

Press release: Review finds family ties 'utterly indispensable' to rehabilitation of female offenders

New report supports Ministry of Justice's emphasis on community alternatives and use of technology to boost rehabilitation of female offenders.



- over half of women in prison have children under the age of 18 and only 5% of children remain in the family home when their mother is sent to prison
- new technology and greater use of Release on Temporary Licence will be used to maintain relationships
- women's prisons to have permanent on-site social workers and greater access to information on key familial relationships

A new report by Lord Michael Farmer on the value of prisoners' family ties has found that healthy relationships are a 'must have' when it comes to preventing women from reoffending.

Prisoners who receive family visits are 39% less likely to reoffend, and research suggests that these relationships are even more important for women than they are for men.

The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) has committed to taking forward the wide-ranging recommendations to boost rehabilitation and divert women away from crime.

This will build on work already being done across the prison estate following Lord Farmer's 2017 report into the male estate – including the roll out of in-cell phones and new rules giving prison governors greater autonomy to grant Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) to offenders following a rigorous risk assessment.

Around 30% of all female offenders have dependent children and maintaining these relationships can also reduce the issue of intergenerational offending.

Justice Minister, Edward Argar said:

The findings of Lord Farmer's comprehensive review lay bare the connection between maintaining strong family relationships and reducing female offending.

I want to thank him for this important work and we will now take forward his recommendations to strengthen vital ties and break the cycle of reoffending.

Our Female Offender Strategy made clear that we want to strengthen community options for women so they have access to a network of local support services and it is easier for them to maintain vital family ties.

Lord Farmer, said:

Healthy, supportive relationships are utterly indispensable for every woman in the criminal justice system if they are to turn away from criminality and contribute positively to society.

Yet female offenders have often experienced abuse and trauma which can profoundly impact their ability to develop and sustain healthy, trusting relationships.

The importance of good family and other relationships, which are rehabilitation assets, needs to be a golden thread running through the criminal justice system

Lord Farmer's report will be revealed this afternoon in Parliament at an event organised by Clinks, which supports voluntary sector organisations in the criminal justice system, including Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT) and Birth Companions, which both specialise in family support services.

Several of the recommendations seek to improve communication between women in custody and their children and close relatives. These include prioritising women's prisons for the roll-out of virtual visits conducted via video link and the installation of phones within cells – for which a £10 million investment was announced by the Justice Secretary last year.

Lord Farmer also recommends that each prison has an on-site social worker to provide dedicated support for women and their children to ensure they are maintaining vital ties with children and family outside the prison gates.

The review also highlights the importance of ROTL in helping female offenders fulfil their caring responsibilities and aid resettlement and concludes that

prison governors should have a greater say in the use of ROTL, with eligible offenders subject to monitoring technology where necessary.

Consideration is also given by Lord Farmer to the impact of convictions and sentencing on the children of female offenders – at least 54% of women in prison have children under the age of 18.

To ensure these children are not hampered by their parent's offending, and that their interests are fully considered, the review recommends a 'Personal Circumstances File' for each offender. This will ensure often sensitive information on dependents is readily available and is carried throughout the journey through the criminal justice system.

Female offenders are frequently among the most vulnerable individuals in society, often suffering from abuse, substance misuse and mental health problems. It is for these reasons that the existence of strong family ties is so crucial to rehabilitation.

The findings of this review will build upon the 2017 report, which looked at the importance of those same ties in men's prisons and formed the basis of much of the work being undertaken across the estate today.

Notes to editors

- MOJ will now look closely at the findings and recommendations from this review and will work closely with partners, agencies and other Government departments to move forward with reforms in this vital area.
- The government's Female Offender Strategy published last year commissioned Lord Farmer to undertake his report into family ties through the lens of women in the criminal justice system.
- Lord Farmer instigated his review with a call for evidence which was circulated to a range of agencies across the criminal justice system including members of the voluntary sector.
- Input into the review from women and their families was obtained through various methods including surveys completed by 372 prisoners across 11 female prisons in England; and 109 prisoners' families and friends.
- Lord Farmer and his review team visited several prisons, women's centres, and community centres across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland to inform his findings.