



All Party Parliamentary Group
Women in the Penal System

4pm, Monday 21 May 2018
House of Commons, Committee Room 8

Giving evidence

Dame Glenys Stacey, HM Chief Inspector of Probation.

Attending with Dame Glenys Stacey, HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Nathan Dick, Management Support to Chief Inspector, HMI Probation

Wendy Martin, HM Inspector, HMI Probation

Chair

Baroness Corston

Parliamentarians attending

Baroness Armstrong

Sarah Champion MP

Kate Green MP

Victoria Prentis MP

Jess Phillips MP

Lord Ramsbotham

Non-parliamentarians attending

Joanna Coles, Crest Advisory

Frances Crook, Howard League for Penal Reform

Stephanie Davin, Howard League for Penal Reform

Danielle Fetuga-Joensuu, Parliamentary Assistant and Researcher to the Bishop of Rochester and Bishop to Her Majesty's Prisons, Co-ordinator For Prison Hope.

William Kent, Catholic Bishops' Conference

Rt Hon Fiona MacTaggart

Lauren Nicholas, Prison Reform Trust

Kate Paradine, Women in Prison

Rob Preece, Howard League for Penal Reform

Rebecca Roberts, Inquest

Becky Short, London Assembly

Jess Southgate, Agenda

Apologies

Diane Abbott MP

Lord Brown

Dr David Drew MP
Maria Eagle MP
Alister Jack MP
Emma Lewell-Buck MP
The Earl of Listowel
Edward Lowe, Commonweal
Angela Smith MP
Jo Stevens MP
Tom Tugendhat MBE MP

Baroness Corston opened the meeting and thanked everyone for coming to the second of several evidence sessions for the APPG's Inquiry into the sentencing of women.

Baroness Corston explained that the APPG's call for written evidence for the Inquiry had now closed. The APPG had received 11 submissions with more expected this week. This included evidence from charities, legal organisations, trade unions, women's centres and academics. The chairs and officers were very grateful to all the organisations and individuals who took the time to submit evidence.

The minutes from the previous meeting were approved.

Baroness Corston introduced Dame Glenys Stacey.

Dame Glenys introduced herself and addressed the issues of transparency and sentencer confidence.

Dame Glenys noted that, if sentencers made a community order, they could not always guarantee that a woman would be overseen by a women's centre – which was up to the individual CRC. She raised concern at the lack of specific direct funding for women's centres.

Victoria Prentis asked whether Dame Glenys thought suspended sentences were misused.

Dame Glenys said she had been heartened by the NPS decision to recommend a more cautious use of suspended sentences.

Baroness Corston asked Dame Glenys what emphasis the inspectorate put on gender issues during inspections.

Dame Glenys described how last year they had carried out a limited consultation to reach a new set of standards for probation inspection, and a number of those standards related to diversity.

The inspectorate did not have specific standards or policies for women; instead it had a requirement that, for everyone on probation, the needs of the individual should be taken into account. Dame Glenys said the key was not a set of requirements on probation for women generally, but for women to be individually assessed.

Baroness Corston asked a question about the sale of the premises at Eden House which is one of the long standing and most successful women's centres.

Dame Glenys said that this was not the sort of information that the inspectorate would be routinely given. She pointed out that it was interesting that the NPS appeared to be responsible for the sale.

Sarah Champion MP pointed out that Dame Glenys was two-thirds of the way through her contract and asked her to reflect on what had surprised her and what she was most pleased about. Sarah Champion MP asked Dame Glenys what were the key changes that she wished to see.

Dame Glenys said that in the first eight or nine months there had been a sense of hope and this was reflected in HMI Probation's September 2016 report on women. Eighteen months on, she said that she did not get that same sense. There had been a retraction in the probation system, with hard choices made due to a lack of money. She noted that most probation staff were women, and most probation staff went the extra mile for women, which gave her comfort.

Dame Glenys said that she wanted to see the Ministry of Justice's long promised women's strategy. She was adamant that the one thing she wished for in the government's anticipated women's strategy is that good women's centres should be funded securely.

Dame Glenys wanted new standards embedded, with every CRC and the National Probation Service (NPS) assessed against these new standards. CRCs embedding standards that were subject to quality assurance would act as a counterbalance to some of the immediate contractual failures of CRCs.

Sarah Champion asked what services Dame Glenys had been hoping for, that had been lost over this past couple of years.

Dame Glenys mentioned services that had seen cutbacks: the 'New Dawn New Day' women's centre in Leicester which had a suite of four programmes in women-only environments; the Good Loaf women's centre in Northampton functioning as a social enterprise and the women's centre in Huddersfield. These centres had several funding streams which meant that they delivered the sentence of the court wrapped inside more imaginative and caring programmes that really helped women.

Lord Ramsbotham noted that in HMI Probation's report on the supply chain they said CRCs are criticised for not employing enough women. Dame Glenys said the inspectorate did not have enough information on women being disadvantaged by the supply chain.

Kate Green MP asked about the importance and impact of devolution.

Dame Glenys pointed out that in Greater Manchester there was a long history of cooperation between agencies and the infrastructure there that brought together local government, police services and women's centres had been particularly successful.

