

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Witness Statement of

Sue Amanda BROOKES

Support person present: No

1. My name is Susan Brookes although most people will know me as Sue. My date of birth is [REDACTED] 1964. My contact details are known to the Inquiry.

Professional Background

2. I initially studied law at Oxford University and, as part of the course, I did various pieces of work supporting offenders. After I qualified, I moved to Scotland where I completed a masters' degree in criminology at Edinburgh University. I then joined the Scottish Prison Service (SPS), whilst at the same time studying for an MBA with the Open University.
3. I joined the prison service in July 1987 as an assistant governor which is the first non-uniform grade. In my career I have worked for spells at lots of prisons across Scotland with all sorts of offender types and sentences. Over the years I have also had various headquarters postings within policy and strategy.
4. My first posting as governor was to the special unit within HMP Barlinnie, between 1994 and 1995. I subsequently went on to close that unit. My first posting as a governor in charge of an entire establishment was to HMP Cornton Vale from 2002 to 2006. My promotion to I-band, which is the senior governor role, was to HMP Edinburgh and from there, in 2012, I moved to HMYOI Polmont.

5. HMYOI Polmont was the last establishment I was governor of and I remained there until 2017, when I did a secondment for a couple of years with Education Scotland. In that role, we were helping head teachers and the policy side of Education Scotland to understand the issues that existed for young people coming into custody with a view to try and stop that happening. I was privileged to be part of the Independent Care Review, which ultimately produced the 'Promise' report in 2020. As part of the Independent Care Review, I co-chaired the workstream on work force. I then spent six months in the prison inspectorate (HMIPS) where I spent time comparing the practices between Education Scotland's inspection of schools and their inspection of prisons. During that time the HMIPS were commissioning the expert review on mental health, which is relevant to the young people's agenda. I then did some research work until the pandemic started, when I was asked to take up the post of interim director of Strategy and Stakeholder Engagement for the Scottish Prison Service, based at HMP Edinburgh.

6. In that, my current, post I hold the brief for the young people and women's strategies and I was the senior responsible officer for the project which led to the establishment for the new HMP Stirling. We led on SPS responsibilities for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) obligations for young people. I am currently leading on the implementation of non-pain inducing restraint across the service, initially rolled out at HMYOI Polmont and HMP Stirling.

Guidance Documents and Reports

7. There were a number of reports in circulation, which were relevant particularly when I was at Cornton Vale. The ones I remember most were in existence before I went to Cornton Vale in 2002. One report was 'A Safer Way' which came out in 1998 and was followed up in 2002 with 'A Better Way'. These would have been the reports I mostly focused on during my time at Cornton Vale. We would also follow international practice and change our methods accordingly.

8. Around the time I was in Cornton Vale there was a lot of concern about how women offenders were managed in other parts of the United Kingdom, in England in particular. This led to a report by Baroness Corston around 2007. I hosted a visit to Cornton Vale from Baroness Corston whilst she was compiling her report, close to the end of my time at Cornton Vale. She was very impressed with what we had done there and comments on that within her report.
9. In 2008 the Prison's Commission published the 'Scotland's Choice' report, which generally dealt with prison numbers and the impact of population increases, which we are facing again now. This was an important document. In 2012 the Angelini Commission was published, which I believe my colleague my colleague Kate Donegan had a lot of involvement with.
10. In 2020 the Promise Report was published by the Independent Care Commission. This report makes clear recommendations about children not being in custody.
11. All these reports I have mentioned, although I am sure there will have been many more, were the core Government steer documents about what we were trying to do.

Nature and Scale of Abuse

Between prisoners

12. When I arrived at both Cornton Vale and at Polmont, both had difficulties of different types, not specifically related to abuse. Both had been subjected to inspections just before or just after I had arrived and I was able to use the reports from the inspections to fix the reports from these inspections as a route to improvement I think it is worth putting this into perspective. Generally, all of the big high schools across Scotland will have one or two individuals who are causing difficulties and are out of control. In relation to Polmont, this means that all those boys who had been causing difficulties at those schools are coming into one place, and they behave in the way they do

because they are hugely vulnerable and damaged because of their appalling life circumstances.

13. One of the biggest issues is always bullying between the boys and how we try and address that. One of the things I introduced at Polmont and at at Cornton Vale was restorative practice approaches. The development of that can be seen from Cornton Vale to Polmont because in Cornton Vale we worked with an organisation called SACRO and trained a number of staff around restorative practices, although that wasn't about restorative practice in relation to the victim and the index offence. This was a mediation-based approach to conflict resolution between the female offenders. At the time it was extended to Polmont even though I was the governor of Cornton Vale.
14. When I went to Polmont the problem of bullying was more acute, probably because the numbers were greater. At that time there were around 700 young men in total and there was a considerable amount of bullying. We set up a unit which we were going to call the Violence Unit but instead called it the Community Safety Unit. A couple of staff and a line manager were involved and a police officer from Police Scotland was seconded to work with us. He did a lot of work with the boys on relationships with authority and difficulties around that. We also worked with an organisation called 'Committed to Ending Abuse', who are one of the very few organisations who will work with men and boys around abuse. We had a whole set of activities and programmes around relationship building. This helped significantly.
15. As the numbers of boys dropped, we managed to get the boys into single rooms rather than sharing and this reduced the amount of bullying. We found that a lot of bullying and abusive behaviour happened in the evening when there were less staff available so giving boys their own room gave them a safe place and considerably reduced the amount of violence.

