



All Party Parliamentary Group  
Women in the Penal System

**Minutes of the Inaugural Meeting (EGM)  
Held on Tuesday 4 February 2020 at 3pm  
In Committee Room 2A, House of Lords**

**Chair**

Kate Green MP

**Present**

Baroness Corston  
Victoria Prentis MP  
Baroness Armstrong  
Lord Bradley  
Baroness Bakewell  
Baroness Uddin  
Baroness Sater  
Julie Marson MP  
Laura Farris MP  
Alicia Kearns MP  
Imran Ahmad-Khan MP  
Baroness Howe  
Liz Saville-Roberts MP  
Baroness Burt  
Baroness Bennett

Eleanor Lynch, Office of Lord Taylor  
Bryony Loveless, Office of Kate Green MP

**In attendance**

Andrew Neilson, Howard League for Penal Reform  
Lorraine Atkinson, Howard League for Penal Reform  
Miranda Bevan, Howard League for Penal Reform  
Eleanor Careless, Howard League for Penal Reform  
Nerissa Martin, the Tolkein Trust

**Apologies**

Sarah Champion MP

Baroness Fall  
Lord Ramsbotham  
Baroness Hamwee  
Lord Taylor  
Lord Judd

1. Welcome

Kate Green MP welcomed everyone.

2. Apologies

Kate Green MP reported that apologies had been received from a number of people (listed above).

3. Election of new co-chairs and officers

The meeting commenced with the election of co-chairs and officers for 2020. The following were elected unanimously:

Co-chairs:

Baroness Jean Corston  
Victoria Prentis MP  
Kate Green MP

Officers:

Sarah Champion MP  
Baroness Hamwee  
Baroness Uddin  
Imran Ahmad-Khan MP

4. It was agreed that the Howard League for Penal Reform would continue to provide administrative support to the APPG on Women in the Penal System

5. Future plans for the APPG

Kate Green MP reported that prior to the general election, the APPG had been conducting an inquiry on reducing the arrests of women and this would continue. It was also launching an inquiry on reducing the imprisonment of women following on from the previous work of the APPG.

6. At the AGM in October it was proposed that the APPG would hold two meetings per parliamentary session. One session would focus on reducing arrests and the other would look at reducing the imprisonment of women. The Howard League was providing funding to support the work of the two inquiries.

**Evidence Session**

7. Kate Green MP introduced the witnesses:

Lorraine Atkinson is senior policy officer at the Howard League and is leading on the programme of work to reduce the arrests of women. Lorraine previously supported the work of the APPG inquiry on keeping girls out of the penal system.

Dr Miranda Bevan is leading on the Howard League's work on the sentencing of women. She was previously a criminal barrister and has worked in law reform. She holds a PhD on the experience of children in police custody.

## **8. Inquiry on reducing arrests of women**

Lorraine Atkinson updated the APPG of the progress of the inquiry on reducing the arrests of women, which was launched in May 2019. The APPG had held three evidence sessions to date with input from Thames Valley Police, the Independent Custody Visiting Association, the Howard League for Penal Reform and the Nelson Trust.

9. The APPG briefing on reducing arrests was published in September 2019. The briefing was sent to ministers, police chief constables in England and Wales, police and crime commissioners (PCCs), the College of Policing and the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC). Subsequently Frances Crook had met with senior police officers, the College of Policing and the NPCC to discuss the arrests of women. Several forces had agreed to conduct further analysis of the arrests of women and to see what could be done differently.

10. The Home Office annual data on arrests was published in October 2019 and showed that arrests of women had fallen by 1.8 per cent compared to the previous year. There were over 97,000 arrests of women in the year ending March 2019. Across England and Wales women were arrested at a rate of one arrest every five minutes.

11. The data on arrests showed that there were 43,000 arrests of women for violent offences. Lorraine Atkinson said this was an area that required further analysis to explore the reasons for arrests and to see what the police could have done differently to prevent unnecessary arrests. Lorraine Atkinson said there was still some way to go in ensuring that police officers understood that treating women equally did not mean that they had to be treated the same as men.

12. Kate Green MP asked for clarity about the role of the Home Office in implementing the Ministry of Justice strategy for female offenders. She suggested the APPG could invite the two departments to give evidence to the APPG.

13. Lord Bradley said the national concordat on female offenders, promised following the publication of the female offender strategy, would be discussed at the next meeting of the Advisory Board on Female Offenders.

14. Kate Green MP said that the College of Policing had a role to play in reducing the arrests of women and suggested the APPG should invite the college to give evidence.

