

Justice Committee

Prisoners (Control of Release) (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from Social Work Scotland

1. Restriction of automatic release

Social Work Scotland agrees with the principle inherent in this Bill that decisions on early release should be based on assessment of the risk which an offender may pose to the community. We also agree that it is appropriate for the two categories of prisoners named in the Bill to be subject to these restrictions. A further category of prisoners which Scottish Ministers may wish to consider are those prisoners who committed offences against children. This can include offences of physical violence and neglect.

We would be concerned however if the impact of this Bill was that the most serious prisoners left prison with no form of statutory supervision. In our experience such supervision can be critical to minimising risk and ensuring effective monitoring of people who pose a serious risk to others. We note, however, that courts will have the option to consider extended sentences, albeit that these do not currently appear to be widely used.

We would highlight that the costs associated with these provisions are not necessarily cost neutral for Criminal Justice Social Work Services. Additional costs are likely to be incurred in the delivery of through-care services, in particular prison based social work services. Furthermore a great use of extended sentences would have a clear impact on workload.

We would agree, however, that the overarching concern is public safety and so are supportive of these proposals provided they are adequately resourced.

2. Power of early release for community reintegration

Social Work Scotland welcomes the additional powers which this Bill would give to the Scottish Prison Service to authorise early release to facilitate community reintegration.

We would strongly urge the production of guidance to prison governors which would require them to consult with statutory Criminal Justice Social Work Services in the prison prior to granting any early release. This will ensure effective coordination of release arrangements.

Social Work Scotland
19 January 2015