



Welsh Affairs Committee

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From the Chair

20 March 2024

Nicky Park

Director of Criminal Justice/Women's Services Development, St Giles Trust.

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

30/04/2024

Dear Chair Rt Hon Stephen Crabb MP

Welsh Affairs Committee Written Evidence

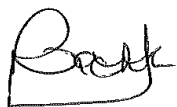
Thank you for your letter asking for the opportunity to provide further evidence to the Welsh Affairs Committee.

Please find below further information in response 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.**

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards



Nicky Park
Director of Criminal Justice and Women's Service Development

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?

Short sentences are challenging for several reasons:

1. Often people in prison do not spend sufficient time in custody under short sentences to be able to access adequate resettlement or rehabilitative support to provide them with the tools to choose alternative lifestyles, for example:

- Education: effective and meaningful courses can either be too long, start dates of programmes do not fit with length of sentence, or due to length of sentence person remains in a local cat B prison with limited education courses beyond entry level literacy and numeracy.
- Rehabilitative interventions: offender behaviour Programmes are not set up to support those on short sentences, this means that if individuals would benefit from Anger management or Enhanced Thinking Skills this would have to wait until release, due to the often chaotic nature of individuals lifestyles, makes engagement challenging.
- Resettlement: those on short sentences, especially under 6 months to serve can slip through the net on receiving resettlement advice and support. This is more evident for those who spend a large percentage of their short sentence on remand. Those on remand receive minimal support until sentenced.
 - o Often those on short sentences experience multiple and complex needs, there is often not sufficient time to be able to address all their needs prior to release.
- Referrals: due to the length of sentence our teams often receive last minute referrals to our personal wellbeing service, leaving little time to arrange to complete needs assessments, build rapport and establish supportive links in the community for release.

2. Building consistent relationships: Due to staff shortages within Probation/Resettlement teams, staff do not have sufficient time to build and sustain trusted relationships in turn allowing staff to gain an understanding about individuals motivations, behaviours, risk factors/trauma and strengths resulting in critical needs not being identified and met pre release.

- There is a lack of consistency across probation provision, often meaning that people are required to complete multiple assessments with multiple people both sides of the gate. This results in individuals disengaging from a service/system which doesn't always see them as an individual but rather a box they need to tick to move onto the next stage.

3. The male CRS process exacerbates this by multiple referrals, and therefore multiple assessments. There is learning to be taken from the female CRS holistic provision which reduces duplication and increases consistency with one organisation and one caseworker who can offer end to end support.

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?

I am not against suspending short sentences as long as this is not seen as a quick fix. Suspending short sentences must be accompanied by heavy investment in support services so that individuals have opportunities to address the root causes of their offending behaviour. If this does not happen then all the government will be doing is putting a sticky plaster on the prison population growth.

There will need to be an investment and opportunities for those who are eligible for a suspended sentence to access detox/residential and community rehabilitations, access educations/training courses which provide real opportunities for someone to see there is a different way of life.

Those issued a suspended sentence should be allocated a support worker, beyond their probation practitioner to ensure that individuals receive support to address their challenges.

Suspending short sentences will especially benefit women, which will have a positive impact considering 69% of women entering custody have committed non violent offences, with 63% serving less than 12 months. If the government want to pilot the effectiveness and impact of suspending short sentences, they should start with the female prison population. There is sufficient evidence of the positive impact to reducing reoffending with women when they receive consistent community support from Women's Centres where they receive wrap around, holistic support to address the root cause of their offending behaviour

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.

Education and Employment plays a key role in reducing reoffending and it was encouraging to see that improving the prison education service was highlighted. However the recommissioning of PES showed little change, there is a continued focus on delivering traditional courses and teaching in traditional ways. There was little investment of funds to reflect the ability to do something different that would actually encourage and excite non-traditional learners to want to engage with prison education.

The 2nd strategy point around wanting every individual to leave prison with improved literacy, numeracy etc would only be possible with a changing mindset around how we shift thinking away from teaching in a traditional way when a large percentage of the prison population do learn in this way or they have traumatic experiences of learning in these traditional settings.

The investment in digital platforms is positive, allowing individuals credentials to follow them through their sentence, it was unclear whether this would continue into the community and that if returning to prison they would not need to start again. In my experience people have had to redo basic skills etc every time they enter prison as there is not a consistent system that tracks their progress and builds on what they have completed in the community.

Prisons have established Employment Advisory Boards and in our experiences the success of these depends on the local buy in from the prison.

What I haven't seen is an increase of bringing varied employers through the gates who can offer sustainable, career opportunities. Future Skills programme is piloting this and there are challenges within this especially when looking at the target of having employers carry out interviews prior to release with start dates close to after release. This does not take into consideration that employment directly on release is not always suitable for example, for those who have served longer sentences it can take time to adjust to the pressures and challenges of life outside of time and having responsibilities for family, bills/utilities, old lifestyles. What's missing is the recognition of the need for transitional support and that employment isn't a quick fix for reducing reoffending, especially if the root causes of offending have yet to be addressed.

I think there should always be more involvement from third sector organisations, especially in providing that transitional support from custody into the community for both the individuals being released but also for employers. Often Employers don't have the mechanisms or understanding regarding some of the additional challenges which may arise from employing someone directly from prison. Organisations such as St Giles Trust have extensive experience of, not only employing staff with convictions for over 20 years, but also supporting employers to do the same through our Peer Adviser Network ensuring that employment placements are successful.