



Justice Committee

Oral evidence: [Women in Prison](#), HC 73

Tuesday 20 July 2021

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Members present: Sir Robert Neill (Chair); Rob Butler; Angela Crawley; James Daly; Miss Sarah Dines; Maria Eagle; Kate Hollern; Dr Kieran Mullan; Andy Slaughter.

Questions 81 - 158

Witnesses

[I](#): Keds, Former Prisoner; Lucy, Former Prisoner; Lisa N, Former Prisoner; and Anna Hamill, Team Administrator and Involvement Officer, Revolving Doors.

[II](#): Jessica Mullen, Acting Co-Chief Executive and Director of Influence and Communications, Clinks; Peter Dawson, Director, Prison Reform Trust; and Jemima Olchawski, Chief Executive, Agenda Alliance.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Keds, Lucy, Lisa N and Anna Hamill.

Chair: Welcome to this session of the Justice Committee. We are continuing to hear evidence in our inquiry into women in the prison system. We will come to our two panels of witnesses very shortly. First, as a formal matter at the start of every meeting those of us with any relevant interests have to declare them. I am a non-practising barrister.

Rob Butler: Prior to my election I was a non-executive director of Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service and the magistrate member of the Sentencing Council.

Miss Dines: I am a barrister, but I have not taken a case since my election in 2019.

Chair: Those are the people in the room. I turn to those of us joining remotely.

Maria Eagle: I am a non-practising solicitor.

Andy Slaughter: I am a non-practising barrister.

James Daly: I am a practising solicitor and partner in a firm of solicitors.

Q81 **Chair:** Welcome to Kate Hollern, a new member of the Committee. Kate, you have made your general declaration of interest. I do not think there is anything to add in relation to this inquiry, but in any event welcome to the Committee. We look forward to working with you.

Our first three witnesses are Kedrina, Lucy and Lisa. Thank you very much for coming to help us with your experiences. I think Anna Hamill from Revolving Doors is on the call but will not be a witness. Thanks for your assistance in that regard, Anna. We are very grateful to you.

I appreciate that it is not always easy to talk about this. We understand, and I look at it more as a discussion than formal questions in this sense. If you are able to, could you explain a bit of the background as to how the three of you ended up in the prison system? What were the different reasons and circumstances? What was going on in your life at the time? What gave rise to it? Then perhaps we will talk about what effect prison had on you and your families and what happened afterwards. Who wants to start on that one? First, would you all introduce yourselves?

Lucy: Good afternoon. My name is Lucy. I am part of the lived experience team for Revolving Doors. I have been working with them for the past year on a number of different projects, and I am really excited to be here today.

Q82 **Chair:** Thanks for coming. Lucy, would you tell us a little bit about that? Can you share with us how that came about?



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Lucy: I had a relatively good upbringing. Some personal things happened that traumatised me and I ended up in a wrong situation. I went away from everybody I knew and my family. I was only young. I went into the city. Some horrendous things happened and I ended up in the prison system. First, it was the care system. I was never given any hope.

Q83 **Chair:** You had been in care before going to prison.

Lucy: Two years. That's how I ended up in prison. It was just a spiral; I kept going further and further down and, before I knew it, I was in prison, broken, frightened and scared. I was a baby when I first went to prison. If somebody had been there, maybe they would have done community sentences or something back then with the resources or the services, and it would have saved 21 years of my life being wasted.

Q84 **Chair:** When did you first go to prison, Lucy? How long ago was it that you first went to prison?

Lucy: I was 18. I went two days after my 18th birthday. I am now 42. I got released from prison two years ago. I have turned my life around. I have a house and I am training with Revolving Doors; I am doing driving lessons, and I will never look back. I have the help now. It took 21 years. I carried a lot of stuff around with me that I have kept to myself because nobody reached out; nobody helped me; I just got judged. They didn't want to know.

Q85 **Chair:** Had you had previous sentences such as community orders, fines, probation or anything like that before you went to prison?

Lucy: I had one stable probation for a while. I think it was an order. I don't think it was a community order. I don't know what they were called back then. I was working with a probation officer. They had just brought out acupuncture and stuff. I remember that that helped me a little, but I have had no counselling.

There are so many young women and women of my age in the system who are broken. They have been seriously abused and have ended up by going into that spiral and then coming under the criminal justice system. Some of those people have lost their children; they have lost their lives. They did not do anything; they were traumatised or seriously abused by somebody else, which destroyed their life and sent them into the criminal justice system, where a lot of them have just been left. There are no proper courses.

They shut down the mental hospitals and sent people from mental hospitals to prison. They should not even be in there because they have different needs. They were being tormented by officers and people in there. There was no proper counselling for women. A lot of women had suffered domestic violence. Social services had taken children away from a home where the kids were loved, and then they had problems and it broke them. These women need help and counselling. They need proper, structured courses.



Q86 **Chair:** Do you mind telling me what sort of offence it was that you ended up going to prison for?

Lucy: The last one was my partner assaulting somebody with a weapon. Obviously, I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. I had not been in any trouble for 11 years. Even though my life was not sorted out, I had not been to prison for 11 years. Because of the past—I don't know—I was sent to prison.

Q87 **Chair:** You have had more than one experience of imprisonment. Put it that way.

Lucy: Yes. I won't be having it again.

Q88 **Chair:** I understand. Kedrina or Lisa, I wonder whether you would like to give us a little bit of background as to what happened to you.

Lisa N: Thank you, Lucy, for starting us off. What was my life like? At the time I was sent to prison part of me was quite relieved that I was taken away from my life at the time. My life was in tatters and I was in a really destructive relationship. I could not stop using substances. I was an intravenous drug user on heroin and crack. I couldn't stop. My addiction was escalating and that had a really bad impact on my mental health. I have a bipolar diagnosis. I was hallucinating and having psychosis, and I didn't have secure housing. I think I had a lot of built-up trauma as a result of my addiction. I found myself getting caught up in heavier and heavier crimes, and involved with more and more dangerous people.

When I went to prison, I was relieved. I thought, "Thank God I've been given the opportunity to be removed from my life and possibly have a period of time when I'm away from that." I had every determination to get my life back together. At the time, I had a lot of hope that while I was away I would not be using substances and would be on a script for methadone or Subutex. I was hopeful that I might get mental health support and have some stability and consistency. I stand by the fact that my experience was that it was an extremely wasted opportunity.

Q89 **Chair:** By the sound of it, the things you hoped for didn't happen.

Lisa N: No, they didn't. I was moved to four different prisons. Every time I almost got on a certain course or something that would potentially help me, I was moved. When I eventually came off Subutex, which was to try to help me detox, my mental health went so crazy that I was suicidal. I was begging for mental health support and had to be on a long waiting list. The solution they offered me was that I could do a crack and heroin awareness course and safer injecting course or go back on methadone.

In hindsight, none of those would have dealt with the problem; it was just putting another sticking plaster over it. We will probably go on to talk about what it was like to leave prison, but for me, by the time I left prison, I was getting caught up in all sorts of trouble. I had every intention to try to relocate and sort my life out the other side, and then



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another spiral happened, which I think we will cover in other questions later on.

Q90 **Chair:** Did you serve just one period in prison or more than one?

Lisa N: I was inside for 18 months and left prison in 2013.

Q91 **Chair:** That is very helpful. Kedrina, what is your take on it?

Keds: I had a pretty okay upbringing. I lived in a broken home, but I still did the normal kinds of things kids would do. Coming up to teenage was when things turned to a bad phase. I was having issues at home. I was always out and taking care of myself. I lived with my father at the time, so it was basically me taking care of myself. Once I got to my adult stages, I basically raised myself from the age of 14 until I went to prison.

I did not really have much support. Growing up, I allowed myself to shield and not trust. It was easier not to trust people than it was to trust them. Then I started to trust again because I ended up getting into a relationship. By doing that and letting down my guard, I ended up in prison, which was really hard. It was a first offence. I had never been to prison for a day in my life. I always strived to do good things. I had even secured my dream job. It might have been a little thing to someone else, but it was my dream job; it was just a little betting-shop job. I had to go to court on that case and fight to prove my innocence and things like that. I was innocent, but that is another story. That affected my entire life. Everything came crashing down. Mental health issues that had been tucked away over the years flared up—childhood stuff and things like that.

When I ended up in prison, I got a sentence of over four years, bearing in mind I had never been in trouble with the authorities in having to attend court and things like that. I was striving for greatness and that never happened, but I will still always say that going to prison saved me. A lot of people wonder why I say that. If I had never gone to prison, I would not be where I am now; I would not have the job I have now; I would not be communicating with the people I communicate with now.

Chair: That's helpful.

Keds: Yes, prison was an awful experience for me, but it motivated me so much that I know I could not end up back there again. I went in there as a first-time offender and saw women being treated badly by officers or other prisoners. I was myself discriminated against because of the colour of my skin. There were incidents where I had to save prisoners' lives. It was not my duty of care; it was the duty of care of officers to look after those women. Those women are suicidal and need support. There is no one they can go to because they don't trust anyone. When they do go to an officer—I have experienced it myself—they are just turned away. As a prisoner at the time, it was not my job to be looking after somebody else. I was just trying to get through my time.



Q92 **Chair:** That is helpful. Do you mind telling me what the offence was?

Keds: Drug charges—offences for drugs.

Chair: That was why you were sentenced as a first offender. I understand that. Some of my colleagues are going to ask some questions.

Q93 **Rob Butler:** Kedrina, Lucy and Lisa, thank you for talking with us this afternoon and sharing your experiences. Sometimes we want to put our experiences behind us, particularly if they have been unpleasant, so it is valuable to us, and we very much appreciate that you are helping us to get a thorough insight into the reality of what women's prisons are like.