Staff bullying

16. There were some complaints by the boys against the staff but I honestly cannot recall any specific complaint being made. It is a fact that young people generally don't complain as much as adults, whether or not they feel they have reason to do so. This is probably because they are more vulnerable and have less confidence, and their relationship with authority hasn't been good, so they don't believe action will be taken. Some also have learning difficulties so aren't able to fill in a complaint form. This means we have to work quite hard, not just with the formal complaint process, but provides opportunities for much more informal engagement around relationships. Most complaints come where they have a good relationship with a member of staff who helps them fill in the form or help them phone. The approach to this has to come from the whole establishment and it is about creating an environment in which people feel safe and are able to talk freely, as opposed to specific interventions.
17. During my time in Polmont, young people would use the complaints system to complain about the attitudes of staff. Generally these issues could be resolved through discussion and mediation, however, in any instance where a young person made a complaint about physical or sexual assault, such issues would be referred to the police. Complaints of physical assault were most often made in the context of a restraint. I cannot remember the specifics, but there were occasions where disciplinary process was invoked where it was felt restraint processes were inappropriately applied. It would have been standard practice across the SPS estate to refer any serious incidents to the police. I don't recall it being a specific policy, however this was certainly my practice.
18. The vast majority of prison staff I have come across have been intensely compassionate and very professional but, like any other big organisation, there will be some who are probably in the wrong job. Where there is evidence to suggest that someone's behaviour is not acceptable then they would be dealt with through disciplinary procedures. If there was something more serious the police would become involved.

Current approach to female offenders

19. At various intervals in Cornton Vale, we had groups called Prisoner Information Consultation (PIAC).various By the time I got to Polmont we increased our youth work services, because they were extremely useful in working with young people. They build relationships around the young people and they did a lot of work on user-engagement and general opportunities for young people to be involved and co-design and co-create the activities. This meant we had a big peer support hub where a lot of the young people were being trained by our youth work services with a member of staff. The young people were in the reception, the halls and the various working areas. This mechanism often is a good way of getting a feel for how the establishment is running and what young people feel about the services that are being provided.

20. We tried to improve things when I first went to Cornton Vale. Very close to the end of my time at Cornton Vale and Polmont further inspections were done. The reports from those inspections show the improvements from the inspections that had been carried out when I first arrived. Both establishments were winning awards at different times and there were a range of indicators. In Polmont there were quality indicators for self-evaluation developed from which we got feedback. In both establishments we run SPS prison surveys at intervals. From these we were getting 80 to 90 percent indicators for good relationships with staff. A standard prisoner survey is undertaken every 3 or 4 years and this is carried out across the whole organisation. The feedback from all of these is usually quite positive.

21. Initially when I arrived at Cornton Vale there were issues with prison population and staff absence and the way in which the population was distributed in the establishment. If staff are seen to be coping with high numbers, which they were, it is not also a good idea for them to be dealing with all different types of prisoners in the same area. Having remand prisoners along with short term and long term and young people all in the same block can be very complex and difficult. We went through a process of redistributing and, over time, refurbishment of the units. The young people were put into a block called Skye so that we could focus on them and their needs. We also

focussed a lot on addiction issues and bullying. If there is a drugs culture generally along with that there is bullying to get access to drugs. A lot of time in Cornton Vale was spent on drugs and addiction.

22. Another thing we did was within a block called Ross House, which at that time was the newest block. Concentrated in there were the women, including young women, with the most serious mental health difficulties. We put in nursing support and concentrated the approach around these most vulnerable women. A combination of these things significantly reduced the instance of self-harming.
23. In Polmont we refurbished the two activity areas at a cost of three million pounds and changed the focus. When I got there the focus was based on industrial training and we maintained some of that, but we also put in a parenting area, two life skills areas, a theatre complex, a radio station, an employability area, hairdressing, craft activities and other life skills so it would help young people to relax and even encourage peer support as well as provide technical skills. We did similar things in Cornton Vale although on a smaller scale because it was a smaller establishment. It was a different strategic approach for the establishments because Cornton Vale was very much about relationships. This was the strategic direction for me at that time. Polmont was about creating a learning environment but the underpinning philosophy there was all about relationships and trust.
24. I have no doubt that all the measures that were introduced made a difference. In Cornton Vale the incidence of self-harm behaviour decreased by about a half across all the offenders. In Polmont the violence dropped considerably for various different reasons. This was not because of one change, there were a number of things. In prison we always strive to create a safe environment.

Other relevant documents

25. Nowadays we have much more trauma-informed and gender-specific practice for women, which is probably informed more generally by the women's rights movement

and understanding of pathways into offending. It is a fairly new approach and there are two documents which work in tandem with each other. There is 'Strategy for the Management of Women in Custody', which was developed as part of the run up to opening HMP Stirling and the Community Custody Units, Lillias in Glasgow and Bella in Dundee. I was the senior officer responsible for the latter part of this project. We are currently working on a number of quality indicators and there is a piece of external independent evaluation ongoing which has been commissioned by the Scottish Government on our behalf.

26. The second document is the 'Young People's vision', which has been in existence for much longer and which started in the time I was at Polmont. I started with the direction that Polmont would be a learning environment and we got into a partnership with Education Scotland. A lady called Gill Robinson was asked to come to work with SPS as a young people's advisor. She had a background in Education Scotland as an inspector of prisons from an educational perspective and she supported me. Gill helped us get the evidence-base around the background of the young people, what worked for them and about what they thought, and we created 'Young People's Vision' and we created quality indicators that sat alongside that. We use them for self-evaluation purposes, even since my time, so the current governor is using the quality indicators to inform his understanding about the impact of service delivery. It is not just about the services we provide, it is about what the young people think about the services provided and how they could be improved. This approach is quite different from our historical approach.
27. Both these documents apply in relation to young people and focus on similar things around trauma and gender appropriate services and supporting people to learn and develop. The documents should be read in tandem and have quite similar themes.

Discipline

28. To try and reduce the disciplinary processes we set up a care orderly room along with a disciplinary orderly room. If anyone was caught with drugs, they were referred into

the care orderly room, which was more like a case conference. Provided that the prisoner was complying with the case conference in dealing with the drugs issues they had then they weren't taken back for a disciplinary outcome.

29. There was one occasion in Polmont I remember vaguely when a young man made a complaint of a serious sexual assault committed by another boy. It involved penetration of some kind but I cannot recall if this was by an individual or with an object. This was referred to the police, which would be done whether the young person wanted to or not, because we were obligated to.

