

Justice Committee

Prisoners (Control of Release) (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from Positive Prison? Positive Futures

We are pleased to respond to the request to provide a written submission which supplements our previous one submitted on 6th May 2014 and our evidence given to the committee on 13th January 2015.

1 The proposed widening of the terms of the bill to cover all people sentenced to 4 years or more is acceptable in that it addresses the issues relating to human rights discussed at the committee session on 13th January. It is unclear, however, how the removal of automatic release aligns with the aim of reducing the prison population in Scotland. (refer to item 2.04 of our original submission¹).

2 The proposed minimum period of compulsory supervision in the community on release from a long-term sentence is also acceptable in principle although the process and timing of how the length of this minimum period will be worked out requires further discussion and/or explanation. Will it be a blanket minimum or one tailored to each individual?

3 We seek assurances that the Parole Board and others would be sufficiently well resourced to deal with all the people on long-term sentences as their time in custody approaches the two-thirds point. The numbers of people they would be dealing with will be increased by the widened terms of the bill.

4 We also seek assurances that the resources appropriate to provision of supervision in the community are sufficient and well resourced. It may be beneficial to review the caseloads of community teams to ensure that the supervision provided is effective and not simply a tick box exercise.

5 We consider there is scope for making use of electronic monitoring in the community for some people as part of their early release programme, possibly in advance of the two-thirds point in their sentence if they have made clear progress in terms of their rehabilitation.

6 The effectiveness of the changes proposed in this bill depend very heavily on the prison staff and management making progress in terms of their reorganisation and bringing about the cultural and organisational changes as part of their new vision as being in the 'citizen recovery business'.

7 In the interest of clarity we wish to restate our support for the section of this bill that would make it possible for people to be released one or two days early to make it much more possible for them to connect with appropriate services and agencies thereby greatly increasing their opportunities to reintegrate.

¹http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_JusticeCommittee/Inquiries/AER6_Positive_Prison_Positive_Futures.pdf

8 In conclusion we can see the value in proposed changes to the automatic early release of prisoners but only as part of a comprehensive review and restructuring of the criminal justice system from arrest through to release and re-joining the community.

Pete White
Chief Executive
14 February 2015