On that note, Kedrina, I wonder whether I could carry on with you. You mentioned that you would not be where you are now if you had not been in prison, but it seemed to be more because it was bad and it was a deterrent than any rehabilitation. Could you confirm whether or not I am right in that assumption? If it was a deterrent, does that mean in a way that prison worked for you?

Keds: No. I am a motivated person. I could be at my all-time low and I will make sure that I get myself where I need to be. There were members of staff in the last prison I was in who were extremely beneficial to my life. They saw things in me at that time that I did not see. During the time I was in prison, I worked with young offenders. That was my passion. I had wanted to work with young offenders ever since I was about 18. Once I did that, I was working with care leavers. This was all within prison. Being a care leaver myself, it was easy for me to do those things. One particular member of staff always had my back and pushed me, but I found everything I needed to find to get me where I am.

Q94 **Rob Butler:** To what extent do you think prison as an environment is helpful for rehabilitation?

Keds: If I can be honest, I never received any rehabilitation. I was just told a release date and I worked towards my release date, counting every single day on calendars that I still have to this day. In my last two weeks of prison, I was asked, "Have you got somewhere to live?" Thank God I had a relative who was adamant that I had to come home. If I did not have a relative, I would have been at risk of being recalled to prison because I was having issues with the accommodation I was living in before I went into prison.

Q95 **Rob Butler:** I know that one of my colleagues will talk a little bit more in a minute or two about what happens when you leave prison, but can we carry on focusing for a minute on when you were in custody? Lucy, what was your impression of anything that would have helped with rehabilitation?

Lucy: I didn't see any rehabilitation. So many women are suffering historical trauma that there are not enough resources for therapists and counsellors. There was a load of cutbacks in staffing and one thing and



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another. If you can imagine however many women are in prison, 90% have mental health problems due to something that has happened to them. They are broken and lost. They don't trust people in authority because they have been let down badly by the wrong people in the system. They won't ask for help because they are scared; they won't reach out, because when you have had to shut down and been let down by people in the system it makes you very wary of everything and everyone. When you feel like that, how do you reach out?

Q96 **Rob Butler:** Did you have the opportunity to do any classes, education, workshops or gardening? When I have visited women's prisons, there were lots of different activities that they told me were towards rehabilitation. Did you have any of that?

Lucy: I left school because I was troubled. I didn't do my exams. On my sentence I got all my qualifications, but I had to push to go to education because they told me I had to work and I could not go to full-time education. I eventually stuck with it and got all my qualifications: levels 1 and 2 City and Guilds English; level 1 City and Guilds maths; two level 2 business courses; a level 2 in warehousing and storage, and food safety and catering. I did classes on self-confidence, wellbeing and some minor relaxation things, but that was short-lived and it did not happen in every prison.

There should be more structured courses involving life skills. A lot of women in prison do not have the simple life skills that some people have. Without those basic life skills and knowledge, you cannot survive. To get women bonding and talking, I think talking therapy is one of the best things you can do. If prisons set up peer mentors or people with lived experience to do those things with women, I think women would open up more, because they would know that those people had been through similar or the same stuff, so they can relate to them; they would know they are not in the system.

I was not helped; I was judged. I was suffering a head injury. I had a severe mental breakdown. Nobody picked up on it. About a year into my sentence, a friend said, "You're not well." I realised it then. It took a long time to come back from that, but I am so happy I was put in the right place with Revolving Doors, because I am doing some amazing things. It has completely changed my life.

Q97 **Rob Butler:** It is good to hear that. Congratulations on all those qualifications. You gave a pretty long list. Well done. Lisa, could I ask you the same question? Do you think prison was an effective place for rehabilitation?

Lisa N: In my experience, not really. Cuts came into play halfway through my sentence, so some of the courses I had heard about, like the Forgiveness project and Sycamore Tree, were no longer available. Those were courses that resonated with me because I had to realise how to break my cycle of crime, addiction and shame.



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Before I went to prison I had a degree, qualifications, a career and I had worked. I had been a productive member of society. I had enough about me to know what I needed to do. Similar to what Kedrina talked about, I had motivation and fight, but we are here to speak for those who do not have a voice and are no longer with us. I saw that they had absolutely zero resources in resilience and how to release themselves from trauma, deal with emotions or properly break the cycle. I saw people who were there because it was a healthcare issue, not necessarily a moral one. In my opinion, a lot of them are victims. Some of them are in prison for lengthy periods of time.

If I could have seen somebody with lived experience who had broken the cycle, they could have given me hope and said, "You can live in a different way." When you get out, there could be somebody there beyond the gate. That is why we talk quite a lot about peer support and lived experience involvement and having that diversity. I think that proper trauma-informed intervention is important. It took me quite a few years after prison to be able to find those kinds of course and that was in the community.

Q98 Rob Butler: Let me ask each of you briefly what might be a difficult question. A lot of people will say, "Well, people are sent to prison only if they have done something seriously wrong and prison is a punishment." Do you think that balance is right? Do you think we spend too much time not thinking about punishment, just about rehabilitation, or the opposite, that punishment is too big a part of the equation? How do we get that balance right?

Lisa N: I had committed crimes and I needed to pay for my crime. There was theft, fraud and a number of different charges. Yes, I needed to pay for it, but what is the point of sending me to prison for a year and a half when it costs—I don't know—£53,000 a year to send someone to prison, and not give me and other women enough to work on ourselves so that when we leave prison we feel strong and have the resources to know what to avoid and how to live our lives moving forward? I do not know whether that answers your question.

Q99 Rob Butler: Absolutely. Kedrina, what do you think about the idea that we must not forget that part of the prison sentence is about punishment?

Keds: I think too much time is spent on the sentence. Too much time is spent on trying to get a conviction and not enough time is spent looking at that person to see whether that person has been in trouble for a day in their life, and whether that person can be worked with better to ensure they are taking positive steps.

Yes, prison is there as a punishment at the end of the day, but once a person has been convicted and they end up in prison and the prison sentence has started, a lot of things are not taken into consideration. They talk about assessments and things like that, but the assessments aren't done correctly. People's needs inside prison are not met. My needs



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were not met at all. Coming up to release, I did not even know who my probation officer was.

Q100 **Rob Butler:** I promise you we will come on to the bit just before release. Lucy, very quickly if you don't mind, what are your thoughts on punishment and the need perhaps for the victims of offences to see that people who have committed them have been punished? Do you think we get that balance right?

Lucy: No, definitely not. Your punishment is to be locked away from everything and everybody, and having dignity and privacy taken away where you feel degraded. You have no privacy; nothing is your own. The fact that you have no freedom is punishment in itself, but there is a reason 90% of the time that people end up committing a crime. I did not commit a crime because I wanted to gain financially or I was naughty. I was a baby and just needed someone to pull me in and realise what was going on with me; I wanted somebody to see the signs: "Something is going on with this girl. We need to sit down and find out what's what." If I'd had somebody to pull me in, believe in me and be my mentor in helping me to move forward in life, I would not have had a criminal record. That is 100% fact. The punishment still is not over because it is on record; it stops adoption; it stops me going to certain places on holiday.

Rob Butler: Thank you very much.

Q101 **Angela Crawley:** We have already covered the concept of rehabilitation and punishment. You can only speak to your own experience, but what would effective rehabilitation have looked like for each of you? Lisa, you touched on this. Can you define for me what trauma-informed prison work would actually look like?

Lisa N: My understanding of trauma-informed is that when I got that kind of treatment I was talked to like I was a human being, with care, empathy and compassion. It was a bit overwhelming at the time. You have to remember that when you have been in the prison system and that way of life you cannot unsee certain things. Often, our coping mechanism is one of anger and aggression, but underneath I was hurt and scared.

It was not until I was given interventions that I saw what they looked like. Some of them were about pattern changing and how to build healthy relationships; some were about how to manage anger and violence; some were about how to be a woman and still have rights. I was never told that. Ultimately, this is stuff that we need to be teaching children at school as well. If it starts getting integrated in the prison system, you will have a little bit more healing as a whole person.

When I am treated like a human being, I want to do all right; when I am treated as being worthy and not dictated by stigma and stereotype—the ball and chain of my past—I have a choice. You can make that choice every day. It is all about empowering and encouraging change. Every



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single human being has the capacity to up the level of their life and live a life of freedom; to have love in their life and achieve certain things. On our involvement panel, we have some incredible people who are capable of anything and everything. Somebody has told us, "We believe in you," and that makes a huge difference.

Q102 Angela Crawley: Thank you, Lisa. I think you captured that really well. It is important to understand exactly what trauma-informed support looks like for the individual. Obviously, it is different for everyone.

Lucy, would you like to acknowledge or address what effective rehabilitation would have looked like in your case? You mentioned that you have a care experience background. What interventions could have been taken in your life perhaps to make it look different?

Lucy: I think it would be to put in trauma-informed training right from the police station to the court. When training prison officers, they should have a trauma-informed course; or maybe the staff in the prison could do it together as a group and learn together. Then it will start to take off.

It is not something that will just happen; we know it takes a while for things to change. They could be given training from the start, with more structured courses, focusing on person-centred needs, and having the resources to educate them and set them up with life skills, if they do not have them. A lot of women in prison have no one. I was so broken, hurt, lost and angry. I was so frustrated I did not know who to trust and talk to. It was frustration, but it was classed as aggressive. That was how people looked at me. Now people have got to know me and the truth has come out, they have realised that it's not the case.

Suicide rates in women's prisons are horrendous. I lost five people before I came out. Some came in addicted to class-A drugs and were left with no medication and had withdrawals; they did not see a nurse or doctor for nearly two days—48 hours. Some of those women are not strong enough to handle being without drugs because that is all they have known, and they take their own life. Staff need educating and proper training. Women need proper psychiatric assessments before they go into prison. There are people in there who have committed crimes. Some people should be locked up, but a lot of them are victims; they are broken and have gone through a number of different abuses, if not all of them, and nothing is being done. It is like a lost generation. If they had structured courses to set them up with some tools to survive, they could go forward and grow and make their lives positive. I was nearly dead and I turned my life around. I am never looking back. It happened by accident, but there are so many women who need a voice. This is why I feel really privileged to be here today.