Accommodation currently for females under eighteen

Direct from court

30. All women sentenced in Scotland in the past were admitted to Cornton Vale and now to HMP Stirling, which has replaced Cornton Vale. Staff there are responsible for their assessment and putting them to a suitable establishment. Young females and the most vulnerable females will remain at Stirling. On saying that, HMP Grampian will also take females direct from local courts. From Stirling, adult women will be sent to HMP Greenock, Edinburgh and Polmont. Young women would only ever be held in Stirling or Grampian. Population increase pressures have recently forced a rethink of this position because at the moment Polmont has places and because the number of young people has dropped, women have relocated from HMP Edinburgh to other establishments.

Accommodation following assessment

31. Young female offenders under eighteen are currently accommodated at HMP Stirling. Until June they would have been held in Polmont but the theory had always been that when HMP Stirling opened as a trauma-informed, gender-specific establishment with a new environment, they would move there. Nowadays there are very few children in either establishment, male or female, but even up to 2021 the numbers were relatively

small, compared to when I was in Polmont when there were thirty or forty young men. Grampian can also hold young women but young men would always be in Polmont.

32. One of the things we did when I was in Polmont in terms of future strategy was in relation to establishments receiving prisoners aged 16 to 21 from the courts. The prison rules actually allow us to keep them until their 23rd birthday. When I arrived, as soon as prisoners turned 21, they were moved to another adult prison. One of the things we have learned a lot from all the evidence is not just about the bereavement and trauma background of the young people, but also about their maturation. The brain doesn't develop fully until they are 25. This encouraged me to change our approach to keep them as long as possible to give them a more focussed approach and be better placed to look after them. This is even more important for boys who don't mature as fast as girls. Boys are also over-represented in relation to learning difficulties.
33. Some of the 21-year-old boys we had were just as vulnerable, if not more vulnerable, than some of the 16-year-olds. We would then have been putting them into an adult prison with sophisticated older people in their late 20s/early 30s so exposing them to more risk of abuse and other criminality we wouldn't want to expose them to. How you structure prisons in the future and what we think about that is important.

Mixing children and adults

34. Although Stirling will also take women over 21, they would be housed in different accommodation areas. When I was at Cornton Vale and Polmont the interpretation of the prison rules was that the young people would not only live separately in their own accommodation area, but even through the day they should not mix with older individuals. In theory, it sounds like the right thing to do not to have young people in contact with adults, but in practice, in terms of the prison regime, it is really bad for them. Basically, through the day you have to designate one workplace for the young people. This means they go from their living accommodation straight to this work area and they don't have any choice and their development opportunities are very restricted.

35. In both Cornton Vale and Polmont I opened it up so they have a safe place to go at night, which is their room in the living accommodation and which is in accordance with the prison rules. During the day, depending on each individual's assessment, they can mix with the broader population, which opens up the doors to all the opportunities that are available in the establishment. Basically, the overriding principle is whether it is in the best interests of the child and would depend on the individual assessments of each child or young person. A decision would be made as to whether it was appropriate for them to mix and what level of supervision should be in place.
36. Having adult women around for the younger women can be quite a settling factor for the younger women because they can mother them and be a calming influence for them. It has to be managed carefully, but it is much better for the young people to be able to mix. Having a very constrained lifestyle is not healthy.
37. Someone who might not be considered suitable would be a young person who doesn't mix with others and who stands out in terms of their own vulnerability. Usually they are unable to mix because their mental health is so poor and they are being managed separately because they are so unwell. These decisions would be made following discussions with a multi-disciplinary team with social workers and health colleagues and considering child protection measures. It would be a big decision to exclude a young person from mixing with others like this. The general rule would be that they would mix unless that difficult decision had been made.

Changes to the approach within Polmont and Cornton Vale to reduce bullying/violence

38. I can't say that this approach on its own reduced the level of violence or bullying. The reduction of violence and bullying within prisons is a whole-establishment approach. It is all about keeping them busy, making sure there are good relationships, and the introduction of restorative mediation approaches and many other things.

39. In general, this was all of the things we were doing in Cornton Vale. As well as changing the population, we were engaged in staff training about mental health and restorative practices, we did work in Ross House, and we set up the addictions and mental health team. We also completely refurbished all the accommodation areas and set up the activities area with beauty therapy and hairdressing facilities and we restructured the activities block and created a central garden area. We also set up craft areas. We established what was then called the Links Centre, which centred around their case management and interaction with partner agencies. One of the issues is that people in prison get bored and that brings with it problems.
40. In Polmont we reconfigured the activity block, redecorated it and put-up murals and photographs, to try and make it all more colourful and visual. We did what we could to get the young people involved.
41. We put a lot of focus, both in Cornton Vale and Polmont, into families. In Cornton Vale we set up the family centre, which was included within the chaplaincy area. This meant the women could have longer visits with children inside the establishment. We also opened the independent living units which were six houses outside the establishment. This created the opportunity for the women to move into them and have their pre-school age children live with them and go to nurseries in the community. In Polmont we established the parenting facility and we increased the number of family contact staff and we refurbished the visits area. All these things help the relationships with family which was important to them. It also helps the staff see these women as whole people and not just in respect of their offence.
42. It is all about creating an environment in which people feel safe, valued and listened to. The staff must also be well-trained, understand the issues and feel productive. It is also important that there are different environments where people can get to know one another. Young people behave differently in the halls where they live in comparison to how they might behave in the activities or the visits areas. Helping staff to understand this helps them to respond to the young person as a whole individual.

43. By the time I was in Polmont, guidance such as 'Get It Right for Every Child' (GIRFEC) had been published and there was the whole systems approach so it was very much a multi-disciplinary team approach. There was a lot of collaboration between social work partners both inside and outside prisons. I have always worked on the basis that the multi-disciplinary approach has to be at the senior team level as well as for those working with individuals. In places like Polmont the people I would have regarded as being part of the senior team were health workers, youth workers, social work and education workers. All would be key players in terms of how we were going to take the establishment forward and what we needed to do. A lot of specialist advice is needed because the individuals we look after have very bad life histories, very complex needs and some can be very dangerous. It is important to remember that we are talking about people who have been abused or severely neglected, and almost always have a history of physical, emotional and sexual abuse in their childhood before they come into the prison system.
44. As prison governor you also have to be constantly balancing their needs with the risk they represent to others. All of these life histories are coming into one place so you always need to bear that in mind.

