

PRISON BRIEFING

AUTUMN 2009



PRISON BRIEFING: SUMMARY

The pressure on public spending may succeed where experts, evidence and experience have failed and finally persuade ministers to look for a lasting solution to the prisons crisis.

Notwithstanding running costs, the government plans to spend at least £2.3bn building five 1,500 place prisons in its latest attempt to cope with a prison population that has been allowed to rocket from 60,000 in 1997 to 84,000 today and which is projected to hit 96,000 in 2014. Ministers had hoped to build three huge, US style Titan prisons, each holding 2,500 prisoners, but this was abandoned following strong opposition from penal reformers, including the Prison Reform Trust.

Greater investment in prison regimes undoubtedly is needed for overstretched staff and underfunded budgets. But building more prisons, without tackling the underlying causes of rising numbers, is like adding another lane to an overcrowded motorway. As the prison population accelerated after 1993, reoffending rates worsened – two-thirds of people are now reconvicted within two years of leaving prison. In 2002, the Social Exclusion Unit put the cost of re-offending by former prisoners at £11bn a year.

Investing in preventative work with children in trouble and diverting vulnerable women, drug addicts and binge drinkers, the mentally ill and people with learning disabilities into the care or treatment they need would cut crime and improve public health at a fraction of the cost of vacuous prison building. Ministers accept that community sentences are far more effective than prison in reducing petty repeat offending but these, too, remain under-resourced.

A greater focus on value for money promises significant cost savings, but that is nothing compared to its potential to make our communities safer.

PRISONS TODAY

- On 4 September 2009, the prison population in the UK was 93,588. In England and Wales it was 84,130.¹
- Between 1998 and 2008, the prison population in England and Wales grew by 27%.²
- The prison system as a whole has been overcrowded in every year since 1994.³
- Prison has a poor record for reducing reoffending - 47% of adults are reconvicted within one year of being released - for those serving sentences of less than 12 months this increases to 60%.⁴
- Total prisons expenditure has increased from £2.8bn in 1995 to £4.3bn in 2006.⁵
- The average resource cost per prisoner in England and Wales in 2007-08 was £39,000.⁶
- The Youth Justice Board spends over 10 times more on custody than on crime prevention programmes.⁷
- It is estimated that there are 160,000 children with a parent in prison each year.⁸

PRT e-newsletter sign-up: www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/newsletter

1. NOMS, Prison Population and Accommodation Briefing for 4 September 2009, Scottish Prison Service : <http://www.sps.gov.uk>, Northern Ireland Prison Service <http://www.niprisonservice.gov.uk>

2. Ministry of Justice (2009) Offender Management Caseload Statistics 2008, London: Ministry of Justice

3. Home Office, Digest 4: Information on the Criminal Justice System in England and Wales, 1999, London: Home Office

4. Ibid.

5. Carter, P. (2007) Lord Carter's Review of Prisons, Securing the Future, London: Ministry of Justice

6. Hansard, House of Commons written answers, 17 December 2008, Col.: 852W

7. Youth Justice Board (2007) Annual Report 2006/7, London: Youth Justice Board

8. Ministry of Justice and Department for Children, Schools and Families, Children of Offenders Review, June 2007