Angela Crawley: Thank you very much, Lucy. You are advocating very strongly the voice of so many women, so thank you for your testimony today. It is incredible to hear how much you were able to achieve through the prison through your qualifications, so well done.



Lucy: Thank you.

Q103 **Angela Crawley:** My next question is about the staff's behaviour and whether it was helpful or unhelpful. Kedrina, I think you said earlier your experience was adverse on many occasions and you were treated differently because of the colour of your skin, in your words. Could you speak to where you had positive and negative experiences and what those looked like for you?

Keds: The first example of when I felt I was going to have to fight every single day was in my first 48 hours in prison. I remember on my first night, I pressed the panic button six times. Each time I pressed it, a member of staff answered and said, "A member of healthcare will come down and see you." Each time I pressed the button, the more annoyed they got. It was not the more annoyed I got; it was the more annoyed they got. Bearing in mind this was my first sentence, I did not have anybody checking on me. There was one officer who was really nice to me but his shift had finished. The night staff allowed me to be curled up on the floor underneath the TV stand for the whole night. No one checked to see if I was okay.

My second experience was in the second prison I was sent to. There were not many officers of diversity—the same skin colour as me. The one officer who was black turned to me and said, "You'll be back here." That scared the living daylights out of me, bearing in mind I had never been in trouble like that before. There was only one member of staff in both of the prisons I went to—one—who took the time out of his day to make sure I was okay. He was a CM. The only reason he did that was that I found out my best friend had been murdered while I was in prison.

From the day he found out I had experienced a death, he made sure to check in every single day. He saw something within me that nobody else did. I didn't see it; he did. I just knew that I would be leaving prison with a job because I came to prison with a job. All I cared about at that time was making sure I left with what I came in with, and I actually left prison with a lot more than I went in with. I came out with confidence, wanting to help people who could not help themselves. I worked with young offenders in there who didn't know whether they were coming or going. All they wanted was to sit down and speak to somebody. From the moment they stepped into that prison to the moment they were leaving, they had me by their side.

Not many prisons have a mentor. That is what is important. It is not just about rehabilitation; it is about what happens inside prison. It is about having somebody who has experienced prison and left and been able to turn their life around, go back in and say, "Look, whether this is your first or fifth time, or whatever it may be, I am here to let you know there is somebody here to support you." I never had that; a lot of women do not have that at all. What is missing is a mentor who has experienced something similar to what these people are experiencing. Whether it be a



female or a male prisoner, a mentor is highly important—somebody who can sit down and listen.

A lot of people just want to be heard. When I went to prison, all I wanted was to be heard. I got abuse hurled at me just because I was trying to get by. My first time, I was moved out of London and put in a prison far away from where I was from. I had to rebuild myself, bearing in mind I had no family able to visit me. I had to take care of myself.

Q104 Angela Crawley: I am glad you raised that, Kedrina, because it was to be my last question. Can I say to each of you who has spoken today that your focus and drive to turn your life around is inspirational to the many people who may be in that position now, or may be in that position in future, or have been in your place. Thank you for being that voice. It takes a tremendous amount of bravery to come to the Committee.

Each of you has mentioned—it seemed to be a common theme—that perhaps in the past you had negative or abusive relationships. There seemed to be a common theme that the relationship with the most important people in your life had broken down. Were you given any support to maintain positive relationships with your family or significant others? I see all of you shaking your heads, so I will take that as a no. Crucially, I am interested to know whether you were given any support to recognise unhealthy relationships and how you moved away from those relationships. Is there anything you want to add? If your answer is simply no, we can move on.

Keds: No.

Angela Crawley: That is the short and sweet answer. Thank you very much.

Q105 Miss Dines: I would like to ask the witnesses about mental health needs. First, thank you for your moving experiences. We know that many repeat offenders will have been offered mental health services in one form or another, but for whatever reason it was not until later in the life story that you all accessed the help you needed. First, I would like to hear individually from you what worked for you that meant you were able to access the help offered. Secondly, what can those in authority learn from that? Could each of you answer that?

Lucy: I think it is learning compassion and understanding; and trauma-informed training. Prison broke me, but I found myself in there. I know it sounds funny. I woke up one night and knew exactly what I wanted and where I was going. I did not know how, but I envisioned it.

I had never opened up about anything that had happened to me. I was asked to go to a conference. From that conference, I was pointed in the direction of Revolving Doors and I have not looked back. They have completely changed my life and given me so much training and support; they have made me feel empowered—the many women and mixed forums I have met. I have met so many inspirational people who have



come from the most broken pasts. It just goes to show that if they had had the help and resources from the start, with mentors and advocates, things would have been very different.

I think women should have someone like a mentor working with them from the start when they go to prison; a go-between to help them get on courses and communicate, and get resources and housing set up so they do not have to worry about coming out with a tent in their hand, not knowing where they are going to sleep or whether they will be safe. There should be emergency accommodation for people suffering domestic violence. If somebody is in a mental health crisis, it does not happen tomorrow; they are in that crisis there and then, and they need to be able to access resources to talk to people.

Q106 **Miss Dines:** Lucy, what was it do you think that meant you as an individual could not accept help when you were 16, perhaps just coming out of the care system? Was it that you weren't ready to have that help, or was it not the right sort of help that you were offered?

Lucy: I was never offered any. I ended up going into the care system as a young person and it spiralled out of control from there. I only got help two years ago, and it is the best help I ever had. I have waited 21 years. I started trauma therapy last week with a proper mental health team. They have put me down with a view to discharging me; they said I had come really far already. They are going to do some stabilisation exercises with me and then they will put me together with a psychologist to help me process and get rid of everything I have been carrying around. I start night college in September to do a level 2 counselling course.

Q107 **Miss Dines:** Thank you, Lucy. Kedrina, you slightly answered the question by saying that you found a mentor who cared about you. Looking back on your life decisions, is there anything you think could perhaps have helped you at an earlier stage and changed your mind about how you reacted to what life threw at you?

Keds: No.

Q108 **Miss Dines:** Was it when you really hit a low and somebody showed an interest in you? Is that what helped?

Keds: I have always been the type of person who can attract different types of people to me with how I am. It was not really just one person. I had a mental health therapist when I was inside. That simply followed the comment of a particular officer that I would end up back inside prison for a much worse offence. I started to notice that I was becoming a lot angrier. When I ended up speaking to the therapist, she literally broke me down and helped me build myself up again. One thing that stuck with me is that she always said, "It's not me doing it; it's you. I'm just helping you find the stages that you need to find for you to say it, get it out there and release it." All the mental health support I had had throughout my life, not just in prison but before as a child, with anger management and things like that, none of it worked. It took this one particular person who



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worked with me when I only had a few months of my sentence left. She managed to help me with some things, but I feel that if mental health had been targeted earlier it might have helped me a lot sooner, in life as well as in prison.

When it came to mental health support within the prison, a lot of women were offered it and a lot turned it down simply because they looked at healthcare as officers and not staff members. A lot of healthcare members of staff treated a lot of the women badly, whether it was speaking to them out of turn, calling them names or just being very disrespectful. A lot of healthcare staff members come across as members of staff in terms of officers and not healthcare professionals. There were only two healthcare staff members I met during my sentence who actually helped and did not judge me. A lot of healthcare members of staff are judgmental, as well as a lot of the officers.

With healthcare I feel it is not just training. You do not need training to teach you how to speak to people properly, to be able to engage with them and make them feel like a human; you need better understanding of yourself, because clearly everyone is human. We are all human and we all deserve to be spoken to with respect. Whether you have committed a crime or not, we are all supposed to be treated with respect, but a lot of people are not, unfortunately.

Q109 **Miss Dines:** Lisa, could you tell us, perhaps with emphasis on substance abuse, what it was that meant you could accept help at that particular stage in your life?

Lisa N: In a way, it goes against you if you have a background of substance misuse anyway. I had the label of, "You're one of them. You're a junkie," so their solution to my mental health was to put me on quite huge anti-psychotic medication that would knock out an elephant. This stuff is seriously strong, and I am sure that it was to keep me calm. That was not a solution. On top of that, any time I got my medication, because I had the label of my substance misuse past, I would be watched. It is quite humiliating when you go to get your medication. I get why they do it. They do not want the meds to be going round the rest of the prison. You have to show your mouth and under your tongue. You are treated as if you are already committing another crime even when you're not.

The mental health support that I got in there was only right at the end of my sentence. I was listening to Kedrina; it is a bit of a lottery and it depends on who you get. You are really fortunate if you get somebody who is able to treat you in that way. However, my experience of mental health support was that I went to see somebody once a month and it was: "Are you sleeping? Are you eating? How are you?" They were very basic questions, maybe because they did not have the time or resources to go into it deeply and give me the space to be able to deal with my mental health. Unfortunately, my solution was to be put on huge amounts of medication.



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When I do things like this, I never forget the people I got to see in prison. I will never forget particularly one person who was on a long IPP charge. I think that initially she only got 18 months. I met her on her seventh year. She was clearly struggling very badly with mental health. It was not until after I left that I found she was no longer with us. That is one of the reasons why I do this stuff. It is not comfortable to come and talk about our past, and represent ourselves and other people, but ultimately we are representing the people who are no longer with us.

Lucy: We were told we were not good enough and would not be able to do anything like this. We spent most of our young adult life being persecuted and judged because we had entered the criminal justice system. When we are speaking here, representing the many voices of women in prison and women we have lost, we have won. We have won already.