Effectiveness of steps to reduce violence/bullying

45. Through the quality indicators, inspection reports and research work including prisoner surveys, it was evident that the level of violence had been reduced and you could see that progress.

Community custody units

Lilias and Bella

46. Originally, there was an issue about SPS being asked to build another prison for women. The design of that was taking place with HMP Inverclyde. There was a cabinet

secretary change when Michael Matheson came into post and he made it clear that the approach for women was not about building more prisons, it was about doing things differently. On the back of that, or it may have preceded it, the Angelini Commission came out. As a consequence of the combined weight of opinion of the Angelini Commission, public sentiment and a number of pressure groups, it was felt we shouldn't design another prison, but instead keep women out of custody.

47. This led to the Scottish Government deciding, based on our advice, that there should be a hub establishment of around 100 places which is HMP Stirling and up to five community custody units (CCUs). What became apparent fairly early on, partly because at that time the number of women coming into custody was dropping, was that there would not be enough women based on the criteria who would be able to access the CCUs. The Government authorised two CCUs initially with a possible further three after evaluation.
48. There are currently two community custody units, Lilius in Glasgow and Bella in Dundee. The one in Dundee is slightly smaller. They are similar semi-detached houses. There is provision for girls under aged eighteen to twenty-one to go into one of the CCUs, but we decided that girls under the age of eighteen should stay in HMP Stirling. Under prison rules we have to designate particular areas as young person's areas. We have the facilities to do that, but it would all be discussed at a multi-disciplinary meeting along with mental health staff and social workers to decide on the level of support from community partners, especially educational support.
49. The main issue, as highlighted in the Promise Report, is getting the 16- and 17-year-olds out of prison and into different facilities. We are actively working with the Scottish Government to try and achieve that. We would have to help those providers who are taking the youngsters on to understand the full range of needs and risks which go along with that and share our experiences of managing that, so they can take them on and manage them effectively.
50. As time has gone on, the numbers of both women and young men has dropped, which is great news and shows that various policies are working. That has meant that the

people who are coming into prison are more and more acute in terms of their risk and their needs. Most of the women now in custody are there because of quite significant violence and the boys are definitely in custody for more violent offences. My view is that we have to look further upstream and put measures in place to stop them from getting into the position where they commit the violence in the first place.

Community custody units for males

51. There are currently no plans at the moment to have CCUs for males. My view is that the Angelini Commission and Michael Matheson's work led to the development of a new model of custody for women which evolved into the CCUs and HMP Stirling. I think we need to go through the same kind of process with Government and other organisations to talk about what should be the new model of custody for young men. The current focus will be to get 16- and 17-year-olds out of the system, which is correct, but I worry that there will then be the view that the problem had been sorted. There are currently 150 young men in Polmont aged 18 to 23 who in my view are just as vulnerable as the 16- and 17-year-olds and who need the same kind of consideration, plus there is a group of 23- to 25-year-olds who are in adult prisons who also, according to the evidence, are not fully mature. I think we need the Government to have a more public discussion about what a new model of custody for young men would look like. This may be something similar to HMP Stirling or a CCU but could also be something quite different.
52. In Polmont, having the women and young men together has been very successful. They obviously don't mix in accommodation but they see each other in the activities areas. It provides for a very normal atmosphere. Women only spaces are not always the answer.

Current approach for boys under eighteen

53. Boys under the age of eighteen are kept in a separate part of the accommodation in young offenders' institutions. Just like the women, they are mixing with older young

men during the day, again based on an individual assessment of appropriateness. This again works successfully because they have access to the full range of activities and supports that are available, which is far more appropriate.

54. I think it is important that we consider the prisoners as three separate groups: children, young people and young adults. Some children and young people, especially if they have been in care, need continuing adult support for an extended period to move into adulthood and independent decision making. There needs to be a clear understanding that it would be horrendous if 16-year-olds moved out of prison and everyone else was classed as an adult, this would not be good. We need a different approach to how we manage our young people and we need to extend that differently for the slightly older group.
55. We are trying to move towards having a trauma-informed approach towards the management of all male offenders including young male offenders. In Polmont particularly one of the things that struck me was how many of the young men had suffered a really traumatic bereavement early on in their life. There has been some excellent research by a lady called Nina Vaswani on bereavement related issues. She did some work for me early in my time in Polmont and the results shocked me, not just the number of bereavements but the nature of the bereavements. For example one boy saw his father being stabbed in the street and his mum was an alcoholic and then died, so he ended up being looked after his grandmother along with his five brothers, however she too died.
56. There was a lot of ill health in deprived areas and men in these areas have a very short life expectancy of around 45. I saw this pattern of extended morbidity within families. It was utterly tragic. You would often see the offending trajectory really kicking off following family bereavement. I think bereavement support, mental health support and particularly additional support around learning difficulties in schools really needs to be there.
57. In Polmont some young boys excluded themselves from everything that was going on. To combat this we set up the inclusion unit with two members of staff supported by

youth workers and others. Their job was to identify these youngsters and understand them and connect them to the services and bring them on individually. A lot of these youngsters were frightened to engage for many reasons. A relationship was built with these boys and they were gradually introduced to the others and ultimately this put them on a different pathway. There was success with some of the most acutely damaged kids.

