

Minutes of the Corston Implementation Coalition

Wednesday 11th July 2007
Norman Shaw North
Victoria Embankment
Parliamentary Estate
London, SW1A 2TT

Present

Krishna Maharaj (Chair), Lorely Burt, Teresa Elwes, Lucy Smith, Jon Collins, Chelsea McKinney, Tapan Pal, Lisa Mathews, Tracy Brown, Martin Pick, Kimmitt Edgar, Natasha Lyons, Andras Beszterczey

Apologies

Kate Quigley, Harpreet Gill, Gillian Unsworth, Kiran Dhami, Karen Moore, Doreen McCollin, Linda Bryant, Aidan Warner, Marcus Roberts, Jacqui Karn, David Stone

Matters arising

Jo Swinson has replaced Lorely Burt as the Liberal Democrats Shadow Minister for Women and Equalities and so the latter will not be as active in the campaign as previously.

Update on current situation

Lorely Burt highlighted a series of complaints recently levelled at HMP Send – for example, the abolition of weekend visits, prisoners confined to their chair during family visits and the negative effect this has on the inmates and their families alike. Tapan Pal recommended that the Corston Implementation Coalition (hereafter CIC) may like to use this information in a press release to strengthen their contention.

Lisa Mathews emphasised a series of changes occurring in the National Offender Management Service (hereafter NOMS) and the Probation Services which may confuse and delay an official response to the Corston Report and Chelsea McKinney stated that though the initial reaction to the Corston Report was positive as a whole, the Women's Policy Team has divided into two sides – those demanding more research before anything specific may be done, and others who believe that the Baroness' work is sufficient in depth. Kimmitt Edgar said that the main issue arising from the Corston Report is the cost in changing to non-custodial sentencing which is being investigated by the New Economics Foundation (hereafter NEF), who have also published statistics of precisely how many women offenders have been remanded and the percentage who have served. That research has revealed the worrying treatment of women upon release – as one applied for housing support in the town her mother lives in incidentally the place she was arrested. The local authority responded by stating that they could not give her support because her registered place of residence was the prison. The rights of people upon release are not compiled in one document and so ex-offenders' knowledge of their rights is insufficient.

Kimmett Edgar continued by stressing that NOMS does not need to carry out more research. The David James Report and the Lawrence Sherman Study into restorative justice in Canada and New Zealand is enough. Lucy Smith added that the King's Study of introducing mental health specialists in the police force and courts showed that it was successful. It was agreed that all relevant documents of use for the campaign would be sent to Krishna Maharaj so the group could use all available resources and studies when need be.

Martin Pick raised the crucial question of what the CIC aims to achieve in the short-time, namely opening up constituencies of opinion so that during the final stage of the campaign when government departmental resistance is bound to arise, the CIC can call upon a large number of professionals to negate this resistance. Ideally, retired senior civil servants would be recruited. However, Krishna Maharaj stated that this must be done quickly as a steadfast government response to the Corston Report would come in the late autumn.

Action

- *Participants with knowledge of/ in possession of reports relevant to the CIC will send them to Krishna Maharaj (Krishna.Maharaj@cityandhackneymind.org.uk).*
- *Participants to enquire amongst their contacts to find retired senior civil servants who would be willing to actively support the CIC.*

Linking up with the Corston Coalition and other key players

Lorely Burt suggested that Baroness Corston is the key individual to know who has influence and Krishna Maharaj is the person to contact her. Teresa Elwes raised the main issue that as the CIC is an alliance of a number of organisations whose focal points are very different – thus it needs central control so work is not duplicated, especially as the time-frame for possible action is very short. Jon Collins of the Fawcett Society and other interested agencies have already established a Corston Group, but stated that all the organisations who are part of that coalition have been lobbying independently with little active coordination apart from the online petition as Fawcett do not have sufficient resources to achieve this.

Tapan Pal suggested that an online discussion group should be created. Krishna Maharaj suggested that we should speak to Women in Prison to use their website as they have already a dedicated page to the Corston Report and its implementation or set up a page in City and Hackney Mind's website.

Action

- *Krishna Maharaj to contact Baroness Corston to investigate the best people to approach for support.*
- *Krishna Maharaj to contact Women in Prison to enquire whether CIC can use their website as their official page or set up a page in City and Hackney Mind's website .*
- *Participating organisations to coordinate their campaigning which will be directed by the CIC.*

Aims and objectives of the campaign

'Implementation of the Corston Report in full' is the newly established aim of the CIC - women offenders need to be released, but with the support system Baroness Corston recommended, otherwise the crime-cycle will simply repeat itself.

Brainstorm name

'Corston Implementation Coalition' was accepted as the campaign name with the tagline as 'Just Solutions for Women Offenders.'

Developing an action-plan

Lorely Burt suggested arranging a Westminster Hall debate for one and a half hours which would provide very good press coverage and the government would have to openly give a legitimate reason for rejecting the Corston Report.

Martin Pick raised the issue that one of the focal statistics of the Corston Report is 'eighty percent of women in prison have diagnosable mental health problems,' however, this is from 1997 so ideally new research should be done. Otherwise anyone seeking to negate the report could easily raise this flaw.

Lorely Burt suggested that CIC should centre on a few key senior individuals for maximum effect. Krishna Maharaj, Lisa Mathews and Kimmett Edgar accepted this, with Chelsea McKinney showing interest subject to approval from her organisation.

Lucy Smith raised the possibility of coordinating with Michelle Collins from SmartJustice to send a petition and Krishna Maharaj stated that he would speak to Paul Farmer at Mind to gain support.

Action

- Krishna Maharaj, Lisa Mathews, Kimmett Edgar and Chelsea McKinney (subject to consultation from her agency) to take charge of the CIC.
- Lucy Smith to contact Michelle Collins and enlist her help.
- Krishna Maharaj to contact Paul Farmer and enlist his help.

Lobbying relevant ministers/parliamentarians

Lorely Burt accepted the responsibility of drafting a letter which could be sent to MPs and suggested using Mind, Prison Reform Trust and Nacro for a future letter-writing campaign.

Action

- Lorely Burt to draft a letter which can be sent to participants' local MPs

Liaising with all party parliamentary interest groups

Krishna Maharaj said he would contact Janet Dean and Emily Frith in particular for support and Lorely Burt volunteered to investigate MPs from the Conservative Party who would be interested in joining the campaign.

Action

- *Krishna Maharaj to contact Janet Dean and Emily Frith and co-ordinators of the following all party parliamentary groups:*
 - o *All Party Parliamentary Group on Penal Affairs*
 - o *All Party Parliamentary Group on Mental Health*
 - o *All Party Parliamentary Group on Prison Health*
 - o *All Party Parliamentary Group on Sex Equality*
 - o *All Party Parliamentary Group on Human Rights Group*
 - o *All Party Parliamentary Group on complex needs and dual diagnosis*

Media campaign

Martin Pick advocated the use of Media Trust which specifically aims to support charities and Kimmett Edgar stated that he would speak to professionals at Prison Reform Trust.

Action

- *Krishna Maharaj to contact Media Trust.*
- *Kimmett Edgar to find suitable media specialists in Prison Reform Trust.*

Date, time and venue of next meeting

Monday 6th August from 2.30pm at the House of Commons.