Miss Dines: Thank you very much.

Q110 **Andy Slaughter:** Could I thank all three witnesses very much for sharing what are very powerful and very personal stories? I was going to ask specifically about the process of leaving prison. You have answered some of that already. If I have understood it correctly, none of you did very short sentences. You should have had more probation support on leaving; you should have had support with housing, benefits and other services. Did you get any of that, or what did you get?

Lisa N: Can I kick off on that? I am particularly passionate about this area. Thank you for that question. My experience is that I spiralled towards the end of my sentence. I happened to spend the last week, bar a day, at the segregation unit and I was not allowed to go to any of my leaving appointments. By the time I left prison, I had been given one place to relocate to because I was a single woman with no children in her 40s, in the hope I would change my life around. That happened to be in Stratford in the middle of London. My mum very kindly came to pick me up.

Thank God she was with me that day because I was required to go to three or four triage appointments. There was a drugs one; I had to go and see a place; and probation. There was another one. If you have never experienced it, a triage appointment is quite a traumatic experience. For an hour and a half, you are asked questions about your life. You are literally fired questions: "What's your relationship history? What's your past? What's this? What's that?" You have to answer in a very matter-of-fact way, but that stuff gets in. At the end of that day, even though I really wanted to stay away from substances, alcohol and all the rest of it, I remember being terrified of the place I was put in, because it was unsafe. My mum said, "Oh, my God. I'd use drugs if I was made to stay here." By the way, she doesn't use drugs; she is very straight. Thankfully, I was able to go back with her. There was a real lack of care. I was lucky that I had family. If I hadn't had family, I would have been lost before I had even started.



Q111 **Andy Slaughter:** You are saying that the services that should have been there to help you actually made you feel worse.

Lisa N: Yes. That needs to be looked at. We talk about that with some of the probation reform panels and things like that and, hopefully, it will be looked at. It is almost inhumane to have that experience when ultimately even the sounds of the street and getting used to being out of the prison environment are enough for your senses to get used to. I get that you need to report, but why not have somebody through the gate? Why not have a peer mentor? If I had had somebody alongside, even if it was alongside me and my mum, to be able to take me to places, they would have said, "Maybe there's another place." People with lived experience know of other hostels and other safer, more grounded things and services. They can speak for us when we do not have the voice to be able to speak for ourselves. I am particularly passionate about that.

Lucy: Me also. I served a 12-year sentence and I'd had nine probation officers. When I came out, they just released me, they gave me four early days back, after serving six and a half years. I had not had a day out. They told me probation had set up my mental health appointment. They had not. As far as they knew, I was going out with no accommodation. I have a good family and I went back to my home town. Having done all that time, at first they wanted me to go to a hostel. I have had experiences of hostels; I have lived in them before, so I know what they are like. I point blank said, "No. That would be catastrophic for me. I now know what is best for me and I need to be with my family and I need to be at home." I fought for it and got it.

I had no help with accommodation. I did it on my own. I did the appointments for my medication on my own. After waiting 21 years to get proper therapy for multiple traumas, I still had to fight another year. I was directed to the wrong place; it was where you go when you have dealt with stuff and you have had your trauma therapy—a place you can go to in order to maintain your wellbeing and mental health. They sent me there first before I had had any proper psychological counselling for multiple traumas. I have been crying out for help for years.

Q112 **Andy Slaughter:** You said you did not have any day release at all.

Lucy: Nothing. I did six and a half years of a 12-year sentence with not a day out. They threw me out. My stepdad was there to pick me up. I was absolutely terrified.

Q113 **Andy Slaughter:** Who was it—was it the probation officer—who was either giving you wrong advice or not helping you at all?

Lucy: I had no contact with probation until, probably, a couple of weeks before the end of my sentence; it was just to say, "Hi. Your licence conditions are blah, blah, blah." I had asked about setting up a mental health appointment. The prison had spoken to probation and said they had set it up. They had not set anything up.



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At one of my recent meetings, I eventually got a decent probation officer who sat down with me. I was able to tell her for the first time what had been happening to me and people in the system. She went back into my history. I never said anything. I walked in one day and she said, "I believe you." I broke down. I thought, "Oh, my God." I had fought so many years to talk to somebody, to say, "Please believe me. Please look at what's been going on." For instance, when I first came out of prison and went for an appointment with an extra support worker who works with probation, the first thing she said to me was, "You're nothing like what it says on paper." I said, "No, because most of it's not true." She said, "I can see that." They stuck behind me and went into my background. That is why I am here today.

There needs to be more through-the-gate support; there needs to be lived experience. Use the lived experience of peer mentors and advocates, because they can be a go-between between probation and services. It will take some of the stress off the services. It will also build trust in probation and the courts, because people have lost that trust. If you have people with lived experience or peer mentors or advocates in there, people will learn from their experiences; they can see how far people have come and what they have done and that it is possible to turn your life around if you have the right resources and the right people behind you.

My friend said to me the other day, "I have never met anybody as driven as you." I said that in everything that has happened to me and everything I have been through in the system, I have always wanted to help people. I have volunteered and done drug work. It has been a passion of mine. I wanted to get change and get my name known for the right reasons instead of the wrong reasons. I don't mind my name being put out in things like this because I am so proud of everybody I have met and what we have achieved. We are here today.

Q114 **Andy Slaughter:** Kedrina, you said earlier that you were determined to come out with something to go to or a job. Did you achieve that? Did you achieve that on your own, or did you have help?

Keds: When I got my dream job and was suspended, I ended up getting another job just before I was sentenced. Once I was sentenced, I had the opportunity to apply for work from within the prison. I worked with Halfords, which had academies in two prisons at the time. I worked with them fixing officers' bikes and charity bikes donated by the community to Halford stores that go into prisons. You build the bikes and they are shipped to Africa. I ended up securing that job and was in it up until three months ago.

I left prison in 2018 and I now work as a peer mentor with ex-offenders. My motivation was solely because of that prison sentence. If it had not been for that prison sentence, I would not have the opportunity to talk to you guys now and do anything else that I do. Literally, it was at the top of my list to make sure that I came out of prison with a job. Not many



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people got that. People came out of prison with a tent; now it is more about getting work or housing. My housing situation is still the same. I heard that my dad wanted me to come home and that was what happened. Up until now, I still live with my father. I never had any follow-up support to see if I wanted accommodation for myself, bearing in mind they all wanted to put me in shared accommodation. I said that shared accommodation affects me mentally.

As an ex-offender, if someone says, "If you put me in shared accommodation, nine times out of 10 I am going to be recalled," that is me telling you about the person you are reading about from a piece of paper. I am telling you face to face, but when you are relaying certain information, whether it be to probation or staff members within the prison, clearly it is falling on deaf ears. Because of my willpower, I stuck with work and continued to say, "Okay, I'm working, so I don't need any more support. I have a roof over my head. I don't want to take away from people who might need support from my probation officer." I didn't want to stress her out because I know that probation officers' client lists are massive. If I am one person who has got myself into work, I am keeping out of trouble and I have a roof over my head, you do not need to focus on me. That is literally how I did my probation period after sentence. The support wasn't offered, but I didn't want to take support because I felt other people might have needed the help rather than me.

Andy Slaughter: Thank you very much for your honesty; it is very revealing.

Q115 **Dr Mullan:** I echo every other Committee member's comments about how important this is and how grateful I am to hear from you today. I want to pick up something you mentioned particularly, Lisa—others touched on it—about being moved multiple times. I can see how that would be very disruptive to your ability to engage in a programme and settle in. Lisa, at the time were you told the circumstances for being moved on multiple occasions?

Lisa N: No reason was given to me for the first move. That was a surprise, because I was in Bronzefield before and I felt quite settled there. I was teaching yoga and able to have some great opportunities. I know that is a private prison. Then it was my choice, because I found out about a course in another prison, but on the way to that prison I was sent to Eastwood Park before I ended up in Downview to do the course.

Q116 **Dr Mullan:** Thank you. Were the other witnesses moved on any occasion?

Lucy: I was moved a number of times. They just come; they do not tell you. They come on the morning or the afternoon. They say, "Pack your stuff. You're being shipped out. The jail is full." How often they move you depends on the category of your offence. They don't care if you are hundreds of miles from home and your family cannot get there. There is the whole stress of that. When you are hundreds of miles away from your



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family, you have to do hours of driving. Then you get on the visit and you only have an hour or an hour and a half. I think weekend visits should be introduced for families, so they can facilitate more time. They could have a Friday afternoon, a Saturday or maybe a Sunday morning.

Wages in prison have gone down. Some people do not have families or support with private cash. They have a system in place for foreign nationals where they give them free phone credit because they have to ring abroad. I think they should do something similar for women so they can have free credits to speak to their families. It is not just that; it is the knock-on or domino effect on your family and loved ones. They are already suffering because you are in prison; they already have to go through that worry and stress, and then there is the trauma of having to travel hundreds of miles.

Q117 **Dr Mullan:** Thank you. I am conscious of time. Kedrina, I saw you nodding. Do you want to add anything in particular?

Keds: As I said before, I am from London. I was moved to Drake Hall in Staffordshire. It took forever for any family member to get there to see me. When I went to prison I was painted a picture that families would be taken care of. My family weren't; they got a phone call to tell them I was on suicide watch. I was not on suicide watch.

I only had one visit in Drake Hall, and that was because my dad was so adamant that he wanted to make sure I was okay. He hadn't seen me. None of my family had seen me in over a year at that point. Even leaving the prison to go home was pressure in itself. I had not seen public transport in over two years. Nobody could come and get me because I was so far away. I still had to pay for certain things. I didn't get any support; my family didn't get any support. If anything, they were just traumatised by my sentence, which was traumatic for me as well.

Dr Mullan: Thank you very much.