58. We introduced a theatre area because this was an area where boys who often found it difficult were able to express how they were feeling. Sometimes it was through comedy, music or drama with physical movement, which are different ways where they could express what happened to them in their lives and sometimes even engage those who were the furthest away.
59. We also had the Dogs' Trust bring in dogs and the boys who were most acutely needy were able to work with the dogs. We took the education people out of the classroom and they were able to teach the boys when they were working with the dogs.
60. We introduced youth workers into the halls so they would go out and find the boys rather than waiting for the boys to come to them. We introduced teachers into the halls who were able to work with those who had the most literacy difficulties but were too embarrassed to say so. The current governor of Polmont has maintained this approach of going to get the boys rather than waiting and very much has an inclusion approach. This has all developed since my time there. Levels of young people who are secluded have reduced significantly.
61. Not long after I arrived at Polmont we set up a big conference with the staff and invited various people to speak. We asked the previous Chief Medical Officer Sir Harry Burns to speak about the development of the brain and why it is that people who have been neglected or traumatised behave differently. Staff came back after the event and completed evaluation sheets. Some staff noted that they had wrongly thought for as long as the past twenty years that the children they were dealing with were bad. They couldn't believe they had been left to think that and that no one had told them a reason why this was happening. This didn't surprise me because a lot of people in society

don't understand about the effects of trauma, but it was watershed for some of the staff.

62. My personal view is that we ought to sit the young people down and train them about trauma because it would be helpful for them to know. We should also generally be doing this in schools. Some young people who we did speak to in a peer support group found it really therapeutic. They thought they had been born bad and finding out there was a reason why their behaviour was challenging was cathartic for some of them.
63. Prisons don't generally have an embedded practice around staff supervision and support like the social work department. Social work have a supervisory/case management approach and so do a large part of the third sector, including Health. Education don't have a model of supervisory practice either and I think they should develop this as part of a new model of work.

Staff Training

64. I think it fair to say that prison staff know a lot more than they think, through experience of working with people all the time. Anyone working particularly with women and young people do, however, need more intensive training and supervision. Over the years I was always keen on developing staff.
65. In Cornton Vale we were rolling out training on restorative practices and mental health awareness. There would have been specific training about working with women, but I cannot recall exactly what that was. When I was at Polmont we rolled out training on learning difficulties, bereavement trauma and loss, the development of the adolescent brain and we had a lot of staff seminar events. We were also developing at that point, with the prison service college, specific training about working with young people. Along the way certain things came up that I thought were important for staff to know. Over time this has been built into modules of working with young people. The same has been happening in the women's estate so staff who have moved to work in HMP

Stirling have been getting training both on working with women as part of the gender specific approach and also on trauma.

66. One of the things we have to bear in mind is that some of the training given may strike home with the member of staff in their own lives or past lives. They may have been the subject of domestic abuse, maybe even sexual abuse or bereavement.
67. One of the other things I also have the lead on in my current post is about how SPS will become a trauma-informed organisation. There is lots of work going on with that at the minute. The advice we have received from lots of specialists in this area, particularly from NHS and Health Improvement is that we need to start with senior leaders.
68. As well as training senior leaders, our corporate plan specifically recognises the importance of trauma-informed practice. We are working with clinical psychologists to better understand the evidence base about what this change process will mean for prisons. We have a number of pilots in place across SPS to test specific aspects of trauma-informed practice. We will be auditing against Scottish Government quality indicators at both establishment and corporate level. Our prison service college is working with NHS colleagues to decide on the training requirements for our wider staff group and, in an initial phase, modules on trauma-awareness will be made accessible to staff online.
69. Other jurisdictions across the UK have tried rolling out lots of trauma training to staff and have then found that the infrastructure and the support supervision structures are not present. If the senior teams don't understand what is going on it can become quite destructive. So the approach we are taking is to roll out the training to all senior leaders. We have completed three or four sessions so far and will soon be training the trade union side and then we will be rolling it out across establishments to wider senior teams. Other planned work includes auditing against quality standards at establishment and corporate level so we can take a view as to what our plan should be going forward. We have taken a more considered, phased and holistic approach because we think it will then ultimately be more embedded.

70. At Polmont we worked closely with Barnardos who provided our youth work support and I made a business case and bought in more youth worker support when I was there. As a specific business case, Barnardos did bereavement counselling for us. We already had 'Committed to ending abuse', which was doing some group and some individual work with the boys, but we also had Barnardos doing work for us too.
71. A lot of the women's lobby organisations will understandably say that it shouldn't be said that people who have been abused will go on to commit abuse. I understand where they are coming from with this statement, however it is also important to recognise that adult men who come into custody for violent crime, statistically are also more likely to be perpetrators of domestic abuse. We know there is a relationship. In Polmont we were working along with 'Committed to ending abuse' with young men generally on relationships. In doing this, if you do so from the perspective of them having potentially been the victim of domestic abuse within the home, they often say that they start to see themselves behaving inappropriately with their partners. They would say they don't want to be like that and they then ask for help.
72. This is just an example of approaching things from a different angle. If we had said in Polmont we were going to have an offence-related programme for perpetrators of domestic abuse then nobody would hold their hands up to participate. Nobody wants to be stigmatised like that but starting to talk about relationships in their own experience, there is more likelihood of individuals then disclosing information. We can then help them access services. The teenage boys were not, in the main, necessarily convicted of domestic abuse, but were potentially on the cusp of how that was going to play out in their own lives.

Segregation/Separation and Reintegration units

73. Segregation for all young people, including offenders under-18 is used, but it is as infrequent as possible. We refer to it as separation and reintegration. There are separate separation and integration units, I think there are about 12 places available

in the unit within Polmont, which is separately staffed. Prisoners can be held there under Rule 41 conditions, which is where they are being assessed because they are suspected of being mentally ill and can't be managed in the hall setting. Sometimes prisoners are put there because they have received a punishment from the orderly room which would usually be for no more than three days under the rules. Any longer would need to be sanctioned through headquarters and would be monitored through other mechanisms. In the adult estate, people can be held under rule conditions for months which is very unusual and doesn't happen with young people.

74. Inclusion staff would be working with the youngster, taking them out for short periods of time through the day. There would also be multi-disciplinary case conferencing around them with mental health, social work and psychology teams. Every effort would be made to get them out of there as quickly as possible because it is not in anyone's best interests.

