

## **Cross Party Group for Children Affected by Parental Imprisonment**

### ***Minutes - 10<sup>th</sup> March 2015 - Women Prisoners***

#### **1. Christine Chapman – Welcome & Introduction**

Christine Chapman AM welcomed delegates, commenting that a large audience is testimony to the importance of the issue. Christine recognised delegates including Suzy Davies AM, and AM support staff from the offices of Lindsey Whittle AM, Ann Jones AM and Jenny Rathbone AM. There has been much debate on women prisoners; there are strong social and economic benefits of keeping women out of prison including in Baroness Corston's report into women prisoners. Christine welcomed the speakers and announced that Yvonne Rodgers, Director of Barnardo's Cymru will continue to Chair when Assembly Members leave for plenary.

#### **2. Messages from Research – Robert Jones: Lecturer in Criminology, University of South Wales**

Robert presented on research into imprisonment in Wales. His presentation focused on issues affecting women from Wales who are often imprisoned at great distances from their home towns and families. Figures suggest that although the numbers of female prisoners in England in Wales had decreased between 2012 and 2014, the number of Welsh women given prison sentences has increased over the same period. Welsh women are held in all of the female prisons in England. The impact that the long distances have on visits was discussed, including costs to families and difficulties with transport. Robert discussed the positive impact of maintaining family relationships on resettlement outcomes, as well as improving outcomes for prisoners' children. The area of the relationship of the imprisoned mother with her children needs more research, as well as how children experience visits. Robert explained the need for systematic data collection at a Welsh Government level, as figures such as the rise in female prisoners are not readily available. Robert also discussed the lack of concession on behalf of prison service, for long distances that families may have travelled. Robert suggested that relatives may require help to make long distances for example more buses. Robert argued that there was a need to be careful to prevent a knee-jerk reaction to the fact that there were no female prisons in Wales, by making a rushed decision on creating one, as it was important to look at alternatives to custodial sentences where appropriate. Robert mentioned an event which will take place on 22<sup>nd</sup> April which will look at alternatives to imprisonment for women, further information on this will be circulated.

#### **3. Visiting Mum Project – Joanne Mulcahy: PACT Regional Head of Services**

Joanne introduced the work which PACT does with women prisoners, including plans to have a family engagement worker in every prison for women in England. Quoting the Corston report, Joanne mentioned the multiple issues many women face prior to coming into the prison. These include heightened risk of suicide, mental ill health and abuse. Also discussed were the anxieties which women feel about their home lives and childcare, with just 5% of children remaining in the family home after their mother has been imprisoned. A report from the Prison Reform Trust suggests that half of all women in prison have not received a visit from their children. This could be due to worries of the effect on the child, or a lack of appropriate adult to accompany the child. Joanne introduced the Visiting Mum Project which, in partnership with SOVA, aims to help women prisoners from Wales keep in touch with their children. Among the objectives of the project are reducing the impact of imprisonment on the child and mother, reducing reoffending, reducing

anxieties caused by separation and using the learning from the project to inform policy and practice. The project works in the prison with the mother and in the community SOVA work with the families affected by imprisonment. The project is currently creating a resource, which is being directed by children and parents, and will be available to families. The project also works with professionals, including social workers who are encouraged to visit the mother so they are more informed of the case. The project facilitates training and events and has released a book entitled; Mum's the word, written by mums for mums. Delegates can contact Charlotte Parsons for a copy of the book and more information on events and training.