Lucy: May I say one more thing?

Chair: Yes.

Lucy: There needs to be more suicide awareness in prison and more training around suicide and self-harm. It is a serious issue that is getting worse. So many lives are being lost that can be saved by simple things.

Chair: Thank you all very much for your evidence today. It is very moving and very powerful for us to hear it. We are really pleased that you have all been able to make those changes, move on and help others as well. It is really appreciated. Thank you for all you have done, and for spending some time with us today. We also thank Revolving Doors.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Jessica Mullen, Peter Dawson and Jemima Olchawski.



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Q118 **Chair:** We will now move to our second panel of witnesses. Let me ask everyone to introduce themselves very quickly.

Jessica Mullen: I am Jess Mullen, director of influence and communications at Clinks, which is the infrastructure charity for the voluntary sector working with criminal justice.

Peter Dawson: I am Peter Dawson, director of the Prison Reform Trust.

Chair: Good to see you again.

Jemima Olchawski: I am Jemima, chief executive of the Agenda Alliance for women and girls at risk. We campaign for women and girls with complex needs.

Q119 **Chair:** If you heard any of the previous panel, do you have any immediate reactions to it? Do you want to kick off first, Jessica?

Jessica Mullen: My first reaction is to thank them so much. A lot of what I say today will probably touch on issues that they face. There is absolutely no way that what I say will have the same impact as hearing it directly from them.

Peter Dawson: It is tremendous that you had that session and that you gave those women the time to be heard. You may know that a very long time ago I was governor of a women's prison. I know from that experience that they have told you an enormous amount of truth. If you forget everything else that you hear today, remember what they said to you because everything sounded familiar and accurate to me.

Jemima Olchawski: I echo that. It was incredibly powerful. I am sure we all appreciate them taking the time and personal cost to do that, because it is difficult to speak out about some of these issues. For me, it came across really powerfully when they talked about the difference that a trauma-informed approach had and what that meant for them. That is a really important message for us and the Committee.

Apologies, I am finding it very difficult to hear you, Chair. I am doing my best but you are very quiet.

Chair: Okay. I'll try to shout a bit. Over to Sarah Dines.

Miss Dines: I was particularly interested in listening to the experiences of former prisoners—*[Inaudible.]*

Andy Slaughter: Chair, I cannot hear at all.

Miss Dines: Can the witnesses hear? Perhaps you should come back to me.

Chair: Let's try to move on. Maria, do you want to come in? We will see if we can sort out the technology for Sarah.

Q120 **Maria Eagle:** It might be better. We might be able to hear the online



stuff better than the in-room stuff.

Jess Mullen, in your written evidence you say that a whole-prison approach should be taken towards mental health and wellbeing. Obviously, mental ill-health issues are at the very core of the problems of a lot of women in prison. Can you set out the whole-prison approach that you refer to? Can you tell us whether there are any examples of prisons where it is actually happening?

Jessica Mullen: The whole-prison approach that we talked about in our written evidence draws on a report we did called “Whole prison, whole person” on the needs of people with mental health issues in prison. It argues for an approach that recognises that all aspects of prison life affect people’s wellbeing and mental health, which we have just heard about from the previous panel, especially for women who have experience of trauma and coercion. They are, essentially, in a coercive environment; that entire environment will have an impact. The report focused on people who had particular needs or were from protected characteristic groups under the Equality Act. We undertook focus groups through them and with organisations that worked with them. We found that the impact of prison processes and procedures on their health and wellbeing could be quite significant.

What we mean by a whole-prison approach is the idea that, rather than just thinking about specific services that respond to mental health needs, we think about embedding a trauma-informed approach in the entire culture, structure and way the prison works, so that every relationship with a prisoner is an opportunity for the support of a vulnerable person.

Q121 **Maria Eagle:** So the whole-prison approach is about embedding this trauma-informed approach into everything that is done. Are there examples of women’s prisons in the current estate where this is actually happening, or is it just an aspiration at the moment?

Jessica Mullen: Jemima and Peter, do chip in. There are pockets of work happening towards this. For instance, One Small Thing have been working in the women’s estate since 2015 trying to embed a trauma-informed approach. They work with the leadership of the prison to implement a plan, provide training across all levels of staff and deliver peer-led trauma-informed intervention. The Growth project has been working at Foston Hall more recently. In both examples, Covid has interrupted the ability to deliver them. One Small Thing has managed to adapt some of the facility, but it is far from a fully embedded approach across the whole estate.

Q122 **Maria Eagle:** Does anybody else have an insight into any of that?

Peter Dawson: I agree with Jess. There are pockets where there is very good practice. My way of thinking about a whole-prison approach is to remember that for as long as they are there you are providing a home for the women. We do not talk about having a whole-home approach; we know what providing a loving and considerate place for someone to live



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in looks like. That attitude is overwhelming. It is very striking that women know very quickly the difference between a good and bad prison officer, or a good and bad probation officer. When I was governor, I talked about kindness the whole time, just to give people one word to hang on to when they had a discretionary decision to take. In a prison, hundreds of times a day prison officers constantly have to exercise their discretion and choose how to behave. You need to provide a guiding light for those decisions and that behaviour.

There is a lot for us to learn about trauma. When I was a governor, I did not understand the depth of what women in my prison had encountered, but we should not make it sound more complicated than it really is. It is the attitudes of the people who work there that make the biggest difference.

Maria Eagle: Thank you.

Chair: Let's try Kieran and then we will try to get back to Sarah to see whether there is any progress.

Q123 **Dr Mullan:** I want to hear from you about how you think the pandemic and the Covid restrictions have had an impact. We have heard in other sessions a mixed picture. In some respects, virtual activity has meant things are more accessible; the lockdown in some respects has made some prisoners feel more secure, but in other ways it made things much more difficult. I want to hear your perspectives.

Jessica Mullen: For the voluntary sector working in prisons, there have been significant challenges. In particular, organisations that work in the community rather than in prison were able to move their activity online or do things over the telephone. We have heard that in many cases that was more successful than they thought it would be and they got good engagement from women. Obviously, in the prison estate that was a much harder thing to do, especially for certain types of intervention and certain groups of people, and particularly for mental health support.

One of the key things the sector was quite keen to explore with the Department at points through the pandemic—we were never really able to—was whether women could be provided with mobile phones to make outgoing calls during the most severe restrictions, and whether there was a way of enabling incoming calls so that voluntary sector organisations could continue to make contact with those women and provide services. That was not possible.

Linked to that, as the Committee will be aware, is that self-harm figures are up over the last period. Organisations have expressed concern to us that in the identification of self-harm the voluntary sector often contributes to those processes and highlights those needs, so there is potentially a risk that the statistics we have do not reveal how high the levels actually are, because we have fewer people in prisons to identify them. The HMIP annual report highlighted that the withdrawal of



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structured support had significant impacts, and that certainly echoes what our members have told us.

Peter Dawson: We have gone out of our way to try to listen to prisoners throughout the pandemic because it is so difficult to know what is going on. We will shortly publish a report, which we will send to the Committee, that looks at the experience of women who responded to that.

It is a mixed picture, but not very mixed. The benefits are minuscule compared with what women and men have suffered in prison. That is not right. I think the chief inspector today in his annual report makes it very clear that it is not right to think that keeping people in their cell for 22 or 23 hours a day is a sensible way to reduce anxiety and fear in prison. It is not. The feedback we got from women was that as early as June last year they were seeing serious mental health issues from the confinements. That is over a year ago, and for most of the last year there have been the same conditions.

It is very good that there are in-cell phones in women's prisons; it is very good that women have been able to make longer phone calls with free phone credit; it is very good that there are video calls, but the loss of face-to-face visits was the overwhelming thing women told us about when we went out to ask. I would say that it has been a disastrous period. That is not to say that it is anyone's fault, but we must not go into the next stage thinking that somehow it has been okay after all. It has not; it has been awful.

Q124 **Dr Mullan:** Thank you. Ms Olchawski?

Jemima Olchawski: I strongly echo what Peter said. Of course, it is good that we have seen the introduction of video technology and more access to in-cell telephones, but it is no substitute. Overall, women's services have reported that during the pandemic the needs of the women they work with have become more complex and challenging. We also see evidence that women in prisons are reporting deterioration in their physical and mental health. As Peter said, I do not think that is surprising given that they are spending 23 hours a day in a cell and perhaps going months without seeing their children.

We have also seen in some cases an increase in the use of force in prisons during this period. That is particularly troubling for this population, the majority of whom are survivors of abuse and come with significant histories of trauma, as you have heard today. Experiences of the use of force and the use of restraint are additionally distressing because they can retrigger experiences of being in real danger or having experienced harm.

Overall, I would say there is a lot to be concerned about. In particular, I suggest we should be looking at the ways in which those impacts have fallen disproportionately on different groups. In the wider community, we know that there are high levels of mental health problems among black



and minoritised women. Research that Agenda has done in the past indicates that black women and minoritised women often find it harder to get mental health support; they feel that when they ask for that support it is perceived more as an anger management or disciplinary issue than as a mental health one. We know that young women have experienced very high levels of mental health problems during the pandemic overall. Younger women make up a minority of those in the women's estate. They often experience particular challenges around transition from a youth to an adult set of services, so it is important to think about the different types of support and impacts on groups with different characteristics and experiences.

Q125 Dr Mullan: I want to ask about the area of your evidence you have just touched on. Can you tell us in more detail what the evidence base is for that, particularly around the different treatment of women from different ethnic minorities?

Jemima Olchawski: There are a few things. There is what women describe to us. In focus groups and interviews, women say they feel that as ethnic minorities they are perceived differently and, more broadly, that that is part of a stereotyping that means their behaviour is read in a particular way. For instance, for black women, behaviour is read as being aggressive that might not otherwise be seen as aggressive, so it gets a different reaction. That is also backed up by the HMIP thematic review of the experiences of ethnic minorities in rehabilitation and release planning. Black women articulate that they find it harder to access support than they felt white fellow inmates did, and also reported higher levels of victimisation.

