

Tomorrow's People on the Rehabilitation of Offenders



WHAT IS THE POLICY?

After decades of consensus between the major political parties on a policy of being tough on crime, there are signs of a new focus on rehabilitating offenders and reducing the prison population. The policy programme published by the Coalition Government immediately after it took power pledged to introduce a “rehabilitation revolution” that will pay independent providers to reduce reoffending. Justice Secretary Kenneth Clarke has said that outside providers will have financial incentives to keep offenders away from crime. Although the Ministry of Justice is still working on the details, Clarke has said success may be measured by whether offenders find and keep a job, become functioning members of society and mostly by whether they avoid reconviction within the first few years of leaving prison. The cost involved in reducing reoffending would be paid for by the resulting savings from the criminal justice and penal budgets.

Some facts and figures

- Government policy aims to reduce reoffending
- Private providers (including the third sector) are to be given incentives to rehabilitate prisoners
- More than 85,000 people are in prison in England and Wales
- Between 1995 and 2009, there was a 66% rise in prisoners
- 65% of adults are reincarcerated with two years of release
- Reoffending rose 8% between 2006 and 2008
- Total spending on prisons was £4.39bn in 2009/10
- 71% of children in custody had been seen by social services
- Almost a quarter of young offenders have learning difficulties

TOMORROW'S PEOPLE THINKING ON THE REHABILITATION OF OFFENDERS

While having a custodial sentence regime is important, either because of the severity of the crime or the threat the offender would pose if at liberty, for a lot of people prison does not work. For many their crimes are linked to engrained behaviour such as substance abuse. We support the new Government's policy outlook because there is a huge amount of evidence that work and education have a huge role in turning people's lives around. We agree there is little evidence that increasing the jail population reduces crime. Tomorrow's People will support any initiatives that are work-focused and which provide training and work opportunities for ex-offenders. We therefore welcome the proposed dialogue on the review of the sentencing regime to be adopted in the UK

OUR CONCERNS

At this stage there is insufficient detail to come to a firm conclusion about the new policy stance. The comments by the Secretary of State indicate a shift away from punishment and more towards rehabilitation. However the one immediate concern for Tomorrow's People as a potential provider of rehabilitation services is the uncertainty over funding for rehabilitative regimes. The October Comprehensive Spending Review has led to a significant reduction in the budgets for the Home Office and Ministry of Justice; we hope that as part of the review on the allocation of funds there can be an open dialogue about the balance of funding between the management of offenders, policing and prevention or rehabilitation based initiatives

WHAT WE WANT FROM GOVERNMENT

We believe there is a strong economic and moral argument in favour of targeting the more limited resources that will be available for the criminal justice system on rehabilitation of offenders. Prison is expensive and deprives the economy of human capital. There is also strong evidence that increasing prison places does not reduce crime or reoffending. Successfully rehabilitating offenders by finding them work, education or training, will reduce the social costs of crime and lead to a better outcome for society.

Our experience of working with ex-offenders is that the provision of safe housing, education and training and employment opportunities is the key to breaking the cycle of crime. Therefore in future any sentence, whether custodial or non-custodial, should come with a target of making offenders more employable as well as being seen as a punishment. Work, education and training must be at the top of the agenda for designing sentencing policy. We believe that investing in rehabilitation and resettlement of offenders will lead to a greater reduction in crime compared with putting the same money into more prison places.

Tomorrow's People is setting up a dedicated residential project, The Junction, that will help ex-offenders and other socially excluded individuals train and work in businesses run by the project. Oxford Economics, an independent consultancy, has calculated that over a 20-year period a 60-bed unit at The Junction will save the taxpayer £57m that would otherwise

have been spent on the costs of re-offending. This is based on the estimate that 66% reoffend within two years, the £65,000 costs of bringing a re-offender to court and the annual cost of £40,000 to imprison them. This means that the social return on investment for every £1 invested in The Junction will deliver a saving to the public purse of £17.70.

Breaking the reoffending cycle makes economic sense. The Home Office estimated the total annual economic and social cost of crime for 2003/04, the latest year for which figures are available, at £35bn. Reducing reoffending rates from 65% to 55% would save £1bn a year. There is the potential for further savings if more ex-offenders can be brought back into the workplace as that will lead to lower social security costs and greater employment rates.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Tomorrow's People supporting ex-offenders into work with The Junction
www.tomorrows-people.co.uk

Speech by Rt Hon Kenneth Clarke, Centre for Crime and Justice Studies
<http://www.justice.gov.uk/news/sp300610a.htm>