

Justice Committee

Community Justice (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from Soroptimist International Crieff

1. *Will the proposals in the Bill transform the community justice system in the way envisaged by the Commission on Women Offenders in its 2012 Report, such as addressing the weaknesses identified in the current model, tackling re-offending and reducing the prison population?*

The final report of 2012 recommended the setting up of a national body and that is what this Bill aims to achieve. The one big omission that we see is that there is no mention in the Bill of working in partnership with the Prison Service as recommended by this report.

2. *Are you content that the definition of 'community justice' in the Bill is appropriate?*

Section 1 gives a comprehensive definition.

We do not think it should be widened. If it is too fulsome there is a danger that powers may be limited.

3. *Will the proposals for a new national body (Community Justice Scotland) lead to improvements in areas such as leadership, oversight, identification of best practice and the commissioning of services?*

Sections 2 to 12 provide for a Non departmental public body (NDPB) with a chair appointed by the Scottish Ministers and 5 to 8 non-executive members. Each member can serve for a maximum of eight years. Members will be paid. We would like to see a wider range of Partners, not just statutory. The Third Sector and other voluntary sector partnerships should be involved. However, provided the appointments are properly made the above improvements will be effected.

We note that members from the existing Community Justice Authorities will not be TUPEd over. Scottish Government does have a robust HR appointment system.

In addition we agree that a timeously annual report must be made to the Auditor General.

4. *Taking into account the reforms set out in the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill relating to Community Planning Partnerships, will Community Justice Partners have the powers, duties and structures required to effectively perform their proposed role in relation to community justice?*

Empowered communities are vital to improve wellbeing reducing inequality and tackling the financial and demographic challenges ahead. The Bill appears to be (and must be) empowering.

5. *Does the Bill achieve the right balance between national and local responsibility?*

Given the relatively small population of Scotland we feel decisions should be enacted nationally and percolated down. The local partners envisaged are all branches of national bodies e.g. Health Boards. No mention is made of the Third Sector bodies operating in the Justice field. We believe that the Third Sector and the Voluntary Sector should have crucial roles.

6. *Will the proposed reforms support improvement in terms of:*
 a) *leadership, strategic direction and planning?*
 b) *consultation and accountability?*
 c) *partnership and collaboration?*
 d) *commissioning of services and achieving best value for money?*

The theory is good, but only once the Act is passed can we determine if there will be improvement. We are not sure there is room for change. This can be seen by the fact the Community Justice Authorities (CJA's) are to be disbanded with this Bill when they were only formed in 2007. Reliance is going to be placed on the board members to deliver.

7. *Are the resources, as set out in the Financial Memorandum, sufficient to transform the community justice system in the way envisaged by the Commission on Women Offenders in its 2012 report?*

It should be recognised that the Financial Memorandum is not part of the Bill. It would appear to be doing away with 25 CJA posts and replacing them with circa 10 posts.

Regarding Costs on Scottish Administration, para 80:

It is stated that the Scottish Government intends to provide £50,000 per annum to the Criminal Justice Voluntary Sector Forum (CJVSF) to help them build capability and capacity and engage with the partnership arrangements across Scotland. We believe that £50,000 is not anyway near enough to build capability and capacity. Technically that would be a one person post. As it is Scotland wide – this means no provision for training etc would be available.

8. *Is the timetable for moving to the new arrangements by 1 April 2017 achievable?*

We think for the Bill to be effective the timetable MUST be achieved.

9. *Could the proposals in the Bill be improved and, if so, how?*

See answers above.

Soroptimist International Crieff
 3 August 2015