Q126 Dr Mullan: Is there anything to support that in the use of force statistics in prison? I do not mean to put you on the spot in that regard if you do not know.

Jemima Olchawski: I do not have those statistics. I do not know whether colleagues do.

Peter Dawson: There is an issue with the use of force statistics, which is that they are very poor. The Prison Service has just started using a digital use of force tool, which should produce much better evidence. This is not disaggregated by gender, but for the prison population as a whole you are much more likely to be subjected to use of force if you are black. We know that you are much more likely to have the new PAVA spray used against you if you are black, disabled or of the Muslim faith. Overall, those numbers are available, but the detail we need to understand what is going on is not available. It has been promised, and I hope the Committee will ask to see more detailed numbers as quickly as we do.

Q127 Dr Mullan: I guess there is always the challenge between unpicking association and cause as the justice system has to do. It is either justify or explain, rather than making a link between the two.



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Peter Dawson: That is exactly right; it is explain or reform, but it is reasonable to start—

Dr Mullan: Yes.

Peter Dawson: —that this happens with use of force incentives throughout the system. It is reasonable to start from the presumption that there is something to explain.

Q128 **Dr Mullan:** Do you want to come in, Jessica?

Jessica Mullen: This is a really important point to consider in the context of Covid as well. Obviously, Covid has disproportionately affected racially minoritised people. The Zahid Mubarek Trust recently published a report called “A Record of our Own”, where they talked to prisoners and their families from racially minoritised backgrounds. It showed a significant impact of the pandemic on their mental health. We need to think in future planning and recovery how that, plus what we have just been talking about, can intersect in the future experiences of people.

Dr Mullan: Thank you.

Chair: Shall we try Sarah again to see if we are doing any better with the mics?

Q129 **Miss Dines:** As a relatively new member of the Justice Committee, in that I came on in early 2020, I would like to hear your views about mental health and wellbeing in prisons in a wider sense. How do you as professionals deal with the need, on behalf of wider society and victims, to punish inmates, of whatever sex, and the need to produce effective support for people who have had a traumatised life and will inevitably be further traumatised by being in prison? How do you square the needs of the victim with the need effectively to treat somebody for rehabilitation? Perhaps Jessica can go first as she brought up trauma initially.

Jessica Mullen: I think the women on the previous panel talked to this to some extent. First, we need to acknowledge that being sent to prison is the punishment, but that being there, with that restriction of liberty, can be re-traumatising for some people. If restriction of liberty is the punishment itself, I suppose the way I would square it is that, once those women are experiencing restriction of liberty, everything else can be done to meet their needs and support them so that they can turn their lives around both for the benefit of themselves and the communities they will return to.

Q130 **Miss Dines:** From the testimony we heard, it was quite evident that it was when people were slightly older or had repeated sentences that the penny dropped, or they met somebody who made a difference to their life. How can we accelerate that for younger female prisoners?

Jessica Mullen: That is an interesting question. I point to some of the evidence from the Transition to Adulthood Alliance that shows the importance of maturity in terms of young adult offending, but that, while



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they are the group most likely to offend, they are the group which, with the right interventions, is most likely to move away from offending behaviour. It all very much rests on whether interventions match people's needs at the right time, and the sequencing of that.

Q131 Miss Dines: What are we doing wrong if people are not accessing that help in their first time in prison? What are the gaps for mental health and wellbeing?

Jessica Mullen: I can carry on, but I will let Peter come in.

Peter Dawson: We were doing something wrong long before that. It is not the first term in prison; it is the first time in court or the first time in a police station that matters. Research shows us that, even when people offend over and over again, you get the best result if you persevere with a community penalty. We always ask the question about the decision when someone has finally been sent to prison and the magistrate or court had no option, but we do not ask the question about the first or the second hearing.

Given the chaos that many of these women have to endure in the community, we just have to get our heads around the fact that helping at that stage will be more resource-intensive than we allow for, and a brief report to court and a sticking plaster is not going to make a difference. We should invest our energy much earlier in the process rather than waiting until we have to spend £50,000 a year to lock somebody up because all of that has failed.

Q132 Miss Dines: Peter, I am not following you. You cannot offer somebody help as a convict at their first police station appearance; you offer them help when they are convicted. I am asking you what we can do in the prison estate for female inmates to make sure that the younger ones are getting the help that maturation means they can accept later on.

Peter Dawson: I understand, but we are talking about helping a person, not a convict. If we help the person at the first opportunity, we might not end up with a convict. That is the fundamental flaw in the system.

Q133 Miss Dines: I am really interested in that. What else should happen at a police station before somebody is even found guilty? What else are you suggesting? It sounds wonderful in principle, but what are you suggesting can be done other than what is happening now?

Peter Dawson: Some police forces have mental health nurses available to go out to incidents in squad cars to make sure that police have on-the-spot immediate mental health advice, so they know whether what they are dealing with is a mental health crisis rather than someone determined to commit crime. That happens in some places and it has a good track record, but it is not across the board. That would be one straightforward thing we could do. Of course, it costs money, but we have choices about where we spend our money.



Q134 **Miss Dines:** One practical idea is to have more mental health cross-practitioner meetings perhaps at an early stage. Again, it is very difficult to deliver if somebody is not found guilty. They may be wholly innocent; you may be institutionalising them by saying, "You've got to have this mental health support." These are tricky issues, aren't they? What more can we do practically? Any other ideas, Peter, before we move on to the other witnesses?

Peter Dawson: A success story in the system is the liaison and diversion service, which makes sure that there is somebody in court to help and, if conviction has to follow, to make sure that the information follows the person wherever they then go, whether that is the community or prison.

It is very unglamorous, but the handling of information within the system about people is so poor. There are so many systems. If I was invited to say one thing that would make the biggest difference, it would be that the way we handle information about individual people who desperately need help from agencies within and outside the criminal justice system could be made better. Then we would not constantly be starting again with too little information and asking people to diagnose themselves.

Q135 **Miss Dines:** I am really interested in this. In my modest career at the Bar before I went on to family law, I would find families and individual suspects who had been offered a lot of help. What I am interested in is not saying we need more help or different ways of storing information. I want to know what practically can make a difference and turn a young woman's life around before she embarks on this life. What can be done practically? Are there any other suggestions?

Jemima Olchawski: I hear what you are saying. If support is offered and somebody does not accept it, what more can you do? One of the things I would point to, particularly given the evidence we heard earlier, is that those women described experiences of trauma that then spiralled into behaviours associated with offending. If we were better at supporting women, particularly young women, at those moments of initial trauma and identifying them and offering meaningful support, that spiral need never happen. Good quality early intervention is and can be done by specialist women's services. In particular, specialist buy-in for services for black and minoritised women or LGBT women have to be part of the mix. You can work with young women before those issues get out of control and before they are in a place where they have been let down so often that they do not feel able to trust someone to ask for support.

Overall, our public services can be better at recognising the signs that something is not right. Women tell us that they are often in contact with a whole range of public services when maybe everyone knows that what they are experiencing is abuse, or that they are in a difficult situation, but they are either turning a blind eye or sometimes stigmatising the woman as a result. If instead that moment was used with staff properly trained to make sensitive inquiries, such as, "What is going on with you? Is there something wrong? Is there something we can help you with?", women or



girls will not always say yes, but those who are ready at that moment can reach out and get the help they need.

Q136 Miss Dines: What is it that is going wrong with all the professionals at school, the GPs, or right from birth with the midwives or health visitors? These themes are picked up time and time again; a child or a family are in difficulties. They may go through the whole school and care system. I am asking for practical recommendations for what we could do differently, bearing in mind that we have a very large estate. What are we getting wrong for these particular girls?

Jemima Olchawski: I don't think we are asking, "What has happened to you?", rather than, "What is wrong with you?" Often, we see those girls through a disciplinary lens. Perhaps they are excluded from school because of behavioural issues. Instead of at that moment someone using that to say, "What's happening? What's driving this behaviour?", we put them down disciplinary routes. The practical thing we can do is find out what is at the root of the issue and then offer support. There are evidence-based interventions that will make a difference for those young people.

There are things in place; for instance, the IRISi intervention in GP surgeries, where staff in surgeries are embedded and trained to recognise signs of abuse, has been incredibly effective at identifying that among patients in their interactions with GPs and getting them support. It can be done, but we need to think about it holistically and make identifying those issues everyone's business, rather than thinking, "My job is to make sure she attends school," or, "My job is to deal with this one particular element of this issue and it is someone else's job—unknown—to address the fundamental issue she is dealing with."

Q137 Miss Dines: I am very interested in that. In my experience, I do not think I have met many professionals in 30 years at the Bar who would speak to somebody by saying, "What's wrong with you?" It is usually a holistic approach, but it still fails. Where did you get the idea that that is what people are told, because it is not my experience? My experience is of families that have had a great deal of difficulty and a lot of very sensitive and excellent professional inputs, but for some reason it does not work. I do not think we can just say, "What is it?", because people are asked and they are victimised, so there is something wrong with them. What do you think we can do practically to help them to be responsible for their own lives but accept help that is offered by the state? What different things can we do?

Jemima Olchawski: It is difficult to answer that. The evidence is that women tell us that opportunities are missed and they would like to be asked. We know there are good interventions, such as IRISi where trained staff ask in the right way and support is offered. I am not sure what the gap is that you would like me to address, to be honest.

Q138 Miss Dines: Is it what is happening in school? Is it what is happening



later on in prison?