#### **4. Women's Pathway Project – Wendy Hyett: IOM Cymru Women's Pathfinder Project Manager**

Wendy gave a brief introduction on Integrated Offender Management (IOM) Cymru, before talking more specifically about the Women's Pathfinder Project. IOM Cymru is a pan Wales strategic partnership which encourages joint work around offenders in Wales under the Wales Reducing Reoffending Strategy, which is the first of its kind in the UK. The strategy outlines a number of priority groups, including women offenders. The aim of the Women's Pathfinder Project is *'to design and deliver a women-specific, whole system, integrated approach to managing women who come into contact with the CJS in Wales.'* Wendy discussed the current work streams of the project and also referenced a new post within the IOM Cymru Delivery Team which will be specifically working on the Children and Families Pathway and will link in closely with the Women's Pathfinder in relation to children and families issues for women. Wendy mentioned that a higher proportion of male offenders than females, has led to a method of working that suits men, which is often then applied to women. This is not always appropriate given women's specific needs. The core aims are to reduce offending and reoffending, reduce arrests, reduce custodial sentences, and develop more effective ways of working with women who come into contact with the Criminal Justice System in the community. The sustainability think tank has been established to ensure that the Pathfinder is sustainable on a partnership basis and good practice becomes mainstreamed, including, building capacity and capability within the third sector. Following the UK wide Review of the Women's Custodial Estate, in the future all Welsh women are held in Eastwood Park or Styal which are to become resettlement prisons. Suggesting a need for more Wales specific research and evaluation, Wendy discussed the benefits of women being diverted from custody to work in the community where they have low level offences as is now happening in a pilot scheme in Cardiff due to be rolled out into four new pilot sites during 2015. In relation to the End-To-End Model pilot currently operating in Cardiff weekly meetings are held within the project to consider each woman that comes into contact with the Criminal Justice System including those on the Diversion Scheme, those sentenced in the community and sentenced to or being released from custody. The project is large and multifaceted, so for further information on particular work-streams, Wendy encouraged delegates to email her.

#### **5. Questions & Answers**

**Rhian Roberts (North Wales Police Crime Commissioner Office):** Winston Roddick, PCC, is keen to support children affected by parental imprisonment in North Wales, there are some interesting developments happening around the new prison. What is your view on whether there should be a remit on women in North Wales?

**Robert Jones (University of South Wales):** No, because there is a strong view against putting provision in prison, which could be a bolt on for women again. This needs to be looked at properly, rather than being a kneejerk reaction.

**Wendy Hyett (Women's Pathfinder Project):** If it is viewed as a good facility, there may be a temptation there, to consider placing women there instead of looking at alternatives. However the transport links from South Wales to North Wales would still be an issue, so it would not necessarily resolve issues around transport either.

**Joanne Mulcahy (PACT):** Agreed on both points.

**Bernie Bowen Thomson (Safer Wales):** The number of women in prison has more than doubled since 1995. I appreciate we want to bring that down, however there are several issues for women who are put on remand, with housing for example. Could we look at alternatives to this?

**Robert Jones (University of South Wales):** There is also a lack of provision for women in hostels too. We need to look in depth into this issue Wales wide. Welsh Government need to get involved, as these issues relate to devolved areas.

**Bernie Bowen Thomson (Safer Wales):** Is it maybe something that could come under the prevention element of the Social Services & Well-being (Wales) Act?

**Robert Jones (University of South Wales):** I have not had much chance to make sense of the Act yet, from my point of view though, it should not be separate and remand is a massive issue.

**Wendy Hyett (Women's Pathfinder Project):** One of the things we hope to take forward as a research project is to look at reasons for remand. We have had this discussion in meetings. We feel it should be a last resort, and should only happen if someone is to be sent to custody. We suggest that there may be some cases remanded where there would have been other options, but we need more evidence to be able to fully understand this issue.

**Barbara Natasegara (Safer Wales):** Could we put forward a UNCRC argument?

**Wendy Hyett (Women's Pathfinder Project):** We need to find out what's going on first.

**Yvonne Rodgers (Barnardo's Cymru):** Could this be something we can bring to attention of Welsh Government? Because of the impact of the Housing Act maybe it is something we can explore in more detail. With the Social Services & Well-being (Wales) Act as well maybe, as a group, we could go back to our respective organisations.

**Beverley Poiner (FFOPS):** Are there any bail hostels in Wales for women?

**Wendy Hyett (Women's Pathfinder Project):** There were but there were some issues, so not anymore. When there was one specifically for women, there were issues. We could potentially work with partners to look at alternatives to pilot next year. We need to look at what is the best way of working for women. What would work is often different for women, sometimes they are not needed for women.

**Bernie Bowen Thomas (Safer Wales):** They are not suitable for women.

**Beverley Poiner (FFOPS):** I have this vision of a house where women can live with their children, the mum could take their children to school. So often when children are taken away, there are so many issues.

**Barbara Natasegara (Safer Wales):** AMs need to see a Welsh stance on this. We don't want a women's prison in Wales, this needs publicity and support. Can I make a plea for this group to support?

