



All Party Parliamentary Group  
Women in the Penal System

## **EGM of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Women in the Penal System**

**11.00am-11.30am  
Wednesday 16 September 2020  
Virtual meeting via Zoom**

### **Minutes**

**Chair:** Baroness Corston

### **Attendees**

Debbie Abrahams MP  
Baroness Bennett  
Lord Bradley  
Baroness Burt  
Sarah Champion MP  
Jackie Doyle-Price MP  
Baroness Hamwee  
Lord Judd  
Lord Ramsbotham  
Baroness Sater

### **Apologies**

Lord Bishop of Gloucester  
Lord Carlile  
Baroness Fall

### **1. Welcome from the chair**

Baroness Corston welcomed everyone to the APPG virtual meeting.

The minutes of the inaugural meeting on 4 February 2020 were approved.

### **2. Election of co-chairs and officers for 2020-21**

The following officers were elected unanimously.

### **Co-chairs**

Baroness Jean Corston  
Jackie Doyle-Price MP  
Debbie Abrahams MP

### **Officers**

Baroness Hamwee

### **3. Brief update on the APPG inquiries and work during the pandemic**

Frances Crook gave a brief update on the work of the two current APPG inquiries.

#### **Inquiry to reduce the arrests of women**

The APPG on Women in the Penal System launched its inquiry into reducing the arrests of women in May 2019. The aims of the inquiry were:

- To reduce arrests of women year on year
- To influence police policy and practice
- To share good practice in keeping women out of the criminal justice system
- To build on the Government's Female Offender Strategy

The APPG had held four evidence sessions in Parliament and heard evidence from Thames Valley Police, the Independent Custody Visitors Association, the Howard League and the Nelson Trust. The first APPG briefing on reducing arrests was published in September 2019. <https://howardleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/APPG-Arresting-the-entry-of-women-into-the-criminal-justice-system.pdf>

To complement the APPG Inquiry and to prepare the second briefing for the APPG, the Howard League met chief constables and senior officers. Five police forces shared data on arrests of women and conducted analyses of the arrests for the APPG. It had succeeded in persuading the National Police Chiefs Council to appoint a lead officer for women.

#### **Inquiry to reduce the imprisonment of women**

The aims of this APPG inquiry were:

- To reduce the number of women remanded to prison
- To reduce the use of short prison sentences, with a particular focus on sentencing in the magistrates' court

On 20 May 2020 the Co-Chairs and Officers of the APPG wrote a [letter](#), signed by more than 40 parliamentarians, urging the Lord Chancellor to release pregnant women and mothers and babies from prisons, in light of coronavirus concerns.

APPG plans for forthcoming year included:

- 28 September 2020 -publication of the second report on reducing arrests of women
- Winter 2020 -publication of a briefing on the abolition of the Victorian law to remand women for their own protection
- Winter 2020 and spring 2021 -oral hearings and evidence sessions
- Further publications for the two Inquiries

The co-chairs of the APPG planned to meet with ministers to discuss the APPG's work.

Baroness Burt asked whether the APPG intended to look at the number of women leaving prison into homelessness. Baroness Burt said she would be asking a parliamentary question on women prisoners and homelessness.

Frances Crook said that the work of the two APPG inquiries was focussing on reducing the numbers of women coming into the criminal justice system. The work was having an impact and the APPG focus would remain on what could be done to keep women out of prison.

### **4. Thanks**

Baroness Corston thanked everyone for attending. She also wanted to place on record her thanks to the two previous co-chairs, Kate Green MP and Victoria Prentis MP. Both Kate Green and Victoria Prentis had had to stand down due to their new parliamentary roles. Their work for the APPG had been invaluable.