

Cross-Party Group on Children and Families
Affected by Imprisonment
Wednesday 2nd April 2014
1-2pm

Attendance: Nancy Loucks, Mary Fee, Richard Lyle, Margaret McDougall, Richard Simpson, Gareth Brown, Sara Watkin, Janice McGowan, Adam Banner, Tim Parkinson, Justina Murray, Don Millar, Sue Maxwell, Jen Graham, Dinah Aitken, Nicki Wray, Lisa Mackenzie, Catriona Gibson, Fiona Jamieson, Kathleen Bryson, Sharon Stirrat, Chris Parfitt, Francis Toye, Marina Shaw

Apologies: Fiona Barlow, May Chamberlain, Christine Baird, Kate Philbrick, Viv Dickenson, Ann Darlington, Evelyn Reid, Jennifer Law, Janice Baillie, Annabel Goldie, Oliver Aldridge, Jackie Baillie

Welcome and apologies	Action
Ms Fee MSP welcomed those in attendance. Apologies were noted prior to the meeting and were not read out.	
Election of office bearers	Action
In accordance with the terms of Cross-Party Groups for the Scottish Parliament, election of office bearers is held on an annual basis. Nancy reminded the group that Ms Mary Fee was the current Convenor of the Cross Party Group, Ms Margret McDougall and Mr Richard Lyle Vice Convenors, and Gareth Brown as Secretariat. The group nominated and re-elected all post holders.	
Minutes of Previous Meeting	Action
Note of previous meeting was agreed unanimously.	
Focus for 2014	Action
<p>Ms. Fee suggested that the main focus of this year be on the Children and Young People's Bill. Ms. Fee informed the group that she had put in a number of amendments to the C&YP Bill and felt it was something the CPG could have a real influence in as the work goes forward to ensure the Bill takes into the account of the needs of children of offenders. Ms. Fee suggested that a smaller group of CPG members form a working group with herself and Nancy to discuss what the work programme should be, what speakers to invite etc. and they could present the work programme to members at the June meeting. Ms. Fee requested that anyone wishing to volunteer to be part of the working group contact herself or Nancy.</p> <p>Janice McGowan asked that future planning take consideration of the fact the CPG focus is on prisoners' families, noting that there was a tendency for speakers to forget about families and focus on prisoners. Janice would like the CPG to focus less on the bigger picture and more on every day issues for families like maintaining contact and supporting them in their own right.</p>	All
Presentation and discussion: IT in Prisons	Action
<p>Francis Toye from Unilink gave a 10-minute presentation on the 'E-mail a Prisoner' service which is used throughout many prisons in Scotland. HMP Kilmarnock is currently the only prison offering a reply service via kiosks in the prison wings. Francis noted that two-way communication could be available in prisons that don't have kiosks, as a prisoner could hand write a letter and scan it in to be sent back as an e-mail. Francis also discussed the secure payment services being used by HMPs Addiewell and Kilmarnock, which allow families to send money electronically to prisoners. Francis informed the group that Unilink was also looking at Skype technology. Francis also informed the group that they will be having a meeting next week about HMP Inverclyde and will be commissioning York University to evaluate the self-service next month. It was also noted that both services were extremely popular with prisoners and staff.</p> <p>Adam Banner (HMP Addiewell) discussed how the service worked in practice. Adam noted that the two services help prisoners maintain better links with their family and frees up staff time. Adam informed the group that Addiewell were looking at putting a kiosk in the Visitor Centre to conduct surveys. Adam noted that the secure payments system has softened a lot of barriers between prison staff and families and visitors.</p> <p>Janice commented that the service was great for families, as communication is instant, and often letters arrive after a visit has taken place. Janice asked if the SPS was looking at the secure payments. Chris Parfitt commentated that Unilink was trying to encourage SPS to participate in this and had a meeting with HMP Inverclyde to set up secure payments in the new women's prison. Janice suggested that secure payments would be particularly beneficially to families who live in the Northern and Western Isles who have to send postal orders because they don't have cheque books, which can be rather costly. Chris informed the group that, with secure payments, families can designate the money being sent in e.g. to be used for phone calls or to</p>	

<p>be spent however the prisoner wishes.</p> <p>Ms Fee asked if the SPS was resistant because they wanted their own system for electronic payments to be used for this. Francis suggested that all national bodies are cautious but suggested that the SPS does seem to be quite risk-averse and suggested that the private prisons were more able to take risks.</p> <p>Tim Parkinson noted that he was interested in the Skype technology for the individual kiosks, as he said Colin McConnell had previously indicated that he would be interested in having an open conversation about virtual visits being aided by local social work services. Tim suggested this seemed like an ideal solution for social workers to complete a family interview via Skype. He suggested there could be booths in the visiting hall where prisoners could have virtual visits with their families. Francis informed the group that Unilink had requests from a few individual prisons for secure Skype services and that they were looking at that the moment. They had to meet a number of security issues but felt positive that there might be a pilot service available in about 6 months. Francis clarified that when he said Skype he meant Skype technology and not Skype itself.</p> <p>Justina Murray commented that the individual kiosks are a great initiative and noted her frustrations that the SPS didn't have them in newer establishments, despite them being highlighted as good practice in a number of Inspectorate reports. Justina asked if there were any potential for families to come under any additional pressure to hand in money to prisoners. Francis suggested there wasn't any from Unilink but felt it was an important point to be aware of. Adam suggested that the prison could ask if families felt more pressured as part of their visitor survey or through the kiosk at the visitors' centre. Chris suggested that Unilink might be able monitor how much money was being sent in and contact social work if they had any concerns that the family was being pressured, or the prison if they were concerned about money laundering.</p> <p>Ms McDougall asked how the service was funded. Francis informed the group that the family pay for E-mail a Prisoner (including the reply service) and secure payments but noted that the charges cost less than the cost of a stamp or postal order. The self-service kiosk is funded by the company that operates them. Francis noted that self-service is considerably more economical.</p> <p>Nancy queried if families had any control over prisoners replying to e-mails, as she was concerned that a prisoner could send messages to other individuals at a relative's expense. Francis confirmed that prisoners could only reply to an incoming e-mail once and informed the group that they were looking at whether a prison could pay for sending messages.</p> <p>Mr Lyle asked if the cost would go down as the use goes up. Francis informed the group that 1.1 million messages in the UK per year are sent via E-mail a Prisoner. Francis would like to see a reduced fee for shorter messages. Mr Lyle welcomed this, as he would like to see the prisoner being able to send quick messages to keep in contact on a daily basis. Francis noted that he would also like families to be able to send picture messages but suggested that it would be likely that the SPS would have a number of security issues around this.</p> <p>Don Miller commentated on virtual visits at the Apex office in Aberdeen as another example of use of IT that improves family ties.</p> <p>Sara Watkin suggested that new initiatives that help families keep in contact e.g. Skype can also be used as an educational opportunity for prisoners to think about relationships and the impact of their behaviour on their children. This lead on to a general chat about research on the effects of imprisonment on children. Sue Maxwell commented that families should be consulted about how the use of IT in prison improves family contact for them and how it makes a difference in their lives, as she felt that this was just as compelling an argument as reducing reoffending.</p>	
AOCB	Action
<p>Nancy informed the group that the annual Children of Prisoners Europe conference, hosted by Families Outside and Niacro, will take place on Friday 19th May at the Royal Botanic Garden.</p>	

Date of Next Meeting – 11th June 2014