15. Baroness Uddin asked about recalls to prison. Miranda Bevan reported that the APPG inquiry would focus on remands and sentencing and other organisations were looking at recalls to prison. Baroness Uddin invited attendees to an event on 26 February 2020 which would consider the issue of recalls.

16. Baroness Sater asked if PCCs had been contacted. Lorraine Atkinson reported that all PCCs had received a copy of the briefing. Kate Green MP suggested that it might be useful to talk to PCCs who had adopted the whole system approach to women, she made reference to the work being done in Manchester as an example. Baroness Sater requested more information on the types of violent offences that women were being arrested for.

17. Liz Saville-Roberts noted the lack of disaggregated data on Wales regarding women in the criminal justice system. The rate of immediate sentences of imprisonment in South Wales was particularly high for women.

18. Lorraine Atkinson replied that the inquiries on arrests and imprisonment would be looking at the data on women in Wales and Frances Crook had met the Chief Constable for Wales and was meeting the Chief Constable for South Wales.

19. Baroness Burt asked about the disproportionate impact of short sentences, post release supervision and transforming rehabilitation (TR) on women. Lorraine Atkinson replied that this was still an issue. Kate Green MP said the APPG should ensure that getting rid of short sentences remained on the government's agenda.

## **20. Inquiry on reducing the imprisonment of women**

Dr Miranda Bevan stated that the inquiry on reducing the imprisonment of women would focus on reducing the use of remand into custody and reducing the use of prison sentences.

21. The remand population for women had risen by 21 per cent since 2018, twice the rise observed in the male remand population. Nearly half the women entering prison did so on remand. 63 per cent of the women remanded to prison by the magistrates' courts did not go on to receive an immediate prison sentence. Women on remand were vulnerable and at greater risk of self-injury and suicide. The inquiry would be focusing on the magistrates' court, collating research evidence and data as well as engaging with those who played a part in remand hearings.

22. The inquiry to reduce the imprisonment of women was focusing on the overuse of short-term prison sentences for women, in light of the damaging impact that this had on the women themselves and on their children. Short custodial sentences for women were often unnecessary, with a strikingly high proportion of sentences under 12 months given to women who were of low or medium risk to the public. They were also often counter-productive and were associated with statistically significant higher levels of reoffending compared with community orders.

23. The inquiry would collate and argue the case for changes to the legal guidance for sentencers to restrict their use of short-term custodial sentences for women. It would also look at the need for guidance for legal practitioners representing women at remand and sentence hearings.

24. Baroness Corston said there was a need for Sentencing Council guidelines on sentencing women.

25. Baroness Corston asked what the Ministry of Justice was doing about the increase in remands. Dr Bevan reported that she was meeting the Ministry of Justice remand team who were looking in particular at bail information services.

26. Liz Saville-Roberts MP asked about the secure provision for women in Wales. Women sentenced to prison were sent to Styal and Eastwood Park. Baroness Corston stated that she had warned the Ministry of Justice against building women's prisons in Wales, since this would only encourage sentencers to fill them.

27. Baroness Bakewell asked engagement with magistrates. Dr Bevan noted that there were difficulties in engaging with sentencers due to the need to maintain the independence of the judiciary.

28. Kate Green MP asked which minister had responsibility for the Female Offender Strategy. Andrew Neilson confirmed that Lucy Frazer was the minister in charge.

29. Kate Green MP was concerned that the impetus behind the Government's Female Offender Strategy might fade away. She suggested inviting the minister to come and give evidence to the APPG.

30. Baroness Howe asked what experience and knowledge magistrates had of the issues facing those who come before them. Dr Bevan reported that magistrates came with a wide range of experiences, but that there was no longer the depth of liaison between probation officers and sentencers that there had previously been to enhance their knowledge and understanding.

31. Kate Green commented that as a former magistrate, she felt there was a gap in the training of magistrates which required addressing. It was her impression that magistrates received less training and there was less localised training. As a result, magistrates were often not aware of local provision for women.

32. Baroness Bennett noted that the Corston Report had had a significant impact on policy. She asked about the impact of the privatisation of probation on services for women. Dr Bevan reported that Transforming Rehabilitation (TR) had had a particularly damaging effect on community provision for women. The APPG had produced a report previously on this negative impact. It was noted that changes to probation were due in 2021, and earlier in Wales.

33. Liz Saville-Roberts MP said that the impact of maternal imprisonment on children had public traction. Baroness Sater referred to the useful recommendations in Lord Farmer's Review for Women.

34. Kate Green thanked everyone for coming. She stated that the APPG on women in the penal system had made a real impact in the past and would continue to do so.