Jessica Mullen: This is shifting the conversation slightly, but what organisations tell us about what is happening in prison touches on some of what Jemima was talking about. A lot of what the sector tells us chimes with the Centre for Mental Health report on mental health in prisons. That found that screening and assessment processes were not robust enough and left needs unidentified. There is something about how we are screening and picking up these issues. We could probably have a whole session on what is the right way to do that, but what organisations tell us is that we are not picking up those issues early enough, and often support is not provided until a crisis point.

Women often say that their own concerns about their health are not taken seriously. Often, when they rate their own concerns about their health, or when their health problems are escalating, it is perceived as a behavioural management issue as opposed to a mental health issue that needs responding to. There is definitely something we need to explore about how we identify and screen for these issues and then—the point you make—provide support that people are willing to take up. There is probably something about the way in which we do the screening that then impacts the willingness to engage with an intervention afterwards.

Miss Dines: Thank you.

Q139 **James Daly:** Thank you, witnesses, for giving evidence. It has been quite telling in the evidence we have heard that victims of crime have been missed out of the conversation completely. I am genuinely glad that we have heard your evidence, but from the evidence you have given I am not quite sure whether you believe in the justice system.

Peter, I noted that one phrase you used was “if conviction has to follow”. Often, within the criminal justice system, victims are completely missed out. When we are talking about how the prison system works, there is a lot of evidence to show that mental health support in prisons is not at the level it needs to be, but what I am interested in and would like your view on is this. People receive a sentence because they have committed a criminal offence. There is often a victim of that. How do you view that victim? Given what the victim has gone through as a result of an offence having been committed, what role should that play in the rehabilitative process you have been talking about?

Peter Dawson: Perhaps I could have first go. James, I have spent over three decades earning my money by administering punishment, so I am not in the slightest bit confused about the need for punishment or that that is what prisons deliver, but it comes back to what Jess said earlier. The huge advantage of the court process and the justice system producing a conviction and deciding on the sentence is that the prison system is not required to decide how it adds to that or makes it worse or better. Punishment is dealt with by the court. Believe me, if you work in a prison you do not go to work every day thinking, “Is what I am doing sufficiently punishing?” You do not think that when you stand in a visits



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room and see people saying goodbye to their children, knowing they will not see them again for another six months.

Q140 James Daly: That's just simplistic, Peter. I am asking a question about victims of crime. What role do victims of crime play in this process and in the rehabilitative programmes that are in prisons to assist offenders?

Peter Dawson: The answer to that is that the system says to victims, "We are giving the retribution through the sentence of the court." In some circumstances, a victim may want to play a role in the offender's life, and there are ways that can happen. It can only ever happen if the victim really wants it to. There are risks to it; it can go wrong. It is plainly not appropriate for some crimes, and plenty of people would not want that. The system should never say to victims that it is any part of their responsibility to rehabilitate that person.

The system communicates very badly with victims about what actually happens in prison. For people serving long sentences, they will hear nothing between the moment of conviction and the person coming to the Parole Board, for example. I would say that that is a disservice to victims, but it is not involving the victim in rehabilitation; it is giving them information if they want it. Some victims will not want it.

Q141 James Daly: One of the issues in sentencing—there are many issues related to it—however you want to describe it, is to assist in stopping people who are in prison reoffending. I just wonder whether understanding what a victim has gone through and the nature of that offending is addressed. I have not heard anything about that type of intervention so far today.

Peter Dawson: There is a simple answer. Yes, it is. I think that if you listen to more women and prisoners about their experience in prison they will say they are constantly taken back to the offence they committed. The whole basis of offender management is to understand the circumstances in which it happened in order to prevent it happening again. Part of the challenge for the system is to say, "You are also a person of value and there is also the possibility of a better future." I do not think any prisoner would say that the system is set up so that they can forget the reason they are there or the impact it has had on victims.

Q142 James Daly: My final question—two witnesses have answered it in the round—is related to what Miss Dines was talking about. We are the Justice Select Committee. We are talking about the input in the prison environment. The witnesses have been very clear and very helpful about other interventions outside the justice system. I cannot believe there is an argument that people do not commit criminal offending. We cannot put in place criminogenic programmes for people who haven't committed a criminal offence. I think there is a very real issue regarding the sentencing and nature of probation when an offender of any kind first comes before a court.

It is unlikely that a female offender will get sentenced to a prison



environment on the first offence, second offence or third offence, unless it is very serious offending. One of the very clear issues we have is that community orders and rehabilitative orders in a non-custodial environment are not working. Rehabilitation rates would suggest that. Do I make a fair point in respect of that? Do I make a fair point that in stopping people coming into the prison environment, all the things we talk about—mental health issues and all the other things that are really at the heart of offending—could at least be touched on and addressed on community orders prior to a custodial sentence being imposed?

Peter Dawson: I am looking a bit quizzical. I completely agree that we could do more earlier, if we went into problem solving quicker. I am delighted that the Government are trialling problem-solving courts and I hope they have a bigger impact, but the data on reoffending has been clear for years and years. Community penalties work better than short periods of custody.

Q143 **James Daly:** Peter, we are the Justice Select Committee. Are you telling us that probation does not work? All I am saying to you is that, in the sentencing programme when somebody receives a non-custodial community and rehabilitative sentence, on many occasions it involves a lot of time-intensive work by the probation service and others in a non-custodial environment. Is the evidence that at that stage people are not getting the support they need?

Peter Dawson: The evidence is that probation works better than prison. It could certainly work better than it does. I would say the evidence is that it is not working as well as we should expect it to.

Q144 **Chair:** Thank you. Who else wants to come in?

Jessica Mullen: I want to come in on the previous point regarding victims. In the voluntary sector in criminal justice, a significant number of organisations work in the justice system to provide restorative justice solutions and work with both victims and people who have committed crimes. What is important to think about is that there is a whole range of interventions for different individuals that will be suitable in different ways in relation to both the person who has committed the crime and the victim of it.

One of the challenges we have at the moment is matching the interventions to the needs, particularly in the prison context. That has been a real challenge. There is often very little understanding of what the profile of need across the prison population is; there is often very little understanding of which organisations are going in from a central point of view. There is very little co-ordination to allow that to take place. We did some work a few years ago on what we called the Good Prison project; we piloted it with voluntary sector co-ordinators in three prisons in the south-west. That was previously required under Prison Service instructions, but is no longer required. That showed a real impact in understanding the needs profile of prisoners and making sure that you



could match them to interventions and sequence those interventions in a way that meant they got the support they needed at the right time—
[Inaudible.]

Q145 **James Daly:** Jessica, I agree with every word you are saying. As the Justice Select Committee, we are taking away these recommendations and looking at where interventions are best made and can be done better, and it is clearly in the non-custodial environment. As I say, the vast majority of people sent to prison are in receipt of a community order prior to being sent to prison, unless they have committed a very serious offence. The evidence would suggest to me, having been a criminal defence solicitor for 16 years, that that type of work, which is very apparent when somebody goes into a custodial environment, would have been apparent in somebody's life if they had committed previous offences.

I am simply asking whether you feel we could have a better way of intervening with non-custodial sentence disposals that might be able to address some of the problems you have been talking about today. I do not disagree with you at all, but the system should be there for that first chance in the community to address the problems. If it has not done so, and it seems that on many occasions it does not, why is it not doing it? Why is it not effective? Is that a fair point?

Jessica Mullen: I understand your point a bit better now. I have some hope that the unified probation service will provide some opportunities for that. The link between the probation service and the kind of interventions I am talking about that are delivered by the voluntary sector was quite challenging to deliver under the previous system. I think the new unified system builds some opportunities for those interventions to reach people in a more consistent and targeted way. I hope that we see some improvements from that point of view. I agree with Peter. We know that probation works better than prisons, but I also take your point that maybe it is not working as well as we would like it to.

Q146 **James Daly:** When you say that probation is working better than prison, what is your evidence base for that in terms of reoffending? What do you point to in terms of evidence to show that is the case?

Jessica Mullen: Those statistics are on the basis that we know people on community orders are less likely to reoffend than those on a short prison sentence.

James Daly: Thank you.

Peter Dawson: *[Inaudible.]* It is the tension with speedy justice. You will know from listening to justices' clerks that the first thing they are asked is how many cases they are getting through and how quickly. That is difficult to reconcile when you have a complex person with a lot of needs coming before the court on probably a minor crime. You would have to take the decision to slow down and take longer, even though the crime itself might look like something that can be resolved very quickly.



James Daly: During my time in the criminal justice system, every possible community sentence has been rolled out and tried. Peter, we could go through all of them. Some of them are seven days a week; some have all sorts of conditions attached, and they very much match much of the evidence we have heard. None of them seems to have worked satisfactorily enough. That is over the best part of 20 years. I want to put something into the debate. We need to get that bit of this correct before we even get into the chance of a custodial environment. If we do not address that, we really are going to have a problem in the prisons.

Q147 **Chair:** There is probably agreement on that by the look of it. I think it is probably true. Does anybody dissent from that?

Jemima Olchawski: There is probably an intervention we have not tried, which is investing in a sustainable and substantial way in the women's centres that we know can work with women before they offend. There is evidence that they save money for the public purse; they support women to deal with the drivers of offending and, to go back to an earlier point, it is much better to prevent crime and victims being created than to try to respond to it further down the track. We could look to sustainable substantial investment in that as a resource that could really make a difference.

Q148 **Rob Butler:** This has been a fascinating discussion. Because this is an inquiry specifically into women in prison, I am going to take us back to that. All the points made have been really interesting and important, but in the few minutes I have perhaps I could focus back on to the prison estate.