75. They would then be returned to their original accommodation area or relocated to somewhere else if this was more suitable. Sometimes prisoners will be put in there on another type of rule for the purposes of good order because of their challenging behaviour and need to be managed differently. I know that over time the number of occasions young people are sent to separation and reintegration in Polmont is decreasing. I learned this having recently spoken to the current governor. When they are sent there it is for shorter periods of time. The same will be true in HMP Stirling. The use of these facilities has definitely decreased over the years and is only used in circumstances where there is no other alternative.

76. In both Cornton Vale and Polmont when I was there, we tried to reduce the disciplinary response to things more generally. An example of that I have already mentioned by setting up the care orderly room for minor drugs offences. We were taking things out that were a need-based issue. We also dealt with minor scuffles, pushes, shoves, low-level fights and name calling, things like that where there wasn't any significant injury, we would put that to restorative practice provided the person complied. Where there had been fights and someone had been physically hurt in those cases, if it was serious, it would be referred to the police.

77. Sometimes separating the individuals was the only option. In some instances in both Polmont and Cornton Vale we used an approach with the staff where if the person is quiet and amenable there is no need to put them straight to the separation and reintegration units. They might just be kept locked up in their room until the disciplinary hearing the following day. If possible, we will do that in the hall. On some occasions it was unavoidable having to separate individuals either before or after any hearing for both young men and women when the only option is to take them straight to separation and reintegration.
78. In Stirling there is still a separation and reintegration unit which is also used for women with mental health needs. There are different accommodation blocks and there is more intensive mental health support following a bid for more support from the NHS. The opportunity exists because there are more safe rooms within other accommodation areas so it is a graduated process moving through from assessment to other smaller facilities. This means women can be in much smaller groups rather than the big halls. In Ross House at Cornton Vale there were thirty or forty rooms for the most vulnerable individuals and then next to it was the separation and reintegration unit. The alternatives were they were either out and about with thirty or forty whereas obviously what these women needed were to be in smaller groups of two or three. The way the facilities are designed in HMP Stirling makes it easier to manage the most complex women in smaller numbers with more intensive support. The whole design of the facility is calmer. Some of the women we receive are incredibly traumatised.
79. When I was in Cornton Vale we also created a sensory room facility and tried to use that with the women from Ross House. This wasn't particularly successful, partly because it was a completely separate room and partly because the staff weren't properly trained. In Stirling I think there are some rooms that have sensory facilities built in as part of the normal living environment. At Cornton Vale there would only be a spyhole to look through. In Stirling there are some safer rooms which have long observation panels in the doors and have inbuilt blinds which can be adjusted from outside. It is basically designed so you can have more women in the general

mainstream accommodation participating rather than having to separate them out into other areas where they are more isolated.

Observations on models of imprisonment for Women

80. I believe that former governor Rhona Hotchkiss' made comments in 2016 that models around imprisonment and justice had not been designed for women. I have mixed views on this. When I was at Cornton Vale I would have been saying very strongly that women were different and that this needed to be recognised and that they needed different supports and services which needed to be gender-specific and trauma-informed. I think over the years we have travelled an enormous distance in doing that for women, and thankfully fewer are coming into custody. At the time I was there I felt that it wasn't appropriate for lots of women to be held in custody and they ought to have been managed in the community. This is the dialogue I would have used when I was there. Women in HMP Stirling now will have committed serious offences so it is difficult for the courts to do much else apart from imprison them. There is also an equalities issue and a risk-related issue the courts are having to manage. The courts do, however, try to keep women out of the prison system.
81. My position now is that we have learned a lot about women and have gone back and examined their pathways into offending and applied the evidence to the practice. We have done this in collaboration with our partners. There are four hundred women and eight thousand men in the prison system. I would say that we do not have policies that are gender-specific as a whole in society for boys and men and we don't understand enough about their gender-specific needs. This is not helping the prevention agenda to get started. If we applied some of the learning through feminism and understanding the pathways of offending for women to understanding the pathways of offending for men, then maybe we would be more able to tackle the problem upstream.
82. I am not saying that some of the men we have in custody shouldn't be there because the boys have usually committed very violent offences and by the time, they come to us the courts have tried everything to keep them out of prison. It is very difficult to say

there is any other alternative to custody at that stage because of the damage they are doing and the risk to other people. The problem is that no one has gone upstream to deal with the trauma, bereavement or domestic abuse they have suffered when they were young in ways that are specific to the needs of boys. I would agree with Rhona Hotchkiss' comments that this was the position when I was in Cornton Vale, but not now as things have changed and moved forward.

Making women offenders feel safe.

83. When we wrote the 'Women's Strategy' we would have taken account of the literature review and evidence base associated with prisons. As I have already said, it is all about a whole establishment approach to create a more therapeutic environment. I previously mentioned that I believe we need a new model of custody for young men and mental health and bereavement support in schools. I do think, as part of becoming a trauma-informed organisation, we need to move towards a model which allows for staff support and supervision in terms of professional practice. This is critical in trauma-informed practice and is a big issue for us in the respect that we would have to change our whole staff deployment structures and might need further investment to implement this, which at the moment is very difficult.

Control and Restraint

84. The other thing I am responsible for at the minute is policy about control and restraint practice. In recent years we have had a number of incidents which required us to review our practice. We have done this in phases, the first being C-and-R phase 1. This phase was about making the existing techniques we have safer. We built into that some training content about trauma-informed practice and a bit about why people behave in this way and how to prevent that. We have now moved on to C-and-R phase 2 which replaces our old restraint techniques with new ones. These are non-pain inducing. We are currently piloting C-and-R phase 2 in HMYOI Polmont and HMP Stirling and in the CCUs.

