PUBLICATION OF THE FARMER REVIEW FOR WOMEN

I am writing to you in your capacity as chair of the Justice Select Committee in order to inform you that tomorrow the Farmer Review for Women will be published. The report was commissioned as part of our Female Offender Strategy in June 2018. I have attached an embargoed copy of the review for your consideration.

This work builds on Lord Farmer’s 2017 review on family ties for male prisoners, which concluded that good relationships are vital to reducing reoffending. For women, relationships are the most significant factor to impact directly on the likelihood of reoffending. More so than men, women in the criminal justice system are likely to be in relationships that are abusive and/or criminogenic, and therefore supporting female offenders to strengthen and develop relationships is not straightforward.

We also know that women are more likely to be primary carers than men when entering the criminal justice system. Whereas children of male prisoners will often remain at home with their mother, children frequently have to leave their home when mothers go into custody. This tells us that incarceration of women disproportionately impacts families and children, and could increase the risk of intergenerational offending.

This is why I am immensely grateful to Lord Farmer for undertaking this important review. Building on his original review, this review looks at his earlier recommendations through the lens of the needs of female offenders, including the distinct complexities in their relationships.

The Farmer Review for Women investigates how supporting female offenders to engage with their families can lower recidivism, aid rehabilitation and assist in addressing the issues of intergenerational crime. It does this by looking across the whole system, not just within prison, following the vision of our Strategy to support women and improve outcomes for them at all points of the justice system.

The review finds that there is a lack of information on the personal circumstances of women, including of dependent children, which poses a fundamental barrier to supporting women to maintain those
relationships. It draws practical proposals to help women communicate better with their family and dependents when at court and in custody, as well as proposing how prisons can better facilitate more frequent, safe, and private family visits.

In line with our Strategy, the review represents a preference for women to be managed, and to manage their own relationships safely in the community, where possible.

I am pleased to welcome this report and to share with you my commitment to take forward this important area of work. We will look closely at the findings and recommendations from Lord Farmer’s review for Women and how we can best give effect to these in both the short and longer term.

In doing so, my department will build on the good work already being taken forward following Lord Farmer’s original review. My officials will also work closely with other agencies, partners and Government departments to ensure the importance of strengthening family and relational ties for female offenders and their children is reflected across the criminal justice system.

The review can be found online at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/farmer-review-for-women

I want to share my thanks to Lord Farmer for his hard work to ensure female offenders’ family and other relational ties are given the prominence in our work that they deserve. I would also appreciate it if you could share this letter with the rest of the committee to inform them of Lord Farmer’s important work.

EDWARD ARGAR MP