Dame Glenys had advised government that it should think before acting. There needed to be some fundamental consideration by government of what probation had to deliver – what were its aims, and design principles. There was a value chain that probation needed to deliver with three key blocks: a good one to one relationship with a probation officer; linked statutory services and engagement with local specialist services. Any future model needed to secure these things. She identified the failure of CRCs to live up to this.

Kate Green MP asked whether the consequences of splitting probation into the NPS and CRCs had been good or adverse for women.

Dame Glenys said that because women generally serve shorter sentences than men, women had been disproportionately adversely impacted by the introduction of post-release supervision

Kate Green MP noted that the Lord Chancellor had said Dame Glenys had reported that decisions regarding breach and recall were not being made inappropriately.

Dame Glenys clarified that the process was carried out appropriately, but the bigger concern was the failure of supervision beforehand. Poor supervision was likely to lead to poor engagement, and therefore triggered a higher rate of recall. She said she was ill at ease with the system of recall.

Baroness Armstrong noted that women who came into contact with the criminal justice system had often suffered violence, abuse and neglect, and probably a combination of these. She asked Dame Glenys what particular treatment or interventions produced the best outcomes for these women.

Dame Glenys said that there was a lot of research on what worked, and she kept coming back to the value of women's centres. Dame Glenys said that women were abused by men on a scale that few people recognised. HMI Probation had just started a thematic review on domestic abuse.

Baroness Corston asked whether there was a difference between how women were dealt with by women's centres and by CRCs, and whether group work was effective for women.

Dame Glenys said that it was usually crucial to build women's self-esteem and give them a sense of worth. Women doing unpaid work that was valued helped with this; for women on probation this tended to be through singleton placements in charity shops. She noted that women's centres work in a way that focusses on the needs of the individual rather than forcing women into programmes that may be unsuitable but CRCs had a more-for-less philosophy.

Kate Green asked whether Dame Glenys thought sentencers were adequately informed.

Dame Glenys said that HMI Probation's 2016 report had surveyed sentencers, who said for the most part they did feel adequately informed. Last year its report on court reporting revealed some gaps in magistrates' knowledge and understanding, for example around gender-specific interventions. She said that accredited programmes had fallen off a cliff as an unintended consequence of transforming rehabilitation and due to a focus on speedy justice, although they were not always appropriate for women anyway.

Kate Green MP noted that in 2016, 271 women were sentenced to prison by magistrates for less than two weeks. She asked Dame Glenys whether probation staff had a role in preventing these extremely short sentences – for example, through what they recommended in their reports and what the Inspectorate was doing to address this problem.

Dame Glenys said she thought that this was a matter of government policy and liaising with the judicial college. NPS staff had an obligation to write a report recommending the sentence – and in her experience they rarely recommended custody – but they could not stop a sentencer imposing a short prison sentence on a woman even when it had not been recommended.

Lord Ramsbotham noted that in Scandinavia people were taken back to sentencers at the end of a sentence. Dame Glenys agreed that closing the loop in this way could be beneficial but said she was wary of 'policy-shopping' from other jurisdictions.

Fiona Mactaggart asked whether the guidance on assessing women's caring responsibilities before sentencing was enough.

Dame Glenys said that this was the responsibility of the NPS and the information should be available to the court.

Fiona Mactaggart noted that one could not always tell from the documentation provided to the court whether it concerned a man or a woman. She asked Dame Glenys whether it made clear whether someone had a child.

Dame Glenys said it did not and added that oral reports were difficult to quality assure.

Lord Ramsbotham said that CRCs had an obligation to help people deal with issues around drugs and mental health. He was concerned with the lack of impetus around drug treatment orders.

Dame Glenys said that drug treatment orders, like accredited programmes, were not being offered as often as previously. Rehabilitation activity requirements (RAR) had taken their place. She thought the biggest problem was in fact not drugs, but the availability of accommodation.

Baroness Corston asked whether the inspectorate had sufficient powers to encourage probation services to follow its recommendations – for example, to resource probation services so they could cope with individuals with complex need.

Dame Glenys said it did have sufficient powers, and it hoped to have more impact than ever because of the new regulations. However, to have impact on how resources are spent, or the totality of resources, would require a regulator.

Baroness Corston asked Dame Glenys why, in her view, we were still imprisoning so many women and had not made more progress in all this time. She asked Dame Glenys, if she could make one change to address this, what it would be.

Dame Glenys said her personal view was that women should only be sentenced to community sentences, save for serious offences such as murder, manslaughter or a serious sexual offence. Women could be dealt with in the community by women's centres

Baroness Corston asked how Dame Glenys could help contribute to Women In Prison's aim of '2020 by 2020', namely, to half the women's prison population by 2020.

Dame Glenys said she could signal when she saw good support in the community as there is a difference between what is acceptable and what is outstanding. They could also choose helpful thematic reports.

Baroness Corston asked what kind of relationship the inspectorate had with magistrates. She asked how HMI Probation could make sure magistrates learnt from the inspectorate's reports and what HMI Probation could do to encourage communication with the magistracy more broadly.

Dame Glenys said that sometimes she met the Magistrates Association but the challenge was how to meet the magistrates that are harder to reach, otherwise one was simply preaching to the converted. She said that they had recently appointed a new Head of Communications, one of whose priorities was to be engaging with the magistrates across the country.

Baroness Corston thanked everyone and closed the meeting.