**Laura Tranter (Barnardo's Cymru):** There was a project in Bristol which had a sustainability issue. It was predominantly regarding who pays, is it a children and families issue or justice? This is even more complex in Wales due to devolution issues

**Yvonne Rodgers (Barnardo's Cymru):** There are some issues coming up here that we can look at as a group. Such as remand, housing and the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act. Another thing is looking at alternatives to a women's prison in North Wales.

**Tim Ruscoe (Barnardo's Cymru):** This may require some speculation. I sense there is an opportunity to do something different in Wales. Looking at alternatives to prison, we need to think about costs, number of crimes, reoffending and children.

**Bernie Bowen Thomson (Safer Wales):** As the Vice Chairman of Women's Breakout I have come across lots of evidence of cost saving when looking at alternatives to custody. I am happy to send this research out to anyone who is interested. In addition one of the things it is important to capture is social capital costs.

**Wendy Hyett (Women's Pathfinder Project):** I can reaffirm that it is definitely cost effective. It is difficult sometimes to prove, we know that, but we are getting to a point where we can show cost. Because there are various costs and implications it can sometimes be a challenge. All strands are different and until you can say this stream cost saves this area it is a challenge. People need to come together and talk about in a sensible way, everyone can play a part.

**Robert Jones (University of South Wales):** I did some research into a women's prison in New York which has been looking into this. There are issues with it, the middle level offender can avoid prison, which is really good, but it can suck in the lower level offender, which will put them into community work, whereas they may have just been cautioned previously. So it is not always appropriate.

**Joanne Mulcahy (PACT):** PACT have done a cost benefit analysis which came out as a cost benefit of £11 for every £1 spent on supporting offenders and their families.

**Yvonne Rodgers (Barnardo's Cymru):** Thanks to everyone for offering to send on and share further information. This group initially started as Christine Chapman asked a question about mothers who have been imprisoned. It seems there is a real opportunity here to influence.

Details of the 22<sup>nd</sup> April Prison Reform Trust event will be circulated.

**Leeanne Plechowicz (IOM Women's Pathfinder Project):** In a former role, I was a Court Team Manager; my team would write pre-sentence reports. If we want to raise awareness, it can be very difficult to get messages across regarding any aspect of sentence.

**Yvonne Rodgers (Barnardo's Cymru):** I agree that it can be very difficult, Barnardo's is trying to address issues with magistrates over child sexual exploitation, which has not been easy.

**Laura Tranter (Barnardo's Cymru):** In my experience of working with Newport courts, they were happy to work with us and make some changes. But we were told the matter had to be dealt with on a national level not with individual courts. Previously, when I was seconded to NOMS, we were told that this was a matter for judicial review. So it is very unfortunate, that there can be difficulties because of the way the system works.

**Wendy Hyett (Women's Pathfinder Project):** There are challenges in engaging with the judiciary because of their need for impartiality which has been raised for discussion with the UK wide advisory board, this has come up a few times. We have had a launch event, in which we show a video about women's experiences, this has been well received. We will be working over next few weeks on the promotion of the video, particularly around court staff, sentencers and police to raise awareness and understanding of women's specific needs. We are hoping this could prompt more work in Wales. I can send it in for our next meeting.

**Laura Tranter (Barnardo's Cymru):** Our CSOF (Community Support for Offenders Families) service has been offered a room in Merthyr Crown Court. We will be there once a week. Hopefully it means we can get to know more of families and the court staff. There does need to be national change, as a UK organisation, Barnardo's has been calling for a Minister with responsibility for this issue, from that may come more opportunities for influencing.

**Wendy Hyett (Women's Pathfinder Project):** The Prisoner Reform Trust is helpful with influencing on women's issues,

**Yvonne Rodgers (Barnardo's Cymru):** Thank you to the speakers and others who have offered significant contribution to this meeting.

**Tim Ruscoe (Barnardo's Cymru):** There will now be one more session on a specific issue, then we will be looking at what we have found in order to put together a final report to Government, which is likely to have two key questions: 1) What can Welsh Government do? 2) How can Welsh Government influence UK Government?

**NB: Since the meeting, it has been requested that the following information be added to the minutes.**

It was discussed at the meeting that there were currently no specific bail hostels in Wales for women, but it has since been found that there is some provision. The Women's Pathfinder Project is in the process of linking this provision in with their pilot activity.