



## **Minutes of AGM of the APPG on women in the justice system**

10<sup>th</sup> May 2023, Portcullis House Room M

Meeting chair: Baroness Hodgson of Abinger

### **Parliamentary Attendees**

- Baroness Hodgson of Abinger, Conservative
- Baroness Burt of Solihull, Liberal Democrats
- Bishop of Gloucester
- Steve McCabe MP, Birmingham Selly Oak, Labour
- Christine Jardine, MP Edinburgh West, Liberal Democrat
- Thomas Caines on behalf of Carolyn Harris MP
- Oliver Daly on behalf of Kate Osamor MP
- Amy Laver on behalf of Kate Osamor MP

### **External attendees**

- Pavia, lived experience witness
- Dami, lived experience witness
- Ruth, lived experience witness
- Laura lived experience witness
- Nicola Drinkwater, Women in Prison
- Sonya Ruparel, Women in Prison
- Sarah Uncles, Women in Prison

### **Apologies**

- Kate Osamor MP, Labour
- Dame Caroline Dinenage MP
- Baroness Gohir, crossbench
- Ruth Jones MP, Newport West, Labour
- Naz Shah MP, Bradford West, Labour

### **Minutes**

1. **Welcome from the vice chair**

Baroness Hodgson welcomed everyone to the APPG and gave apologies for the prospective chair, Kate Osamor MP, for not being in attendance. The Howard League for Penal Reform were thanked for their important work with the APPG to date and Women in Prison was introduced as the new secretariat.

## **2. Introduction to the Secretariat, Women in Prison**

Sonya Ruparel introduced the charity Women in Prison, which has been working with women in contact with the criminal justice system for the past 40 years and was set up by two women, one of whom had lived experience of the justice system herself, Chris Tchaikovsky.

Sonya set out some of the key challenges facing women in the justice system including that racially minoritised women and girls are overrepresented at every stage, that a significant majority of women have been victims of abuse, over a third of women have been in the care system and that eight in ten women in prison have mental ill health.

## **3. Discussion on proposals for future work and themes and direction of APPG**

Pavia, Dami, Laura and Ruth led a discussion on key issues they would like the APPG to focus on with reference to their own experiences in contact with the justice system.

Pavia introduced a briefing paper of key priorities that she had informed alongside Dami, Laura and Ruth. She spoke about the revolving door where women repeatedly come into contact with the justice system due to unaddressed needs around poverty, harmful substance use, mental ill health and trauma and that it is important to be able to address these root causes to reduce offending and criminalisation. She summarised a quote from Women in Prison founder Chris Tchaikovsky about how the justice system takes women who are already most familiar with abuse, neglect and punishment and responds to their trauma by punishing them further.

A discussion followed where the group spoke about how their involvement in the justice system could have been prevented had they have been able to receive support for their trauma and mental ill health at an earlier stage in the community. Women spoke of their own experiences of abuse, growing up in care, harmful substance use, severe mental ill health and the impact of having insecure immigration status. Women said that the focus should be on care and prevention rather than punishment.

Summary of the issues raised included:

- Women spoke about the remand for “own protection” or prison being used as a place of safety in response to mental ill health and that this power should be abolished.
- Women spoke of being stigmatised and judged as a result of being in contact with the justice system and being labelled as a “criminal”. Women spoke of challenges in finding employment opportunities after receiving a criminal record.
- Women spoke of poor conditions in prison and a lack of support for mental health. One woman described only being allowed out of her cell every three days for a half an hour shower over an 18-day period.

- Women spoke about the lack of community based mental health support meaning that women did not have appropriate diagnoses, medication, therapy or support for their mental health needs.

Baroness Hodgson thanked everyone for being engaged in the discussion and that the members of the APPG with consider these areas and the briefing paper put together by women with lived experience to develop key priority areas for the following year.

#### **4. Election of chairs and officers for the next year and discussion of name and purpose**

The following officers were elected to the APPG:

- **Chair:** Kate Osamor MP
- **Vice Chairs:** Baroness Hodgson, Baroness Burt
- **Officers:** Bishop of Gloucester, Baroness Gohir, Dame Caroline Dinenage MP

Baroness Hodgson set out the proposal by Kate Osamor MP to edit the name of the APPG to the *All-Party Parliamentary Group on women in contact with the justice system*, and to update its purpose “*to increase the knowledge and awareness of the experiences of women in contact with the justice system and promote approaches that reduce criminalisation and meet women’s needs.*”

This was approved.

Bishop of Gloucester said she spends a lot of her role as Anglican Bishop to women’s prisons joining up the different stages of the criminal justice system. She felt that this revision in name and purpose would enable a broader focus of the wider system.

Baroness Hodgson agreed that prevention was an important area of focus, such as for housing and health, and potential for reoffending if those things are not dealt with.

#### **5. Thanks**

Baroness Hodgson thanked everyone for attending. She mentioned that Women in Prison would be in touch to gather feedback on the briefing paper for key priorities to inform the workplan for the APPG for the next year that will be developed with the chair, Kate Osamor MP and the timeline for the next meetings.