The Ministry of Justice has said that women's prisons need to be trauma-informed and it is working towards that. We heard earlier from women who had themselves experienced prison how important they thought it was to deal properly with trauma. What do each of you think a good trauma-informed prison would look like in practice? Do we have examples in the estate and what steps could be taken to ensure that we have a good solid trauma-informed women's estate across the country? It is broadly about trauma, and hopefully I can just keep it as one big, broad question. Shall we start with you, Ms Mullen?

Jessica Mullen: I touched on some of this. Part of it is about learning from those experts by experience. What we heard from those women earlier is incredibly important in thinking about this. There are existing initiatives doing it: One Small Thing, the Growth project and others. Not long ago, I talked about the key point of identifying needs—we cannot respond to things if we do not know what people's needs are—and creating an environment in which people feel able to disclose their needs and share them. That links back to what I was talking about in terms of the whole-prison approach and an environment that is very relational based, and every relationship is an opportunity to support a vulnerable person.



Another thing to think about is that for the estate itself to be trauma-informed, the system has to be trauma-informed. Who are we sending to prison? Who is there? Are their rehabilitation needs and the underlying needs behind their offending behaviour being met by being in prison? That really needs to be considered as well.

Q149 **Rob Butler:** Are there any examples of prisons in the estate that you think do a reasonable job in at least some of those areas that others could learn from? One of my concerns when I was on the board of the Prison Service was that there was not very good sharing of great and best practice. Are there pockets of great practice that you might highlight?

Peter Dawson: Colleagues who have just returned from a trip to Drake Hall had very positive feedback from women there. I have seen good practice at Send and Low Newton. You will know from your time in the Prison Service that things come and go in cycles. The sharing of best practice is a holy grail, and you are absolutely right on that. Most of what we need to know about what would make a good trauma-informed prison is there for us to see in certain parts of some prisons at certain times, and it will be very good if this inquiry flushes out more of that.

Q150 **Rob Butler:** Finally, Ms Olchawski?

Jemima Olchawski: As Jess and Peter have said, there are pockets of examples of good practice. There will always be a limit to how trauma-informed a prison can be because by its nature it is, as we discussed, a coercive environment. One of the fundamental features of experiences of abuse and trauma is the loss of control and the impact that has, so an important starting point is recognising the re-traumatising impact of that experience.

We would start with the needs of the women in that environment and support them. We very much need to build on creating trusting and open relationships with staff. As Jess said, it is about a much wider culture that enables staff to act in trauma-informed ways: ongoing training; clinical supervision; opportunities to reflect on their practice and their impact in working in that environment; having peer elements where women are able to support one another and create environments of trust; ongoing meaningful therapeutic support to deal with the fundamental issues they are facing, rather than something that is stopped and started by people moving around, and which is planned in good time; as well as making supportive plans for transitioning women when they leave the prison environment.

Q151 **Rob Butler:** Thank you very much. On the point about staff training, I noticed both Ms Mullen and Mr Dawson nodding fervently. Can I take it as read, and therefore put it on the record, that you agree that that is an important aspect?

Peter Dawson: Absolutely. The prison officer is a much undervalued commodity and we invest too little time in their training.



Rob Butler: Indeed. Thank you.

Q152 **Maria Eagle:** I was Prisons Minister some time after Jean Corston's review, as some of you might recall, and had some responsibility for trying to implement it. Many years later, the current Government have some similar policies that are focused on trying to do some of the things Jean Corston's report was trying to do, the concordat being the latest effort.

Even though the number of women in jail has gone down somewhat, the percentage is similar, and there is a very worrying increase lately in self-harm and suicide. Those of you who are long enough in the tooth will recall that the catalyst for Jean Corston doing her original work was a sudden spate of suicides at Styal—worrying numbers. What is your view about why this is happening, given that the policies of the current Government have some of the same aims as the Corston review?

Jessica Mullen: On the reasons why, obviously we cannot discount the impact of the pandemic on the most recent statistics. I mentioned earlier that the very sudden withdrawal of structured support meant that organisations were not able to go in and provide that support, and women lost the safety net that maybe they had. That is very important.

I am not sure whether it speaks to your point about the policies being somewhat similar, but the fact is that much of the mental health need we see in prisons is exacerbated by the experience of prison, but it most likely pre-exists in women going into prison. It goes back to the point about whether that is the right place for women to be to meet those needs and the best way to rehabilitate them so that they can return to the community and live a positive life. That is a very significant question. Obviously, the Corston report and the Government's own current female offender strategy aim to move women who would be best left in the community into that kind of provision and talks about the role of women's centres. That needs to remain very much our focus in addressing some of these issues.

Q153 **Maria Eagle:** Mr Dawson?

Peter Dawson: The independent advisory panel on deaths in custody did a lot of work listening to prisoners about this, and some of the responses are exactly what you would expect and we are familiar with. It is about kindness from people in prison. One thing that always strikes me is that the issues that drive so much self-harming behaviour come from before prison but they continue through prison, and they are about what is happening outside prison.

There are two things I would lodge for consideration in future. One is that when we look at the future prison estate, which I know the Prison Service is looking at now, we have very little information about who the estate is being designed for and what they might need in terms of security, where they should be in the country, or what types of sentences they would be serving. My guess would be that the estate is a great deal more secure



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than it actually needs to be. It is a very long time since there was any serious disorder in a women's prison or a woman tried to escape from a prison. If we had a more open estate, the possibilities for softening the boundary between prison and all the issues outside that concern women are greater.

Secondly, I was very shocked to hear one of your previous witnesses say that she was released after six and a half years without ever being out for a day on release on temporary licence. That is an immensely useful tool that is not used nearly to the extent it could be. I remember having a conversation with the governor of Styal prison, as it happens. She said she would gladly have sent women out on temporary release in the first week of their sentence to put things in order so that they could be more confident that the issues they were leaving behind were being dealt with while they were in prison. I think there are opportunities to make it much easier for women in prison to stay connected and able to make a difference to the issues outside that trouble them so deeply.

Q154 **Maria Eagle:** Jemima, do you want to come in?

Jemima Olchawski: We have heard about the difference that community interventions and specialist organisations have made for women, and they have been a key part in women finally getting the support they need. It is fantastic that the female offender strategy and the national concordat recognise the value of that and are promoting it, but I do not think we have seen the level of investment we would hope for in order to make that the norm and the usual experience for women in prison, rather than the exception. The amount that has been spent on building new prison places dwarfs the amount of money spent since the announcement of the female offender strategy on supporting a women's sector under pressure that works very effectively.

Q155 **Maria Eagle:** Obviously, the pandemic has had an impact on things like ROTL and whether or not people can be released and what opportunities there are, but is it not the case that because the women's estate is quite small—there are only a small number of prisons—most women are held much further away from their homes than men as a consequence? Does release on temporary licence help them to make sure that things are settled at home and minimise the disruption that there will be when they come out, or not?

Peter Dawson: It doesn't at the moment because it is reserved until the last stages of the sentence. You would have to use it much earlier to fulfil that function. Even in those circumstances, it could be used more than it is.

Q156 **Maria Eagle:** Part of the female offender strategy is that there should be an improvement in family ties to try to make sure that women do not lose touch, particularly with their children. I realise there is an issue with the pandemic, but has any progress been made to improve family ties in custody since the publication of the female offender strategy, which was



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after all in 2016? Some progress should have been made ahead of the pandemic, which admittedly may have been set back since. What is your impression of that?

Jessica Mullen: Maybe I can answer that. The Committee is probably aware that Clinks led the call for evidence for Lord Farmer's review. We now sit on the HMPPS working group for the implementation of the recommendations. We are incredibly pleased that the Department accepted them in their entirety. You are absolutely right. The activity has been significantly impeded by Covid. That working group has not met in this calendar year or published an update on its activities, so it is quite challenging to provide an assessment.

One of the things I would reflect on about a number of the reviews that have taken place in the system over recent years is that there is quite a lot of attention paid to the activity that is taking place to respond to recommendations, but maybe not as much focus on the impact that that activity then has. As we move towards recovery and building back from the pandemic, we need to focus our minds on whether the activities that the Department has come up with to meet those recommendations are having the intended impact. If not, why not, and what do we need to do differently?

There has been some progress. The progress on video calls and in-cell telephony is incredibly promising and really important, given that our research with Birth Companions showed that the impact on mothers in prison being separated from their children during the pandemic has been really acute. It is really important that that has happened.

The other thing happening in this space is that the contracts for family services are being re-tendered following an extension to September 2022. We see that as an opportunity to think about how the voluntary sector can be involved, not just as people who might be able to deliver those contracts but also as experts, to think about the needs of families and the needs of prisoners for information to keep in touch with their families so that those services can deliver what they need to deliver and provide full-cost recovery so that the quality of service can be delivered in that way.

Q157 **Maria Eagle:** Thank you. Jemima, do you have anything to add?

Jemima Olchawski: I also want to point to the work of Birth Companions. They are concerned that it is very difficult to get data on the number of pregnant women or women with infants in prison, so it is very difficult to know about progress or otherwise with that group of women. They experience ongoing challenges in offering support for women who are pregnant in prison or have their children with them in prison—for instance, the resources they need to breastfeed, or if they are being separated from their children. That is an area where, to start with, we just need some better data about who is in prison and what their



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circumstances are before we can even begin to think about whether it is getting better or worse.

Q158 **Maria Eagle:** Thank you. Mr Dawson?

Peter Dawson: I echo what Jess said. There has been some good, admirable progress during the pandemic, but it has been mitigating a terrible time for women, particularly through their separation from families and anxiety about what is happening to them.

Maria Eagle: Thank you very much.

Chair: Thank you very much to all our witnesses. It has been extremely helpful. We also have the detailed written evidence you have provided, for which we are very grateful. If there is anything more, perhaps we can get in touch with you and your organisations. We appreciate your time and trouble on a very hot day. We are grateful to you for your evidence. No doubt we will see you again at some point. Thanks to all my colleagues. This session is concluded.