by the private prison companies, to say that prison is the route to ending offending. Maggie highlighted how harmful prison is on individuals and compared it to giving someone cancer.

Ms Fee suggested that Cabinet Secretary would be given information on the topics that the group wished to discuss but wouldn't be giving him advance notice of the questions. Ms Fee suggested that the themes that have come out of the day's meeting would be circulated to the group. If members have any other issues they would like to raise, they should email this to Ms Fee's Office.

Marina suggested that the group might like to raise the practice of releasing individuals from prison with all their belongings in a clear bag for them then to have to get themselves home, and that this was very demoralising. Marina highlighted that a woman was recently released from HMP CorntonVale with four clear bags, which she had to carry with her between Housing and Benefits offices in two towns in Lanarkshire. Nancy noted that prisons down

south release prisoners with clear bags stamped with 'HM Prison Service' on it. Diane informed the group that there was a push to provide women with bags on release some two years ago. Marina informed the group that she had fed into a recent consultation on useful activity in prison and had suggested that prisoners could be making their own bags.

-Parliamentary event on the Human Rights Act and Children of Prisoners

Ms Fee and Nancy informed the group that a Parliamentary event on the Human Rights Act and Children of Prisoners was a proposed event for the Judiciary following on from the court case discussed in previous meetings, currently looking at the availability for dates in September. Maggie informed the group that she had been in contact with the Institute of Judicial Studies, and they would be happy to take part in an event to discuss the UNCRC and EHRC consideration in sentencing. Maggie suggested a round table discussion with the judiciary, defence advocates, and criminal justice advocates. Ms Fee suggested establishing a clear idea of who to invite, then invitations can be sent out. The group agreed an evening slot would be best and to send any proposed names for attendees to Ms Fee's office. Ms Fee highlighted that an evening event might require refreshments being put on and suggested her office would look into catering, however suggested if attendees could make contribution, this would be helpful.

-Future meetings of the Cross Party Group

Ms Fee asked the group for any ideas on topics or to propose any speakers they might like to invite to future meetings. Nancy informed the group that she had received some feedback previously that the meetings tended to be high-level discussion about policy, where the issues for families might be more day-to-day. Ms Fee had distributed a feedback sheet for members to fill in and suggested she would distribute this to all group members to fill in and return to her office. Kate Philbrick suggested it would be useful to see what change had occurred as a result of the Cross Party Group influence. Marina suggested inviting family members along, and Maggie suggested Kinship Carers being invited to a future meeting and discussion around the issues for Kinship Carers. Dinah said she would be interested inviting a journalist to discuss how crime is reported in the media. The group agreed a meeting on media perception would be interesting, in particular Maggie highlighted the important of how to get the alternative story out there. Sarah highlighted that Families Outside were now contributing to the No Offence Guest Blog and had recently responded to a story published in the Courier

around APVU payments (travel expenses) for families visiting prison and the cost to the tax payer.

AOCB

Nancy highlighted that the University of Strathclyde will be hosting an event with a significant contributor from South Africa to hold a panel discussion around Child Impact Assessments amongst other things. Sarah Roberts and Tam Baillie will also be contributing. The date is yet to be confirmed but will around 1st-3rd July

Dates of Next Meetings

Tuesday 4 June, 6 - 8pm