85. It is very much based on a learning model and involves support supervision for the staff groups. If a restraint has happened there is learning support for the staff about the circumstances and actions taken and whether anything could have been done differently. Part of it is establishing whether the incident could have been prevented. Staff are enjoying it and learning from it. We are also debriefing each of the young people afterwards too. We talk through the incident to establish what happened and find out how they felt about it, how they could repair the relationships with staff and how they could approach things differently next time. All of this is subject to evaluation, which will take place over three years and there is a lot of independent research ongoing around that.
86. We have experts doing all the training for us at the college. One of the experts leading this had experience in other settings before coming to work for us and also has a background in learning difficulties and was training in different restraint techniques. I think what they are doing is world-leading stuff. The manual lays out the hierarchy which starts with verbal communication and then goes onto other techniques like using soft cuffs. At the peak of the hierarchy triangle there are still pain-inducing techniques, but in very specific circumstances where there is significant risk. The C-and-R 1 techniques involve applying locks with the intention to cause pain to bring the person under control. The C-and-R 2 techniques do not require the use of pain unless you are at the peak of the triangle.
87. As part of this approach we have introduced soft cuffs which are basically enhanced Velcro. If staff come across two people fighting, they would keep them in a standing position and apply the soft cuffs. The number of occasions when soft cuffs have been used has increased, but the number of times prisoners have to be taken to the floor or restrained where pain has been applied has significantly reduced. Fights are going to take place between the boys so it is all about managing it very quickly, stopping it safely, and not having to put hands on, in terms of restraints.
88. The initial results from Polmont are hugely positive. It has been rolled out to HMP Stirling and is being developed with our trade union colleagues because restraint is a

very sensitive issue because of the safety of their members. It is also an important cultural issue in terms of getting people to think differently. We have built a lot of stuff into the training about trauma-informed practice and thinking differently about restraint and how to do things differently.

89. We are about to roll this out to HMP Lowmoss, which will be the first adult establishment to pilot it. One of the issues for them is there are big, powerful men there, so we will have to find out if it is safe and see how it goes. In the pilot establishments we have built in line manager posts who are responsible for the training and development and doing the debriefing with the young people. It means they are an additional resource associated with that but it is an important role. They are also taking on responsibility in those establishments for broader planning around violence reduction.
90. If the evaluation is all positive then I would be pitching to roll it out across the whole of the adult estate. There is no doubt it is better to do these things slowly and do it well, rather than rush it and have incidents which undermine the whole thing. It would be good to get some further Government support for some of the resourcing issues around this roll-out plan.

Current corporate plan

91. Our current corporate plan has a purpose statement in it which is due to be published. It is all about being person-centred, trauma-informed, inclusive and rights based. Everything we do is about relationships. The foreword from the chief executive officer is very much about the quality of relationships between all parties.

Experiences as prison governor

92. In my experience I don't think staff dealing with female offenders need any different skills but what is needed is different knowledge. Again it is all about a trauma-informed

practice and gaining an understanding as to why that person has come into prison in the first place. There is obviously a component of dealing with women which is gender-specific and relates to the needs of women. The same thing goes for the boys, but in society we don't place the same emphasis on gender-specific practice.

93. In days gone by there was the view that the governor of Cornton Vale should always be a woman. I don't ascribe to that at all. I think women as well as men need different kinds of people in their lives. It is as important for the women as it is for boys to have positive male role models around, so that they are able to recognise that not all men are violent or bad and that women deserve to be treated with respect.
94. I think senior leaders within the prison service have to work in ways which are evidence-based and the purpose statement in the corporate plan is applied. Some of this requires knowledge and some of it is about developing skills in these areas. There are different types of senior leaders in the organisation so I would say you have to be good at networking because a lot of what we do is around the multi-disciplinary team which requires engagement with partners and Government. If you are going to influence future practice you need to be able to set a direction for the establishment and have good planning skills.
95. Fundamentally, the issue is all about relationships. People can have lots of qualifications but little common sense. In our organisation you have to be good with people because our staff are working with people who are in our care. Everything that you are going to try to achieve is through these people. You also need to understand things like change and bereavement, because bereavement is a form of change. We are asking people in our care to change their life circumstances. Senior managers need to be able to reflect and evaluate on their own behaviour.

Suicide prevention

96. The most important thing about suicide prevention and the most likely way of establishing if someone is suicidal is if they tell you that they are feeling bad and going

to hurt themselves. Previous history is important too, but we don't always get that, particularly if the person is on remand or only in for a short sentence. Other aspects could be from assessment or identifying triggers, but it goes back to the quality of relationships. If the person knows that you are going to deal with it sensitively and that there are supports in place then they are more likely to talk things through. Good training is obviously important too.

97. I am currently responsible for the SPS response to the Death in Custody review because the health team reports to me. We are trying to deliver against the recommendations from that. We have just reviewed and reissued the Death in Prison Learning, Audit and Review (DIPLAR) process which is a case-conferenced approach to deaths in custody. It looks at the circumstances pre- and post-death and what learning can be extracted from that. We have redesigned all of that paperwork in a very consultative process, including talking to families who had been affected by deaths in custody. We are also due to review the 'Talk to me' strategy again to see if there is more we can do around that. That process has been commissioned and is starting.
98. One of the groups in the 'Death in custody' review, led by Gill Imery, is about prevention of deaths in prison so we are collaborating with that group to share data about deaths. We have just done a complete review and our head of research has been through all the DIPLAR paperwork extracting from that any specific themes or patterns. All of this data will be shared with the 'Preventing deaths in prison' group. There is a report, possibly very recently published by Gill Imery, which pulls together some of this data and information.
99. The bottom line is that people coming into prison have had appalling life circumstances, such as addiction problems, complex mental health problems or have suffered bereavement. I wish sometimes people would focus on how many people SPS staff save from hurting themselves, rather than statistics about numbers of deaths. They never look at how many prisoners staff have prevented from hurting themselves.

