



Welsh Affairs Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA Tel: 020 7219 1424

Email: welshcom@parliament.uk Website: www.parliament.uk

From the Chair

20 March 2024

Yvonne Thomas
Chief Executive, The Clink Charity

Thank you for appearing before the Welsh Affairs Committee on Wednesday 13 March as part of our inquiry into prisons in Wales.

Unfortunately, we were not able to cover all of the intended areas of questioning during the session. As such, I would be grateful if you could provide answers to the following questions:

1. What impact do short-term sentences have on individuals wishing to access your organisation's services while in prison? In your experience, are they an effective means of reducing reoffending?
2. How have you received the Government's plans to introduce a presumption to suspend short-term sentences, as part of the Sentencing Bill 2023?
3. What does the Prisons Strategy White Paper 2021 get right, and get wrong, when it comes to education and employment within a devolved context? Furthermore, do you believe it adequately recognises the contribution of voluntary sector organisations, such as your own?

Yours sincerely,

Rt Hon Stephen Crabb MP

Rt Hon Stephen Crabb MP,

Chair,

Welsh Affairs Committee

23 April 2024

Dear Mr. Crabb,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit further written evidence. In response to your questions, please find our answers below.

How effective are short sentences?

The Prisons White Paper highlighted the reconviction rates for short-sentenced prisoners as a particular area of concern. The reconviction rate quoted in the white paper was 58.9% compared to the overall rate of 41.6%. The reconviction rate for short-sentenced prisoners from Jan-March 2020 is 63%. This compares unfavourably with the rate for those receiving community sentences in the same period (56%) (*Bromley Briefings Jan 2024 quoting MOJ Tables 2.5a and 2.5b MOJ 2022 Offender Management Statistics Quarterly April to June 2022*).

The proposed Short Sentence Function, designed to address reconviction rates for short-sentenced prisoners and to be implemented in probation by June 2022 (as proposed in the White Paper) is not evident to us.

The evidence clearly indicates that short sentences do not reduce reoffending. In support of those serving short sentences, we have expanded our vocational qualification portfolio to include industry-relevant qualifications that can be completed in 3-6 months. However, our preparation for release and post release support requires at least 3 months engagement prior to release to put in place the services and support necessary for successful rehabilitation. People sentenced to short sentences are often passing through the “revolving door” of prison. Each time, more chaos is created which needs addressing on release. Community sentences do not involve the same level of disruption and statistically attract a lower reoffending rate. We remain surprised that, despite years of evidence supporting the fact that short sentences make reoffending more likely, no measures have been taken to address this damaging trend and the use of community sentences has fallen as a proportion of overall sentencing.

Sentencing Bill 2023

The proposal to suspend sentences of under 12 months for certain types of offences is welcomed but we would observe that we are seeing higher levels of both recalls and breaching of suspended sentence orders than previously and will therefore reserve our position on the effectiveness of the proposals until further evidence is available.

Prison strategy – White Paper.



Starting with the positives, the push to improve employability skills has delivered results, and we welcome it.

The ongoing improvement in employment outcomes in prisons in England and Wales is due both to investment in prisons in Prison Employment Leads, the setting up of Employment Advisory Boards and - in large part - to the efforts of charities and not-for-profits such as The Recruitment Junction, No Going Back, Recycling Lives and, of course us – The Clink Charity. These charities operate both inside and outside of prisons and are specialists in training, employment, and rehabilitation. Charitable bodies are not being materially funded by the government, but our outcomes are claimed as successes for all. The contribution of the voluntary sector in Wales and in England is not, in our experience, recognized at the planning and commissioning level. We would suggest that increased use of the voluntary sector, adequately funded, to provide true “through the gate” services would have a measurable impact on reoffending, help to address employment gaps in Wales (and England) and cost less than current arrangements. Services including employment, accommodation and support which are crucial to reducing reoffending are commonly commissioned from multiple providers, based within the prison rather than genuinely through the gate. Duplication is evident and the specific requirements of individuals leaving prison are not able to be addressed within the narrow confines of the various disconnected services.

A renewed approach to education provision is set out in the White Paper with the re-procurement of Prison Education Services at its centre in England. With competition underway, we remain pessimistic that the re-procurement will deliver improvements. It appears to be a replica of the current service using the existing model of a small number of prime providers and with no evident joining up of initiatives such as vocational skills and apprenticeships.

We would urge the Committee to take advantage of the flexibility accorded by education being a devolved matter to encourage and support approaches in Wales that consider an holistic approach to vocational training and qualifications that joins prison education, training, apprenticeships, and employment as one set of connected services, funded from one budget. Prisons offer a rich variety of vocational training opportunities which, if considered as part of a whole education strategy, could save money, and improve effectiveness.

Other proposals in the White Paper such as the Resettlement Passport (which would ease the path to employment and accommodation by providing a “bundle” of ID, CVs, qualification certificates etc.) have not yet been delivered. We await the arrival of these proposals with both hope and interest.

Further comment on the White Paper

The central tenet of the White Paper is the push to build new prisons to enable the incarceration of over 100,000 people in England and Wales. The existing prison estate is crumbling, there are more people on remand than ever before with insufficient staff to ensure that many existing prisons are functioning properly. In Wales there is more continuity of staffing in HMPs Cardiff and Swansea,



(where we deliver services) but both establishments are old and, in the case of Swansea, severely limited in space to develop rehabilitative and employability programmes.

Perhaps a more prudent and effective approach would be to aspire to lock up fewer people and invest in diversion and rehabilitation thus saving billions in capital costs of building and the ongoing cost of c.£46,000 per prisoner per annum? The cost of additional incarceration over and above the capital expenditure will be an ongoing c. £522 million each year, every year – money that we believe could be spent on reducing reoffending with a better return on the investment of public money and improved societal outcomes.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our thoughts on the important questions you have asked us. I hope the Committee has found our contribution useful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in grey ink that reads "Yvonne Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Yvonne Thomas
Chief Executive
The Clink Charity