100. My view would be that when you look at the circumstances you can generally see on lots of occasions up front where there should have been health interventions, social work interventions, education interventions or childhood interventions that might have prevented someone getting into that position before custody. When someone dies in custody, however, the focus is always on the 24-hours beforehand and whether we should have done anything differently. My view is that it should be more like a significant case review and look back over the life course of that individual and about the stages of their life history. We would learn more about preventing deaths.
101. I personally think the Fatal Accident Inquiry process is a significant part of the problem. Gill Imery has already publicly commented on this issue. The process is very adversarial and staff feel it is designed to find someone to blame. If you really want to learn about preventing deaths an FAI needs to happen much more quickly and there has to be a learning focus. The current process doesn't do that and it makes things worse and not better. It makes it worse for the families too.

Are prisons safe?

102. I absolutely agree that children should not be in prison. It is a travesty for our society that we continue to imprison children. I have always said that it is wrong and we shouldn't be doing it. The Promise report concluded this and there is Government commitment to removing them. I hope that in time there will never be any children in prison, but this is more a question for the Government to answer. I personally think there should be a blanket approach that there should be no children- in custody. If there is a loophole which says 'Unless in exceptional circumstances', there is always the chance that children will be committed to prison, whether it is exceptional or not.
103. I believe prisons are safe places and were while I was governor at both Cornton Vale and at Polmont. It is worth mentioning that Scottish prisons are not run like prisons in England and are a completely different service. The vast majority of the time Scottish prisons are calm places with good relationships. When I joined in 1987 there were hostage incidents and quite significant large incidents. There is always the possibility

of incidents like that happening, but it hasn't for a long time and that is testament to the very hard work and consistent effort by prison staff.

Other observations

104. One of the things I have learned over the years, and you can see how it has developed, is the importance of an evidence-based approach but also about using that to write a strategy document which then, for governance purposes, commits the organisation to a particular way of working for the long term.
105. When I was at Cornton Vale, towards the time when my tenure came to an end, a lot of work had been done and the team were getting awards. One of the awards was the Butler Trust award for our work in restorative practice and the inspection report was good, however governors change and things don't necessarily continue, whereas if there is an evidence base and a strategy document and corporate approval for that, then there is more chance of sustainability in the longer term.

Lessons to be learned

106. Relationships have to be worked at and it can be really hard work. My colleague Gill Robinson did a piece of research work recently which was really about building learning about young people into teacher training. She interviewed a number of children about their experiences in education because she wanted to be able to reflect that back to the teachers. She had to go back three or four different times to speak to the individual young people before they would open up and disclose to her how bad they felt about being in class at school. One of the current, understandable things in education, is the view that you want to get everybody in the class involved. If you have a child who either has a particular learning difficulty or problem then that individual spends most of their time living in fear that the teacher is going to pick them out and ask them something which, if they can't answer, will embarrass them. Helping teachers

to understand the prior educational experience of young people should help their practice.

107. Some boys will have panic attacks and have felt physically sick at the suggestion of them taking part in any classwork. Being able to connect with them isn't just about being able to say hello. It takes a lot of time and effort and consistency in terms of staffing and proper resourcing. It takes the right kind of people so you need to have a mixture. Some will relate to prison officers and some prefer a social worker or a nurse.

Hopes for the Inquiry

108. As part of the work done for me by Nina Vaswani on bereavement related issues, I know that often boys who had suffered a bereavement would be asked by school staff if they were okay, but boys will always say that they are because it is too raw and they wouldn't want to talk about it. It is important that teachers are persistent about this and go back after six months and on anniversaries and talk to them, perhaps pointing out things that indicate they may not be alright. There needs to be more emphasis on guidance support and formal training around guidance support in schools to elevate it to the position that it deserves. I also think that there should be much more training for teachers as part of their general teaching qualification around trauma and working with the whole child.
109. If you want to stop people coming into prison and abusing others then all the money needs to be put into parenting and into early learning supports and into schools and education. Then you wouldn't have to worry about prisons because there would be less need for them. Governors see the end result of the violence and abuse but these are not necessarily about prisons, they are in fact societal issues that the prison service have to support people through.
110. Having been involved in the Promise report, I hope that the Inquiry will reinforce and potentially expand on its recommendations. I hope that the focus is on children in care. A large amount of people in custody have had experiences of the care system in one

way or another. Children being excluded from education is a key indicator of coming into custody. If the number of children who have bad experiences of care is reduced then hopefully this will reduce the number coming into custody.

111. We all know that bullying, violence and sexual violence is predominantly perpetrated by men against women. Men do commit these offences and when they do, they must be met with a robust judicial response. However, what we really must do, for the benefit of women, is think about how we can stop men from getting into the situation where they offend. This should involve careful consideration about how we bring up little boys. In prison there is no doubt that there are lots of young men in custody who have been the victim of violence themselves. We really have to have a good think about why that happens.


Other information

112. One of my main concerns is about boys in prison. I am currently doing a PHD about masculinity. This is all about pathways into offending for boys and prevention. It is basically about whether Government policy pays enough attention to the gender-specific needs of boys with a view to ultimately preventing people ending up in custody. There are currently about 8000 males in prison and young offenders institutions as opposed to 400 females.
113. From a feminist perspective, which is the angle I am interested in, if you really want to prevent violence against women and girls then, as we have done with women, we have to go right back to the beginning. We need to look at what is causing this problem. We need to examine how we are bringing up little boys and what values we are giving them and what support is available, and what is different about little boys that might make them experience things differently. For example, if they are subjected to domestic abuse, what is it about that experience that causes boys to then potentially, although not always, perpetrate that abuse on others? The approach to boys needs to be an asset-based approach, not solely a deficit-based model.

- 114. A lot of the things we do with boys nowadays where there is any recognition of gender tend to be deficit-based. There are a lot of programmes about all the things boys shouldn't do or how they shouldn't behave, but there much less about positive masculinity and helping boys become positive Scottish men, or about knowing what that is and having role models that are relevant to that.

- 115. One of the things we are currently worried about is the population increase, the fiscal environment and our ability to deal with the increasing complexity and vulnerability of people coming to us and our capability to work safely with the resources we have. Every organisation will be saying the same thing, but unfortunately that is the reality.

- 116. I have no objection to my witness statement being published as part of the evidence to the Inquiry. I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed..... 

Dated..... *21/9/2023*